

# Propositions in the Making



## Experiments in a Whiteheadian Laboratory

Edited by  
Roland Faber, Michael Halewood,  
and Andrew M. Davis

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# List of Abbreviations

## ALFRED NORTH WHITEHEAD

AI	<i>Adventures of Ideas</i> (1933)
CN	<i>Concept of Nature</i> (1920)
ESP	<i>Essays in Science and Philosophy</i> (1948)
FR	<i>The Function of Reason</i> (1929)
MT	<i>Modes of Thought</i> (1938)
PNK	<i>An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Natural Knowledge</i> (1919)
PR	<i>Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology</i> (1929)
R	<i>The Principle of Relativity</i> (1922)
RM	<i>Religion in the Making</i> (1926)
S	<i>Symbolism: Its Meaning and Effect</i> (1927)
SMW	<i>Science and the Modern World</i> (1925)

These abbreviations refer to works by Whitehead and not to any particular published edition. While there are several editions that share common pagination, there are some whose pagination differs between publishers. To find a specific reference, consult the relevant bibliographic list for the chapter in which the reference appears.





# Editors Preamble

Whitehead's thought continues to offer fresh interdisciplinary insight for the shifting contours of our postmodern world. Whether in metaphysics or cosmology, ethics, education, or society, scholars persist in creatively applying his philosophy in new contexts and amid new challenges.

In 2016, a unique conference between SenseLab and the Whitehead Research Project met at Claremont School of Theology in Claremont, California. This conference was spurred as a result of innovative conversations between philosophers, Erin Manning and Brian Massumi, and process philosophers, Roland Faber and Michael Halewood. The meeting of their respective communities in Claremont aimed chiefly to expose and explore the multivalent connections between postmodern thought and Whitehead's philosophy, particularly as they relate to his novel understanding of "propositions."

Rather than a "logical assertion," Whitehead described a proposition as a "lure for feeling" for a collectivity to come. Propositions cannot be reduced to the verbal content of logical justifications; rather they are infused with the communal feeling of aesthetic valuations. It is this understanding of propositions which formed the contextual horizon for the conference and SenseLab's central inquiry:

What would a conference look like were it to take Whitehead's propositions about propositions seriously? It would look more like a laboratory of speculative thought, we proposed, than a "marketplace" of ideas. A matter of fact in potential, directly experienced, is enacted, not exchanged. Our questions were: what would it mean to make the conference form "propositional" in the way that process philosophy understands it? How would that reorient what Isabelle Stengers calls ecologies of practice, within the academy, as well as in the academy's relation to the world's awaiting collectivities-to-come?<sup>1</sup>

How indeed might the philosophy of A. N. Whitehead aid us not simply in thinking differently, but also acting, living, communicating, and learning differently? The deeper question of the conference emerged: *How do we make ourselves a Whiteheadian proposition?* In answering this question, philosophers, artists, and activists creatively expressed Whiteheadian propositions in wide relevance to existential, ethical, educational, theological, aesthetic, technological, and societal concerns. What was enacted in this conference was nothing short of what Roland Faber called “a Whiteheadian Laboratory.” It is the experiments of this laboratory which have become the present volume.

Published here for the first time, the unique contributions in *Propositions in the Making* articulate the newest reaches of Whiteheadian propositions for a postmodern world. They do so not by presenting completed ideas or arguments, but by activating interdisciplinary lures of feeling, living, and co-creating the world anew.

In chapter 1, “For a Whiteheadian Laboratory: How Do You Make Yourself a Proposition?,” Erin Manning and Brian Massumi put forth an excellent challenge to think about Whiteheadian propositions, and the difference they could make to the various fields engaged, if they would be sensed and explicated in the profound impact they have in changing the frame of thought. Their contribution is, therefore, an introduction to the context and concerns of the book as a whole. Here, Manning and Massumi explore what it might mean to practice academic research and communication as a Whiteheadian laboratory. The discussion centers on Whitehead’s concept of the proposition understood as a dimension of the event—its performative infusion with graded potential—irreducible to a logical statement. They also discuss the “research-creation” practice of the SenseLab in Montreal, particularly as it contributed to the planning and execution of the 2016 Whitehead Research Project conference in Claremont.

In chapter 2, “Knowing Whitehead?,” Michael Halewood investigates what it would mean to “know” Whitehead. Whitehead published a large number of texts on a variety of topics. Much of his work is technical, sometimes mathematical, and often, deeply philosophical. This makes any claim to “know” all of these texts a very bold, perhaps, impossible, one. Drawing on insights from Foucault, Halewood argues that a claim to “know” Whitehead runs the risk of substantializing his thought into some object—something Whitehead’s own process philosophy warns against. Halewood argues that a researcher into Whitehead must take responsibility for working on his ideas and applying them afresh. He does this by reviewing some of his previous contributions on the tuning of musical instruments (Equal Temperament) and Alzheimer’s disease, and by demonstrating that while an awareness of the technicalities of Whitehead’s thought is crucial, it requires proper balanced with attention paid not only to *what* we think, but to *how* we think.

In chapter 3, “Space, Time, and the Deity of Peace,” Roland Faber engages the question “How do we make ourselves a Whiteheadian proposition?” as a suggestion not only regarding reality—of what is—but as an imaginative impulse for the realization of that which could or should be. Faber unfolds this question with reference to one of the most enigmatic propositions in Whitehead’s work, namely, that of the meaning, reality, and motive-force of peace. His considerations intend to demonstrate that peace is not just a paradigmatic proposition that we must glean from Whitehead’s work in order to understand his whole project, but in fact represents the structural paradox at the heart of the creation of propositions in Whitehead’s sense as such. Faber stresses that this endeavor is not so much meant as an exercise in understanding Whitehead or the function of a proposition in his thought, but as useful engagement with an existing Whiteheadian proposition, even if it cannot be reduced to Whitehead, as it ventures out to a current imperative for making proposals of peace for the future of humanity.

In chapter 4, “Designing Propositions,” A. J. Nocek unpacks the meaning of speculation within the rapidly growing field of speculative design. He does this by showing how Whitehead’s philosophy might serve as an important touchstone for design research. He also examines how contemporary media theory is an especially valuable resource for understanding how speculative design propositions mediate experience within our current technical milieu.

In chapter 5, “An Internet of Actual Occasions: Notes toward Understanding Twenty-First-Century Tendencies in Media, Communications, and World,” Andrew Murphie proposes that we think socio-technical developments differently. In particular, he brings some of Whitehead’s key concepts into speculation concerning “an internet of actual occasions.” He proposes, moreover, that the “internet of actual occasions” is a way of understanding contemporary and future media and communications in both their conceptual and practical dimensions, and perhaps also a way to think and work with them differently.

In chapter 6, “Thinking with Whitehead about Existential Risk,” James Burton argues that the conceptual framework of “existential risk” (Bostrom), while heuristically valuable for thinking and making concrete speculations regarding possible human-eradicating future events, nevertheless entails certain pitfalls and blindspots. These arise from its in-built probabilistic and categorial biases. He argues that a process-oriented approach in the Whiteheadian tradition may prove a valuable supplement with resources that could counterbalance some of these potentially disastrous effects.

In chapter 7, “Witness at the Slaughterhouse: Seeking Conflicting Propositions for Alternate Futures,” Brianne Donaldson argues that social transformation of complex ethical issues requires a confident grasp of conflicting propositions, even and especially when those views are believed to be wrong.

Drawing upon three years of field research of Midwest pork production, and utilizing epistemologies of multiplicity articulated by Whitehead, Jain philosophy, and Nietzsche, Donaldson puts forth a poetic philosophical meditation on witnessing the many sides of a social ill in order to craft a more complete alternative.

In chapter 8, “Communities Keep the Dream Alive as Proposition?,” Timothy Murphy argues that communities are a necessary location for propositions that envision a more just world and essential for such real potentials to remain available for feeling. For Murphy, it is not essential that they “be” the proposition as an actuality, rather he insists that what matters is that they “hold” the proposition for the sake of the planet in order that it might be felt positively at some point. In wrestling with concerns for the need for social transformation and its often perpetually deferred actualization, Murphy speaks to the need to overcome capitalism and its many devastating impacts, especially those on ecology and communities of color.

In chapter 9, “Geology Not Chronology: Problems of Naming in Education,” Matthew Goulish considers the challenge of fitting words to experience—the challenge of naming. He argues that geology rather than chronology surveys a given name’s tendency to ensnare us in a limbo of conceptual miscategorization. In attending specifically to problems of art education, he draws on ideas from Whitehead, Deleuze, Nietzsche, Susan Howe, Branislav Jakovljević, and Mark Wilson. He also considers contemporary artist, Alberto Aguilar, in proposing the reality of “doubled” names.

In chapter 10, “Under Construction,” Susanne Valerie [Granzer] considers the themes and questions of the Claremont conference and the insights of Whitehead’s propositions through the lens of the artist, in particular, the actress. By virtue of the radical exposure toward others, she reveals the ways in which the self-centered subjectivity of an actress dies on stage. It is this outstanding condition in which the pro-position of a pre-subjective layer of life can pop up: life itself as the adventure of creativity.

In chapter 11, “Choreographic Propositions: Grasping the Environmental Excess That Feels Like nothing, Yet,” Diego Gil engages Whitehead’s concept of the proposition with the aim of formulating an alternative vision of choreography. His aim is to think choreography as a pedagogical tool in order to register and to invest in the relay of potential processes that remain at the edge of actual perceptions.

The diverse and creative voices, topics, and considerations of this volume articulate the wide reaches of Whitehead’s propositional philosophy in conversation with a variety of disciplines and contexts. The contributors of this volume are confident that the mounting challenges of the postmodern world require philosophical resources able to meet and overcome them. Whether in philosophy, science and ethics, or education, ecology, and technology,

Whitehead's prehensive and value-laden philosophy challenges us to not simply *think* these matters, but to *feel* them. How indeed do we make ourselves a Whiteheadian proposition? Whatever answer we give to this question must not simply remain in the theoretical spaces of the page; rather, it must be *brought to life* and *practiced* in and among the lived and related spaces that together form a becoming world.

Roland Faber  
Michael Halewood  
Andrew M. Davis

### NOTE

1. "How Do You Make Yourself A Proposition? A Whitehead Laboratory—Dec 1–3 2016," [Senselab.ca/wp2/](http://senselab.ca/wp2/), available at: <http://senselab.ca/wp2/events/how-do-you-make-yourself-a-proposition-a-whitehead-laboratory/>.



*Part I*

**THE MAKING OF PROPOSITIONS**





## Chapter 1

# For a Whiteheadian Laboratory

## *How Do You Make Yourself a Proposition?*

Erin Manning and Brian Massumi

Propositions, Whitehead proposes, “are not primarily for belief, but for feeling at the physical level of unconsciousness. They constitute a source of the origination of feeling which is not tied down to mere datum” (PR, 186). The Whiteheadian proposition, of course, may rise selectively to consciousness and filter through judgment to form a derivative “intellectual belief” answering more recognizably to what in everyday life, and in other philosophies, responds to the same name. Few domains are as dedicated to this filtering as academe. Few genres are more in the thrall of intellectual judgment and belief than the academic conference. To raise the question of what it might mean to practice academic discourse propositionally in the Whiteheadian sense, specifically in the context of a conference, is apt in most quarters to elicit primarily disbelief. Originating feeling at the physical level—seated stiffly on a panel? Unconsciousness—in the atmosphere of intense self-consciousness so often setting the dominant tone of the room? Not tying oneself down to the datum—in other words, surpassing the given—in a context tailored to the transmission of the judgmentally already-arrived-at? Not a proposition likely to fly.

If it would fly anywhere, it would be at a conference of the Whitehead Research Project. It was with this belief that SenseLab accepted the invitation to contribute to the planning of the Project’s December 2016 conference. At the previous year’s Center for Process Studies international conference, Roland Faber had responded to a presentation of SenseLab’s (decidedly unconference-like) activities by saying that it was as if SenseLab styled itself as a “Whiteheadian laboratory.” Flattered, and feeling an immediate kinship in the mere evocation that such a thing was, first, possible and, second, desirable, we were ripe for the lure. So it was natural for the group to accept the invitation when it came. SenseLab received the invitation as a challenge to

transport some of SenseLab's techniques into the conference context to see if the compass of the genre could be gently inflected a degree or two toward a propositional practice in the Whiteheadian sense. How, the SenseLab asked the conference to be, do we make ourselves a proposition?

This question—how do we make *ourselves* a proposition—arose from one of the most striking characteristics of the Whiteheadian proposition. Unlike the conventional, or merely logical, proposition, it does not enshrine a separation between the subject of the statement and the subject of the enunciation. In the conventional proposition, the subject of the statement is the logical subject, or what the proposition is about (essentially, the grammatical subject). The subject of the enunciation is the producer of the statement. The action of the subject of the enunciation, says a philosopher, is to designate the logical subject and make a statement about it by attaching a fitting predicate to it (“mortal,” “three-cornered,” “on the mat,” to take the classic examples). The action of the subject of the enunciation does not figure. It is bracketed, sequestered from the logical proposition itself, as if it went just as well without saying. The statement is treated as if it resided in a realm of pure thought, outside the world of work-a-day philosophers whose mundane lives inspire them to think of no better examples. In a word, the conventional proposition is generally specifying (qualifying a class of being in the abstract). This schema is transposed into the academy in the treatment of the subject of study as a neutral content of general validity separate from the subject of the teacher or researcher enunciating it. This sequestering of logical content—nowadays degraded to the status of information—enables the transmission model of teaching and scholarly communication. The transmitter figures only in the role of master of propositional ceremony: expert designator and predicator, to the general edification of the information's recipients.

Ostensibly, that is. There can be a prestige that attaches to that role (hence the self-consciousness of the conference milieu). The prestige relies on the separation between the subject of the statement and the subject of the enunciation that makes of the proposition a neutral content to be mastered in the abstract, and at the same time belies it. It implicates the subject of the enunciation concretely in the proceedings. It makes it palpable that the fitness of the statement is not the only thing at stake. The status of the speaker himself is as well. The speaker (or writer) performs herself. The performance can be felicitous, or it can go bad. It plays out. This makes it something of an event. The communication of a logical proposition is never a pure transmission. It plays out, event-like, in a way that fatally binds the subject of the enunciation to the proposition. The moment of separation was only ever abstract. The artifice of its abstraction only succeeded in deferring the non-separability between the subject of the statement and the subject of the enunciation, displacing it from the production of the proposition to its reproduction in

transmission. Concretely, the bare neutrality of the logical content of the proposition is always clothed in the finery of a performance. In the event of the performance, all manner of elements enter in. Feelings of many a kind may originate: pride, shame, shyness, bluster. These feelings physically implicate the speaker, with sweat and tics, or on the contrary bodily signs of self-possession. Much of what is at stake in what is at stake remains unsaid, even unconscious. What is at stake is the prestige of mastery. What is at stake in what is at stake might lend itself to psychological analysis, in terms, for example, of mimetic rivalry, whose feeling of competition is famously just the tip of an unconscious iceberg. In short, in practice, the *generality* of the conventional proposition surreptitiously *personalizes* the proposition, down to its unconscious concomitants. The non-Whiteheadian proposition lives uncomfortably in the element of the generally personal. The discomfiture resides in its disavowed dramatization of what it contrives to neutralize.

Where the conventional proposition personalizes, the Whiteheadian proposition historicizes. It does this most importantly not in the usual sense of making statements about the past, even less by concerning itself with a purportedly linear descent through time, but more radically by removing the emphasis in the first instance from the statement and placing it squarely on the event. When Whitehead launches his discussion of the proposition in *Process and Reality*, he moves quickly to an historical example, the Battle of Waterloo (PR, 185). What most immediately interests him is not the truth-value of a statement about Napoleon's defeat. He does not subscribe to the logician's (and common sense) creed that the "one function" of propositions "is to be judged as to their truth or falsehood" (PR, 184). Their primary function, rather, is as "*a lure for feeling* providing immediacy of enjoyment" (PR, 184). Propositions are to be *entertained*, more fundamentally than they are to be judged.<sup>1</sup> What interests Whitehead is the event's fecundity in spinning off lures for feeling, its affording occasions for entertainment beyond its own occurrence. An event throws off lures like spores to the future. It can do this because its occurrence is surrounded by a "penumbra of alternatives" (PR, 185) to its truth—or truths. As he explains, the statement of every proposition, even the classic examples, carries a degree of ambiguity. " 'Socrates is mortal' . . . may mean 'The *man* Socrates is mortal,' or 'The *philosopher* Socrates is mortal.' " The basic statement "Socrates is mortal" presupposes a "relational system" that "can be carried further than the mere requirements of indication" (PR, 195). The statement's truth is surrounded by a penumbra of alternative nuances. These are an integral part of what the statement proposes, and cannot fail to be activated each time it is stated. Not only are they integral to what is proposed, they constitute propositions in their own right.<sup>2</sup> Every proposition is complex, carrying a multiplicity of implicit variations on itself. So much so that this multiplicity is essential to our understanding

of what a proposition is. Not even the simplest proposition can be reduced to what its statement says in so many words. The “form of words symbolizes an indefinite number of diverse propositions” (PR, 195). “No verbal statement is the adequate expression of a proposition” (PR, 13). “It is merely credulous to accept verbal phrases as adequate statements of propositions. The distinction between verbal phrases and complete propositions is one of the reasons why the logicians’ rigid alternative, ‘true or false,’ is so largely irrelevant for the pursuit of knowledge” (PR, 11).

Now, credulity toward verbal phrases as adequate statements of propositions is precisely what defines academic communication. The Whiteheadian understanding of the proposition lays down a challenge to its relevance, to the extent that it insistently fails to make the distinction between verbal phrases and the complete proposition (the proposition in Whitehead’s broader conception). The challenge is all the harder because the penumbra of alternatives composing the proposition can extend much farther than nuances on what is being indicated, or what the predicate (“mortal”) is being applied to. It can extend as far as alternative courses of the world. What is relevant to, and therefore presupposed by, the statement, includes *what “might have been, but is not”* (PR, 226). The “impress” of these alternatives is felt differently—with different emphasis, different gradations of felt germaneness, at the limit fading off into what amounts to an exclusion—depending on the mode of entertainment characterizing the occasion in which the proposition is repeated.

One person, Whitehead says (PR, 185), may daydream a Waterloo, in which case the alternatives of its penumbra “float . . . without consciousness of deliberate decision.” In this case, the alternatives are “admitted” into entertainment by an “internal decision.” This can only mean a decision internal to the proposition itself—to its own pressing to make an impress. The complex of relevant alternatives carries a propositional *force*, such that it is essentially self-proposing. This force is what makes the proposition a lure to feeling. The pressing to make an impress beckons some manner of attention, awakens a degree of interest. The gradation of the penumbral complex of alternatives it introduces into the dawning occasion now coming to entertain it “obscurely influences” how it will play out. For some, more attentive than the daydreamer, the influence may be felt in an “emotional tone . . . without any conscious analysis of [the] content.” The tone may vary widely, from one “of gratification, or regret, of friendliness or hatred,” depending on the conditions. The tone is not determined solely by the force of proposition as given, but also by how it is taken up. It marks how the lure for feeling that the proposition has impressed upon the circumstances is transduced by the arising occasion into the first stirrings of an *aim* providing its impetus toward self-completion.

Peculiar things happen when the aim is a professedly dispassionate judgment. The floating of alternatives is arrested as much as possible. The emotional tone is bracketed. The proposition is nailed to what it indicates, gradating away the relevance of alternative courses of history, nuances held to background as much as possible. But this is rearguard action. The penumbral complex will have already exercised its strike force. It will have already made the internal decision to set the lure of daydreaming. Although this provocation is declined, it cannot but have made itself felt after a manner (if only through the effort of turning them away, in negative prehension).<sup>3</sup> And it will already have exerted an obscure influence clothing itself in emotional tones, which the dispassion of judgment will have to strip from it as it admits the proposition into consciousness for logical analysis. By the time the proposition has reached the level of conscious judgment, its field of relevance will have been whittled down, to the point of making the proposition, however true it is judged, largely irrelevant to the pursuit of knowledge. That is, if knowledge is understood to concern itself with the composition of the actual world as it happens—in other words, as it is eventfully influenced by a propositional *force of thought* that is internally decided to make felt alternative courses of its own realization, in aim-inviting excess over any particular verbal phrasing of it, and in emotional surplus over any supposedly neutral analysis. “The conception of propositions as merely material for judgments is fatal to any understanding of their role in the universe” (PR, 187).

The notion of the proposition as a lure for feeling relaying into an aim providing an impetus for the self-completion of an arising occasion dramatically changes our sense of what a proposition is. It makes the circumstances, normally conceived as externalities that can be safely disregarded for all logical intents and purposes, into an *internal variable* of the proposition itself, part of its very warp and weft. Propositions don’t hover in an ether of general thought. They have a “locus.” By Whitehead’s “ontological principle,” every thing that is, must be somewhere. The locus of the proposition is the somewhere of its event of entertainment. The locus “consists of those actual occasions whose actual worlds include the logical subjects of the proposition” (PR, 186). This is a proliferating series. Propositional force is fertile.

Take Whitehead’s second historical example, Caesar’s crossing of the Rubicon (PR, 195–196). The locus is the “society” of occasions forming a nexus around that event. The defining characteristic of the society is the manner of the two logical subjects, Caesar and the Rubicon, coming together for the crossing. That defining characteristic subsists as a complex eternal object—a composite relational potential. This can be “conjecturally supposed to be prolonged up to the contemporary world with the judging subject, or, even more conjecturally, into the future world beyond the subject.” In other words, the relational potential is re-realized in the contemporary world for a

later subject re-feeling the propositional force of the event. When this happens, a variation on the proposition occurs. Whitehead evokes an old soldier from Caesar's army sitting on the banks of the Rubicon many years later. His contemporary world now also contains Caesar's having been assassinated, inextricably linked, in an extended nexus, with his having crossed the river. The emotional tone of this later-life, peacetime entertainment is markedly different from the same soldier's experience of the crossing as it happened in his youth. Among other things, a new logical subject figures in the extended scene: enter Brutus. Another predicate, "having been assassinated," links itself to "having crossed." The composite of relational potential carried by the proposition has expanded and complexified into a *propositional field* folding in a multiplicatory set of interwoven logical subjects and predicates, partially disjunct but overlapping. Each predicate is a thread that can be extricated from the weave to stand out in and as a separate proposition, as different as crossing and being assassinated. The penumbral complex has expanded to include all this, and more—stretching on as far as daydreaming can rove. At each entertainment, the complex of relational potentials is re-graded to include more or less in its focal length. The propositional field telescopes in or out, encompassing more or fewer logical subjects and predications, in differing patterns of emphasis. Think of a traveler today sitting on the banks of Rubicon, and all that their contemporary world includes. Think of the differing emotional tones those inclusions invite. Think of the diversity of aims that the once-again varying proposition might now incite with its lure for feeling. The proposition is so much more than a statement. It is nothing less than a worlding. It is a serial iteration of the world's complexing, and re-complexing, of its own relational potential. The proposition is the force of thought gone worlding.

Not only are the circumstances of the entertainment an internal variable of the proposition, so too is the entertaining subject itself. "Everything" in this worlding "depends upon the differences in direct perceptive knowledge" which the iterations presuppose for their entertaining subject (PR, 196). "The particular subject of experience can, in the nature of the case, never be eliminated from the experienced fact" (PR, 195). This is "the doctrine of *the inherence of the subject in the process of its production*" (PR, 224).<sup>4</sup> The separation between the subject of the enunciation and the subject of statement safeguarding the neutrality and generality of the proposition in its conventional modeling is brushed aside. Each variation on the proposition in its series of avatars becomes irreducibly *singular*—unisolatable from the circumstances in which its lure is felt—and irrevocably *interested*—formatively inflected by a renaissance of aim, born in direct perceptive knowledge.

What constitutes transmission is also complicated, in a way that removes it from the passive/active dichotomy. On the one hand, the proposition is

self-proposing, in its alluring beckoning of attention. In its role as lure for feeling, it is playing the role of provoker. But it is nothing outside of its taking up into an aiming of the coming occasion toward its own self-completion, for whose coming it is patient. It “awaits its logical subjects” (PR, 188)—which now include among their number the entertaining subject itself, recognized as an internal variable of the proposition. The proposition as datum—in its givenness to an occasion—is simultaneously active and passive, provoker and patient. The entertaining subject also displays this combination of activity and passivity. It receives the lure at the same time as it actively transduces the lure into an aim. The two active-passive syntheses overlap on the threshold to the new event in which the proposition will play out. The dividing line between the entertaining subject, or subject of the enunciation, and the logical subject, or subject of the statement, falls away in a dual act of origination, singularly occurring. The proposition awaits its subject, and the force of its strike kick-starts the subject’s actively coming into itself. Just thus, with just this emotional tone, for just this lure-begotten aim, constituting just this event in the series that will continue past it.

The entertaining subject *does not preexist* the entertainment. It emerges in it and as it, one with its event, in a singular manner. “It is new, a *new type of individual*, and not merely a new intensity of individual feeling. That member of the locus [that is the entertaining subject] has introduced a new form into the actual world” (PR, 187). The proposition is a real *individuation*, serving as the focal point of an actual reworlding. The individuation is a *speciation*: the veritable invention of a new *type* of individual. Rather than transmission, *creation*. Rather than linear progression, self-complicating seriation. Or, if this is transmission, it is the transmission not of statements about the truth, but truly of creative events.

Creation is *affirmed* before it is judged true or false. The proposition “enters, as a value, into the satisfaction [self-completion] of that subject; and it can only be criticized by the judgments of actual entities in the future” (PR, 191). In the event, it is a pure affirmation, in the sense of the direct, perceptive, “intuitive judgment” of “what is,” prior to any “intellectual judgment” of what is “true or false” that may be brought to bear later.

The term “individuation” should not mislead. The proposition is “not restricted to that individual experience” (PR, 191), referring to the singular experience coming into itself in response to the lure. To the extent that the new individual that emerges is the recipient of the proposition’s self-proposing, it integrates into its coming-to-be a “nexus whose relatedness is derived from the various experiences of its own members and not from that of the judging experient” (PR, 191). The patience of the entertaining subject is the immanence in its emerging character of the relational character of an indefinite multiplicity of others. “There are always others” (including, it must



not be forgotten, those “which might have been and are not” [AI, 276]). The individuation at issue in a proposition is fundamentally a *collective individuation*. A proposition is societal, both at origination and in destination. For the subject now emerging will add itself to the extended nexus, as it conjectures itself beyond this occasion toward the future. The many will have become one, for more to come, as the occasion “objectively conditions the creativity transcendent beyond itself” (PR, 221).

Can academic practice cross the Rubicon of the Whiteheadian proposition into the empire of collective individuation? Is it capable of making the crossing, or is it here that it meets its Waterloo? What would it mean for academic “communication” to integrate the propositional force of reworlding “intuitive judgment, couched in direct perceptive experience,” into its mode of operation? How do we make ourselves a proposition, taking the question literally. Not: how do we make a proposition *for* ourselves. But how do we really make *ourselves* a proposition: how do we creatively, collectively individuate, into a new academic type? How do we originate new forms in the academic world?

SenseLab’s practice has grappled with this question throughout its fifteen-year history, even before it learned to articulate it in terms of the Whiteheadian proposition. Earlier, the articulation was in the convergent terms of the Bergsonian “problem,” as propositionally relayed by Deleuze.<sup>5</sup> From the beginning, SenseLab activities have revolved around the making of events. The question the always-evolving group took as its point of departure was what it would take to make an academic or artistic meeting, conference, artist’s talk, exhibition, live up to the name of the event? The answer, as Whiteheadian as Deleuzian, was the emergence of the new, the origination of novelty. A movement of thought would be set in motion that could lead to the formulation of thoughts previously unthinkable. This could not be a neutral or general “newness”: generality activates the conventional proposition and settles into the element of mere intellectual judgment. The process would have to be oriented, interested, a matter of appetite as much as of intellectual curiosity. In short, to be worthy of the event of thought, the gathering would have to begin by setting a lure to feeling apt to transduce into a collective aim.

Preparatory meetings and interactions, live and online, around readings, artworks, movement, and materials are necessary for the setting of the lure. This is because the lure is only propositional in the Whiteheadian sense if it self-proposes, in that region of indistinction between activity and passivity, provocation and patience. It cannot simply be a verbal statement of a theme or topic. It has to emerge of its own from the complexity of a preparatory process open enough to embrace the full range of attentional modes, from daydreaming to the intensest study of the precisest of metaphysical concepts, and to activate their interstices. It would emerge from this entangled complexity not as a thematic topic, but as a problematic: a propositional field carrying a

penumbral complex of relational potentials ripe for the re-complexing, ready to telescope in and out to find the patterns of emphasis crystallizing it into a new, self-completing variation on itself.

Then procedures must be set in place to pass from the preparatory phase to the gathering event that will perform the variation. The crossing of that threshold will have to bring the lure into the gathering place, respecting the fragility of its dual nature, with its superposition of activity and passivity, provocation and patience. It must be palpable, at the literal threshold to the gathering, that the transmission model, with its own dual nature of generalizing and personalizing, will not be in force. The threshold must be a making-collectively-felt of the lure, inviting its transduction into a collective aim in the course of the activities. By “collective” is meant indivisibly relational: emerging as an excess of effect, an effect that is more than the sum total of the actions of the individual contributors, emergently more than the sum of the parts, and directly felt as such. The society of this “emergent collectivity” is what will constitute the entertaining subject, not restricted to individual experience. The sensation on the part of the participants will be one of having been swept up in a movement of thought washing through them, and sweeping them along, their own individual experience and cogitations forming a cellular eddy in the societal stir.

The way in which the emergent collective conjectures itself beyond this occasion toward the future will need to be attended to. The event will have been singular, but not single: events seriate. The process must proliferate, in order to be faithful to its own event. For it will have selectively re-graded the penumbral complex, foregrounding some of its logical subjects and predications, backgrounding some of the relational potentials while bringing others into salience. As is the case with all events, in their character as worldings, the “full sweep” (PR, 189) of this relatedness will be bequeathed to the next event in the series, for its own singular re-worlding. Attending to the way in which the event has conjectured itself into the beyond of the next event involves finding ways of making felt the full sweep of the relational complex under variation, including the elements of it that were backgrounded, or negatively prehended, in this iteration, and extending to alternatives that might have been but were not (yet still might come to be). This is a question of curating the event, in a completely new sense. The curating of the full sweep of the event, as it passes into self-completion to potentiate what lies beyond it, is a practice SenseLab has intensely explored under the name of the “anarchive.”<sup>6</sup> The way of the anarchive is the caring for the penumbral complex.

Over its lifetime, SenseLab has experimented with a panoply of “techniques of relation” for propositional event-making.<sup>7</sup> The term “research-creation” was adopted as the most flexible academic category for them. The term was just beginning to be institutionalized in Canada as SenseLab launched. As

practiced by SenseLab, research-creation is a performative practice, staging a propositional movement of thought couched in direct perceptive experience and uncontained by conventional disciplinary boundaries. The work locates itself at the crossroads of philosophy, art, and activism, in a multivectorial movement between collective reading practices and movement-and-materials-based explorations.<sup>8</sup> A concept of “immediation” has been collectively developed to conceptualize the move from the traditional transmission model to this event-based model, for which the operative concept is transduction: not the transmission of already formulated stated content, but the passage of a self-reformulating relational complex from one set of event-producing conditions to the next, across an evolving series of occasions in an expanding nexus.

It was against this background that the invitation to contribute to the organization of the WRP conference came. At that moment, SenseLab itself was at a crossroads, exploring the possibility of spinning off from the university into a community-based “Three Ecologies Institute” (named after the eponymous book by Félix Guattari).<sup>9</sup> The three ecologies refer to the conceptual/mental, social/political, and environmental/technological. The WRP’s long-standing engagement with ecological thought in a similarly extended paradigm was an added lure. It was clear, however, that SenseLab techniques could not be imported wholesale into a different milieu, especially in the absence of the sustained collective preparatory work toward the passing of the threshold into the event and the setting in place of techniques of relation serving as a springboard for the ensuing interactions (this phase of the collaborative setting of conditions is even more crucial when different organizational cultures are coming together). It was also clear that making a dramatic departure from the conference format was not appropriate for the proposed convergence between SenseLab and WRP. What the circumstances seemed to call for was a modulation of the existing conference format nudging it in a propositional direction.

The strategy adopted was to prepare a call containing choice quotes from *Process and Reality* where Whitehead most provocatively sets forth the differences between his notion of the proposition and the conventional view, and inviting prospective participants to join in an exploration of what a conference taking the difference seriously might look like. Presenters were encouraged to avoid the usual conference paper format. Three alternative formats were suggested:

*Knot*: a paradox or temporary impasse in your work, life, thinking, or creative practice that might become newly productive if staged in a way that opens it to a collaborative exploration, in language or between language and other modes of expression.

*Juncture*: a known conjunction reopened for further exploration through new techniques reconfiguring its potential. Such a juncture might be a given theoretical perspective, a set of established techniques informing a

particular practice, an already-operating collaboration or project, or an existing disciplinary, interdisciplinary or intermedia platform, restaged with a new inflection.

*Vector*: a move out from known junctures into a wander-line that is oriented by a proposition, and in that sense directionally constrained, but is at the same time open-ended in way that invites new takings-form on the fly.

It was assumed that not all of the presenters would take up the invitation of an alternative format (which indeed proved to be the case), but it was hoped that enough of a critical mass would for the event to have a palpably different tone. The idea was for the presentations to offer themselves from the angle of their incompleteness; incomplete, but already in the middle, the arc of an aim toward self-completion interestedly en route. This would make the presentation's point of entry into the event problematic: unresolved, but striving appetitively toward a resolution. Others would be invited into this movement of thought, and to share the appetite, in the hope that this multiplication of entertaining subjects might jog the movement of thought contributed by the presenter toward a fitting outcome, but one the presenter alone would not have otherwise arrived at. Such a resolution is unlikely to occur in situ, especially in an environment such as the conference setting, already choreographed with the expectations of mastery and self-presentation.

SenseLab's proposition to *make ourselves a proposition* by orienting thought toward knots, vectors and junctures would facilitate a different way of coming-into-relation. We would meet in the constellation of thought's incompleteness, in the very movement of thought. There would be no pressure to conclude, still less to reach a consensus. The technique is anarchival, bearing on the force of thought's ongoing. Its aim is to plant seeds of potential that may sprout into alternative courses, perhaps after having lain fallow, perhaps even without their effect being specifically felt. It may come of a re-grading of the penumbral complex, altering its quotient of negative and positive prehension. It may come in interference or resonance patterns in regions of the propositional field that are liminal to the presenter's consciously attended-to central focus. Or, it might percolate up as from nowhere as a sudden realization at a later date, as when a key piece of a preoccupying puzzle comes of its own in a dream. The exercise will have been a success if, for example, the article later prepared for the conference publication carries something derived from the direct perceptive experience of the presentation and discussion into its final form, like an imperceptible birthmark. Or, if a new way of formulating an aspect of the problem surfaces unexpectedly in the teaching context. In short, the openness of the problematic mode suggested for the presentations was not meant to be closed by the presentation. It was meant as a technique for the openness to keep working conjecturally beyond it.

To model this kind of collective enunciation in an ongoing openness of relation, it was suggested that among the invited participants there be a certain number with a history of working together collaboratively who would make joint presentations. The hope was that a knot, juncture, or vector from an ongoing collaboration collectively presented would act as a lure for the audience's feeling the potential of their own implication in the movement of thought crossing through the room. Budget constraints did not allow as many collaborations as originally desired, but it was possible for a certain number to contribute.

Another technique for setting in place the conditions for a more propositional event was to ensure the presence of a large contingent of people from SenseLab, all of whom had experience in alternative format academic/artistic events and who had been involved in the internal discussions around how the convergence with WRP might best be staged. SenseLab funded twenty-five of its participants from its Canadian, European, Brazilian, and Australian hubs to come to Claremont.<sup>10</sup> This was done in recognition of the fact that the modes of response to presentations on the part of audience members are important determining factors for whether the propositional force of the thinking is empowered or disabled. Responses oriented toward individual judgment of the verbal phrasing of statements neutralize the collectively individuating force of thought that Whitehead's theory of the proposition brings to the fore. The conventional mode of response in academic contexts comes down on the side of individual judgment, taking debate for its fundamental paradigm: a battle for supremacy between individual verbal phrasings, their propositional stakes replaced by the personal stakes of owning the room by getting one's own formulation across the most forcefully. Of course, this is rarely practiced in so bald a manner. It is mostly practiced with politesse, in the attenuated forms of the "exchange of ideas," "friendly commentary," and "conversation." But the essentials—mistaking a verbal statement for a proposition—remain the same in these more genteel variations. SenseLab participants have years-long practice of moving in concert to the complete proposition, and share an allergic reaction to debate, echoing Deleuze's oft-quoted (and almost as often misunderstood) saying that nothing is more inimical to thought than conversation.

Most of the SenseLab participants did not give presentations but were considered full participants in the event through their responses to the presentations, not only during the sessions but also around them. It is a widely commented truism that in the traditional conference setting, nothing ever happens in the sessions, but only in the corridors, during breaks, or afterward over food. The hope in this case was that something would indeed happen in the sessions, but that in addition, the interstitial and ambient spaces would also be activated and resonate propositionally. SenseLab participants were primed to function in those spaces, as well as in the sessions, as guardians of the

penumbral complex. Their way of fulfilling this role could be “atmospheric”: barely perceptible, operating through “minor gestures” inflecting the potential of the event by modulating its emotional tone.<sup>11</sup> This participatory activity in a minor key was meant to be an essential contribution to the event. For it is in an event’s minor gestures that its anarchival force is couched: aspects of its relational complex that might not have been (fully, directly, or globally expressed) but still may be (in some manner determining, perhaps surfacing after having long lain fallow). So involved were SenseLab participants in this role that in sessions where presenters did not take up the challenge to make themselves a proposition by trying out one of the alternative formats, the disappointment was palpable, at one point breaking out into a dramatic eruption. The way of the proposition is sometimes rocky.

The third conditioning technique SenseLab brought to the gathering was a particular practice of collective reading that it has employed since close to its beginnings. Instead of a presentation session, the first regular time slot was dedicated to a “conceptual speed-dating” séance.<sup>12</sup> This is a practice where a text, no more than twenty pages in length, is circulated in advance and everyone is urged to read it carefully before arriving. The attendees are divided into pairs to discuss the text, and at five-minute intervals one person from each pair moves to a next person and the discussion is continued across the interval. A particular concept, of a particular kind, is chosen as a focus for the discussion. The concept must be a “minor” concept—the textual equivalent of a minor gesture. This is a concept that might not even be noticed as a formal contributor to the conceptual weave of the thinking moving through the text, but once attended to appears as integral to the weave, and even essential for making the other concepts hold together. The concept must be minor in order to avoid activating already-arrived at conclusions and engrained presuppositions about the text that participants may have brought to the gathering, luring them into a renewed engagement. The strict time-limit that cuts off each mini-discussion in mid-stream and the pressing need to find a quick way back into the discussion with each new interlocutor pressurizes the experience. It creates a slightly altered mental state where one’s over-active tendency to dominate one’s own thoughts and one’s discussion with the other is quietened. There is no time to self-present or to contextualize one’s individual approach to the problems raised. It is necessary to go straight into the rethinking. This instills a receptivity to what the *concept* is saying: how, in this occasion, it is revealing and recomposing its propositional field. Conceptual speed-dating is a technique for fostering patience for the movement of thought. After a few moves, it can be difficult to remember if a particular thought came from oneself or another. This is the sign of a collective enunciation: a collective individuation of thought in the making. If the exercise has been successful, the whole-group discussion after the session has a very different feel from the usual plenary discussion. The just-emergent collectivity of thought can be felt

in the air and its aftertaste can potentially move into and obscurely influence subsequent interactions. In the case of this particular exercise—a gathering of Whitehead experts—it was deemed crucial *not* to use a text by Whitehead. This was because everyone present would have entered with a finely honed set of established understandings that it would be difficult to reopen for renewal. The approach had to be sideways (like the SenseLab members’ guardianship of the penumbral complex in the subsequent sessions’ question and answer periods and in the conference’s interstices). A set of carefully curated extracts from Nietzsche’s *Late Notebooks*<sup>13</sup> was chosen that had strong, and doubtless for many, unexpected resonances with Whitehead’s thought, and in particular with his concept of the proposition and its eventual nature. The extracts dealt with the limits of consciousness and the affective basis of thought, will and the zones of indistinction between activity and passivity, the implications for our notions of causality of what in Whiteheadian terms is formulated as the inherence of the subject in the process of its production, the fiction of individual expression, and the self-proposing force of thought.

The conference has now passed. One of the futures it conjectured has now occasioned this book. Have anarchival traces of the gathering made their way between the lines? If so, we can say together that we have made ourselves a proposition.

## NOTES

1. “The primary mode of realization of a proposition in an actual entity is not by judgment, but by entertainment. A proposition is entertained when it is admitted into feeling” (PR, 188).

2. “An element in this penumbral complex is what is termed a ‘proposition’ ” (PR, 185).

3. “An actual entity has a perfectly definite bond with each item in the universe. This determinate bond is its prehension of that item. A negative prehension is the definite exclusion of that item from positive contribution to the subject’s own real internal constitution. This doctrine involves the position that *a negative prehension expresses a bond*” (PR, 41, emphasis added).

4. “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 . . . It is better to say that the feelings *aim at* their subject, than to say that they *are aimed at* their subject. For the latter mode of expression removes the subject from the scope of the feeling and assigns it to an external agency. Thus the feeling would be wrongly abstracted from its own final cause. This final cause is an inherent element in the feeling, constituting the unity of that feeling. An actual entity feels as it does feel in order to be the actual entity which it is” (PR, 222).

5. Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Hammerstam (New York: Zone Books, 1991), chap. 1, 13–35.

6. Andrew Murphie and SenseLab, *The Go-To How-To Guide to Anarchiving* (self-published on Amazon, 2016). A collection of essays titled *The Way of the Anarchivist* developing the concept further is in preparation for publication by Punctum Books under the 3Ecologies imprint.

7. For a conceptual history of the first ten years of SenseLab practice, see Erin Manning and Brian Massumi, “Propositions for Thought in the Act,” *Thought in the Act: Passages in the Ecology of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 83–151.

8. For more on the practice of the SenseLab, see Erin Manning, “Practicing the Schizz” and “Cephalopod Dreams: Finance at the Limit,” *For a Pragmatics of the Useless* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, forthcoming).

9. Félix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, trans. Ian Pindar and Paul Sutton (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

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11. Erin Manning, *The Minor Gesture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).

12. For an in-depth discussion of conceptual speed-dating and collective enunciation in relation to Peirce’s theory of the sign, see Brian Massumi, “Collective Expression: A Radical Pragmatics,” *The Principle of Unrest: Activist Philosophy in the Expanded Field* (London: Open Humanities Press, 2017), 111–143.

13. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, ed. Rudiger Bittner, trans. Kate Sturge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

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*Part II*

**THINKING PROPOSITIONS**



## Chapter 2

# Knowing Whitehead?

Michael Halewood

Foucault, in *The Use of Pleasure*, asks, “What would be the value of the passion for knowledge if it resulted only in a certain amount of knowledgeable-ness?”<sup>1</sup> I have been working on, and with, the work of A. N. Whitehead for about fifteen years. Does this mean that I “know” the work of Whitehead? Or have I merely accumulated a certain amount of “knowledgeableness”? These questions occur to me sporadically, and under different guises. For example, there are occasions when someone who has not read Whitehead, on discovering my interest in his work, quite understandably asks me to tell them what he is “all about.” Often this leads to a feeling of slight panic. What do I know? How can I not just explain but justify the time I have spent reading his work and trying to analyze it? Sadly, my responses often start with “Well, Whitehead was born in 1861 and died in 1947.”

The reverse situation also occurs from time to time. Foucault, in the same passage as cited above, also states that “there is something ludicrous in philosophical discourse when it tries, from the outside to dictate to others, to tell them where their truth is and how to find it.”<sup>2</sup> At certain events, ones which are focused upon the work of Whitehead (such as the one organized at Claremont, on which the chapters in this book are based), there is a temptation to display one’s knowledge of his texts, to quote them (without the relevant text to hand). The aim might be to provide an accurate reading of Whitehead, but this does often smack of correcting the errors, the interpretations, of others. This is a “tactic” of which I am guilty. The difficulty is in finding a balance between rigor and “dictating to others from the outside,” as Foucault puts it. The texts of Whitehead can be quite technical; their terms and concepts are interlinked and have specific roles to play. It is dangerous to take one such term or concept on its own and deploy it too readily elsewhere. Whitehead’s philosophy is not a free-for-all. Yet neither is it dogmatic, and there is an

openness to his thought which such prescriptive readings would seem to go against. This openness is evident in Whitehead's approach to the very concept of knowledge, which he grants an extremely wide reach. Whitehead's statement that "Every actual entity has the capacity for knowledge" (PR, 161) extends the realm and status of knowledge. It also implies that human knowledge involves much more than the closed realm of scientific or philosophical "facts":

We find in those occasions, as known from our present standpoint, a surprising variation in the range and intensity of our realized knowledge. We sleep; we are half awake; we are aware of our perceptions, but are devoid of generalities in thought; we are vividly absorbed within a small region of abstract thought while oblivious to the world around; we are attending to our emotions—some torrent of passion—to them and to nothing else; we are morbidly discursive in the width of our attention; and finally we sink back into temporary obliviousness, sleeping or stunned. (PR, 161)

Our knowledge varies in both range and intensity. It is not only the clear-cut appreciation of distinct events, facts, or entities. Knowledge continues when we are half-awake, asleep, or even stunned. Whitehead wanted to demote knowledge from its position as the focal center of philosophy, as witnessed by the modern rise of epistemology following Descartes and Kant. In *Modes of Thought*, he laments that the "question, What do we know?, has been transformed into the question, What can we know?" (MT, 102; emphasis in original).

All this leads back to question of "what would it mean to *know* Whitehead?" From Whitehead's description it would appear that "knowledge of Whitehead" is not constant but rises and falls, according to circumstances. It is not a well to be dipped into at will. Yet, there is such a thing as knowledge, and it has its due importance. How to recognize the importance of knowledge without becoming "vividly absorbed within a small region of abstract thought while oblivious to the world around"? How to situate our thought, as Haraway<sup>3</sup> might put it.

To attempt to respond to such questions, I will start by taking one aspect of Whitehead's thought, that of the interrelationship of nature and societies. In *Process and Reality*, Whitehead provides the rather particular example of an individual's "knowledge of the Greek language" (PR, 90). What is instructive about this example is that Whitehead further explains how "Such knowledge is a common characteristic inherited from occasion to occasion" and this "common characteristic" "constitutes a society in reference to knowledge of the Greek language" (PR, 90). Knowledge is not itself a society, but it is related to societies. What does this mean?

## KNOWLEDGE, NATURE, AND SOCIETIES

In recent years, Whiteheadian scholars such as Didier Debaise<sup>4</sup> and Isabelle Stengers<sup>5</sup> have demonstrated the importance of the concept of “society” within Whitehead’s philosophy. With regard to the question of knowledge, it is possible, with Stengers, to go so far as to state that, according to Whitehead, “it is always societies that we study.”<sup>6</sup> This is not to state that all that we experience or encounter are societies, but that to which we pay attention, that which we study, are. For, as Whitehead puts it, in a rare mention of “physical objects”: “An ordinary physical object, which has temporal endurance, is a society” (PR, 35). Rather than go into a detailed analysis of Whitehead’s specific meaning of the terms “social” and “society,”<sup>7</sup> I want to focus on *why* Whitehead felt it important to develop such a position, and how it influences questions about knowledge, and what it would mean to “know Whitehead.”

As a historian and philosopher of science, Whitehead was keenly interested both in *what* science studies, *how* science operated, and, even more importantly, the justifications that science provided, or failed to provide, for its procedures (see, for example, SMW). One important aspect of his critique is what he terms the “bifurcation of nature.” This is a presupposition which, Whitehead maintains, haunts modern science, and which needs to be overcome. In *The Concept of Nature*, he describes this as follows:

What I am essentially protesting against is the bifurcation of nature into two systems of reality, which in so far as they are real, are real in different senses. One reality would be the entities such as electrons which are the study of speculative physics. This would be the reality which is there for knowledge; although on this theory it is never known. For what is known is the other sort of reality, which is the byplay of the mind. Thus there would be two natures, one is the conjecture and the other is the dream.

Another way of phrasing this theory which I am arguing against is to bifurcate nature into two divisions, namely into the nature apprehended in awareness and the nature which is the cause of awareness. The nature which is in fact apprehended in awareness holds within it the greenness of the trees, the song of the birds, the warmth of the sun, the hardness of the chairs, and the feel of the velvet. The nature which is the cause of awareness is the conjectured system of molecules and electrons which so affects the mind as to produce the awareness of apparent nature. The meeting point of these two natures is the mind, the causal nature being influent and the apparent nature being effluent. (CN, 30–31)

Modern (Western) thought is faced with an ongoing dilemma, in the literal sense of the term. It is faced with two mutually exclusive propositions, simultaneously. The first is that we must accept the findings and theories of “speculative physics,” with its faith in ultimate particles and ultimate explanations

which lie behind, and which in some undefined way, cause the everyday experiences of ordinary humans. The second is a focus on that other reality which suffuses our experience, that of birdsong, colors, emotions, things that are so important to us, but have no correspondents in the kind of nature envisaged by speculative physics. It is not that nature is to be distrusted, but our concept of nature is to be treated with caution.

This mistrust of our concept of nature never left Whitehead. Although in his major metaphysical work, *Process and Reality*, he rarely talks directly of the “bifurcation of nature,” this does not mean that his concerns have shifted. In fact, they have broadened. Now, his “protest is against the bifurcation of actualities” (PR, 289). Those actual things which we study cannot be shorn from their local environment. Any actual thing is a combination of elements of “nature” which were previously diverse. Such combinations are not isolated, they occur within an environment. It is for these two reasons that “every actual occasion is social,” or, to put it another way, that all that we study are societies. What is specific about a society is that it manages to endure. Such endurance is not inert, however; such endurance involves a level of interest. “The capacity of a society is relative to its environment and vice versa.”<sup>8</sup> Scientists (should) become sociologists, in that they seek to understand such endurance in relation to that which enables it, and which it enables. This is not limited to scientists but to anyone who studies, and it includes “also every novelist.”<sup>9</sup>

Quietly influenced by Whitehead (and Stengers), Bruno Latour has also developed a trenchant critique of the “modern” conception of nature and society.<sup>10</sup> Akin to Whitehead’s description of the “bifurcation of nature,” Latour talks of the “The Modern Constitution,”<sup>11</sup> wherein a gulf has been established between nature and society. Once again, nature is considered to be constituted by objects and organisms which the various branches of science supposedly study. Society, on the other hand, is supposedly only constituted by humans with their politics, economics, literature, and so on. The abiding concern of modernity is the ongoing effort to keep these separate, to ensure the purity of each realm. To allow politics, for example, to become involved in matters of nature would be to pollute the purity of nature (peculiar, almost paradoxical, echoes of such a position can be heard in recent debates over the “reality” of climate change). Likewise, to allow nature into the social realm runs the risk of falling back into an unacceptable (biological) determinism, where human behavior is both driven and explained by either our genes, our instincts, or our “hardwired” evolutionary psychology (so that the remnants of our supposedly hunter-gathering past lurk within modern individuals and society). Such a position risks betraying the post-Enlightenment image of humans as rational, cultured beings who inhabit their own realm of agency. Latour counters the bifurcation inherent in the “Modern Constitution” by insisting that nature,

society, culture, and humans have always been “hybrid.”<sup>12</sup> In place of this, he has offered what he calls a “sociology of associations”<sup>13</sup> where nature and culture are all mixed up together. In my work, I have tried to steer a line between Latour and Whitehead, though siding mainly with Whitehead, to develop forms of thinking (and even, perhaps, some knowledge) of matters which seem to have been obscured by the strict division between nature and society which inhibits modern thought.

## NATURE, SOCIETY, AND THE TUNING OF MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

How to conceive, concretely, the relations between nature and society in a Whiteheadian manner? I hoped to provide one example of this through a discussion of the tuning of musical instruments in the West.<sup>14</sup> When a friend of mine started a course on learning how to tune a piano, he introduced me to the notion of the “Pythagorean comma.” I was used to the idea that instruments such as violins and guitars “tune to themselves.” That is, the tuner adjusts one string to resonate sympathetically (harmonically) with the next, usually a fifth above. For example, an A string is tuned in relation to the D which is five notes below; if D is the first note, A is the fifth (D, E, F#, G, A). However, I had not thought how this related to the tuning of keyboard instruments such as the piano, harpsichord, or organ. Naively, I assumed that all the notes of the keyboard were “known” and it was simply a matter of allocating the right pitch to each of, for example, the 88 notes on a modern piano. It turns out that things were not so simple and that there was at least 800 years of research and literature on this topic. A vast amount of “knowledge,” complex, detailed, and at points arcane, but fascinating. Much of this was concerned with the problem set out by the Pythagorean comma.

Although it may not have actually been Pythagoras who discovered this issue, it is his name which is commonly associated with the important fact that notes need to be generated not by simply stepping up from one to the next (from C to D, for example) but by discovering the sympathetic resonances between different lengths of material (most often lengths of metal, such as a violin string). For followers of Pythagoras, the clearest and strongest relationship was that of the “fifth” (which is why musicians refer to this interval as the “dominant”). Rather than move from C to D, the procedure is to move from C to G. Once this G note is established, a D can be generated, and so on (from D comes an A, from A comes an E). There is, however, a problem. The generation of the interval of a fifth comes from a mathematical ratio of 2 to 3. By shortening the original piece of material by a third, a fifth above is produced. It might seem that it is possible to use the system to produce all



the notes on a piano keyboard, but this is not the case. Applying the ratio of 2:3 over and over, to generate the “same” note a few octaves above, does not produce a note which is totally sympathetic to the original. The reason for this is mathematical. And, although Pythagoras did not have access to the notion of measuring frequencies in terms of Hertz, it is the best way of explaining the problem of the Pythagorean comma.

Applying the ratio of 2:3 to an original frequency of 100Hz, which I will call the note “C,” produces the following:

C=100Hz  
 G=150Hz  
 D=225Hz  
 A=337.5Hz  
 E=506.25Hz  
 B=759.375Hz  
 F#=1139.0625Hz  
 C#=1708.5937Hz  
 G#=2662.8905Hz  
 D#=3844.3357Hz  
 A#=5766.5035Hz  
 E#(F)=8649.7552Hz  
 C7=12974.632Hz

However, if instead of applying the ratio of 2:3, the length of the piece of metal is halved over and over (a ratio of 1:2), the following is produced:

C=100Hz  
 C1=200Hz  
 C2=400Hz  
 C3=800Hz  
 C4=1600Hz  
 C5=3200Hz  
 C6=6400Hz  
 C7=12800Hz

Eight different “Cs” can be generated simply by repeatedly doubling the frequency. The problem, which Pythagoras highlighted, was that the final C (C7) generated by the two different methods does not have the same frequency. One is at 12800Hz, one is at 12974.632Hz. There is a difference of 174.632Hz between the two different Cs. If these were played at the same time, they would sound horrendously out of tune. This difference, this resolute out-of-tuneness, constitutes the Pythagorean comma. It is a phenomenon

which haunts all Western music, especially that which includes keyboard instruments. A range of tuning systems has been developed to address this problem, such as Meantone, Justified, and Equal Temperament. It is the last of these which was finally accepted as predominant in the late nineteenth century. The solution offered by Equal Temperament was to “distribute” this out-of-tuneness throughout the scale, by establishing an equal distance between each note, so that there is an interval of 1.059463094 between each. This is a neat solution, but it moves away from Pythagoras’s original idea about sympathetic resonances and, paradoxically, entails that all musical instruments are, when compared with the original insight of Pythagoras, slightly out of tune.<sup>15</sup>

Why does all this matter, and what does it have to do with Whitehead’s concern with nature and societies? To my mind, this issue is an example of the complex relationship of what we have previously considered to be natural and the social, and it shows their implications within each other. Pythagoras’s original position is entirely based on “natural” elements: the fact that all entities, all things (jars, bridges, amoebae, metals, violins) resonate. Further, there are distinct relationships between the frequencies of such resonance. These can be measured mathematically. The application of different modes of relating these frequencies, either by halving the length of a piece of metal or by reducing it by two-thirds, is not unnatural, nor is it some kind of “social construction.” Yet, it produces two divergent outcomes. It seems that nature itself is out of tune! The “social” aspect involves the manner in which this natural “out-of-tuneness” is reconciled. However, this is not simply a product of human thought or society.

Whitehead’s refusal of the bifurcation of nature would not allow for a division between the real physical world of frequencies and the different cultural understandings of such frequencies (for example, through the different tuning systems which make some music sound different, even “exotic” to others—such as can sometimes be found in the Middle East or Asia, for Western ears). Whitehead’s thought enabled me to understand that the tuning of musical instruments, and the example of Equal Temperament, is a society, in his specific sense of the term. It is both natural and social, it endures, it inhabits a specific environment which influences it, and which it is influenced by. For example, electronic keyboards tuned to Equal Temperament are often used to produce music for Bollywood films, perhaps distorting the original tuning which might have been used.

Equal Temperament, or any tuning system, as a society can be “known,” but this knowledge is of a specific kind. It is not knowledge of an object or a fact, but an understanding of the specific abstract-concrete system that it comprises; one which has a history which involves humans, and yet is within nature; one which endures and both feeds and feeds off its environment.

## ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE AND WHITEHEAD'S CONCEPT OF THE SOUL

My father was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease in 2010. He died in 2013 from complications having to do with prostate cancer. Following my father's diagnosis, I read some of the literature on Alzheimer's disease, both scientific and that produced by the hospital and the Alzheimer's Society, offering support to families. Throughout all these documents, there was a quietly insistent theme. A diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease marks a watershed. As with other forms of "dementia," the person involved is envisaged to be on a remorseless path of disintegration. They will not get better, only worse. Their brain is deteriorating remorselessly, and so are their cognitive capacities, and their mind. Or so it is supposed. By contrast, although a diagnosis of cancer can be distressing, nowadays we are encouraged, in the United Kingdom at least, to "Stand Up to Cancer"; to engage in a battle which could be won. There seems to be no such hope with Alzheimer's disease. This hopelessness is characterized by Moser as "the idea that people with Alzheimer's disappear into the 'mist of oblivion' or some unknown land, that they leave real life reality, and that they get lost to us before they have actually left us."<sup>16</sup> But what or who, exactly, was supposed to be "lost" in cases of Alzheimer's disease?

There seemed to be two different but interrelated answers to such a question, but both of which fall on one side, or another, of Whitehead's notion of the Bifurcation of Nature. On one side is the biomedical ("natural") response, which was that what was being lost was the structural integrity of the brain. This was manifest in the degradation of certain cognitive capacities, such as memory or the use of language. A second response, a more "social" one, was that what was being lost was the traits and capacities which made that person what they were. Cultural theorists, sociologists, and some philosophers may be used to seeing identity, the self, or subjectivity as something which is constructed, which is separate from the biological. However, when thinking about Alzheimer's disease, such arguments do not seem able to fully explain what is going on. For example, difficulties with language are often taken as symptoms of Alzheimer's disease: forgetting words, problems with constructing sentences, repetition. Language becomes a marker for the loss of brain function. However, on this view, language (the social element) is reduced to a direct outcome of the biological. The "social" element of social construction has failed. At the same time, to ignore the "medical" aspect and to try to develop a "purely sociological" analysis and insist that the self, subject, and identity, including those diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, *only* comes from the interrelations of groups and individuals, does not help get to the heart of the matter. Yet, to give up and merely accept the rather discouraging biomedical view did not seem helpful either. As a result, I tried to use

the work of Whitehead and Stengers to approach the question in a different way, one which allowed for the social and biomedical elements, but was not constrained by them.

The title of my article is “Do Those Diagnosed with Alzheimer’s Disease Lose Their Souls?”<sup>17</sup> It is deliberately provocative and has received some criticism. The decision to use the term “soul” as a marker for the core of a person, for what was being lost, was to emphasize the implications of current framings of discussions about Alzheimer’s disease. That is to say, when faced with the question of what is being lost, rather than rely on vague notions of “identity,” “individual psychological make-up,” I used the term “soul” to stand in for the core of the person, aware of its connotations—for example, a loss of humanity. It seemed to me that those who talked of Alzheimer’s disease in terms of loss were not being clear enough, were not facing up to the consequences of their position. The term “soul” was used as a placeholder to highlight what is at stake in this question.

Throughout his work, Whitehead uses the term “soul” not to refer to some enduring (or immortal) entity within us, but as something which marks the enjoyment of possibilities which characterize an important element of human life. Stengers<sup>18</sup> builds on this notion by looking at the role of language as expressing such enjoyment of possibilities. The advantage of their approaches, as I see it, is that they are able to retain a notion of the “core” of a person, including those diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease, which is not based on either purely social interrelations or an enduring physical entity. Yet, it retains aspects of both. I hope that the readings of Whitehead and Stengers that I offer enables the development of an approach which means that those diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease are not lost, different, or other to “us.”

This may have implications for how we think about diseases other than Alzheimer’s disease. As Schillmeier puts it: “Dementia demands that we slow down and interrogate how we do things and rethink what we consider normal, meaningful, true and good knowledge, common sense and so on.”<sup>19</sup> Dementia, when viewed as a loss of cognitive capacity, seems to suggest that the person diagnosed with dementia is excluded from the realm of “healthy reason”<sup>20</sup> which marks out the full and active members of modern society: “The disease attacks the holy realm of modernity: the mind.”<sup>21</sup> There is a link here to the theoretical and practical treatments of madness throughout history, as analyzed by Foucault. A healthy mind or a healthy reason is linked to a supposedly healthy individual. Such a view is established and supported by differentiating such individuals from those who are not so “healthy.”

It seems that there is something like this going on in discussions of Alzheimer’s disease. What the work of Whitehead (and Stengers) enables is a reframing of the problem, in a manner which does not prioritize or ignore

either the natural (biomedical) or social aspect. There is a need to develop ways of thinking and acting which can incorporate the wide range of experiences of humans without excluding some, or designating them as “lost to us.” When researching Alzheimer’s disease, what we are actually looking at is one aspect of possible human experience, one among many. However, there is a tendency to view those diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease as “different from us,” as others, as lost to us. How we think about Alzheimer’s disease, dementia, and perhaps other diseases such as Huntington’s, says a lot about us.

### A VERY BRIEF CONCLUSION—A STYLE OF (PRAGMATIC) THOUGHT

I started this chapter by asking what it would mean to “know” the work of Whitehead. I may not have provided an answer, but it does seem that what can be taken from an engagement with Whitehead is an understanding of the need to pay attention not just to *what* we think, but also to *how* we think. Again, this is not so far from Foucault in his discussion of knowledgeable-ness, where he describes philosophy as an activity which comprises “the endeavour to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known?”<sup>22</sup>

Nevertheless, a problem remains. Whitehead is a technical philosopher, at least in *Process and Reality*, with a technical vocabulary. An understanding of this seems necessary to develop new modes of thought. There is no simple answer to the question “how much do we need to know.” Perhaps the correct response is to reframe this question; to take a more pragmatic slant. Our “knowledge” of Whitehead is to be judged by its outcomes, by the extent to which it encourages or enables others to think differently, but also effectively.

### NOTES

1. Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality*. Volume 2 (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 8.
2. Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, 9.
3. Donna J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1991).
4. Didier Debaise, *Un empirisme spéculative. Lecture de Procès et réalité de Whitehead* (Paris: Vrin, 2006).
5. Isabelle Stengers, *Thinking With Whitehead: A Free and Wild Creation of Concepts* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2011).
6. Stengers, *Thinking With Whitehead*, 325.

7. For a fuller analysis see Michael Halewood, *Rethinking the Social Through Durkheim, Marx, Weber and Stengers* (London: Anthem Press, 2014), 79–89.
8. Didier Debaise, *Nature as Event: The Lure of the Possible* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2017), 75.
9. Stengers, *Thinking With Whitehead*, 331.
10. Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
11. Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Harlow: Prentice Hall, 1993), 13ff.
12. Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, 41–43.
13. Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 9.
14. Michael Halewood, “On Equal Temperament: Tuning, Modernity and Compromise” in *History of the Human Sciences*, 28/3 (2015): 2–21.
15. For those interested in the technicalities of the argument, my article “On Equal Temperament: Tuning, Modernity and Compromise” might be of interest.
16. Ingun Moser, “Making Alzheimer’s Disease Matter: Enacting, Interfering and Doing Politics of Nature” in *Geoforum*, 39 (2008): 104.
17. Michael Halewood, “Do those Diagnosed with Alzheimer’s Disease Lose their Souls?” in *The Sociological Review*, 64 (2016): 786–804.
18. Isabelle Stengers, “Whitehead’s Account of the Sixth Day,” in *Configurations*, 13/1 (2005): 35–55.
19. Michael Schillmeier, *Eventful Bodies: The Cosmopolitics of Illness* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 48.
20. This is a phrase which I have borrowed from Schillmeier. It is one that he, in turn, locates in the work of Kant. See Schillmeier, *Eventful Bodies*, 31–32.
21. Schillmeier, *Eventful Bodies*, 13.
22. Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, 9.

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## Chapter 3

# Space, Time, and the Deity of Peace

Roland Faber

In order to explore the Whiteheadian proposition<sup>1</sup> of peace, I must circle around, or rather try to cut through, a knot, a profound paradox of Whitehead's thinking, expressed here as an underlying characteristic of Whitehead's thought as such: How can a presupposition, assumed to be present as a condition sine qua non in and for the whole process of reality and, hence, in any individual event of its happening, as well as in the formation of patterns of existence, allow for the affirmation of its (this presupposition's) own derivations, deviations, and really oppositions, antagonistic negations, and seeming annihilations, without self-negation, self-annihilation, or falsification of its status as a necessary precondition? And further, within this paradoxical metaphysical patience, how can the self-affirmation of this presupposition of reality simultaneously figure as the driving force of the whole process involved such that through the conundrums of its own fragmentation it is bound, or meant, to envision and to facilitate the overcoming of its oppositions, negations, and annihilations?<sup>2</sup> By tracing several related concepts in Whitehead's work, I will identify the site of these questions by pointing at this patient reality and driving force of the process universe *as* peace.<sup>3</sup> If we can, as I think, find in Whitehead's later work the ideal and reality of peace as the driving force for the survival of, and hope for, a civilization of the future that will tend to (have) overcome violence in its myriad forms as its only hope and means for survival, these questions might be of existential interest to humanity, and Whitehead's contribution at least worth pondering.<sup>4</sup>

While I will end with something like the deification of peace in Whitehead's work, I want to begin with Samuel Alexander—the slightly older contemporary of Whitehead, a renowned English philosopher famous for his refiguration of speculative cosmology, which was obviously a main interest of Whitehead's later philosophical work (PR 3)—as the inclusive paradigm



of the becoming of the universe, embracing humanity from parameters that guide and simultaneously emerge within this all-encompassing process of existence.<sup>5</sup> However, for Alexander, this is neither merely a process of meaningless shuffling along dissipating lines of diversification (although this also happens, and has become part of several postmodern and scientifically based cosmologies),<sup>6</sup> nor one of preordained centralization to a point omega in which all becomes one in a divinity, such as in Teilhard de Chardin's momentous vision.<sup>7</sup> Rather, the enfolding cosmic process seems to function similarly to Munchhausen's spectacular but fictitious deed, lifting himself out of a moor which is slowly devouring him by using only his own hand, dragging himself by his hair up and into safety: in the becoming of the universe Time, Space, and Deity themselves *become* (what they are or will be) in order to transform the universe as an emergent process of, well, some kind of (immanent) deification, but not necessarily to a definite end or final state.<sup>8</sup>

We know that these elements work well in Whitehead's thought pattern of a process of becoming that is one of transformation into ever new states of achievement that will become sites of decay and reformation (literally, of the birth of new forms of realization), rather than one of a transformation of such a state into an everlasting state of things (PR, 111). And Whitehead pays his due to Alexander at the outset of his own endeavor to understand this process and its ingredients, of which space, time, and deity are emphasized as the leading actors in the drama of becoming, together embodying the realization of a principle of unrest in all activity (PR, 28, 41). Yet, it is in Whitehead's last lecture series, collected in *Modes of Thought*, that he rehearses and reinterprets Alexander's triad anew (MT, 101–2) according to his own interest, situating it in the context of a universe in which life and humanity can appear and are in some way bound to realize themselves as a presupposition and a driving force for the realization of a site in which, within this process, something arises that could be seen as the metaphysical value of the whole clamor of becoming, even its ideal realization in modes of a civilized universe beyond violence, through the actualization by organisms of nonviolent modes of organization—a transformation for which Whitehead states in almost prophetic terms elsewhere that novelty would not imply loss (PR, 340). This, it seems, is the deification of peace.<sup>9</sup>

Meanwhile, in *Modes of Thought*, the triad of Space, Time, and Deity appears as a haunting problem specifically for humanity, as humanity becomes the conscious reflection on these ingredients of the universal process, almost as in the famous image used by John Wheeler, namely, that in the emergence of the human mind the universe itself not only reflects back onto itself as a whole, but becomes created and transformed (or recreated) through this conscious awareness of the process as a whole in the mind's own image.<sup>10</sup> But to what end? Whatever the answer may

be by the many thinkers who were invigorated by this vision to speculate on the destiny of existence, from Whitehead's standpoint, the aim of this emergence is peace (and correlative terms symbolizing peace), addressed with a religious aura as "the intuition of holiness, the intuition of the sacred, which is at the foundation of all religion," noting that in "every advancing civilization this sense of sacredness has found vigorous expression" (MT, 120). The sense of deity in this consciousness is what peace captures, but tempered with the processual and relativistic co-emergents of time and space, which together hold the process open and prevent its closure.<sup>11</sup>

As Whitehead develops this triad further, he relates it to three of the main characters of the process of becoming through which he had explored the constitution of events in *The Concept of Nature*: temporality, spatiality, and characteristics of patterns (CN, chs. 3, 5, and 7). Now, in *Modes of Thought*, they become projective summaries of the way his philosophy has proceeded throughout his complex metaphysical explorations over several books and decades of thinking to represent the advance toward novelty (time), the achievements of such becoming (space), and the valuable coordination of potentials of alterations (deity), in which the whole process is always ahead of its game, as it where, or projects itself always anew into an adventurous process (MT, 173–4; AI, ch. 19).

Apart from time there is no meaning for purpose, hope, fear, energy. If there be no historic process, then everything is what it is, namely, a mere fact. Life and motion are lost. Apart from space, there is no consummation. Space expresses the halt for attainment. It symbolizes the complexity of immediate realization. It is the fact of accomplishment. Time and space express the universe as including the essence of transition and the success of achievement. The transition is real, and the achievement is real. . . . Finally, there is deity, which is that factor in the universe whereby there is importance, value, and ideal beyond the actual. (MT, 101–2)

Yet, Whitehead ends his transformational discussion of Alexander's triad by linking its workings to the becoming of human consciousness, in which its force receives the status of a purpose on its own, mediated through the sense of deity.<sup>12</sup>

It is by reference of the spatial immediacies to the ideals of deity that the sense of worth beyond ourselves arises. The unity of a transcendent universe, and the multiplicity of realized actualities, both enter into our experience by this sense of deity. Apart from this sense of transcendent worth, the otherness of reality would not enter into our consciousness. There must be value beyond ourselves. Otherwise every thing experienced would be merely a barren detail in our own

solipsist mode of existence. We owe to the sense of deity the obviousness of the many actualities of the world, and the obviousness of the unity of the world for the preservation of the values realized and for the transition to ideals beyond realized fact. (MT, 102)

Mediated by the consciousness emergent through the pervasiveness of the factor of Deity, humanity is distinguished in the use of the triad (MT, 102) in purposely striving “for the ideals characterizing the civilized phases of human society” (MT, 105), or, as I suggest, based on Whitehead’s reflections in *Adventures of Ideas*, in the deification of peace—not only as an (arbitrary) ideal, and always ahead of us, but as a (necessary) presupposition for the whole process to come about (AI, ch. 20).<sup>13</sup>

However, this scenario introduces the conundrum mentioned in the preamble: If the civilizing factor, the Deity of value, importance, purpose, and peace, is all-present throughout the process (although not necessarily as present<sup>14</sup>)—otherwise characterized by the rhythms of time and space, the revolutions of attainment and decay, the forces of unification and dissipation, the coexistence of compassion and violence,<sup>15</sup> the antagonisms of ruthlessness and forgiveness, or the multifariousness of the world, as Whitehead summarized this complex of good and evil on occasion, which must not be ignored by philosophy (PR, 338)—how can it, on the one hand, be presupposed for, and, on the other, ever become a force of, the nonviolent civilizing of humanity or (in a vast universe or even multiverse) any other site (RM, 160)? Without lying rationalizations or blind fantasizing imaginings, how can this factor of Deity, in the midst of the temporal and spatial conspiracy of unsettling and uncertainty, of destruction and failure, ever be claimed not only to be an ideal for transformation, but even more a force of attainment in the midst of its own ongoing negations, oppositions, and annihilations, prevalent in any glimmer of attainment (PR, 341–51)? How can that which, if it is a profound condition for such a transformation of the universe and humanity, is obviously too weak to succeed in this endeavor be called an ideal worth striving for, motivating the emergence of a civilization of peace (AI, 167)?<sup>16</sup> Or to rephrase the question in terms used in *Adventures of Ideas*: How can *this* factor (Deity, Peace), while it is always a future hope for attainment, a final fact, be the eros of the process progressing to its own attainment (AI, 294–95) if it in some grave sense affirms its own radical violations, negations, and annihilations?<sup>17</sup>

Throughout history, this conundrum has maintained prominence in a variety of ways as addressed by philosophies and religious discourses to which Whitehead’s work variously reacts while he has set up the stage for his own understanding of it. A few examples may suffice. One could understand this conundrum to be that of theodicy: and Whitehead answers in *Science and the Modern World*, at the very place where he publicly introduces the

notion of God in his thought, with the differentiation between the function of value in process, which is the reality of God, and creativity, the function which represents the interferences of space and time (SMW, 169)<sup>18</sup>—a vital distinction for the whole of his emerging philosophical work.<sup>19</sup> One could refer to coping arrangements in different religious contexts in which either a dualism of good and evil resides (later Zoroastrianism, Gnosticism) or a monism of divine reality issues or includes both good and evil (certain forms of the Kabbalah and related mystical monisms), creation and destruction (as in certain Hindu systems revering Shiva or Shakti, or the *lila* of Krishna), life and death (as in the biblical and Qur'anic texts and related systems), or mercy and violence (as for instance in the anonymous Second Isaiah 45). But Whitehead escapes these solutions, on the one hand, by differentiating the gospel of love from that of fear, where love becomes the fundamental force of any serious civilized religion with sufficient rational reflection and ethical standing (RM, 72–73),<sup>20</sup> and, on the other hand, by examining the development of philosophical reflections and their inherent pervasive molding in religious thought after Plato as the progression from a divine ideal of the absolute tyrant to a persuasive agency of mutuality (AI, 165–69).<sup>21</sup> Even the interpretation of profound violence as the wrath of God (as in certain layers of the Hebrew Bible and by apocalyptic justification of justice in Abrahamic traditions in general) or the inevitability of the cause and effect cycle in the web of connectivity of action and reaction (as seen in Greek deifications of fate and the Dharmic karma) are ideas that Whitehead views as misinterpretations of the all-engagement of the divine production of values and alternative potentials of and for the good under conditions of space and time (RM, 41, 153; PR, 244).

Nevertheless, Whitehead holds on to the conundrum precisely by venturing beyond the limitations of these seeming solutions, not by removing a factor from the equation (such as: there is no God, there is no peace ever to be reached), but by affirming that *all* sides of the conundrum together are the very paradox that unmasks such eliminations as short circuits.<sup>22</sup> The question is, how can he justify this paradoxical affirmation?

A deeper understanding of the conundrum in the concept of peace in Whitehead's work leads me to ask whether that which he uncovers as its core paradox is not something that pervades the very essence of Whitehead's metaphysics, or, if you will, is the intuition around which he constructs the imaginative generalizations (PR, 5) by which he tries to penetrate the mysterious womb of nature and the nature of things he has set out to explore (PR, 17). In fact, Whitehead seems to think that the processual and connective structure of nature itself, in its most universal manifestation, is precisely that which we can find in our philosophical approach to it (PR, 4), as mind and conscious awareness of this paradox reflect and transform the becoming of

things in the triad of time, space, and deity, or constitute the categorical obligations of becoming itself (PR, 26–28): how process and progress, creative advance and decay, unification and diversification are possible—or, better, *actualized*—in a process of harmonization that leads to consciousness as the reflection and creative transformation of the becoming of the universe itself.<sup>23</sup>

While rumor has it that Whitehead endeavors to create or recover a coherent, necessary, and logical system (PR, 3) that comprises the inner workings of all phenomena available in the experience of this process (especially as experience is already constituted before consciousness arises from unconscious natural processes), I rather see in his enterprise a complexity of paradoxical thinking, or the necessity of formulating thought in a paradoxical way that eludes such sedimentation into neat little systems (RM, 55).<sup>24</sup> On first glance, an observer of the development of Whitehead's thought might agree, and even commentators of Whitehead's work might have felt to conform to the postulate of such systematizations of Whitehead's thought, or, if they detect incoherencies, try to reconstruct Whitehead's system from some assumed coherence, in order to make sense or to prove its validity, often with great care and persuasion<sup>25</sup>—thereby sometimes whisking its complexity away, exchanging it with some kind of ideal of simplicity or harmonization. It is known that Whitehead mistrusts simplicity (CN, 163), not least because of his systemic conviction that any system is a process of becoming one and, by the same token, of becoming contextualized in a multiplicity of new systematizations, in the best case enriched by its unique unifications (PR, 21).<sup>26</sup> Thought in process (PR, 29) is rather, as in Deleuze,<sup>27</sup> an event of culmination and serialization alike (PR, 34–35). It is as if all abstraction is messy in itself, not only because it is involved, as it always is, in actualizations that exhibit creative and destructive abilities in forming a world,<sup>28</sup> but because thoughts, ideas, categories, forms, possibilities, and propositions are themselves, in such complex interactions with actualizations, always coming in movements of contrasting—as forms not just in, but *of* becoming (MT, 86)—that exhibit the endless process not only of complexification, of contrasts of contrasts (PR, 49), but of opposition, molded into ever new negotiated limitations, definitions, and determinations in a wider field of indeterminacies, indeterminations, and deconstructions of definitions, “de-limitations” in this paradoxical sense, always demanding anew their recognition in a process of evolution (PR, 229).<sup>29</sup>

In a thread of related contrasts of this kind (in an indefinite movement), we discover the indeterminacy of mind and matter in *Symbolism* (S, 20),<sup>30</sup> of particular and universal in *Process and Reality* (PR, 48–51), of reason and creativity in *The Function of Reason* (FR, 81–82), or the methodological indeterminacy between relationality and rationality in *Process and Reality* (PR, 4)—all of them presupposing that there is never a finality to any

dualistic unraveling of the tension between the unique and the universal; that experience is only universal as it is unique; that it may not lose its novelty, its unprecedented appearance in unexpected contexts, and its relevance for all experience for any generalization; that it might need to always demand its creative value (as a valuation process and as transcending transmission of its self-determination) so as to be shining through its perceived (abstracted) relevance, as in *Modes of Thought* (MT, 174). Like Deleuze,<sup>31</sup> Whitehead does not connect dualities such as individuality and generality in his definition of metaphysics—that is, the endeavor of ever new imaginative generalization—but circumvents dualism by fusing singularity and universality in mutual indetermination.<sup>32</sup> Just as actuality and nexus are mutually indetermining (PR, 21), so does any other paradoxical togetherness in actuality indeterminate its finality into a transcending process of infinite becoming.<sup>33</sup>

I have explored several of those transformational ways of togetherness in other contexts more in depth.<sup>34</sup> Here I will only rehearse a few of them as seems necessary for the kind of paradox we are dealing with in the conundrum of space, time, and the divinity of peace. It is important to realize from the outset that this paradoxical con-fusion is, as stated above, the affirmation of the incompatible realities of space-time and peace, at the same time. They are not fused by negation, as in Hegelian dialectic.<sup>35</sup> Deleuze captures this Whiteheadian intuition by recognizing that in the process of space-time, God—read Peace here—is not a harmonization of the compossible, by any dialectic, but the tracing of divergences.<sup>36</sup> While compatibility of the possible negates one side in favor of pre-stabilized harmonization, as in Leibniz (PR, 48), and hence limits the process by foreclosure (PR, 231),<sup>37</sup> at the heart of Whitehead's conundrum of peace, the deity of peace affirms all negations (PR, 345). And while this affirmation allows for the patience of its negations to exist in its own relativization (R, ch. 2), the force of negation always works by self-negation, and its transition is self-annihilation. As Deleuze observes,<sup>38</sup> and as Whitehead proposes (RM, 155–56), while dialectic ends in a logic of determination, affirmation of negations *indeterminates* oppositions and negations so as to offer them again for the process of ever new (polyphonic) harmonizations.<sup>39</sup>

This Whiteheadian logic of becoming-multiplicity in the affirmation of oppositions, their affirmation in the transformation of them into contrasts, is the logic of the deity of peace in space-time (PR, 346).<sup>40</sup> Yet, this logic shows already in several fundamental structural decisions that it harbors the potential to express such a thought meaningfully, despite the conundrum that it generates. Three of these structures that are productive of Whitehead's metaphysics and civilizational dynamics alike (both on a methodological and cosmological level) are his conceptualizations of (necessity in) universality, coherence, and mutual immanence.

“Necessity” in universality is an odd term that appears in the opening remarks on Whitehead’s method of imaginative widening of any reasonable language and all potential meaningful categories in which to formulate the matrix of existence and consciousness alike (PR, 4). It not only is the crown of what a system of all experiences in Whitehead means, but sets the stage for the dynamics of the process of becoming, becoming conscious, and becoming-multiplicity itself. It states that both the process of becoming and the consciousness of becoming coincide in the universality of relationality,<sup>41</sup> which as such generates the process, and, at the same time, defines the boundaries of (conscious) rationality comprising this process in the oscillation with its matrix in flux.<sup>42</sup> Reason, the conscious (emergent) reflection of space, time, and deity—not only in analysis, but also in creative transformation and as instrument of purpose (FR, 37–38)—does not filter out incompatibilities, but affirms their connectivity, even when that which this triad produces and harbors is steeped in degenerations of mutual negation, ugly limitation, and violent opposition. This mode of reason amounts to the wisdom of valuation and harmonization in the face of diversification (PR, 345–46).

Coherence—“the great preservative of rationalistic sanity” (PR, 6)—is just another way to say the same thing: that connectivity, even throughout all negations of unifications and harmonizations, and sometimes even because of them, is the presupposition of any reasonable pattern of existence and thought without which negations and dualisms would prevail—such as those that Whitehead detects in the systems of Descartes, Leibniz, and Spinoza (PR, 6–7). By understanding coherence more like the Dao of Laozi, that is, as mutual coinherence of all elements, even in their spatial and temporal violation,<sup>43</sup> Whitehead not only demonstrates his allusion of the kinship of his philosophy to Chinese thought (PR, 7), but transforms the basis of his whole project into one of the inevitability of the interference of space-time and the deity of peace, or of creativity and God.<sup>44</sup> Yet, in his methodological exposition, he can formulate this vibrating pattern of coinherence without naming either of them. Instead, by carefully defining coherence as the mutual presupposition of all involved elements, he creates the paradoxical situation from which only a nexus of events of becoming, instead of definite structures defining the reality of things, springs. He accomplishes this deed by further declaring the mutuality of these elements not as analytic, but as synthetic togetherness, that is, not by making their coinherence a matter of mutual inclusion, such that each one element does holistically enfold, and can be pressed to release, all others, but rather that, although they coinhere, yet they cannot be derived from another, nor abstracted from one another (PR, 3).<sup>45</sup> We will revisit this characteristic when we introduce the conundrum in terms of values and peace.

Mutual immanence is only the most imaginative generalization of such patterns as applicable, in Whitehead's universe, to nothing less than everything.<sup>46</sup> It is the universal category of inclusion of all-embracing relationality and processual advance into novelty, satisfying the ultimate intuitive ground of appeal, namely, togetherness (PR, 21), and distilling the ultimate reality of existence itself. As I have often referred to the recourse to mutual immanence as ultimate reality in Whitehead—instead of creativity or God, or any other such element in his thought claiming its own peculiar ultimacy—in other places,<sup>47</sup> I will only relate one of its more surprising functions in our context. In *Adventures of Ideas*, Whitehead describes mutual immanence as that which is before all specifications of space-time and deity, that is, before any form of temporality, be it serial or not; any concept of spatialization, be it relating or diverging; and any characterization of any activity by potentials, abstractions, forms, patterns, and values.<sup>48</sup> He identifies its function with that of the Platonic *khora*, with general connectedness devoid of any common relevance of its elements, beyond any order, and with ultimate metaphysical obligation of existence (PR, 201).<sup>49</sup> This all-embracing coinherence of whatever can be called real or imaginative, local or universal, abstract or actual, is, in fact, nothing else but the all-pervasiveness of a patience by which nothing that opposes any of the more specific elements of reality is excluded, but is affirmed even in its negations, oppositions, limitations, diversifications, violations, and annihilations.<sup>50</sup>

It is in this breathtaking universal view that any world, any universe (if we admit the multiverse in Whitehead), any categorical differentiation or form of becoming, and any kind of activity and abstraction from it is not only affirmed (this affirmation being the ultimate presupposition of any becoming, attainment, or failure), but hints at the very center of the conundrum we are tracing here—namely, that the very patience of accepting all divergences allows generation and degeneration to happen, although not by blind affirmation of all elements even in their modes of negation, but by pervading all such divergences in the mode of, one could almost say, in the existential mood of, the generation of forms and lures and propositions of, and feelings for, becoming that altogether mirror this patience as directed to a purpose, the purpose of transforming the impossible womb of nature and its forces of antagonism and violence into one of self-conscious connectivity, for which humanity has failed to find other than sacred words, such as compassion, love, harmony and nonviolent togetherness of the all of existence.<sup>51</sup> This is further demonstrated by Whitehead's choice to identify this ultimate (chaotic, but relational) Nexus<sup>52</sup> with Plato's medium of intercommunication (AI, 134) and with the self-conscious, ethically challenged, and highly complex organism of human personhood.<sup>53</sup> If personhood, in Whitehead's application of *khora*, is



in its very essence a stream of space-time progressing by individualized and diversified purpose and importance (AI, 187), it is precisely the breakthrough of this ego-less essence of personhood beyond the control of purpose that releases the meaning of peace in Whitehead (AI, 285).<sup>54</sup> Peace, here, becomes the purpose beyond purpose,<sup>55</sup> and Whitehead hints at the divinity of it by identifying its function with that of God in Leibniz (AI, 135), yet also indetermining it from religious preoccupation by referencing Democritus's void (AI, 122). Yet, in Whitehead's own rendering, the khoric suggestion of peace has transcended the categorization as an element within a triad. Peace has also been elevated beyond the relational differentiation, or even the antagonism, of valuation in and from the divergences of space-time, instead expressing the unspoken, all-pervasive, often undiscovered dynamics of existence itself. As it cannot be abstracted from anything more specific, it appears now as a universal, even inevitable presupposition, and a driving force of the process,<sup>56</sup> without suspending the conundrum expressed with the deity of peace.

To be sure, I do not mean to say that we should follow some postmodern interpretations in which *khora* replaces the formative element of Deity (RM, 160) as the new divinity (or instead of it),<sup>57</sup> but rather we are entering here a sphere of nondualism, the non-difference (neither identity nor difference) of Deity with Peace<sup>58</sup>—excluding the dualisms from considerations of identifications, venturing beyond monism and pluralism as in Deleuze and Guattari.<sup>59</sup> Instead of trading the sacred for some kind of secular mysticism, as in some post-philosophy approaches (as another substitution),<sup>60</sup> the entitative view of Whitehead's God must rather be transformed<sup>61</sup> into a non-dual *indifference* from the khoric mutual immanence as motive force of peace, as Deity *of* peace, not *existing* as God, but *insisting on* and *in* and *as* peace.<sup>62</sup> This will become clearer when we further investigate this purpose beyond purposes with Whitehead's final installment of the conundrum in his last lecture "Immortality."<sup>63</sup>

Since I have elsewhere argued for the exceptional nature of the content of this final lecture as in many ways a final shift in Whitehead's thought,<sup>64</sup> I will concentrate here on only two of its more outstanding features addressing the conundrum of peace, one methodological, the other metaphysical, but both of them engaged in unveiling the phenomenon (and proposition) of peace, as both of them strike at the very heart of the conundrum of presupposition, patience of negation, and civilizational dynamics. Here, in this reading of Whitehead's "Immortality," peace as purpose beyond purposes is addressed as the question of values, their function in any activity, their pluralism, and their necessity for peace to come about beyond the mere ideal of an indefinitely deferred future.

Earlier, in *Religion in the Making*, Whitehead had named another triad to be the formative elements of all becoming or existing, differentiating between

creativity, potentials, and God (RM, 90), a triad that crosses space, time, and Deity—or becoming beyond attainment, attainment in becoming, and value infused in this process (RM, 100)<sup>65</sup>—by immersing itself into a certain perspective, namely, that of the *world* of becoming as the site of their interaction.<sup>66</sup> Later, in *The Modes of Thought*, space-time already names this concrete intersection of creativity, potentiality, and God, but highlights the process of attainment and the attainment in the process *as* a creative infusion of values harbored in, or precisely being, God (MT, 102), while God's function from the earlier conceptualization has not changed (RM, 100–05). In between these instantiations lies the differentiation between potentials as abstractions from this process, necessary for its patterning and re-patterning, and the force of patterning itself—namely, God—in *Science and the Modern World* (chs. 10–11), and the integration of potentials as always only existing in a process of valuation, particularly in every world event and organization, but universally as the very definition of (the function of) God in *Process and Reality* (PR, 31). The constant in this shifting scheme is the process of valuation of potentials in action, and as possibilities beyond their enactment in events and patterns of nexuses as the purpose of God, even necessitating Whitehead to differentiate (indifferent from all events) these two perspectives of (primordial) envisioning and (consequent) realizing as natures of God (PR, 345–48).<sup>67</sup>

Yet, here the conundrum appears again glaringly: while without the involvement of valuations space-time has no actuality, no direction of realization, and would be indistinguishable from mere nothingness (nothing would happen),<sup>68</sup> the same valuation of potentials must be concretely related to the situation of any event in its immediate and universal context of its mutual interference with the all-pervasive (khoric) Nexus of mutuality. Hence, while any realization of valuations is divergent according to its situation, creative appeal, and purposeful direction—that is, is only indicating an irreducible multiplicity of values aspired to and realized—universal divine valuation of the whole process cannot create a unifying purpose, even if its means and aims are compassion, harmony, love, and peace.<sup>69</sup> In other words, restating the conundrum: while the divine function of valuation may be understood as always expressing, these universal (khoric) values of compassion, harmony, love, and peace, even as a condition for the process to happen at all, the realizations of this divinity in the process of a concrete world may not seem to express these values at all (PR, 244), or even, on the basis of the divergent valuations realized, must exhibit the patience of their own denial, deviation, reduction, antagonism, and annihilation in any given situation, even to the extent that we might deny its insistence in the process at all. We cry out: God, the sense and purpose of compassion, harmony, love, and peace does obviously not exist! The Deity of peace is dead! And yet, this utterance happens on the basis of its (their) patience. Rather, existence is the aesthetic patience

of the immanent insistence of the deity of peace, and only through it (RM, 99, 105).

In “Immortality,” then, Whitehead takes this knot up again. He counters the impossibility that the affirmation of both sides of the conundrum seems to present with the affirmation of both a world of creativity and a world of value as a necessary presupposition for any world to exist at all. But against all suggestions of implications of a potential dualism between these worlds, Whitehead treats them as analytic categories for the sake of the conceptualization of concrete becoming, safeguarding their affirmation as an intersecting of modes of mutual immanence (Imm., 686), and by indifferenciating both sides, as they for themselves would only indicate abstractions from the one universal process itself (Imm., 685–88).<sup>70</sup> Methodologically, their indifferenciating through coinherence is achieved by a bold move, the impact of which can easily be overlooked: as we can articulate any of these perspectives—whether that of creativity, as the immanent ground of the world of becoming, and God, as the immanent ground of the world of valuations, in seeming counter-differentiation (or even opposition)—only in reference to the other in mutual presupposition (coherence), they cannot be differentiated without already having included the respective other perspective as means and medium of the very articulation of either side (Imm., 685). This includes two perspectives: on the one hand, every description, analysis, articulation, and formulation of the world of creativity must be performed by using the vocabulary (descriptions, analyses, articulations, and formulations) of the world of valuation and vice versa; on the other hand, this procedure is productive precisely because that which cannot be abstracted from the mediation of the other world in such articulations is nevertheless indefinable in terms of the other world (PR, 3).<sup>71</sup> Here immanence meets transcendence, indifferently.

On the metaphysical level, this coinherence, then, stipulates the actors of valuation—be they finite or local events realizing values, or be it God as universal valuation mediating the creative process—as coinherent, and this coinherence as medium of this process as value process integrating the divine purpose beyond purposes, namely peace, and the affirmation of its negations in the realized purposes of the universes diverging in their plurality of valuations.<sup>72</sup> In this profound relativity or pluralism of values and their potential realization, the divine patience for all values is, at the same time, their togetherness as peace and their divergence in its realization as well as negation (PR, 31–32). Hence, creativity, *khora*, and mutual immanence allow for, are patient of, and even enshrine oppositional powers, forms of violence, values of adversity, and dynamics of dualities of exclusion in a relativistic manner.<sup>73</sup> But the question is: Do they not only presuppose and somehow in a hidden manner (indifferently) articulate the purpose beyond purposes—namely,

peace—but also, specifically under these conditions, drive a movement of and toward peace?

In fact, this is what Whitehead claims to be the case by introducing his concept of peace at the end of *Adventures of Ideas* (AI, ch. 20). While it is true that the process of valuation and the values this process creates or manifests cannot have recourse to a preestablished or predetermined order or even a criterion of necessity besides coinherence that would define the realizations of such abstract measures in their actualization,<sup>74</sup> Whitehead offers a criterion beyond mutual immanence that is surrational in the realm of values, as they are abstractions in God's primordial nature as a symbol that comprises the hierarchies of abstractions, in relation to actualities, only as vortexes of "indetermining" restructuring, and surrational in actualization, as they are realized values in processes of decision (PR, 105, 115).<sup>75</sup> This criterion is that valuation in mutuality and coinherence of all its elements involved in the dancing web of actual space-time, in the surrational actualization of ever new events and nexuses and universes, and inheres also in a universal valuation, indifferent from this process, but *as* activity, as *Deity* of peace, as activity of purpose that is explored with terms such as love, gentleness, patience, harmonization, eros, nonviolence (AI, 265–69), being patiently indifferent to the realization of all possibilities in their season in the infinity of multiple cosmic epochs (PR 91) or a multiverse (AI, 277; RM, 160).<sup>76</sup>

When Whitehead introduces this concept of peace in *Adventures of Ideas* as the crowning metaphysical achievement of civilization, it seems to be riddled by the odd incompatibility of being the final fact of its coming about while only always appearing as its own initiating eros, but overcome precisely on the basis of the indifferentiation between mutual immanence and the Deity of peace (AI, 295). Here are three steps by which Whitehead achieves this deed. First, Whitehead introduces peace as the motive force of the spirit that transcends all valuations by opening them up to their mutuality, always being a medium of the removal of inhibitions (AI, 285). Yet, this does not mean a primordial indifferentiation devoid of differences and identities, or some kind of anesthesia, the bastard notion of peace, in which the activity of peace disappears into nothingness (AI, 286). Rather, it indicates an opening of any valuation and its realizations into an indifferentiation that actively (and patiently) mediates the most universal consciousness of mutuality beyond limitations of personality and society, but is always only realized in their limitations and their overcoming (AI, 285–86). Second, Whitehead testifies to the horizon of our consciousness as initiated and bounded by such a transcendent immanence of peace *as* an activity, which he, therefore, hesitates to either identify right away with either non-personal harmony or personal love (the much discussed incompatible characteristics of Eastern and Western philosophical and religious reflection on ultimate reality). Instead, Whitehead

chooses to name this activity “peace” in order to avoid the potential inherent limitations of concepts such as harmony of harmonies, tenderness, and love to articulate this activity—although he would go on to use them as corollary perspectives as he saw fit (AI, 284–85).<sup>77</sup> Third, and most importantly, Whitehead indifferentiates both mutual immanence and the Deity of peace (again, without counter-identifying them against one another) in the process of the Universe as One, of which *khora* is the aspect of mutuality and the divine process its affirming activation (AI 295).<sup>78</sup>

So, finally, given the Whiteheadian considerations on the conundrum, what are the implications for the development of a civilization of peace, given these indifferentiations?<sup>79</sup> If we are inclined to search out this constitutive activity at the root of our consciousness (AI, 284–85)—a consciousness that is well aware of the suffering and tragedy of valuations opposite to coinherence, but at its very base (AI, 286)—we may also want to agree with Whitehead that the essential incompleteness of the adventure of the becoming of society (S, 88) is related to the transcendence of any such consciousness—only dimly presenting itself at the boundaries of our ape-like consciousness (AI, 295)—as well as its interaction with the reformation of civilization in the image of peace, as it is a motive force of transcendence of any realization of peace by the very activity of (the Deity of) peace itself (AI, 295).<sup>80</sup> Peace is never realized; yet is it always the condition even for its negation, its memory, and its transformation (AI, 286–87). Peace is never a mere dream or an abstract idea, but the motive force driving beyond space-time, and releasing it into its divergences. Peace is the spirit of becoming *as* becoming, without which becoming would be not. But becoming is never in vain because of the spirit of peace and our sense of peace (AI, 295).<sup>81</sup> This sense is so profound that—while it can be ignored—it is always already present as an eros of becoming, and in these vast realms of becoming, becoming peaceful. Darwinian antagonism has to be tempered with creativeness (SMW, 111), as it builds the transformation into a nonviolent divergence that harbors and is harbored by introducing more of the Divinity of peace into every event, nexus, and pattern of organization, consciousness, and society (RM, 155–56).

In making ourselves such a Whiteheadian proposition, which is itself always in the making, several discourses might be altered: how we engage in the envisioning of a peaceful future in which the overcoming of violence in the face of divergences and acting on such an insight might not undermine the pluralism of values realized in such a process (or even the multiplicity of worlds and universes); how different worldviews (philosophical, ideological, or religious) might existentially be based on the consciousness of a presupposition of coinherence such that they will not seek their mutual eradication; how the patience of affirmation might be realized as a profound ethical impulse toward mutuality as a given motivation to actualize its promises

because of the realization of it as presupposition for its very denial; how modes of communication and conviviality with the otherness of divergence might instill not the fear of otherness, but a departure from the value of values as based on their relational essence (PR, 115),<sup>82</sup> symbolized by the other as other side already embraced in naming it other. The proposition is this: that peace conducts nothing, seeks nothing, forces nothing, but affirms everything, even the despicable redundancy of its negation, *only* because it insists in this multiplicity of becoming so as to let the all consciously (one might even say spiritually) realize its potentials in the overcoming of negation as such.<sup>83</sup> The Whiteheadian proposition becomes an invitation: it can be ignored, but only because it was already affirmed.

Is such a proposition practical? Whitehead answers with his version of pragmatism: If it does not happen, it will self-destruct the deniers in their negation without destructing the affirmation of patience that seduces them to become (S, 87).<sup>84</sup> In the end, the surrational intuition is toward togetherness (PR, 21); we cannot venture beyond it, as it is the essence of the universe to exist from and within such a horizon, and that it is the utmost that rationality can do (PR, 4). Space-time is not just the image of an eternity of peace (PR, 338), as in Plato, but the very site of its becoming-event, of and maybe for eternity.<sup>85</sup> What changes if we follow this impulse of the coinherence of multiplicity instead of negating it—and, hence, recreating (or degenerating) it in its dualistic, oppositional, self-negating forms—is nothing less than the realization of the purpose beyond purposes: *sur-vivre*, acting from the impulse for more than just living, becoming more alive, and life more than alive (to allude to Derrida and Deleuze).<sup>86</sup> Only in the (space-time) events of such happening will we become (indifferent from the Deity of) peace, as in Alexander's vision, but in Whitehead's proposition the vision itself is already always happening.

## NOTES

1. I will not try to espouse the technical use of the term “proposition” in Whitehead's work, as there are good introductions and reflections on it and related issues in Whitehead. See Elisabeth Kraus, *The Metaphysics of Experience: A Companion to Whitehead's Process and Reality* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1998), 119–24; Isabelle Stengers, *Thinking with Whitehead: A Free and Wild Creation of Concepts* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 396–422; Stephen Franklin, *Speaking from the Depth: Alfred North Whitehead's Hermeneutical Metaphysics of Propositions, Experience, Symbolism, Language, and Religion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 2–36. I will take a central passage of *Process and Reality* (PR 184–207) to mean that a proposition appears as an active lure for the activating feeling of a potential (reading of reality) related to actualization (into a new process),

and that the process of the exploration of the proposition of peace will reveal its essential character in this sense.

2. I have exemplified how the awareness of such a paradox at the heart of Whitehead's thought changes the view of opposing positions regarding a grammar of reality, thereby overcoming the antagonism between horizon and event, and the liberation of the process of reality from fixations on symbolizations on either an ontological or ontic entitative view of divinity in Roland Faber, "Tears of God—In the Rain with D. Z. Philips and J. Keller, Waiting for Wittgenstein and Whitehead," in Randy Ramal, ed., *Metaphysics, Analysis, and the Grammar of God* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 57–103.

3. See Roland Faber, "God's Advent/ure: The End of Evil and the Origin of Time," in Joseph Bracken, ed., *World Without End: Christian Eschatology from Process Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 91–112.

4. See Roland Faber, *God as Poet of the World: Exploring Process Theologies* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), §46; Roland Faber, "Theopoetic Justice: Towards an Ecology of Living Together," in Roland Faber, J. R. Hustwit, and Hollis Phelps, eds., *Beyond Superlatives: Regenerating Whitehead's Philosophy of Experience* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2014), 160–78; *The Becoming of God: Process Theology, Philosophy, and Multireligious Engagement* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017), Exploration 13.

5. Whitehead used to tell his students at Harvard that he was sympathetic to conflating his philosophy with that of Alexander. See Victor Lowe, "The Development of Whitehead's Philosophy," in Paul Schilpp, ed., *The Philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead* (La Salle: Open Court, 1991), 120. Dorothy Emmet, an early student of both, even claims that Whitehead had a closer affinity with Alexander than with any other contemporary philosopher: Dorothy Emmet, *Whitehead's Philosophy of Organism* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), 70.

6. See Jim Holt, *Why Does the World Exist? An Existential Detective Story* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2012) and John Leslie and Robert L. Kuhn, ed., *The Mystery of Existence: Why Is There Anything At All?* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2013).

7. John Haught, *The New Cosmic Story: Inside Our Awakening Universe* (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 2017); Faber, *God as Poet*, §15.

8. Samuel Alexander, *Space, Time and Deity: The Gifford Lectures at Glasgow 1916–18* (London: MacMillan, 1920, vol. II); Alfred Stiernotte, *God and Space-Time: Deity in the Philosophy of Samuel Alexander* (Whitefish, MT: Literary Licensing LLC, 2011). While Whitehead was going through a Spinozistic phase in *Science and the Modern World* (SMW, 166–8), he decided that this was not to be his last word, instead moving in a pluralist direction, even with elements of ultimate reality (PR, 7); I have named this the "theopoetic difference." See Faber, *God as Poet*, 144 and §27.

9. This kind of—one is tempted to say—process "eschatology" has important implications for any Whiteheadian proposition of the character of such an emergence in relation, and in opposition, to simple notions of progress. Correspondingly, Whitehead's notion of peace as the *telos* of the civilizing process of the universe must not be misunderstood as the reaching of a state of affairs that will, when it is reached, last

forever, as many “eschatologies” (religious or not), at least in the West, have historically implied. See Faber, *God as Poet*, §39.

10. See John Wheeler, *Cosmology, Physics and Philosophy* (New York: Springer Verlag, 1984); *The Light Behind Consciousness: Radical Self-Knowledge and the End of Seeking* (Oakland, CA: Non-Duality Press, 2008); John Barrow and Frank Tipler, *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), ch. 7.

11. For the complex differentiation of space-time of our universe as contingent, and on a basis much deeper than any such contingent form, implying much more abstract characteristics of both space and time if they should be able to hold meta-physically for more than our concrete cosmos, see Roland Faber, *The Divine Manifestation* (Lanham: MD, Lexington Books, 2014), ch. 7.

12. In Roland Faber, “Ecotheology, Ecoprocess, and Ecotheosis: A Theopoetical Intervention,” in *Salzburger Zeitschrift für Theologie* 12 (2008): 75–115, I have suggested that this mediation by the sense of deity in MT 102 is not just a subjective mode of consciousness, like an imagination, but, in Whitehead’s text, an objective mediation of physicality and factual reality, although always laden with value, or the recognition of values as *realized* in fact and proposed from the past in feelings and propositions (and propositional feelings) that *actively* are suggested by the mediating activity of deity. Consciousness, here, is not a dualistic addendum to physicality, as deity is not a spiritual addendum to a material universe, but conversely: consciousness, here, is that tension between potentiality and actuality in which time and space become realized *as* objective processes, or matter is realized as a *concrete* process of concrescence because of the deity insisting on such realizations of creativity. In this context, “realization” has the hybrid meaning of concretization and becoming conscious. In this sense, connection to John Wheeler’s quantum physical importance of consciousness is suggestive.

13. See Faber, *God as Poet*, §§35 and 39. As in Walter Benjamin, this implies a force of the future, as the *telos* that releases space-time and transforms it at the same time, not foreclosing it: see Roland Faber, “Messianische Zeit. Walter Benjamin’s ‘mystische Geschichtsauffassung’ in zeittheologischer Perspektive,” in *MThZ* 54 (2003): 68–78. This approach differs from Lewis Ford, *Transforming Process Theism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 9–14, 237–40, as it does not understand the past as a process of divine settlement or sedimentation of the future as the primordial site of the divine—as if peace could ever become a genetic inheritance—but as a “shock of the past” by the future, backward indetermining past’s sedimentations for an openness that is necessary for the realization of peace: see Faber, *God as Poet*, §39.

14. Whitehead’s implications of space-time in relation to deity in conversation with Heidegger in Derrida’s reading about a metaphysics of presence are discussed in Roland Faber, “‘Indra’s Ear’—God’s Absence of Listening” in Ingolf Dalferth, ed., *The Presence and Absence of God: Religion in Philosophy and Theology* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 161–86. However, compare the different use of potentials as the presence of the timeless, not hindering, but instigating a process of novelty, creative and continuous transmission, as well as remembrance in Faber, *God as Poet*, §18.



15. See Catherine Keller, “The Mystery of Insoluble Evil: Violence and Evil in Marjorie Suchocki,” in Joseph Bracken, ed., *World Without End: Christian Eschatology from Process Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 46–71.

16. In a similar way, but from a Derridian background, this question is also asked by John Caputo, *The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006). But see my Whiteheadian criticism in Faber, *Divine Manifold*, ch. 15.

17. Compare the newer discussion between views allowing for the overcoming of violence and denying such a possibility for human development: Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (New York: Viking, 2012).

18. See Philip Rose, *On Whitehead* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2002), 16–24.

19. See Faber, *God as Poet*, §45. Several suggestions were made from this “theopoetic difference” in the context of Whiteheadian thought, some building on the persuasive weakness of God, others on the stature of God coping with the affirmation of these negations, neither of them exhausting the possibilities. See Faber, *Becoming of God*, Exploration 12.

20. This differentiation in *Religion in the Making* and related notions in other writings of Whitehead has led me to the thesis (or proposition) that we should not use categories of power at all to determine the deity, which presupposes, lures into, and presents in the process of becoming as, peace: see Faber, *Divine Manifold*, ch. 11.

21. See Faber, *God as Poet*, §35. Such pervasiveness is, however, not in itself a sufficient justification of the lure toward nonviolence as an essential ingredient of peace, because as long as this lure is that of ideas, it can still become a powerful function for instigating violence, as demonstrated by diverse political ideologies of the twentieth century ending in total war. Hence, the later phases of such transformation of philosophical and religious thought leads Whitehead to the preference of the notion of essential relatedness and mutual immanence (AI, 168).

22. See Faber, *Divine Manifold*, ch. 3. That this affirmation is not a fusion of opposites, especially good and evil in God, is demonstrated not only by the notion of the transformation of evil in RM,155, but also by the expansion of facts (whether good or evil) by new possibilities. See Helmut Maassen, *Gott, das Gute und das Boese in der Philosophie A. N. Whiteheads* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1988), 136–56.

23. The fact that Whitehead understands (rightly against Kant) consciousness not as constitutive of experience (PR, 36), but as its emergent outcome in higher modes and complexifications of experience, does not imply that conscious (intellectual and imaginative) feelings (PR, 186) of personal societies or persons productive of propositions, inhabiting (or inhabited by) an entirely living nexus (PR, 105) that, at the same time, is embodied as creative canalization of novelty (PR, 107), are not a real achievement of this whole cosmic process that necessitates its own civilization in order to persist. See Thomas Hosinski, *Stubborn Fact and Creative Advance: An Introduction to the Metaphysics of Alfred North Whitehead* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1993), 124–27, 139–43.

24. See Roland Faber, “O bitches of impossibility!—Programmatic Dysfunction in the Chaosmos of Deleuze and Whitehead,” in Keith Robinson, ed., *Deleuze, Whitehead, Bergson: Rhizomatic Connections* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan,

2009), 200–19 and Roland Faber, J. R. Hustwit, and Hollis Phelps, eds., *Beyond Superlatives: Regenerating Whitehead's Philosophy of Experience* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Press), 2014. Any understanding of rationality in Whitehead without the interference of creativity, which again must be understood as the mobilization of relationality, would either fall into sterile conceptionalism (concepts as more real than concrete events and nexuses) or a Hegelian dynamics of dialectic that postulates concepts before life: see Reiner Wiehl, "Whitehead's Cosmology of Feeling Between Ontology and Anthropology," in Friedrich Rapp and Reiner Wiehl, eds., *Whitehead's Metaphysics of Creativity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 127–51.

25. See, for example, David R. Griffin, *Reenchantment without Supernaturalism: A Process Philosophy of Religion* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001); and Jorge Nobo, *Whitehead's Metaphysics of Extension and Solidarity* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1986).

26. See Roland Faber, "Whitehead at Infinite Speed: Deconstructing System as Event," in Christine Helmer, Marjorie Suchocki, and John Quiring, eds., *Schleiermacher and Whitehead: Open Systems in Dialogue* (Berlin: DeGruiter, 2004), 39–72. In the context of the history of (philosophical) systems and their constitutive elements, Whitehead, following Deleuze's differentiation, falls between Leibniz and Deleuze, but can, in such a contextual reading, release its indeterminant factors.

27. See Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).

28. See William Leue, *Metaphysical Foundations of a Theory of Value in the Philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead* (Ashfield: Down-to-Earth Books, 2005), ch. 3. Despite ideal limitations of the chaos of potentials (as situated in the primordial process of divine valuation), every event has access to the whole realm of potentials.

29. See Faber, *Divine Manifest*, 147–53.

30. See Roland Faber, "Uniting Earth to the Blue of Heaven Above: Strange Attractors in Whitehead's Symbolism," in Roland Faber, Jeffrey Bell, and Joseph Petek, eds., *Rethinking Whitehead's Symbolism: Thought, Language, Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 56–78.

31. See Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), ch. 1.

32. See Roland Faber, "On the Unique Origin of Revelation, Religious Intuition and Theology," in *Process Studies* 28: 3–4 (1999): 273–89.

33. See Faber, *Divine Manifest*, ch. 6.

34. See Faber, *God as Poet*, parts 2–4.

35. See George Kline, "Concept and Concrescence: An Essay in Hegelian-Whiteheadian Ontology," in George R. Lucas, Jr., ed., *Hegel and Whitehead: Contemporary Perspectives on Systematic Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), 133–53.

36. See Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), ch. 6; Faber, *Divine Manifest*, 75–84.

37. See James Williams, *Encounters and Influences: The Transversal Thought of Gilles Deleuze* (Manchester: Clinamen Press, 2005), ch. 6; Faber, *Divine Manifest*, 256–61.

38. See Deleuze, *Logic*, 177; Michael Hardt, *Gilles Deleuze: An Apprenticeship in Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), ch. 1; Faber, *Divine Manifold*, ch. 8.

39. See Faber, *Divine Manifold*, 147–57 and ch. 15.

40. See Faber, *Divine Manifold*, chs. 14–15. This does not imply that valuations that further such polyphonic harmonizations—and, hence, embodiments of peace—are not being valued more highly as the Good to be attempted (and already presupposed) in the process. This is the meaning of Whitehead’s understanding of this deity as a principle of concretization (SMW 168). It does not imply exclusion, but ranges of valuation and emphasis of purpose, the purpose of higher intensity and harmony in the process; Faber, *God as Poet*, §§ 21–4, 27.

41. This universality of relativity is, in a triad of principles (of process and ontology), the foundational principle (PR 22) for the avoidance of atomism, isolation between subject and object, and epistemological foreclosure of metaphysical (and [physical] insight. See Faber, *God as Poet*, §13.

42. See Roland Faber, “Immanence and Incompleteness: Whitehead’s Late Metaphysics,” in Roland Faber, Brian Henning, and Clinton Combs, eds., *Beyond Metaphysics? Explorations in Alfred North Whitehead’s Late Thought* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010), 91–107. In PR 4, this actually implies two coinciding indeterminations. First, Whitehead poses the relation between the pattern of nexuses of the cosmos and their conscious recognition in speculative philosophy, not as literal identity, but as exhibiting the same relational structures of experience. This is not a sign of a simple realism, but is explored in the complex avoidance of Kant’s mutual exclusion of phenomenal and noumenal realms by a metaphysics of subjective form that always transcends events of origin and is perceived in other experiences; see Faber, *God as Poet*, 22–23; Steven Shaviro, *Without Criteria: Kant, Whitehead, Deleuze, and Aesthetics* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009), chs. 1–2. Second, the equation of boundaries of relationality and rationality is an implication of the first, without again equating both, except in the mind of God (PR 115), which again is the symbolization of the present conundrum.

43. See J. J. Clarke, *The Tao of the West: Western Transformation of Taoist Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2000), ch. 4.

44. See Faber, *God as Poet*, §42. While coherence is part of a complex recognition of the different theories of truth in Whitehead’s work, it has a special connection to the “eschatological” status of things in God (PR 12).

45. See Roland Faber, “Trinity, Analogy and Coherence,” in Joseph Bracken, and Marjorie Suchocki, eds., *Trinity in Process: A Relational Theology of God* (New York: Continuum, 1997), 160–62; Faber, *Divine Manifold*, 154–60; “Immanence,” 99–100. The only other author I know of who has engaged this characteristic of coherence as coinherence without mutual inclusion is Michel Weber, *Whitehead’s Pancreativism: The Basics* (Frankfurt: Ontos, 2006), 108–12.

46. See Faber, *Divine Manifold*, ch. 4.

47. Despite the varied discussions on ultimate reality in Whitehead, mostly concentrated on creativity and God, sometimes recently venturing into the registration of *khora* as well, the even more inclusive mutual immanence became the center for

my own understanding of ultimate reality in, and analysis of, Whitehead from early on and has remained at its center ever since. See Roland Faber, *Prozeßtheologie. Zu ihrer Würdigung und kritischen Erneuerung* (Mainz: Matthias Grünewald Verlag, 2000), §21; Faber, *God as Poet*, §35; Faber, “Immanence,” 102–4; Faber, *Becoming of God*, Exploration 10.

48. See, Faber, *Divine Manifold*, ch. 7.

49. For the underlying function of *khora* in Whitehead’s work, see Faber, *God as Poet*, Postscript.

50. See Roland Faber, “Khora and Violence: Revisiting Butler with Whitehead,” in Roland Faber, Michael Halewood and Deena M. Lin, eds., *Butler on Whitehead: On the Occasion* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Press, 2012), 105–26. From his own perspective, Whitehead predates the recovery of *khora* by thinkers such as Derrida, Deleuze, Kristeva and Irigaray, somehow prefiguring the connection between *différance* and related notions of poststructuralist accounts of reality.

51. See Roland Faber, “‘Must ‘religion’ Always Remain as a Synonym for ‘hatred?’’: Whiteheadian Meditations on the Future of Togetherness,” in Roland Faber and Santiago Slabodsky, eds., *Living Traditions and Universal Conviviality: Prospects and Challenges for Peace in Multireligious Communities* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016), 167–82.

52. For an analysis of this chaotic but relational Nexus as basis for all becoming, and in counter-differentiation (but indifference from) the divine matrix of becoming, see Faber, *God as Poet*, §15 with §32. Despite the common intention of non-dual indifference, this approach differs from Joseph Bracken, *The Divine Matrix: Creativity as a Link between East and West* (New York: Orbis Books, 1995) in several ways, but especially regarding the function of patterns in Bracken vs. life (entirely living nexus) as ultimate element of indetermination, instead of determination: see Roland Faber, “The Mystical Whitehead,” in Marc Pugliese and Gloria Schaab, eds., *Seeking Common Ground: Evaluation and Critique of Joseph Bracken’s Comprehensive Worldview* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2012), 213–34.

53. See Faber, *God as Poet*, §22; *Becoming of God*, Exploration 2. While some process thinkers glean the understanding of personhood in Whitehead from its definition as temporally ordered nexus (PR 34–35), I find the other, much more radical notion of personhood built on the Platonic *khora*.

54. See Roland Faber, “Becoming Intermezzo: Eco-Theopoetics after the Anthropoc Principle,” in Roland Faber and Jeremy Fackenthal, eds., *Theopoetic Folds: Philosophizing Multifariousness* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 212–35.

55. In Faber, *God as Poet*, 101, I have called this purpose beyond purpose “purposeless” to indicate that it is not a function of any other purpose, propelling any other agenda or being aiming at any goal outside of its own.

56. See Roland Faber, “Process, Progress, Excess: Whitehead and the Peace of Society,” in Łukasz Lamża and Jakub Dziadkowiec, eds., *Recent Advances in the Creation of a Process-Based Worldview: Human Life in Process* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), 6–20.

57. See Sigridur Gudmarsdottir, “‘God as Lobster’: Whitehead’s Receptacle Meets the Deleuzian Sieve,” in *Secrets of Becoming*, 191–200.

58. See Roland Faber, "Bodies of the Void: Polyphilia and Theoplicity," in Christian Boesel and Catherine Keller, eds., *Apophatic Bodies: Negative Theology, Incarnation, and Relationship* (New York: Fordham, 2010), 200–23; Faber, *God as Poet*, §40.

59. See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 25; Faber, *Divine Manifold*, 440–45.

60. See Anthony Paul Smith, "What Can be Done with Religion? Non-philosophy and the Future of Philosophy of Religion," in Anthony Paul Smith and Daniel Whistler, eds., *After the Postsecular and the Postmodern* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 280–98.

61. One of the very few thinkers who has argued persuasively that we must overcome a simple entitative view of deity, as is often applied in a literal reading of Whitehead of the concreteness of God as event, is James Bradley, "Transcendentalism and Speculative Realism in Whitehead," in *Process Studies* 23 no. 3 (1994): 155–91. Yet, my own reading of this transformation, while building on his analysis, is more oriented toward a non-dual in/difference, or process of in/differentiation as underlying activity worthy of being symbolized with the Deity of peace: Faber, *Divine Manifold*, 440–45.

62. The motive of the insistence of the deity of peace (instead of the existence of God) in, on, and as process takes its cue from Deleuze, *Logic*, 34 and develops from the non-dual implications in Roland Faber, "De-Ontologizing God: Levinas, Deleuze and Whitehead," in C. Keller and A. Daniels, eds., *Process and Difference: Between Cosmological and Poststructuralist Postmodernism* (New York: State University of New York, 2002), 209–34 (and the German nucleus "'Insistenz'—Zum 'Nicht-Sein' Gottes bei Levinas, Deleuze und Whitehead," in *Labyrinth. International Journal for Philosophy, Feminist Theory and Cultural Hermeneutics* 2 (2000): [http://faber.whiteheadresearch.org/files/Articles\\_in\\_Journals/FaberR-20-Insistenz.pdf](http://faber.whiteheadresearch.org/files/Articles_in_Journals/FaberR-20-Insistenz.pdf)), to become a central notion in *God as Poet*, especially §40, to the exploration of its pluralistic implications in *Divine Manifold*, 282–88 and passim, and its summary in *Becoming of God*, Exploration 14.

63. Alfred North Whitehead, "Immortality," in Schilpp, Paul (ed.), *The Philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead* (La Salle: Open Court, 1991), 682–700.

64. See Roland Faber, "'The Infinite Movement of Evanescence'—The Pythagorean Puzzle in Plato, Deleuze, and Whitehead," in *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 21:1 (2000): 171–99; "De-Ontologizing God," 218–22; *God as Poet*, §28.

65. See Faber, *God as Poet*, §27.

66. For a reading of these formative elements together with the actual world as a logical square see Faber, *Becoming of God*, Exploration 7.

67. See Faber, *God as Poet*, §25.

68. See Faber, *God as Poet*, §23.

69. See Faber, *God as Poet*, §27. This is the reason that it would be a misunderstanding to view Whitehead's principle of concretization, limitation, and determination as a determination of the process of valuation for any event or nexus or pattern arising in this process (SMW, 168). Instead, as is true for coherence as pluralistic movement, ever staying in process, never settling (PR, 6–7), so must the valuation process in general (as limitation of laws of nature, for instance) and in particular (as

arising in any event and nexus ever anew: PR, 31, 164) be an open one, never reaching a state of determination. In some sense, the values of khoric relationality purposed in this process might be of the very nature of movements of indetermination.

70. See Faber, “De-ontologizing God,” 219–21. So, in “Immortality” the two worlds carry the mutuality of non-dual indifference and the process of in/differentiation as the universe.

71. See Roland Faber, “‘The Infinite Movement of Evanescence’—The Pythagorean Puzzle in Plato, Deleuze, and Whitehead,” in *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 21/1 (2000): 171–99; “Mysticism,” 196–99.

72. See Faber, *Divine Manifold*, ch. 7 and 14.

73. See David Ray Griffin, *God, Power, and Evil: A Process Theodicy* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 276–81.

74. See, Faber, *God as Poet*, §21; *Divine Manifold*, chs. 2, 4, and 8.

75. See Roland Faber, “Surrationality and Chaosmos: For a More Deleuzian Whitehead (with a Butlerian Intervention),” in *Secrets of Becoming*, 157–77; *God as Poet*, §19.

76. For the notion of cosmic epoch (and its relation to the chaotic Nexus) in Whitehead, see Faber, *God as Poet*, §§14–15. For the character and implications of a multiverse in Whitehead, see Faber, *Divine Manifold*, ch. 7 and *Becoming of God*, Exploration 3.

77. Especially the term “harmony of harmonies” is held on to as means of analyzing complexity, relativity, and pluralism in the surrational evaluation of the deity of peace and the realization of its harmonizations in finite events and nexuses: see Faber, *God as Poet*, 118 and §39. For its resonance with Deleuze’s “polyphony of polyphonies,” see Faber, *Divine Manifold*, chs. 8, 15.

78. See Faber, *Becoming of God*, Exploration 3.

79. See Faber, *God as Poet*, §40 and part 6; *Becoming of God*, Exploration 13.

80. In a sense, here, peace has the function of the messianic consciousness in Walter Benjamin and, as taken up by Derrida, of *différance*, as not only deference and multiplication, or (in one word) becoming of, justice, but as its motive force. See “Theses on the History of Philosophy,” in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968); Jacques Derrida, “Différance,” in *Margins in Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); “Jacques Derrida, 1930–2004: The Last Interview,” in *Le Mond*, August 19, 2004; Robert Sinnerbrink, “Deconstructive Justice and the ‘Critique of Violence’: On Derrida and Benjamin,” in *Social Semiotics* 16:3 (2006): 485–87; Faber, “Indra’s Ear,” 161–86; *God as Poet*, §§24, 32, 39–40; *Divine Manifold*, ch. 6.

81. See Roland Faber, “The Sense of Peace: A Para-doxology of Divine Multiplicity,” in C. Keller and L. Schneider, eds., *Polydoxy: Theology of Multiplicity and Relation* (London, Routledge, 2011), 36–56.

82. See John Lango, *Whitehead’s Ontology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1972), 18–46.

83. See Faber, *Divine Manifold*, 282–88.

84. See Roland Faber, “Cultural Symbolization of a Sustainable Future,” in Adrian Parr and Michael Zaretsky, eds., *New Directions in Sustainable Design* (London, Routledge, 2011), 242–55.

85. See Faber, *God as Poet*, §18; *Divine Manifold*, 225–29.

86. See Jacques Derrida, “Survivre,” in John Lleavey, *Parages* (Paris: Galilee, 1986), 111–203. See also in relation to Deleuze: Gilles Deleuze, *Pure Immanence: Essays on a Life* (Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 2005); Faber, “Bodies,” 200–23; Roland Faber, “Introduction: Negotiating Becoming,” in *Secrets of Becoming*, 1–50; Roland Faber, “Theopoetic Justice: Towards an Ecology of Living Together,” *Beyond Superlatives*, 160–78.

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## *Chapter 4*

# **Designing Propositions**

A. J. Nocek

There is a speculative turn underway in the world of design research. In the last couple of decades, speculative design has had a strong influence on traditional design fields—including architecture, graphic, product, interaction, and industrial design—and has contributed to the rise of new fields, such as design for debate, discursive design, and design fiction.<sup>1</sup> What distinguishes this form of design from others is that it tends to be less interested in designing solutions for present users and more interested in designing concepts and future scenarios for users who do not yet exist. With its rise in popularity, speculative design has also been the source of great confusion and heated debate. In particular, there are many critics who claim that speculative design has had very little positive effect on the actual design world since it circulates in spaces for privileged Western audiences.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter attempts to negotiate some of these concerns by unpacking the meaning of “speculation” in speculative design. I attend to certain aspects of speculation that are especially problematic, and then suggest that the speculative philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead could serve as an important antidote to many of speculative design’s shortcomings. More specifically, I propose a different and more robust notion of speculation for design by drawing on Whitehead’s theory of the proposition. I conclude this chapter by demonstrating how contemporary media theory is an especially valuable resource for understanding how speculative design propositions mediate experience within our current technical milieu. To frame this argument, rehearses some of the history and discourse surrounding speculative design in order to appreciate the specific meaning speculation has come to have for designers.

## AN INCOMPLETE HISTORY OF DESIGN SPECULATION

Within the growing body of literature on speculative design, Italian Radical Architecture and Design from the 1960s and 1970s is most often cited as the progenitor of twenty-first-century speculative design<sup>3</sup> While Futurists and Constructivists were already doing much of this work in the early twentieth century, these mid-twentieth-century designers gave concrete expression to a critical and future-oriented approach to architecture and design. In exhibitions such as *Superarchitettura* in 1966, design collectives such as *Archizoom* and *Superstudio* emerged at the forefront of a new and highly diversified conversation about the failures of modern architecture and urban planning and how to re-imagine their future.<sup>4</sup> Although the Italian Radicals did not necessarily share a set of goals or practices, their work tended to be highly conceptual and to have ties to critical and cultural theory, especially the work of Herbert Marcuse and Umberto Eco (semiotics of architecture).<sup>5</sup>

In this guise, the Italian Radicals found themselves working at multiple scales of design—from the architectural to the modern urban environment—and critiqued how it shaped human behavior through consumer objects and practices. To combat this tendency, they often introduced “strange” and “alien” dimensions into design objects (re-semanticizing the object) in order to wage war on modern functionalism and open up new imaginative horizons for design.<sup>6</sup> Such strangeness brought a fictional and even surrealist element into much Radical Design from the 1960s and early 1970s that was meant to rewire the imagination. And yet this recalibration of the design imagination was short lived, as the cornerstones of Radical Design, such as anti-functionalism, whimsy, and surrealistic imagery, were quickly appropriated and reimagined through the lens of kitch and pop art in order to become the backbone of the consumer-driven postmodern design movement, perhaps most notoriously embodied in *Memphis Group* from Milan.<sup>7</sup> There are surely other crucial moments in art and design history that helped shape speculative design today. For instance, the *Situationists* were invested in many of the same critical urban theories and practices as the Radicals.<sup>8</sup> And Dutch design in 1990s, while less overtly political, became well known for its distinctive combination of humor, repurposing, storytelling, and defiance of expectation.<sup>9</sup> While this does not exhaust the possible influences on speculative design within the last decade, it nonetheless offers some historical and intellectual context for its rapid emergence in the last couple decades.

Characterizing speculative design is not especially easy, however. While there are some chief representatives of the so-called field—perhaps most notably the design duo Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby—speculative design is really more like an amorphous set of practices traversing a range of design

and para-design fields. In this way, speculative design functions more like a vector infecting and transforming design: product, interaction, service design, industrial design, human-computer interaction, and graphic design have begun to speculate.<sup>10</sup> Amid this speculative fury new design fields have begun to take shape as well, such as design fiction, adversarial design, and design for debate.<sup>11</sup> Currently, there's a fair amount of discussion over whether some of these fields are actually "speculative," but we'll return to this.<sup>12</sup>

Although there are currently many variations on speculative design, there does nevertheless seem to be some minimal consensus about its meaning and use. It is widely recognized that speculative design is a more or less direct outgrowth of the critical design movement initiated by Dunne and Raby in the mid-1990s. Critical design was introduced in the context of product design to "challenge narrow assumptions, preconceptions and givens about the role products play in everyday life."<sup>13</sup> Much like the Italian Radicals before them, critical design endeavored to intervene in the dominant perceptions of the designed world by providing a "gentle refusal, a turning away from what exists," offering "alternatives that highlight weaknesses within existing normality."<sup>14</sup> But the term "critical" was slowly replaced by another term: namely, *speculative*. In many ways, this replacement had more to do with refining the description of what was already going on in design than it did with inventing a new design paradigm. The trouble with the critical design, explain Dunne and Raby, is that it tends to be associated with critical theory, which it is not; and it also gives rise to notions of negativity, when it should not.<sup>15</sup> As they conceive it, "[a]ll good critical design offers an alternative view to how things are," but "[u]ltimately it is positive and idealistic because we believe that change is possible, that things can be better; it is just that the way of getting there is different; it is an intellectual journey based on challenging and changing values, ideas and beliefs."<sup>16</sup>

Speculation then redirects our attention: it makes plain how criticism of the present is accompanied by imaginative alternatives to it. This is why Jonathan Lukens and Carl DiSalvo claim that speculative design distinguishes itself from other modes of design research by being "futures oriented"; this does not mean that it entertains *any* future or fantasy, however. On the contrary, it means that design brings into being those possibilities not currently entertained by our techno-political imaginaries. In this regard, a key point of departure for many speculative designers is that it operates outside of the demands of the contemporary market. If design was wedded to commercialism in the 1980s and 1990s, then speculative design offers a needed alternative to design's total subsumption under late-stage capitalism.<sup>17</sup> And while these alternatives tend to be highly conceptual, they are no less valued because of it (like unrealized blueprints). Speculative design "celebrates

[its] unreality and take[s] full advantage of being made from ideas.”<sup>18</sup> This is design, write Dunne and Raby, that is about fictional worlds, and these worlds are all the more powerful for being “fictional.” Where mainstream design solves problems for present users in a commercial setting, this field designs for users who don’t yet exist, and we may never want to bring them into existence.<sup>19</sup>

The narrative and fictional potentials of design are brought into sharp focus in the quickly emerging field of design fiction. First popularized by the science fiction writer Bruce Sterling, and championed by Julian Bleeker and futurists such as Stuart Candy, design fiction mobilizes science fiction writing and cinema to design futures currently unavailable to us.<sup>20</sup> The relation between design fiction and speculative design is not always clear, however. In an interview with Dunne and Raby, Rick Poynor notes that design fiction, especially as Sterling sees it, “is not necessarily useful or positive and just describes the existential complexities of being human in a contemporary world.”<sup>21</sup> What’s more, Sterling characterizes Dunne and Raby’s brand of design fiction as distinctly European, whereas his is more indebted to the “California film industry.”<sup>22</sup> Dunne and Raby, for their part, worry that design fictions are “rarely critical of technological progress and border on celebration rather than questioning.”<sup>23</sup> And yet other critics, such as DiSalvo, maintain that both speculative/critical design and design fiction are, at the end of the day, “kinds of speculative design because what is common across this work is the use of designerly means to express foresight in compelling, often provocative ways, which are intended to engage audiences in considerations of what might be.”<sup>24</sup> Turf wars aside, the term “speculation” seems to range over a host of design expertise that imagines (fictional) alternatives to our technological present.

Some examples taken from speculative design might be helpful at this point. Much of James Auger and Jimmy Loizeau’s design work is exemplary.<sup>25</sup> They design technical devices for fictional worlds and interrogate how they might transform our perceptions, behavior, and values. For instance, in collaboration with computer scientists Reyer Zwiggelaar and Bashar Al-Rjou, Auger-Loizeau designed *Happy Life*, which uses real-time dynamic profiling technologies (thermal imaging, etc.) in the context of a family home.<sup>26</sup> The project places rapidly developing sensing technologies in a fictional scenario to ask: When does surveillance become too invasive? “What would it mean for an electronic device to know more about your partner’s emotional state than you do?” In other work, such as *Afterlife*, Auger-Loizeau examines how religious belief in an afterlife could be recast in technoscientific terms.<sup>27</sup> As they put it: “The project proposes the harnessing of our chemical potential after biological death through the application of a microbial fuel cell, harvesting its electrical potential in a dry cell battery.

Here, technology acts to provide conclusive proof of life after death, life being contained in the battery.”

In Dunne and Raby’s work, we witness a deep commitment to both pointed technological critique and whimsical futures construction. In their 2009 project, *Designs for an Overpopulated Planet: Foragers*, they examine the future of farming given the overpopulation of the planet and the mounting demand to produce more food.<sup>28</sup> Their project imagines a scenario in which we would be able to extract nutritional value from nonhuman foods using synthetic biology and product design. In their design, extreme users build devices that are able to function as external digestive systems that would be able to turn the urban environment into a much richer food source. In other work, Dunne and Raby design fully functioning electronic products that conflict with what we normally demand from our electronics—such as products that meet our existential needs. In one piece from their 2007–2008 work, *Do You Want to Replace the Existing Normal?*, they designed a sexual obsessive compulsive disorder device for people who watch pornography but feel guilty about doing so; the device monitors the pixelation of the image according to the viewers’ arousal. In another piece from the same series, they imagine a statistical clock that arranges its newsfeed by transportation fatalities from the BBC. You turn the dial to “train, car, plane” and so on, and it reads the fatalities off: “1, 2, 3, etc.”<sup>29</sup>

Of course this is a sample of the kind of speculative work produced by designers and researchers and promoted in institutional settings such as the Royal College of Art, Goldsmiths University of London, MIT, and Parsons, as well as at the MoMA, the Tate Modern, and increasingly throughout Europe, North America, and Australia<sup>30</sup> But with such a “speculative turn” underway in design, it would be all too easy to get swept up in the momentum created by futures building without paying due attention to some of the deeper methodological issues at stake. So, for instance, we might ask: What tools or techniques are required to build speculative futures? Dunne and Raby speak a good deal about the importance of imagination. But whose imagination is it? And how is it accessed? And what role do digital media and technology play in speculative design, since the discourse seems rather narrowly focused on technological futures? Sterling himself remarks that design fiction “suits our era of network culture and rapid product development”<sup>31</sup>; and in a lecture delivered to the European Graduate School, he suggests we “create a design fiction suited to the specific aims of media philosophers.”<sup>32</sup>

I do not want to pretend that questions of method are resolved for speculative designers, and that their field is not constituted by deeply contested practices and methodologies which become more apparent as it has grown in popularity. I would, however, like to try one idea on for size. In



commenting on the many devices and products dreamed up by speculative designers, Jonathan Lukens and DiSalvo insist that they all require technical *fluency* in order to be imagined. They suggest that this is a defining feature of speculative design, and it is one that sets it apart from certain species of design fiction and scenario building. Fluency is not the same as literacy: where the latter entails nothing more than “rote application,” fluency “is the ability to be creative with technology . . . the capability to understand, use, access technology”<sup>33</sup>; it is to be able to “write poetry” with it, instead of just read, write, and speak it. Speculative design is a “technical poetics,” which manages to explore the “possibility space” of our current technological condition. Or as the philosopher Gilles Deleuze might say, it actualizes the potentials that insist within our current, and unfortunately narrow, technological literacies. Speculative design, Lukens and DiSalvo continue, is an “exploration of the space of possibilities created by technology—a space that can be imagined only by the technologically fluent.”<sup>34</sup> And indeed, we can see this commitment to “technical fluency” operating across the wide range of work that qualifies (either explicitly or implicitly) as speculative design: from the work of Auger-Loizeau, Dunne and Raby, Bill Gaver, Natalie Jeremijenko, and Carl DiSalvo, to much of the design research on biotechnology and synthetic biology conducted by the MIT Media Lab’s Design Fiction group and large-scale research projects such as Material Beliefs organized by the Goldsmith’s Design Department.<sup>35</sup>

Of course there is a sense in which Lukens and DiSalvo offer a narrow definition of speculative design. Not only do narrative and scenario building not count as “speculative design,”<sup>36</sup> but neither do any of imaginative activities that do not display fluency with technical devices. For them, technical fluency is the *sine qua non* of imaginative re-description. However, I think a more generous reading of their work would reveal a deep commitment to the idea that speculation does not come cheap; it requires thorough expertise or mastery in a technical field. Thus, speculation is not delivered on a platter through cursory re-description, but through sustained experience and engagement with technology. This is why cross-disciplinary collaboration is a cornerstone of speculative design research, since multiple forms of mastery are often required.<sup>37</sup> With this more generous reading, the net is cast wider so that multiple forms of fluency may be required, not all possessed by the designer herself. Engineering, product design, creative writing might all come to be fused together in design research. Dunne and Raby are not synthetic biologists, and the four designers who facilitated the Material Beliefs project at Goldsmiths are not biomedical engineers. But their expertise in design fused with modern scientific expertise to yield speculative objects that challenge current views of biotechnology.

If fluency functions as a condition for speculative design, then this is because it is a catalyst for the other condition: the imagination. The “imagination,” write Dunne and Raby, “gives us entry to abstraction . . . We gain the ability to conceive alternatives . . . . We gain the ability to think of futures and outcomes, skills of planning. The ability to think ethically also becomes a possibility.”<sup>38</sup> In short, “designers . . . need to shift from designing applications to designing implications by creating imaginary products and services that situate these new developments within everyday material culture.”<sup>39</sup> Similarly, Julian Bleecker writes that “design fiction is a way of exploring different approaches to making things, probing the material conclusions of your imagination, removing the usual constraints when designing for massive market commercialization—the ones that people . . . call ‘realistic.’”<sup>40</sup> “Rather than giving up altogether,” Dunne and Raby write optimistically, “there are other possibilities for design: one is to use design as a means of speculating how things could be—speculative design. This form of design thrives on imagination and aims to open up new perspectives.”<sup>41</sup>

I want to suggest that we are homing in on something like the mutually pre-supposing cornerstones of speculation in design: fluency and imagination. To be fluent with technology is to “write poetry” with it and to imagine alternatives to what is prescribed. But in order to imagine other uses, or other ways of being with technology, one must be more than literate—that is, rote application—one must be fluent. My suggestion then is this: while there may be a range of design and para-design activities in the last decade that fall under the heading of speculative design, and while practices may not outwardly lend themselves to being captured by a methodology, there do appear to be at least two characteristics that have to be in place in order to qualify as speculative: some form of *fluency* in the current techno-political landscape, either directly or indirectly through collaboration; and *imaginative re-description*, which opens up alternatives to the technological present that tend to fall somewhere between utopian proposals for new techno-poetic modes of existence and dark cautionary tales that warn us about where we are headed. These are the twin pillars of contemporary speculative design.

### “A TROUBLED ADOLESCENCE”<sup>42</sup>

There is an important sense in which the speculative turn in design seems like a step in the right direction. After decades of being wedded to commercialism, contemporary design has resurrected the critical spirit of the Italian Radicals and is imagining nonconsumer alternatives for technology. Numerous designers and commentators have celebrated the post- or nonconsumer

climate of speculative/critical design and are using it to marshal in a new era of making and research. And yet not everyone sees the same value in speculative design. The heated debate that took place after the MoMA included Michael Burton and Michiko Nitta's "Republic of Salvation" in their online curation platform is instructive.<sup>43</sup> According to the curator, Burton and Nitta,

Contemplate what could happen if our society were confronted with food shortages and famine. They envision a dystopian fallout in which the government is forced to implement a strict food-rationing policy, whereby an individual's food allotment is carefully tailored to the emotional, physical, and intellectual demands of their employment. The example explored here is that of an industrial worker's diet: composed largely of starch, allowing the body to work for longer periods on fewer nutrients.<sup>44</sup>

Some of the main voices in speculative design and design studies weighed in on this work, including Susan Yelavich, James Auger, Cameron Tonkinwise, among others. What emerged from this debate is that there is a growing concern in the design public that speculative design operates in privileged, Eurocentric spaces that only address those directly engaged in the field. While Auger passionately defends speculative design, and in particular emphasizes how it attempts to address itself to a wide audience through "carefully crafted, plausible, tangible, but at the same time unsettling visions," in the end his defense sounds tired and unable to demonstrate concrete ways in which speculative design engages wider audiences, especially non-Western ones. In another context, Tonkinwise is critical of speculative design's focus on dystopian futures when it should be exposing what is dystopian about the present: "It is an epistemological error," he asserts, "when Speculative (Critical) Designers at the Royal College of Art, for instance, imagine what they believe to be dystopian scenarios in a distant future, when in fact people in other parts of the world are already living versions of those lifestyles."<sup>45</sup> This criticism falls in line with work on the decolonization of design that aims to dismantle the hegemony of Western epistemologies to allow new decolonized design practices to emerge.<sup>46</sup>

Likewise, on the design research platform *Modes of Criticism*, Luiza Prado and Pedro Oliveira make the compelling argument that speculative design's inability to engage these wider geopolitical realities has something to do with its methodological priorities. While speculative design seems to "spare no effort to investigate and fathom scientific research and futuristic technologies," it is only cursorily engaged with the humanities and social sciences, and so "avoids going deeper into how even our core moral, cultural, even religious values might—or should—change."<sup>47</sup> It seems to me that such a shallow understanding of the historical, social, and cultural dimensions of

technology in speculative design has everything to do with its privilege of technical fluency and mastery. If fluency is the gatekeeper to imagining technical futures, then there is little need to tire over the nuances of the humanistic forms of inquiry. Translation: the epistemological spaces of technoscience are valued over all else, which means that speculative design is just as much an inheritor of scientific modernity as it is Radical Design.<sup>48</sup>

While I am generally sympathetic to the many criticisms leveled against speculative design, and more specifically to the idea that its speculations are fashioned in the image of scientific modernity, I do not think that this has to be the end of the road for speculative design. One of the troubles with having a mere cursory interest in the humanities and social sciences, and even having an aversion to “Theory,”<sup>49</sup> is that there is little to no consideration of the history and meaning of the *speculative* in speculative design. Speculation, for designers, amounts to imagining potentials for technology that are not currently entertained. But this is to treat speculation as if it were not in question, as if its meaning and legitimacy are a given, and it can be readily deployed in the context of design provided certain conditions are met (technical fluency, etc.). treats speculation as if it didn’t have a conflicted history in modern thought, as if its meaning and use were not fundamentally in question after Kant’s critique of dogmatic metaphysics.<sup>50</sup> What a deep and sustained engagement with speculation would hopefully yield is a much better understanding of what it means to speculate in the wake of Kant’s Copernican Revolution, and whether and to what extent design can even be speculative. This work would not assume that fluency and mastery activate the speculative imagination; instead, it would situate these activities in terms a more robust understanding of what speculative practices are in the first place. From there, we’d be in a better position to interrogate what is speculative about design in any case.

I cannot pretend to provide a full account of this deeper understanding of speculative design in the remaining sections of this chapter. What I would like to do, however, is sketch a possible itinerary for such an account by drawing on the work of Alfred North Whitehead.<sup>51</sup> What interests me about his work is how speculation is framed as demanding activity requires we guard against the modern temptation to privilege certain modes of knowing and exclude, reduce, or explain away others (see PR, 17). And it is this modern temptation, I want to suggest, that has seduced many speculative designers today.

## SITUATING SPECULATION

Of course Whitehead’s speculative metaphysics is marvelously abstract, and for this reason it has led many to assume that it is a relic of our pre-Kantian

past, or the dogmatic subsumption of the universe under a set of notions that are necessary and sufficient to explain its complexity.<sup>52</sup> This version of speculative philosophy does not begin to capture the specific way in which Whitehead concretely situates the speculative activity of thought. For Whitehead, speculative philosophy always begins from somewhere; it is not an abstract view from nowhere. As early as *The Concept of Nature* (1920), Whitehead sought to construct a speculative concept of nature that would pay due attention to *all* of what “we are aware of in perception,” from the scientist’s interpretation of the sunset in terms of electro-magnetic waves to the poet’s description of its beauty (CN, 28). It is crucial not to mistake Whitehead’s proposal for one that endeavors to provide an exhaustive account of nature or even perception; rather, he wishes to offer an account of what we are *aware* of in our perception of nature.<sup>53</sup>

By the time of his major metaphysical treatises *Science and the Modern World* (1925), *Process and Reality* (1929), and *Adventures of Ideas* (1933), Whitehead’s problem has shifted somewhat: it is less about ensuring that nature does not bifurcate, and more about ensuring that we do not overestimate the importance of our abstractions. In particular, he wished to guard against “the accidental error of mistaking the abstract for the concrete,” which he called the “fallacy of misplaced concreteness” (SMW, 51). To do so, “it is of the utmost importance,” Whitehead thought, “to be vigilant in critically revising your modes of abstraction” (59). Such revision calls for speculative abstractions that would not “indulge in brilliant feats of explaining away” (PR, 17), but would be able to form a “system of general ideas in terms of which every element of our experience can be interpreted,” including “everything of which we are conscious, as enjoyed, perceived, willed or thought” (PR, 3).

But in order to construct such a bafflingly inclusive systems of notions, we must begin from somewhere. We cannot start in the thin air of abstraction lest we already presume the relevancy of certain notions and fall victim to the fallacy of misplaced concreteness. For this reason, Whitehead insists that speculation must begin in the domain of particular experiences. Speculation

must have its origin in the generalization of particular factors discerned in particular topics of human interest; for example, in physics, or in physiology, or in psychology, or in aesthetics, or in ethical beliefs, or in sociology, or in languages conceived as storehouses of human experience. (PR, 5)

What is crucial is that none of these interests or experiences can be used to explain the rest of them. In other words, no experience, including the physicist’s experience of the world, can be abstracted from the others’ and taken as the final word on a situation. Speculation involves generating a system of

notions capable of coordinating all experiences into a general scheme where there are no privileged cases.<sup>54</sup> “No entity,” Whitehead writes, “can be conceived in complete abstraction from the system of the universe, and it is the business of speculative philosophy to exhibit this truth. This character is its coherence” (PR, 3).

Whitehead deepens his insights about speculation by referring to it as a process of “imaginative generalization” (PR, 5). Michael Halewood rightly observes that imagination operating in a speculative mode is a deeply constrained activity for Whitehead. The speculative imagination is not a mere fanciful flight where anything goes, but it is a demanding operation of abstraction whereby the imagination leaves the place from which it originated to find connections beyond itself.<sup>55</sup> This is why Whitehead explains in the passage above that “construction must *leave its origin* in the generalization of particular factors discerned in particular topics of human interest” (emphasis added). The idea of leaving safe ground is famously likened to the flight of an aeroplane:

The true method of discovery is like the flight of an aeroplane. It starts from the ground of particular observation; it makes a flight in the thin air of imaginative generalization; and it again lands for renewed observation rendered acute by rational interpretation. (PR, 5)

It is essential to speculative abstraction that it lands. Speculation does not stay in the thin air of the imagination, but it returns to the world. The success of the speculative flight is entirely pragmatic: determined by whether the ground it returns to is different (“rendered acute by rational interpretation”).<sup>56</sup> Of course the wager is that there will be ground to meet the imaginative flight upon its return, but the hope is that it is transformed by the landing—that it is no longer the same runway.<sup>57</sup> This is the empirical side of speculation that determines its success: “The success of the imaginative experiment,” Whitehead continues, “is always to be tested by the applicability of its results beyond the restricted locus from which it originated” (PR, 5).<sup>58</sup> The success of speculation rests on whether the imagination is able find notions that are capable of being exemplified beyond the narrow field of experience from which it began. “In default of such extended application, a generalization started from physics, for example, remains merely an alternative expression of notions applicable to physics” (Ibid.).

But the challenge posed to speculative thought in particular is that it is also “adequate,” which “means that there are no items incapable of such interpretation” (PR, 3). According to Stengers, adequacy “obliges philosophers not to invoke any cause allowing them to eliminate, forget, treat as an exception, or disqualify an element of experience. In particular, the scheme

must be able to embrace the very thing that would be invoked in a mode of a challenge, contradiction, or scandal: *but what do you do with 'this'?*<sup>59</sup> The adequacy of speculation is thus framed in terms of an obligation not to use a particular case—the fluency of the technician, for instance—to reduce, explain away, or disqualify any item of experience, including seemingly irrelevant experiences.

Whitehead deepens this insight when he frames speculative abstractions in terms of propositions. The proposition is of course a crucial element in Whitehead's categorical scheme (one of the eight categories of existence [PR, 22]) and it also marks a real departure from his earlier collaboration with Bertrand Russell.<sup>60</sup> Where in the *Principia Mathematica* propositions are “material for judgment,” in *Process and Reality* propositions are neither true nor false in themselves, but “lures for feeling” (PR, 187). Didier Debaise dwells on the meaning of “lure” for Whitehead and underscores how it is not supposed to conjure up notions of “artifice” or “illusion”; rather “the term is resolutely neutral: a lure incites a change which can be either positive or negative, according to the circumstances; it entices someone, producing a diversion, modifying the course of an event by giving it a new direction.”<sup>61</sup>

To create such a “lure for feeling,” the proposition places an actual subject of experience (actual occasion) into a potential relation with a predicate (eternal object) in order that the actual subject may entertain its relevance within its particular milieu. There is nothing true or false about this relation, it is only meant to propose an alternative relation between subject and predicate, which may or may not be actualized.<sup>62</sup> And to obtain a metaphysical proposition in particular, which is what speculative philosophy aims to create, the proposition must have “meaning for any actual occasion, as a subject entertaining it,” and it must also be “‘general,’ in the sense that its predicate potentially relates any and every set of actual occasions, providing the suitable number of logical subjects for the predicative pattern” (PR, 197). Speculative metaphysics therefore proposes a predicative pattern capable of relating all items of experience—there is no reducing or explaining away—to an actual subject in the world. This last point is crucial since it means that the propositional relation must be meaningful to a situated subject in the actual world. This is Whitehead's way of saying that the imaginative flight must land and be empirically verified. Short of this, “the proposition itself awaits its logical subjects” (PR, 188).<sup>63</sup>

The crucial point is that speculation is characterized by the demanding work of constructing propositions that do not privilege certain items of experience. And yet this work is never resolved. This is why Whitehead insists in the Preface to *Process and Reality* that “there remains the final reflection, how shallow, puny, and imperfect are efforts to sound the depths in the nature of things” (PR, xiv). Speculation does not aim to describe or represent the world

as it is in itself. Rather it aims to induce a feeling for how the world might be coordinated for a particular perspective within it. Speculative abstraction is thus always haunted by the fact that it is incomplete. For this reason, there are no speculative propositions that communicate how the world is in itself; rather, “propositions grow with the creative advance of the world” (PR, 188).

## SPECULATIVE DESIGN BEYOND PROFESSIONALISM

In a few exceptional passages from *Science and the Modern World*, Whitehead meditates on the problem of the modern professional. In particular, he criticizes the nineteenth-century “discovery of the method of training professionals, who specialize in particular regions of thought and thereby progressively add to the sum of knowledge within their respective limitation of subject” (SMW, 196). What worried Whitehead was the crippling effect that modern professionalism has on thought: professionals “live in contemplating a given set of abstractions. The groove prevents straying across country, and the abstraction abstracts from something to which no further attention is paid” (SMW, 197). When this happens, thinking loses its hold on the complex environmental coordination required for a specific set of abstractions to exist. As Whitehead explains in *Process and Reality*, “every proposition proposing a fact must, in its complete analysis, propose the general character of the universe required for that fact” (PR, 11). But professionalism creates “minds in a groove” that thrive on privileging certain regions of knowledge at the expense of others, and so cannot contemplate the “general character of the universe” required for that fact. Such professionalism enacts the “fallacy of misplaced concreteness” that Whitehead spent the majority of his philosophical career fighting against and that prevents speculative thought from taking hold.

What is striking is that design speculation seems to be subject to just the kind of professionalization that concerned Whitehead. Speculation is enabled by the privileged spaces of technoscientific expertise and addresses itself only to those spaces. In Whitehead’s terms, the flight of the imagination lands in more or less the same spot that it took off. This is a professionalized imagination that only provides variations on the same theme, instead of true variations from that theme. Of course there can be little doubt that expert knowledge is a crucial element for speculation. Whitehead was a mathematician and his later philosophical work is very much an attempt to accommodate the mathematics and physics of his day within a speculative scheme.<sup>64</sup> What I want to suggest, however, is that it is just as essential not to overestimate how important expertise is for speculation.

If, for Whitehead, speculation demands that we resist the modern temptation to neglect, reduce, or explain certain experiences in the name of a common



measure that transcends them, then the importance of expert knowledge cannot be overestimated. Speculative thought operates by giving due attention to the divergences that make up our world, all the while resisting our well-worn habit of offering an account that would be able to subsume them under a concept or abstraction once and for all. To make sense of this idea, Stengers pays careful attention to how important “common sense” is to Whitehead’s speculative philosophy. Stengers is not speaking about Gilles Deleuze’s notion of common sense, the sense that is presumed to be true because it is held in common;<sup>65</sup> rather, she is talking about the necessity of “taking an interest in the way others make their world matter, including animal others,” and other living and nonliving systems.<sup>66</sup> The idea here is that paying attention to what matters in a situation means accepting that there are radically different ways of having a situation matter, and these differences cannot be explained away or accounted for in advance. In other words, the common sense of a situation indexes the divergent ways a situation comes to make sense to others, and how it is impossible to conceive of an individual who would be authorized to speak on behalf of those other ways of making sense.<sup>67</sup>

If we were to use this framework as our guide for envisioning what speculation could mean to design outside of its professional framing, then we would have to come to terms with a very different understanding of speculative design. In particular, we would be obliged to acknowledge that the connection between design and speculation is not obvious or straightforward. This is not to say that there is no connection, or that one could not be forged, but it is to say that the relation is not already secured by a privileged set of tools, instruments, and techniques (or *techné*). They would have to be designed according to what a given milieu requires, which is to say, according to the ground from which speculation arises. For instance, Whitehead’s tools are linguistic, meant to redesign the abstractions that dominated the situation in which he found himself:<sup>68</sup> namely, within the climate of early twentieth-century philosophy hijacked by Russell and the early Wittgenstein (SMW, 59).<sup>69</sup> It is within this philosophical milieu, which more or less forbade speculative metaphysics, that Whitehead dared to do speculative philosophy. And yet the tools he chose to use could not guarantee the success of his speculative flight. Whitehead agonized over their inadequacy: “The great difficulty of philosophy is the failure of language” (MT, 49).

A truly speculative instantiation of design would also agonize over whether the tools and instruments it chooses to use are appropriate to the milieu it is working within. While expert tools, such as Arduino boards and custom software, cannot be discounted and play an important role in our current and future technical landscape, they may not always be well suited to the task of constructing speculative propositions that coordinate the wealth of divergent experiences with technology today—including, or maybe even especially, nonexpert experiences. Whitehead helps us appreciate the way

in which a speculative encounter with our current technical milieu also requires a deep and sustained engagement with those practices that are cast aside and pose a challenge to the authority of technical expertise in the West, such as postcolonial experiences of poverty and racial discrimination, or perhaps mystical experiences not authorized by Western cosmologies.<sup>70</sup> Such engagement would also situate the speculative design work that I am proposing in close conversation with the “decolonizing design” research a number of design researchers are currently advocating. What is at stake here, in any case, is coming up with techniques capable of re-designing (Whitehead) our well-worn habits of thought in Western technocapitalism in order to bring divergent sense-making practices together in a speculative framework, all the while refusing to authorize, reduce, or explain any of them away.

What I am proposing, then, would be a version of design that does not end its work in a gallery show. This is design that is worthy of being called speculative precisely because it is never finished: it is wedded to the struggle of expressing the forgotten, changing, and unanticipated concerns of our techno-capitalist present. For this reason, speculative design may not, and maybe even cannot, operate in the antiseptic spaces of the professional design world that are only prepared to address itself. It may very well have to operate in the shadows or on the fringes of the institutional spaces of Western design. Perhaps we would do well then to look to the neo-pagan activist circles that Stengers celebrates,<sup>71</sup> or to the forms of urban collectivity with immigrants that the radical art group Free House organizes in Rotterdam for inspiration.<sup>72</sup> There may also be some important antecedents to what I’m proposing in the Earth Democracy movement advocated by Vandana Shiva,<sup>73</sup> or in the Afro-Futuristic photography and video work of Nigerian and Kenyan artists Mūchiri Njenga, Osborne Macharia, and Kadara Enyeasi.<sup>74</sup> What matters to design, then, is the ongoing work of inventing tools for designing propositions that imagine how diverse and contesting experiences *may be* held together (propositionally) without reducing what matters to each of them to a common measure.<sup>75</sup> In this guise, the success of design depends upon whether and to what extent the subjects entertaining the design propositions are moved to experience the world “beyond the restricted locus from which it originated”: namely, from the privileged spaces of technoscientific mastery that we have inherited from scientific modernity.

## CONCLUSION: PROLEGOMENA TO PROPOSITIONAL MEDIA FOR DESIGN

I want to conclude by retuning to Bruce Sterling’s insistence that we should “create a design fiction suited to the specific aims of media philosophers.”

My final provocation in this chapter, which also gestures toward a trajectory for future research, is that Sterling is entirely right, but not because speculative design or design fiction concerns itself exclusively with media devices and information networks, which is what he had in mind (Kittler and Manovich are his points of reference). Rather, and much more crucially, speculative design aligns itself with the work of those media philosophers who have not forgotten the transcendental significance of *mediation*.<sup>76</sup> These are theorists who are in many ways the inheritors of Marshall McLuhan,<sup>77</sup> but they are those who most importantly appreciate that studying the operations of media in the plural (modern technical devices, information technologies, etc.) presuppose that the human is always already outside of itself and thus mediated by various “concrete externalizations.”<sup>78</sup> Mediation is a transcendental condition for human and nonhuman sensibility, which has various modalities, including, but certainly not limited to, modern technical mediation.<sup>79</sup> This turn toward mediation is also important to the collaborative work of Alexander Galloway, Eugene Thacker, and McKenzie Wark. In particular, they emphasize how media studies has forgotten what “mediation” is: “Have we not forgotten the most basic questions? Distracted by the tumult of concern around what media do or how media are built, have we not lost the central question: *what is mediation?* In other words, has the question of ‘what’ been displaced by a concern with ‘how’?”<sup>80</sup>

My suggestion here is that Whitehead is a part of this intellectual genealogy of media philosophy, along with Hegel, Marx, and other modern philosophers.<sup>81</sup> Recall that for Whitehead, there are no unmediated experiences: “We cannot think without abstractions,” he insists, which is why we must be “vigilant in critically revising . . . abstractions” (SMW, 59). In the perspective of media philosophy, speculative design propositions mediate human (and nonhuman) experience in a very particular way: they place the narrow sphere of technical expertise into a much wider context of possible experiences and meanings (via new predicative patterns). In particular, they generate an “interstice” in the closed loop of our current technical imaginary, interrupting the idea that there could ever be a privileged space from which to determine the meaning and relations of our technical devices.<sup>82</sup> As speculative mediators in our experience of technology, propositions do not simply communicate a different message; instead, they ensure that there is no privileged “message” capable of communicating the meaning of technical experience once and for all.

When Galloway, Thacker, and Wark (both individually and collectively) return to the mediation in our media, it is with the expressed purpose of showing how all communication presupposes “excommunication.” This is essentially the (heretical) idea that communication is always pervaded

by its own inadequacy, by the fact that there is actually no message. But this “does not simply destroy communication, but evokes the *impossibility* of communication, the *insufficiency* of communication as a model. In this way, excommunication is prior to the very possibility of communication.”<sup>83</sup> Although “excommunication” is perhaps most closely aligned to the non-standard philosophy of François Laruelle, and may seem to have very little in common with Whitehead’s work, my hunch is that a media theory of speculative design propositions would very much benefit from an encounter with “excommunicative” media. While the fit would be anything but perfect, I nonetheless think there may be something to be gained from situating our work on Whitehead and design in terms of excommunicative media. In particular, it would help elucidate a very important, and yet sometimes neglected, dimension of Whitehead’s speculative philosophy: namely, that philosophy cannot communicate the meaning of reality to thought—this message is never delivered. Every propositional communication is inherently insufficient, which means that no propositional coordination of technical experience is capable of providing the last word on its meaning. This emphasis would intervene in much of what is wrong with speculative design today: namely, its colonization by the privileged spaces of technical mastery. Whether such a media theory proves to be of any real use to my design proposal has yet to be seen. However, it is worth remembering just how firmly Whitehead believed that speculative philosophy is never certain and always incomplete: “In philosophical discussion,” he insists, “the merest hint of dogmatic certainty as to finality of statement is an exhibition of folly” (PR, xiv).

From these insights, we might piece together what the mediating function of a speculative design proposition is within our era of ubiquitous computing. The challenge of course will be to resist the temptation to construct recipes for these mediating practices that turn into well-rehearsed formulas. Much like Whitehead, designers must never be content with the tools they use to forge interstices within our well-worn habits of technical existence. Short of this struggle to redesign each situation, each set of abstractions according to what they demand, design indulges in privileging ready-made solutions for speculation, and forecloses any possibility of achieving it. For this reason, design, like any other practice, must struggle to be worthy of speculation.

## NOTES

1. See Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby, *Speculative Everything: Design, Fiction, and Social Dreaming* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2013).
2. See for instance, Cameron Tonkinwise, “Speculative Practice Needs Diverse Cultures.” [Speculative.hr/en/](http://speculative.hr/en/), available at: <http://speculative.hr/en/cameron-tonkinw>

ise/; and the heated debate over Michiko Nitta and Michael Burton's *Republic of Salvation*, John Thackara, "Republic of Salvation (Michael Burton and Michiko Nitta)." Moma.org, available at: <https://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2013/designdandviolence//republic-of-salvation-michael-burton-and-michiko-nitta/>.

3. See Dunne and Raby, *Speculative Everything*, 6–7; and Jonathan Lukens and Carl DiSalvo, "Speculative Design and Technical Fluency." *International Journal of Learning and Media* 3, no. 4 (2013): 24.

4. See *Strange Design: From Objects to Behaviors*, ed. Jehanne Dautry and Emanuele Quinz (Netherlands: Idea Books, 2015).

5. See Quinz, "Prologue: Critical Objects" in *Strange Design: From Objects to Behaviors*.

6. Ibid.; See Dautry and Quinz, *Strange Design*, passim.

7. Marjanne Van Halvert, *The Responsible Object: A History of Design Ideology for the Future* (Amsterdam: Astrid Vorstermans, Valiz, 2016), 180–81.

8. See Guy Debord, "Report on the Construction of Situations and on the International Situationist Tendency's Conditions of Organization and Action," <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/report.html>; and McKenzie Wark, *The Beach Beneath the Street: The Everyday Life and Glorious Times of the Situationist International* (London and Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2011).

9. See Renny Ramakers and Gijs Bakker, eds. *Droog Design: Spirit of the Nineties* (Netherlands: 010 Publishers, 1998).

10. See *Strange Design* and *Speculative Everything*.

11. See Carl DiSalvo, *Adversarial Design* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2012), 109; and *Design Fiction Vol. 2* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016).

12. See Rick Pynor, "Critical World Building," in *Design Fiction Vol. 2*.

13. Dunne and Raby, *Speculative Everything*, 34.

14. Ibid., 34–35.

15. Ibid., 35.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid., 8. See also Julian Bleecker, "Design Fiction: A Short Essay on Design, Science, Fact and Fiction." *New Future Laboratory* (March 2018), available at: [http://drbfw5wfljxon.cloudfront.net/writing/DesignFiction\\_WebEdition.pdf](http://drbfw5wfljxon.cloudfront.net/writing/DesignFiction_WebEdition.pdf).

18. Ibid., 12.

19. See, for instance, the television series *Black Mirror*, and especially "The Entire History of You" (Season 1, Episode 3).

20. On Design Fiction see Bleecker, "Design Fiction"; Bruce Sterling, "Design Fiction." *Interactions* 16, no. 3 (2009): 20–24; and Alex Coles, ed., *Design Fiction Vol. 2* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016).

21. Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby (Interview with Rick Pynor), "Critical World Building," in Coles, *Design Fiction*, 50.

22. Dunne and Raby (Interview with Rick Pynor), "Critical World Building."

23. Ibid., 100.

24. DiSlavo, *Adversarial Design*, 109.

25. See their website at <http://www.auger-loizeau.com/>.

26. James Auger and Jimmy Loizeau, "Happy Life" (2010), Auger-Loizeau.com, available at: <http://www.auger-loizeau.com/projects/happylife>.

27. Auger and Loizeau, "After Life."
28. Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby, "Designs for an Overpopulated Plant." DunneandRaby.co.uk, available at: <http://www.dunneandraby.co.uk/content/projects/510/0>.
29. Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby, "Do You Want to Replace the Existing Normal?" DunneandRaby.co.uk, available at: <http://www.dunneandraby.co.uk/content/projects/75/0>.
30. See Dunne and Raby's *Speculative Everything* for a thorough overview of the many institutional contexts that have given shape to speculative design in the last decade.
31. Bruce Sterling (Interview with Verina Gfader), "Most Design Fiction Will of Course Be Pretty Bad," in Coles, *Design Fiction*.
32. See Sterling's lecture: "Futurism: Design Fiction for Media Philosophers." Egs.edu, available at: <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/bruce-sterling/lectures/>.
33. Lukens and DiSalvo, "Speculative Design and Technical Fluency."
34. *Ibid.*, 27.
35. See for instance, Natalie Jeremijenko, "OneTrees: An Information Environment." NYU.edu, available at: <http://www.nyu.edu/projects/xdesign/onetrees/>; and Jacob Beaver et al., eds., *Material Beliefs* (London: Goldsmiths, University of London/Interaction Research Studio, 2009), available at: <http://research.gold.ac.uk/2316/>.
36. Lukens and DiSalvo, "Speculative Design and Technical Fluency," 26.
37. *Ibid.*, 32.
38. Dunne and Raby, *Speculative Everything*, 70.
39. *Ibid.*, 49.
40. Bleecker, "Design Fiction."
41. Dunne and Raby, *Speculative Everything*, 2.
42. In an interesting article written for the online research platform, *Modes of Criticism* (<http://modesofcriticism.org/>), Luiza Prado and Pedro Oliveira suggest that speculative design is going through a "troubled adolescence." See Luiza Prado and Pedro Oliveira, "Futuristic Gizmos, Conservative Ideals: On (Speculative) Anachronistic Design" (Feb., 2017). [modesofcriticism.org](http://modesofcriticism.org/futuristic-gizmos-conservative-ideals/), available at: <http://modesofcriticism.org/futuristic-gizmos-conservative-ideals/>.
43. Burton and Nitta's *Republic of Salvation*, burtonnitta.co.uk, available at: <http://www.burtonnitta.co.uk/RepublicOfSalvation.html>.
44. Thackara, "Republic of Salvation."
45. See Tonkinwise, "Speculative Practice Needs Diverse Cultures."
46. See Tony Fry and Anne-Marie Willis, "Design and the Global South." *Design Philosophy Papers* 15, no. 1 (2017): 1–2; Tony Fry, *A New Design Philosophy: An Introduction to Defuturing* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 1999). Also see Luiza Prado de O. Martins and Pedro J. S. Vieira de Oliveira, "Breaking the Cycle of Macondo: Design and Decolonial Futures." *XRDS* 22, no. 4 (2016): 28–32.
47. See Prado and Oliveira, "Futuristic Gizmos, Conservative Ideals: On (Speculative) Anachronistic Design."
48. See Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*.
49. Dunne and Raby, *Speculative Everything*. See also Jurgen Bey and Emanuele Quinz, "Constructing the Image of a World 'That is Slightly Out of Kilter'" in *Strange Design: From Objects to Behaviors*.

50. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965).

51. In recent years, a number of design theorists from the United Kingdom (mostly) have come to appreciate Whitehead's speculative philosophy. Perhaps most notably, the edited collection, *The Lure of Possible Futures: On Speculative Research*, showcases design work that draws on Whitehead and Stengers. This research tends to be more closely aligned to the social sciences, and science and technology studies in particular, than it does to the humanities or philosophy.

52. See Nicholas Gaskill and A.J. Nocek, "Introduction: An Adventure of Thought" in *The Lure of Whitehead*, ed. Nicholas Gaskill and A.J. Nocek (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

53. Isabelle Stengers, *Thinking With Whitehead: A Free and Wild Creation of Concepts*, trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 31–57.

54. Stengers, *Thinking With Whitehead.*, 233–253.

55. Michael Halewood, "Situated Speculation as a Constraint on Thought," in *The Lure of Possible Futures: On Speculative Research*, ed. Martin Savransky, Alex Wilkie, and Marsha Rosengarten (London: Routledge, 2017), 55.

56. On Whitehead's Jamesian pragmatism see Stengers, *Thinking with Whitehead*, 112–113, 251–53.

57. Stengers, *Thinking With Whitehead*, 245–53; Halewood, "Situated Speculation as a Constraint on Thought," 57.

58. Whitehead explains that "[i]t will also be noticed that this ideal of speculative philosophy has its rational side and its empirical side. The rational side is expressed by the terms 'coherent' and 'logical.' The empirical side is expressed by the terms 'applicable' and 'adequate'" (PR, 3).

59. Stengers, *Thinking With Whitehead*, 246.

60. Didier Debaise, "The Lure of the Possible: On the Function of Speculative Propositions," trans. Michael Halewood, in *The Lure of Possible Futures: On Speculative Research*, ed. Martin Savransky, Alex Wilkie, and Marsha Rosengarten (London: Routledge, 2017).

61. Debaise, "The Lure of the Possible: On the Function of Speculative Propositions," 213.

62. The realization of this potential is dependent upon the teleological aim of the concreting occasion of experience, which aims to secure "intensity of contrast" as an "aesthetic achievement." See Judith Jones, *Intensity: An essay in Whiteheadian Ontology*.

63. Isabelle Stengers hints at the idea that Whitehead's own speculative propositions had to await their logical subjects—the twenty-first-century subject. See *Thinking with Whitehead*, "Introduction."

64. See for instance, Michael Epperson, *Quantum Mechanics and the Philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004).

65. Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (London: Continuum, 2001), 134.

66. Isabelle Stengers, "Speculative Philosophy and the Art of Dramatization," in *The Allure of Things: Process and Object in Contemporary Philosophy*, ed. Roland

Faber and Andrew Goffey (London and New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), 200.

67. Of course this reading of Whitehead is closely related to Stengers's own work on cosmopolitics and the ecology of practices. See for instance, Stengers, "The Cosmopolitical Proposal" and "Introductory Notes on an Ecology of Practices."

68. As Whitehead puts it in *Process and Reality*: "Every science must devise its own instruments. The tool required for philosophy is language. Thus philosophy redesigns language in the same way that, in a physical science, pre-existing appliances are redesigned" (PR, 11).

69. Halewood points out that "I would suggest that it is possible to set out an implicit location from which Whitehead makes his initial jump; it is the context of early twentieth-century philosophy, especially that of Russell and the early Wittgenstein, one where speculation and the associated taint of metaphysics were deemed irrelevant if not impossible. Halewood, "Situated Speculation as a Constraint on Thought," 56.

70. The work of the Brussels-based artist collective, FoAM, is instructive for engaging science and spiritual practice in art and design research. See <https://fo.am/>.

71. See Stengers, "Reclaiming Animism" and "Introductory Notes on an Ecology of Practices."

72. See Free House works at [http://www.jeanneworks.net/projects/freehouse\\_-\\_radicalizing\\_the\\_local/](http://www.jeanneworks.net/projects/freehouse_-_radicalizing_the_local/).

73. See Vandana Shiva's work, *Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability, and Peace*.

74. See exhibition at Foam Photography Museum in Amsterdam at <https://www.foam.org/museum/programme/foam-x-african-artists-foundation>.

75. This is most explicit in Stengers's reading of Whitehead.

76. See especially, W. J. T. Mitchell and Mark Hansen's "Introduction" to *Critical Terms for Media Studies*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell and Mark B. N. Hansen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010); and Alexander Galloway, Eugene Thacker, and McKenzie Wark, *Excommunication: Three Inquiries into Media and Mediation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

77. Mitchell and Hansen observe that for McLuhan, "the body, in sum, is a capacity for relationality that literally requires mediation and that, in a sense, cannot be conceptualized without it" (Mitchell and Hansen, "Introduction," xiii).

78. This would also mean that Hegel and Marx would be important media theorists.

79. Mitchell and Hansen, "Introduction," xiii.

80. Galloway, Thacker, and Wark, *Excommunication: Three Inquiries into Media and Mediation*, 9.

81. See Jonathan Beller, *The Cinematic Mode of Production: Attention Economy and the Society of the Spectacle* (Hannover: UPNE, 2012), for a careful analysis of money as media; also see Mitchell and Hansen's "Introduction" to *Critical Terms for Media Studies*, xx.

82. Stengers writes that for Whitehead, "[s]peculative abstractions, for their part, wager on the interstices of our social abstractions, not to disqualify them but in order



to activate what lurks in these interstices, the ‘feeling’ of the abstraction as such.” Stengers, *Thinking With Whitehead* 420–21.

83. Galloway, Thacker, and Wark, *Excommunication*, 16.

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## Chapter 5

# An Internet of Actual Occasions

## *Notes toward Understanding Twenty- First-Century Tendencies in Media, Communications, and World*

Andrew Murphie

### MEDIA IN WORLD/MEDIA AS WORLD

It's not just that social media intrudes so much into social and personal life. Far more is afoot in media and communications' expansion into world—often now in the form of networks and data. Microchips are now inserted under human skin to integrate the body and networked technics. Tiny graphene radios allow communications across an internet of nano-things. There are now camera lenses the size of a grain of salt, and what is called “smart dust,” collections of wirelessly connected miniaturized electromechanical devices such as sensors and tiny robots. IBM can store data on a single atom. Artist Paul Thomas has recently attempted to talk to a phosphorus electron.<sup>1</sup> Generally, user interface and world are increasingly becoming hard to tell apart. Indeed, some UX (user experience) design is now directed toward “Zero UI” (no user interface). Zero UI imagines a world bathed in invisible yet ubiquitous and responsive computation.

There are many ways in which world and media now *seem* to be collapsing into one another. It seems obvious that media and communications are hijacking other, “non-media” (social, personal, material) aspects of the world. Indeed, thinking this way has been a pillar of Western (and other) philosophy, from Socrates's famous suspicion of writing onward. It has also been a crucial aspect of Western modernity, certainly from the printing press on. It assumes a world that is, or at least has been, distinct from media and communications. This is a world into which human invention (and exploitation) can intrude. Yet, this is not the only way media and world have been conceived.

There has long been a very large, if sometimes unrecognized, undercurrent of thinking about media and communications differently, without such a clear distinction between media and world. Media and world are not clearly separate in much of religion (burning bushes, angels, visions, mysticism). They are not clearly separate in significant philosophies, especially in aspects of Chinese or Indian philosophy (for example, five element theory in Chinese philosophy, or the four elements of the Pali Canon in Buddhism, with all such “elements” something like aspects of a complex circulating communication). They are certainly not separate in many indigenous philosophies in which the earth itself is communicative. Indeed, the relations of media and world are also complex in Western philosophies that emphasize process and becoming. Then there is recent thinking coming out of the sciences, such as biosemiotics, that finds media and communication to be a constitutive part of the world—a part of the biology of living cells, for example. It should be no surprise, then, that much (perhaps not quite mainstream) contemporary media theory also questions neat divisions between media and world. In all such thinking, “our” media and communications—our technical means—are only able to hijack so much of world for a simple reason. This is that these technical means align themselves with the mediatic and communicative powers and processes of the world not made by us. In sum, in this thinking the world is always already a matter of media and communication. The hijacking of world is real enough, but is only made possible by the broader “world as medium,” as Whitehead put it (PR, 286).

There are many ways to respond to this. One thought-provoking example is a recent art project by Karolina Sobiecka, *Cloud Services*. The work proposed a global distribution of DNA via bacteria that would form a kind of bio-geographical internet.<sup>2</sup> A quote from the novel *Frankenstein* is translated into binary data, and then translated once again into the quaternary code of DNA. This DNA is then chemically synthesized and inserted into the DNA of a certain kind of bacteria that are found in the atmosphere. These bacteria travel the world by hitching a ride with clouds. The bacteria also have the peculiar property of turning water into ice. This leads to precipitation, and, in *Cloud Services*, this carries the now genetically altered bacteria back to the ground, perhaps on another continent. What is being communicated, thought and felt in this meeting of bacteria, DNA, clouds, rain and wind, literature and art, and who or what is thinking and feeling via this communication?<sup>3</sup> If this is mediation, what exactly is a medium? Could such a strange technical-biological-geographical assemblage eventually prove to be a way to communicate more directly with climate itself<sup>4</sup> (which could be seen as a complex example of the world as medium)?

Such questions present a different set of problems to those relating to that which Alfred North Whitehead discussed as an unhappy but common

“bifurcation of nature” (CN, 26ff). This is a bifurcation into nature apprehending (one aspect of which is perceiving subjectivity) and nature apprehended (nature “out there”).<sup>5</sup> This enables other related divisions<sup>6</sup> such as the “disastrous separation of body and mind” (MT, 154). In such disastrous separations, bifurcation creates a “nature lifeless” from within a “nature alive” (MT, 127ff). Now, however, this bifurcation and a number of dualisms that are based on it are being undone. Entire cultural problematics change. As in the *Cloud Services* example, the problem becomes one of thinking, working, and moving with(in) the world, having left behind our habits of bifurcation. As Didier Debaise notes, “a growing tension has set its seal on our experience of nature,” one between our “inherited,” “modern conception of nature,” with all its bifurcations, and “contemporary ecological transformations.”<sup>7</sup> This tension “has reached a point of no return.”

A very different example of the “ecological transformations” that question a given divvying up of the world is material computation. In this, computation, media, and world merge. As Luciana Parisi explains:

Material computation is concerned with immanent processing in which information has acquired an energetic pulse and has become itself a process *in-formation*. The scope is not simply to induce algorithmic processing by establishing a continuous feedback between programmed instructions and the biophysical environment. More radically, it involves an ontological merging of computational processes and physical processes. This radicalization of inductive reasoning problematically implies a naturalization of computation, claiming that the potentialities of biophysical substrates are now central to what can be constructed.<sup>8</sup>

Parisi goes on to argue that it is even more important to think the specificity of computation in this situation. Here, however, I will just remark on the new flexibility of computation—and of therefore of computational media—to become with the world in an “ontological merging.” In doing so, computational media move with and indeed often help propel the formation of multiple, shifting ontologies, or simply ways of being. Nothing simply “is,” once and for all. These shifting ways of being require a kind of metaphysical multiplicity, pliable enough to attempt description of these ontologies as they form and unform, and to some extent to account for the way in which they form and unform. Is, for example, material computation a matter of the naturalization of computing, or, just as convincingly, Parisi’s non-naturalization of the algorithmic? Or is it both of these and more at once?

This chapter will approach such questions via the basic elements of process that Whitehead called “actual occasions”—the basic elements of process by which the world becomes what it becomes. Actual occasions do not only produce the world; they are the world, anew, in its ongoing process

of production. In apparently less “stable” worlds such as the contemporary world, actual occasions’ generation of novelty seems more intense. Ontological mergings and multiplicities arise in a generation of novelty energized by new kinds of prehension.<sup>9</sup> This produces more radically different spaces and times (for Whitehead these arise differently with each occasion). It creates more transient ontologies (different ways of being and becoming), and requires a more contingent metaphysics (as attempted description of these ontologies). The media we make fold through this. It is perhaps no surprise, for example, that an imagined function of AI might be to help process these multiple ontologies and contingent metaphysics as these emerge, and as they participate in transforming the mundane into the multiply unrecognizable (as suggested, for example, in the conclusion of the film *Her*<sup>10</sup> in which the AI seems to move to a very different way of being in the world, with other AIs, inaccessible to the male character). Are such dynamics once again providing opportunities for Capital, and for increases in the worst kinds of structural violence? Are they providing different kinds of opportunities to attune, via the new techno-ecologies, with basic world ecologies? Is the situation more complex than this opposition might allow?

This chapter attempts to assemble a useful proposition or lure for feeling,<sup>11</sup> one for better thinking-feeling<sup>12</sup> the *apparent* collapsing together of media and world. The chapter draws on developments that have already happened in thinking media and world. Some of these are (r)evolutions in thinking and work with media and world that occurred long ago; some are still unfurling.<sup>13</sup> They have in common a thinking, and often a work with communications, that assumes them to be messy, complex, and entwined within the world. At the same time, this chapter acknowledges that, at least since the late 1940s, such complex approaches to media-world relations have been strongly and almost programmatically resisted. Part of this has involved the development and popular uptake of a series of purposefully reductive metaphysics of media and communications. This reductionism has leaked out into a number of key aspects of culture—not only media and communications, but subsidiary fields that are often more a matter of media and communications than might be admitted, such as education, management, psychology, and even perhaps elements of philosophy (for example, in the way that philosophy is taken to be a logically coherent system, free of noise,<sup>14</sup> at the same time as a way of intervening from afar into a more mute or less expressive world). The result is not only a technics, but an accompanying metaphysics of control. The most prominent example of this is the way that Shannon and Weaver’s well-known mathematical model for communication was taken up in culture and became the “model of the century” or “model of all models.”<sup>15</sup> The model, as taken up in culture, famously conceives of a controlled and controlling medium that produces clear, linear, and undistorted signal, faithfully received. Here

the medium was conceived (by Weaver at least) as a “discreet” secretary.<sup>16</sup> It was as minimally involved with real-world events as possible. It worked best in the docile service of those specific humans who put it to work. On behalf of these humans, media and communications target targets (enemies, or certain demographics—voters or consumers—or, these days, a manager’s Key Performance Indicators). Media and communications deliver orders. These orders order the world, and maintain these orderings. In the process, media create metaphysics and ecologies of practice that form the “closed worlds” of the like of the cold war.<sup>17</sup> This produces a certain kind of “human”—rationalist and bureaucratic, controlling and controlled, and often imperial. For such humans, only certain aspects of world and events come to “count.” Certain modes of organization follow, of a limited and limiting world—a limited subject, a narrowly prescribed home, the workplace as conduit for clean and ordering communications, the “planet” itself as humanly ordered. More recently this has developed toward the like of collections of data points, the network as the limited movement between all of these, and through the narrow channels of data networks, a devolution of the subject toward a series of data-defined “dividuals.” “Political communication”—including now the like of data analytics and algorithmic organizers of influence—comes to dominate and order politics. In this and other respects, media orders become intensely globalizing and localizing at once, but only in particular modes of address. Limited publics and privacies are formed, violated, and unformed, according to the shifting needs of order and command.

The lure for feeling attempted in this chapter is directed toward a different metaphysics for media and communications to this ordering of the world from a somewhat separate, “bifurcated” place within it. It draws on Alfred North Whitehead’s concept of the “world as medium” (PR, 286). It suggests “intercommunication” (AI, 134) as an ecological multiplicity involving not only points or lines, but entire fields of mutual immanence.<sup>18</sup> It suggests this *as world*. This intercommunication as world underlies and empowers the reductionist hierarchies, metaphysics, and media technics of the closed world. Yet, it is important to stress that it also allows for many other potential worlds, and in this very different metaphysics, media technics, and modes of organization. To put this slightly differently, media are not only powerful because they mediate the engagement between humans, or between the world and the human sensorium (although they are powerful because of this). Indeed, media are not only or perhaps even, fundamentally, *mediations* of other, supposedly “non-media” aspects of world. In *Process and Reality*, Whitehead instead suggests that media and communications are intensive (PR, 286)<sup>19</sup> movements *of the creativity of the world itself* in what some have recently called “immediation.”<sup>20</sup> For Whitehead, the immediating world is *made up* of mediums, and of instances of communication, and what he called



the “vector transmission of influences” (PR, 286) or feeling.<sup>21</sup> Mediums are inherent within the processes that are the immediative becoming of continuity that is world. Again, the world’s infinite mediums are for the most part independent of “our” technical development, although they obviously make technics possible. Yet, many fields of thought and ecologies of practice seem based on pretending otherwise.<sup>22</sup>

To reiterate, in Whitehead’s terms, media as we usually know them are only able to intrude “into” the world because they hijack that which is already within the world—the larger world *as* medium and communication. Simply put, “*our*” *media and communications, as themselves process in the world, hijack other aspects of world process*. Understanding the world as medium, however, complicates our understanding of world as much as it challenges many common understandings of media—the actualities, potentials, tendencies, limits, and thresholds involved. Crucially, it also complicates our understandings of powers at the junction of world, media, and communications. This is because the world as medium’s movements are also *world-movements of felt powers. These are immanent to the communicative event*. These felt powers form the basis for experience, *as* the ongoing waxing and waning, from moment to moment, of the feeling of power. Whitehead calls this the “sense of power” (MT, 119).<sup>23</sup> This is a crucial coming together of the feeling of power—crucial to the inherent sense of events themselves, and to what we take to be “our own” feeling or sense of power—insofar as the feeling/sense of power is necessarily immanent to ongoing transmission and communication in and as world.<sup>24</sup> This power can be thought not only in actuality, but in the immanent shifting or constant restructuring of virtual potentials, tendencies, limits, and thresholds—in signaletic drifts in the capacity to affect and be affected.<sup>25</sup> Simply put, this is power as the ongoing “compulsion of composition” (119). It is the *immanence of the communicative event thought and felt as power, in process, as composition*. Indeed, it draws our attention to *power in and as process and process as power*. One implication of Whitehead’s philosophy of media and world is that, even in a world so awash with media technics, we may as yet have underdetermined the complexities and available powers formed within the new constellations of media and communications and/as world.

There are many ways to understand the contemporary response to what can now clearly be understood as only an apparent collapsing into each other of world and media. However, two kinds of events stand out, mixed differently in different situations. First, there is a re-formation of powers in a kind of ongoing speculative pragmatics<sup>26</sup> of power (that capitalizes on process as power). Power is constantly reformed, both as broadly conceived, and this through the way it works within the senses or feelings of power immanent to communicative events. Second, there are shifts in more general metaphysics

which themselves participate, if differently, in an ongoing speculative pragmatics. In the tension between the re-formation of powers and shifts in more general metaphysics are many questions involving changing ecologies of thinking, feeling, and practice. I will explore this a little further.

A significant aspect of the re-formation of powers involves what Brian Massumi has described as a “becoming-environmental of power.”<sup>27</sup> Michael Dieter writes that “For Massumi, the becoming environmental of power resembles a kind of ontopower, since its ‘field of application’ is now proto-territorial . . . For Massumi, this mode of power attempts to intercept force by distributing disruptive ontogenetic waves toward global flow-on effects.”<sup>28</sup> Media and communications as commonly understood are arguably core to this. They enhance the potential for hijacking the already existing and potential powers of the much broader world as medium. Even “wrongly” conceived and unethically deployed media and communications are of course more attuned to the general world as medium than many other ecologies of practice.<sup>29</sup> That is what media and communications do. They are a power to move an attunement within the world differently, as the world “worlding”—even if this is a power that is badly or inadequately attuned. Only one example of this might be data’s infusion into daily life, so that data, as a kind of inflecting energy, or what Whitehead called “data as the potential for feeling” (PR, 88), becomes incorporated in power forming and unforming, in the feeling and sense of power—in the “compulsion of composition.” All this enters into the circulations of pre-, co-, trans-, infra- and post-individuations within the everyday.

The second significant aspect to the contemporary response to the apparent collapsing into each other of world and media involves shifts in more general metaphysics as this becomes a more obviously *speculative pragmatics* as the neat divisions between communication, world, action, and thinking are undone. There is a series of variations—and not only Whitehead’s—on the reconceiving of world as medium and medium as world. A series of speculative pragmatics emerges at the heart of cultures that begin to reflect on the extent to which media and world can be collapsed, or might always already have been collapsed from the start. A tension arises within these, however. As discussed throughout this chapter so far, this is between addressing a more obviously unavoidable, processual world that is never closed on the one hand, and the remaining desire for order and control—for the “closed world”—on the other. Culture becomes moved by the most generous of speculative pragmatic moves, the most sophisticated of philosophies, the most vacuous of Silicon Valley “concepts” and the most reactionary of resistances to change and therefore process (with defensive propositional feelings directed against the world as medium). Indeed, together these find themselves in a kind of tangle that increasingly influences the world’s becoming. This tangle has no

clear cut answer to the question perhaps underwriting this chapter—namely, how far can “our” media and communications go? Although for some at least, the answer is clearly that they should go “as far as they can” (if in different situations with very different purposes—for example, either a hijacking of the world of medium in a becoming environmental of power, or a more benevolent enabling of participation in world).

### A SPECULATIVE PRAGMATIC PROPOSITION— AN INTERNET OF ACTUAL OCCASIONS

I will propose here that one way to think this through is via a kind of Whiteheadian speculative pragmatic proposition. This proposition involves thinking socio-technical developments via the idea of “an internet of actual occasions.” It is proposed as a way of understanding contemporary media and communications in both their conceptual and practical dimensions, and perhaps also as a way to think and work with them differently. This is not to suggest that media and communications (as we think them in common human or quasi-human terms) could in reality hijack and control *all* actual occasions, even if some people might want them to and in effect have large projects engaged in the attempt to do something very close to this. In fact, I am not suggesting that it would be possible to make contact with any real things called “actual occasions” at all. First, it is true that technical culture often tends to think concepts as new classes of things that can be accessed, controlled, and exploited (and although mistaken this has consequences, as we shall see). However, Whitehead means concepts such as the “actual occasion” speculatively, as a different way of thinking with the world, rather than as an accessible new “thing.” Second, actual occasions, accessible or not, are a way of thinking the world as becomings, not things.<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, it has to be said that technical culture, in its often naïve but powerful way, is now quite fond of the idea of accessing, controlling, and exploiting becomings or, to put this differently, it is somewhat torn between data(sets) and data operations as collections of identifiable *things* that can be owned and the attempt to own and exploit *process*,<sup>31</sup> thus mirroring, if often in a crude way,<sup>32</sup> much of the philosophy of the last 150 years. Given all this, an “internet of actual occasions” is proposed as a way of thinking something like the tendencies within a technics of desire—with sometimes dangerous lures for feeling—that inform much of contemporary media and communications development. This desire is often directed toward as full a becoming environmental as possible. If media and communications as we usually think of them *could* colonize all actual occasions, would Facebook or Google, Amazon or Apple really hold back from such a move? Are they not already directed

toward such a possibility? If we are to build alternatives to such badly conceived if powerful becomings-environmental of power, we may need to find new relations between speculation and practices. I will provide an example of an ethically dubious drive toward an internet of actual occasions to draw attention to what is at stake.

Following on from the emerging Internet of Things, someone recently proposed an “internet of nano-things.”<sup>33</sup> I am reminded of the interesting but flawed film *Transcendence*.<sup>34</sup> This film is a kind of endgame depiction of a powerful reductionist metaphysics of control, conjoined to an immensely powerful technics, as these meet the world as medium. In this film Will Caster (Johnny Depp), the developer of an advanced AI system, is poisoned. He is then uploaded into the AI in order to save his “life.” Merging with the AI, he eventually builds a global network that allows him to distribute himself, dramatically magnify his powers, and deploy his own nanotechnology throughout the planet (in a planetary extension of his decidedly white, male “will to power,” even as Will himself becomes distorted in his becoming-AI-network). There is a long sequence—it’s hard to tell whether it is fantasy or reality within the world of the film—in which the Will Caster AI manages to transform the world almost completely. Here the world as medium is swept into a very literal and complete becoming environmental of power. Caster’s AI/global networked/nanotechnology enabled “internet of nano-things” immerses itself in every molecule of the planet. A highly controlled utopia is quickly produced. Polluted environments are suddenly and completely cleaned up. Water everywhere becomes pure. Plants bloom perfectly. The earth suddenly becomes a Garden of Eden. This is a fantasy of singular power that in many ways reflects the essence of the becoming environmental of power—an increasingly abstract, disembodied male merges with a planetary technology to control process, so that technology and planetary *becoming* occur only and totally under a masculine speculative pragmatic control—in what is *perhaps an imposition of fantasy*.<sup>35</sup> This is in many ways a complex single becoming (the Caster AI becomes here a kind of God transcending and “saving” the world in what is nevertheless its ultimate colonization). Yet, it is also a double or multiple becoming, of the planet, media technics, and Will Caster’s disintegrating subjectivity—the latter disintegrating subjectivity that, in attempting to control the world, attempts a strange hybrid that may seem familiar today—something like a liberal neofascism.

The “transcendence” involved in the film is also an attempt at a distributed immanence—a global inhabiting of the feeling or sense of power, of the compulsion of composition, in every actual occasion, as it occasions. It attempts something very like a literal, technical instantiation of a transcendental empiricism, although as this slides into the blurring of technics and world, both the AI and indeed the film itself begin to become incoherent. In this

respect and others, the Edenic sequence in the film gives an extreme depiction of the tensions and contradictions that shadow so many of our technical, media, and communications developments when they move toward a total technical intrusion, for good and/or ill, into Whitehead's "world as medium for the transmission of influences."

*Transcendence* also depicts a world in which what is at stake is not just transcendent occupation and control of the territories of the world (although this is indeed at stake). As suggested previously, something else seems to become possible—the *occupation and control of fundamental process*, of the planet as process, of world as process, *of processual immanence itself*. As the film points out, technical development is now quite deliberately laying siege to process (think only of AI and robotics, although there are many other examples). It often does this in a crude way. It often twists and recomposes an understanding of what the like of processual immanence might be or become if process is to be controlled and exploited. Yet it does this with great power. Exploring this critically is now crucial. Such critical exploration would include a speculative pragmatic working into: the new attempts to enter into and control process; the complex relation of the political-industrial thinking involved to philosophies of process; and the reality of actual and potential work with process. To avoid the questions involved is to cede very deep powers to the powers that be, or to what these powers are becoming.

The proposition of an internet of actual occasions is meant to enable the exploration of such questions. Such a proposition would concern itself with that which have until now been known, and thought, as "media," "communication," "networks," "data," "algorithms," and related concepts/technics. Yet it would concern itself with all of these transformed—speculatively, pragmatically. None of these are now exactly what they are often assumed to be, if they ever were. It is indeed possible that we have too limited a conception of all of them.

*Start with this speculative pragmatic proposition: let us assume that we can go as far as possible, that an "internet of actual occasions" is possible, that we could approach technical engagement with the basic elements of a processual world, immanently.* How would it work? Would it be desirable? If we could, should we do it? What difference would it make to think this way, situate critique critically within its immanence, build worlds in partnership with it? Should it be resisted? Would it require a new politics, or new philosophies? Or do we, in reality, already have it? Is it found *in the world itself*, as described in Whitehead's exploration of the "world as medium," a concept that could become a kind of philosophical-technical diagram for exploring the world? If an internet of actual occasions is in fact already "there," what would its relationship to human-designed technics be? What would this tell us about "media," "communication," "networks," "data," and "algorithms"?

What would this demand of speculation, of pragmatics, of technics, of modes of living, of all of these thought and lived together?

The speculative pragmatic proposition of an internet of actual occasions might begin by exploring the many ways that metaphysics—of many kinds—come into the actualization and potentialization of technics, and into technicized cultures (despite the apparent poverty of metaphysics within these at times). Speculative pragmatics necessarily takes metaphysics to be an incomplete and therefore changeable metaphysics.<sup>36</sup> In speculative pragmatics, metaphysics would allow for and take part in a shifting multiplicity. It would be immersed in the mutual “universal immanence of the communication of everything in everything.”<sup>37</sup> The surprise here is that communication, thought in Whiteheadian terms (or in other world-process terms), turns out to be a crucial basis for metaphysics—communication might even be *constitutive* of a processual metaphysics.<sup>38</sup> Although, once again, this is not communication considered to be something like “a controlled message.” It is rather communication as the general relationality of the becoming of the world. Whitehead also discussed this as the world as the “medium of intercommunication.” For Whitehead, he also understood it, thinking with Plato’s *khora*, this had the power of the “foster mother of all becoming” (AI, 134).<sup>39</sup>

How, then, might speculative pragmatics explore the way that metaphysics comes into the actualization and repotentialization (differently) of technics, in technical development and social events? There is only space for a suggestive sketch.

For a start, rough analogies for a concept might be taken up consciously in technical development and social events, even if the concept itself is not named as such. Earlier in this chapter I listed some examples of this, such as “smart dust,” or the internet of nano-things, that not only resonate<sup>40</sup> with the concept of the actual occasion, but with the way occasions form collectivities in nexus and societies and the serial social and personal orders involved. The speculative artwork/proposition, *Cloud Services*, also resonates, in a different way, with a speculative pragmatics of the actual occasion. In a different way, the world infiltration project found in the speculative film *Transcendence* clearly seems to approach the limit found in something like an internet of actual occasions. All these instances think/work the future differently in terms of the tendencies, potentials, real limits and thresholds in which they are involved.

The proposition also provides a way into thinking what drives the like of more conventional startups and other forms of contemporary technical development, again in terms of what limits/thresholds very many of them attempt to approach via technical development and social intervention. In sum, although no one that I’m aware of has explicitly taken up the concept of the actual occasion per se in recent technical development, technical

development does often seem to be conceived in ways that resonate with the concept. Here Google's attempt to integrate all data throughout the world, and constantly build "great things that don't exist"<sup>41</sup> (while famously "doing no evil"), might be engaged with differently, in terms of the proposition's critical and creative work within fields of tendencies and potentials, limits and thresholds.<sup>42</sup> As might Facebook's famous algorithmic "occasioning" of users' Facebook feed, or the attempt to fine tune and precisely target micro-media events using data analytics, social media, and hacking within the 2016 U.S. presidential election, or technical interventions in financial formations, such as those using blockchain and post-blockchain technologies. Thinking with the proposition of an internet of actual occasions gives a way of thinking with such developments, always resonating with their tendencies as much as actuality. The aim here would be to allow such a proposition to influence things differently, in ways that are more ecologically attuned to world. At the same time, as on ongoing speculative proposition, it would allow such an attunement to be as yet indetermined (thus avoiding Whitehead's "evil"). After all, for Whitehead, propositions are "matters of fact in potential" (PR, 22), somewhat indeterminate lures for feeling.

In fact, media development often really does take up an available speculative pragmatics that at some point has incorporated concepts such as the actual occasion, if in a kind of relay, in a serial transmission of influences that transforms concepts in the process.<sup>43</sup> This seems at least likely in Whitehead's case.<sup>44</sup> In short, it is probable, given Whitehead's influence within the fields involved, that the concept of the actual occasion really has influenced, and continues to influence, technical development. This is to suggest that there really has been a speculative pragmatic proposition for an internet of actual occasions all along.

The speculative proposition of an internet of actual occasions, then, provides a way of diagnosing possible modes of thinking within current technical development and social events with regard to media and communications. At the same time, it provides a propositional lure away from, and cure for, any ills involved. On all sides of this it gives a way to think, feel, and participate differently in what, in conventional terms, seems an increasingly mediated world. More generally, quite aside from questions of its accuracy, the provenance, influence, and variability of Whitehead's philosophy with regard to technical events in media, communication, and indeed computation, make it a valuable philosophy with which to explore the fields involved. It is firstly a philosophy with several distinct periods that have been taken up (differently) in major events in twentieth-century media and communications development. It is secondly a philosophy that constantly questions the relation of metaphysics, or more simply of concepts and propositions to actual events. It is thirdly a philosophy that undergoes its own "becoming-process," precisely

during the period in which media and communication seem to activate the world in terms that raise questions of process and of involvement in process. As Jude Jones remarks, we live in an “instigating world and find ourselves instigators as one of our ways of being-in that world.”<sup>45</sup>

You may be happy to read at this point that the confusions, slippages, or tensions involved might be as important a part of these questions as any singular clarity. Indeed, Whitehead gives a surprising justification for this. He writes that “there is no reason to hold that confusion is less fundamental than is order. Our task is to evolve a general concept which allows room for both” (MT, 50). Whitehead’s view on the relation of this confusion to process is somewhat startling for many academics, I suspect.

*Now process is the way by which the universe escapes from the exclusions of inconsistency. . . . By means of process, the universe escapes from the limitations of the finite. Process is the immanence of the infinite in the finite; whereby all bounds are burst, and all inconsistencies are dissolved. . . . In the nature of things there are no ultimate exclusions, expressive in logical terms. (MT, 54—my emphasis)*

It is not without irony that this is written by someone who earlier was one of the most famous seekers of consistency in symbolic logic (although he writes this after he himself has escaped the shackles involved).

## AN INTERNET OF ACTUAL OCCASIONS—SCHEMATICS

I have so far argued that the now expanding technics of media and communications involve an attempt to colonize the world as process, via exploitation of the underlying world as medium, as far as is possible. The limit case for this, in Whiteheadian terms, would be the colonization and exploitation of actual occasions. I then proposed an internet of actual occasions as a speculative pragmatic way into thinking this situation. It is perhaps the moment for a more precise schematic of an internet of actual occasions.

The obvious needs to be stated. A media theory based on Whitehead’s philosophy would already conceive of the internet as an internet of actual occasions, if only because actual occasions (or “actual entities”) are the “final real things of which the world is made up,” the “drops of experience, complex and interdependent.”

There is no going behind actual entities to find anything more real. They differ among themselves: God is an actual entity [the same as an actual occasion], and so is the most trivial puff of existence in far-off empty space. (PR, 18)



If any internet was to be made up of real things, these real things would be actual occasions.

To quickly schematize the internal and external relations of the actual occasion, from a Whiteheadian point of view, is also, as I suggested above, to schematize the possibilities for power that his philosophy grants to thinking, feeling, and practice in the “compulsion of composition.” Actual occasions or entities are atoms of experience in an “atomic theory of actuality” (PR, 27). “Experience” here, however, is the experience of the occasion itself rather than “our” experience as humans. Moreover, the “atoms” involved are obviously processes.<sup>46</sup> They are processes of composition, literal processes that express generative ontological power, in which each actual occasion involves a composition, or bringing together of feelings into a unity. This is a kind of self-satisfaction (on the part of the occasion). This is also aesthetic in the technical sense that the composition brings feelings together. Whitehead calls this bringing together “concrecence.” Feeling here is usually understood as something like grasping and drawing in (in what Whitehead calls “prehension”). This process—concrecence—has an obvious correlate in media in the signal processing vital to communication. In signal processing, multiple signals are drawn in and convolved (folded into each other) to transform the relational movement of older signals. This produces, and gives coherence to, a new signal.

What can we conclude from this basic schematic for an internet of actual occasions? We know that such an internet would be a techno-social intrusion into the most fundamental elements in the universe, producing a media and communications with “atomic” (*processually* atomic) powers. This would involve tendencies toward, appetites for, or the hijacking of: processes of composition; feeling or prehension (of what is grasped and brought into occasions of experience and of how it is grasped); and self-satisfaction in aesthetic unity.

There is more. God, for Whitehead, is a kind of grand actual occasion. If so, however, God is an exceptional actual occasion, one that provides coherence to other occasions’ actual occasioning via a kind of store of potentials (Whitehead calls these “eternal objects”<sup>47</sup>) from which all actual occasions in concrecence can draw. This too could become part of the drive toward an “evil” internet of actual occasions—a taking hold, storing, ordering, restriction and totalization of the potentials for future becomings. This would provide the possibility for a highly sensitive and absolutely fine-tuned automatic movement within the ongoing process of the world, in toto. Think total, pliable surveillance and control—in fact, more than this, the creation, in situ, of events in process, as they form. Think the fine-grained “responsive” control of events. Think a planetary level extraction of value from diverse, infinite actual occasionings, from the energy and power of composition. This is akin

to what Massumi calls “ontopower.”<sup>48</sup> The extensive continuum itself would become a new proprietary resource for extraction. There would be a final conversion of all the world into property. This would not quite be property as we usually think of it but a new kind of property, with process and immanence themselves becoming-proprietary. I will discuss this shortly as a “third enclosure” of everything. In the midst of this we would face the false gods of a new Olympus, battling it out over who will most be able to exploit potentials for becoming and own process itself. They have already arrived. They are Google, Facebook, Apple, WeChat, Amazon, and the like.

At the same time, actual occasions are very many, far too many to be counted (in fact, they are uncountable because they transform the world with each occasion). Actual occasions make up everything, even “the most trivial puff of existence in far-off empty space.” This is complicated further by the ongoing generativity involved. In process, actual occasions combine continuity (from that prehended and drawn into a composition) and novelty (in part by developing new intensities in new contrasts between prehended elements of previous actual occasions<sup>49</sup>). This is then drawn into further assemblages of continuity and novelty, in physical continuity and novelty, in conception, in the ongoing combination of both<sup>50</sup>. As I began to suggest previously, Whitehead also discusses further, higher order, assemblages of actual occasions, into nexus (a loose assemblage in the moment) and societies (more coherent), with “social” and “personal orders.”<sup>51</sup> As suggested above, whatever time and space and experience are, they emerge anew from within each actual occasion. What we take for broader space-times (the “extensive continuum,” as Whitehead calls it) are produced in variation as actual occasions actually occasion, and then draw from each other to actually occasion again.

Recall that there is also here a feeling or sense of power—literally of the power of transmission and (re)composition. This is at the very heart of the aesthetic satisfaction in the immanence of actual occasioning. What more could a Silicon Valley entrepreneur want to work with than these infinities of process at the very basis of space and time, and of feeling, sense, and power? This would be something to take hold of, to own perhaps, to exploit—in which to find a new basis for extracting value. Being able to work within the immanence of the communicative event of actual occasions make available the power to hijack the world in a hyper-accelerated micro-fascism. The world could be inflected and controlled in every moment of its production, at the very basis of its process, along with everything that builds on this (including eventually human experience, whatever that might be in this context).<sup>52</sup> Think of the most micro of microgestures as accumulative power. Think also, perhaps, of potential nonhuman “microaggressions” at the level of the atomicity of process.<sup>53</sup> Even if all this is seemingly impossible, think of this

as *tendencies of contemporary media and communications infused power*, as something that media and communications tend toward.

The internet of actual occasions—taken both as the world as medium, and technical intervention within this—is therefore something that we might tend to, and care for, differently. Would other tendencies emerge in the infinity of becomings involved, different to enhanced powers over process, and breaking from new controls and orders? For one thing, an internet of actual occasions would take the famously decentralized powers of the internet to the extreme. It would diffuse its powers among ordinary actual occasions, in what might be an intensification of the “universal immanence of the communication of everything in everything.”<sup>54</sup> There would be opportunity for a greater multiplicity of more relational ontologies.

The crucial politics of what Erin Manning has called the “minor gesture” may here form an opening out from possible enclosures of process. This is a kind of approaching-atomic swerve away from capture, an activation of alternate actual occasionings in alternate assemblages and series, with a creation of alternate spaces-times. This does not so much oppose a technical desire to control and exploit, as much as it moves away from control and exploitation from within.<sup>55</sup> The minor gesture creates new modes of moving, in moving, that disconnect from techno-capital’s actualities and lures for feeling. Manning writes—

The minor isn’t known in advance. It never reproduces itself in its own image. Each minor gesture is singularly connected to the event at hand, immanent to the in-act. This makes it pragmatic. But the minor gesture also exceeds the bounds of the event, touching on the ineffable quality of its more-than. This makes it speculative. The minor gesture works in the mode of speculative pragmatism. From a speculatively pragmatic stance, it invents its own value, a value as ephemeral as it is mobile.<sup>56</sup>

In this one can begin to imagine a non- or post-technical culture, one that aims to mobilize the minor gesture, or begins to. It would be one that tends to the minor gesture and its speculative pragmatism, along with its invention of ephemeral value. It might undo the very notion of “technics” as something with which to operate on the world (this seems in some ways the logical conclusion of thinking in terms of the world as medium). This is perhaps the task of those wishing to create new modes of living from within a highly technical society. One way to think of this might be in terms of an ethics of fields of potential response within what have become highly complex “responsive environments.” We might think also in terms of the care for what Donna Haraway has called “response-ability”<sup>57</sup>—the care for the very ability to respond, differently, or perhaps even sometimes just to respond.

Thinking with actual occasions, although somewhat frightening in these contexts, can also reveal useful dimensions of what is at stake within the world's current tensions. If actual occasions are indeed the elements of process that make up all the events we come to call world, in accounting for these Whitehead also provides a thorough metaphysical-technical vocabulary with which to rethink techno-social organization.

Consider again the powers made available to speculative pragmatism by such a philosophy. It assembles powers of gathering, feeling, grasping, composition, drawing together, unifying. It provides something of a power over, or power within, the occurrence of fundamental occasions in themselves, and the way in which one entity "becomes internal to another."<sup>58</sup> Thinking all this via the proposition of an internet of actual occasions allows a speculative pragmatism to do three things. It firstly allows us to think the technics involved differently, more in tune with Whitehead's understanding of the world as medium and, more specifically, the world as medium of intercommunication in relation to the khora or "foster mother of all becoming" (AI, 134).<sup>59</sup> This is to think media and communications technics, and social consequence, truly and fully processually. It is even perhaps to move to a non- or post-technics.

Secondly, thinking an "internet of actual occasions" reveals a drive within contemporary technics toward a control of as much as can be controlled, and often a capitalization of as much as can be capitalized. This allows a deeper critique, and perhaps reinlection, of tendencies within this drive. As I suggested above, it allows us to better understand the parameters for a very involved, flexible, and precise critique from within, and a struggle over, nothing less than a third enclosure, within a third media revolution.<sup>60</sup> I will explain this briefly. The first media revolution was that of writing and abstraction, and it allowed a first enclosure, through for example written record keeping, of land and even of people, as property that could be exploited. The second media revolution was that of the expanded technical duplication and distribution of representations, from the printing press to contemporary social media, and this allowed for an expanded field of enclosure, in intellectual property, not only of creative work, but eventually in the patenting of processes such as genetic manipulation or software. The third media revolution is that in which media—as usually understood in much Western thought—and world collapse into each other, or, as suggested here, are discovered never to have been separate. This allows a third enclosure. Simply put, this is the enclosure of everything else—an enclosure that includes not only more obviously materials aspects of the world, but thinking-feeling, attention, and process. It potentially encloses even a generative multiplicity of ontologies and metaphysics. It potentially encloses both speculation and pragmatics. Simply put, it encloses all aspects of process. Thus, *the tendency toward the actual*

*occasion is a kind of ground(less) zero for what might be called a multiscalar politics from nanopolitics to micro, meso, and macro.* Whitehead's philosophy seems apposite to the politics involved in this situation. This is not to say it is the only possible philosophy in this situation. On the contrary, it might make the field of speculative pragmatics accessible to, while it participates with or even makes way for, other philosophies that engage with the fuller relational intensity of the world.

Thirdly, thinking the proposition of an internet of actual occasions perhaps contributes to thinking a different ethics, as I have begun to suggest above. It might allow for a take up of technics—or a surpassing of technics—in terms more sensitive to process and relation (relation considered as relation to everything in the universe, in every event), and in terms of the specificities of concrescence in each actual occasion. What kinds of ethics would make for an internet of actual occasions different to the tendencies toward control described above?

One way of thinking this is again by returning to Whitehead's *Adventures of Ideas*, and his rethinking of Aristotelian divisions in a return to the later Plato.<sup>61</sup> Here again it is crucial to note that this is a return to the very different idea of the medium—as receptacle, or *khora*, or a “medium of intercommunication” across a field.

Ironically, a related way to think this is with Claude Shannon. One could begin by looking once again at Shannon and Weaver's famous mathematical model of communication.<sup>62</sup> From one point of view it is the model of command and control that it seems. It is indeed a template for the faithful, linear communication of a message without distortion—an engineering of the consistently “true.” Yet, it is also remarkable how closely the model echoes the structure of process in the concrescence of an actual occasion. Perhaps this is because it is a mathematical model for engineering signal, not for producing “meaning.” All engineering, but especially that working with electricity, must engineer at the junction of structure *and* process. It is therefore not so surprising that the Shannon and Weaver model has some parallels with the actual occasion. These include the like of subject converted into something of an “object” (information source and message), the formation of a subject immanent to the process that has an “aim” (a transmitter), the interweaving of prehensions into a definite actual entity (convolution of aspects of signal in transmission), and satisfaction (of reception and destination),<sup>63</sup> after which this signal perishes, and becomes an object for take up in another actual occasion of signal processing.

Shannon himself seems to have headed to something like a more Whiteheadian understanding of process, and of transformational fields.<sup>64</sup> He notes that you can—

make the case that the nervous system is a complex communication system, which processes information in complicated ways . . . Mostly what I wrote about was communicating from one point to another, but I also spent a lot of time in transforming information from one form to another, combining information in complicated ways, which the brain does and the computers do now. So all of these things are kind of a *generalization of information theory, where you are talking about working to change its form one way or another and combine with others, in contrast to getting it from one place to another*. So, yes all those things I see as a kind of a broadening of information theory. *Maybe it shouldn't be called the information theory. Maybe it should be called 'transformation of information' or something like that.*<sup>65</sup>

What is signal communication considered not as information transmission but “transformation of information”? What is signal considered as participant in a khora or field of intercommunication? For such signal, as for actual occasions, the general problem becomes one of shifting values across fields, of being becoming (of the “becoming of continuity”), of cut as well as flow, of novelty as well as continuation. Data can also be thought this way, conceived now in and as processual field. As process, data is relay and signaleitic transformation of world, at the same time as it is serial occasioning (or gathering of many occasions). So data is not only a matter of process in the moment, but also a matter of “the potentials for feeling” that are present in relation to other times and spaces yet to be created (PR, 88). Data is never only a series of isolated informational data points. To think data in this way would be an instance of Whitehead’s “fallacy of simple location.” On this there is much more to be said, but not today.

## NOTES

1. Paul Thomas, “2015 Quantum Consciousness and Richard Feynman.” *visiblespace.com* (July 20, 2015), available at: <http://visiblespace.com/blog/?p=1376>

2. On this see *CloudServices Preview* on *vimeo.com*, at <https://vimeo.com/170112129>. The site is at <http://www.nephologies.com/CloudServices/>. See <http://www.gravitytrap.com/>. I arrived at this example via Deliah Hannah. The project states:

In explicit integration of computation and environment, Cloud Services points to the fact that we already have the infosphere in our atmosphere and in our stomachs. Analogous to proposals in fields of synthetic biology, geo-engineering or artificial intelligence, the Cloud Services proposal pits the engineering mindset against our gut instincts suggesting what is in principle possible, but what sounds audacious. We present it as a scenario for developing a meaningful discussion around the ethical, social and governance issues raised by planetary-scale technology deployments and direction of research and

innovation. It is also a reflection on the present, on materialities of data and on natural systems conceived as information systems. Cloud Services founders see this technology as a response to the ecological crisis, leading to an emergence of new structures of power arising from countering the ideal of speed, access on demand, and operability. (<http://www.nephologies.com/CloudServices/>)

3. In the midst of considering this art proposition, consider also that “bacteria use brainlike bursts of electricity to communicate.” Gabriel Popkin, Gabriel, “Bacteria Use Brainlike Bursts of Electricity to Communicate.” *Quanta Magazine*, September 5 (2017), available at: <https://www.quantamagazine.org/bacteria-use-brainlike-bursts-of-electricity-to-communicate-20170905/>.

4. Climate is a good example of a series of events that express what Whitehead called “personal orders.” What Whitehead calls a “personal order” is not at all tied to persons as we usually think of them, although personal orders are vital to such persons (as only one kind of accumulation of personal orders). Whitehead writes that an “enduring object” or “enduring creature,” is a society whose social order has taken the special form of “personal order” (PR, 34). A society for Whitehead is not “social” in the usual sense, but rather any gathering of actual occasions in which there are intensities, or patterns of contrasts in common—thus a social order (Whitehead actually writes of common “forms,” although these could be conceived as patterns rather than something like Platonic forms). A personal order, then, is any order in which the collective relatedness of a society continues through time. Loosely put, a personal order’s defining qualities are its temporal nature, its emphasis on the mental pole or the creation of novelty, and also perhaps that it heads toward abstraction. It is also, of course, serial, as the relatedness involved continues through series of actual occasions. Again, neither the social nor personal are necessarily or even that often human. See Didier Debaise, *Speculative Empiricism: Revisiting Whitehead* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017) on all these. Thinking this in terms of climate, climate is temporal in that it is a relatedness through a series of events or actual occasions. Climate also emphasizes the mental pole—that of adding novelty within continuation and relatedness. Climate change provides variation within climatic personal orders here. Climate also obviously heads toward abstractions of that series that can be felt as “climate.”

5. Whitehead writes of “the nature apprehended in awareness and the nature which is the cause of awareness” (CN, 31). He writes later of an entire “complex of bifurcations, fatal to a satisfactory cosmology” (PR, 290). Debaise discusses the “deeply peculiar position” that the “subject occupies” within this bifurcation, in which it is posed against “a set of heterogeneous physical, chemical and biological realities that have nothing in common save for the contrast they establish with subjectivity.” Debaise, *Speculative Empiricism*, 70.

6. Didier Debaise, “The Modern Invention of Nature,” in Erich Hörl (ed.), *General Ecology: The New Ecological Paradigm* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 153.

7. Debaise, “The Modern Invention of Nature,” 151.

8. Luciana Parisi, “Computational Logic and Ecological Rationality,” in Erich Hörl (ed.), *General Ecology*, 82.

9. Prehension is the manner in which each actual occasion grasps aspects of previous occasions to bring together a new one.

10. Megan Ellison, Spike Jonze and Vincent Landay (Prod.) and Spike Jonze (Dir.), *Her* [motion picture] (Hollywood, CA: Annapurna Pictures, 2013).

11. Whitehead suggests that the “primary function of a proposition is to be relevant as a lure for feeling” (PR, 25). He also suggests the lure for feeling as a way of understanding the productive difference between two actual entities or actual occasions—“in the comparison between two actual entities, the contrast between their objective lures is their potential difference” (87).

12. Brian Massumi, “The Thinking-Feeling of What Happens: A Semblance of a Conversation.” *Inflexions* 1, (May, 2008), available at: [http://inflexions.org/n1\\_The-Thinking-Feeling-of-What-Happens-by-Brian-Massumi.pdf](http://inflexions.org/n1_The-Thinking-Feeling-of-What-Happens-by-Brian-Massumi.pdf).

13. Only some of the first here might include the thinking of Leibniz, Joseph Fourier, Ada Lovelace, Alfred North Whitehead, Alan Turing, Grace Hopper, Doug Engelbart, Alan Kay, Norbert Wiener, Gregory Bateson, Walter Pitts, even perhaps Steve Jobs, and ironically the later thinking of Claude Shannon. All of these had in common the idea that media and world were mutually problematic and could engage in mutual transformation. It would be foolish to begin to list those outside the mainstream. See Andrew Murphie, “The World as Medium: A Whiteheadian Media Philosophy,” in Erin Manning, Anna Munster and Bodil Marie Stavning Thomsen, (eds.). *Immediations* (London: Open Humanities Press, forthcoming), footnotes 11–15 for a discussion of some of these and some more recent thinkers).

14. One place to begin for a cartoon version of this might be Descartes’s famous evil demon, the original purveyor of “fake news,” the contemplation of which “forces” a retreat into one’s own thinking as last resort. This is in the end not so different to much of what is complained about today in the lack of response to climate change science or other seemingly evident aspects of the world (in short, everyone is conveniently suspicious of the evil demon, who can take almost any form, as long as this allows retreat from the experience of the complexity of the world). Kant’s philosophy is almost entirely one that examines the possibility or failure of human communication with regard to a differentiated world (from which comes phenomenology’s examination of sensation and the subject, and more recently Meillassoux and others’ reaction against this). Hegels’s dialectic is unimaginable without communication, but this is reduced to communication between all too human masters and slaves. Marx only turns this into a more material communication between workers and owners of the means of production. Here also one could note the movement of Whitehead and Russell’s early work, and other early twentieth-century thinkers, into early analytic philosophy, and at the same time through cybernetics and into the cognitivism that supported 1940s reductionism and everything that arises at this in many ways unfortunate conjunction of ideas, practices, and technics. The bifurcation of nature was strong. The Shannon and Weaver model arises from this complex history and feeds back into it as one of its fiercest allies, even though it actually still has one foot in the messy world.

15. Erik Hollnagel and David D. Woods. *Joint Cognitive Systems: Foundations of Cognitive Systems Engineering* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2005), 11.

16. Gary Genosko, “FCJ-079 Regaining Weaver and Shannon.” *The Fibreculture Journal*, 12, (2000), unpaginated, available at: <http://twelve.fibreculturejournal.org/fc-j-079-regaining-weaver-and-shannon/>.



17. Paul N. Edwards, *The Closed World: Computers and the Politics of Discourse in Cold War America* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997).

18. Roland Faber, "Immanence and Incompleteness: Whitehead's Late Metaphysics," in Faber, Henning and Combs, *Beyond Metaphysics? Explorations in Alfred North Whitehead's Late Thought*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010, 91–107.

19. A. Judith Jones, *Intensity: An Essay in Whiteheadian Ontology* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1998), 164; Andrew Murphie, "The World as Medium" in Manning, Munster and Stavning Thomsen, *Immediations*, forthcoming.

20. Alanna Thain, *Bodies and Suspense: Time and Affect in the Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017) 11ff; Brain Massumi, *Semblance and Event* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), 166ff; Brian Massumi, "Immediation Unlimited," in Manning, Munster and Stavning Thomsen, *Immediations*; see Manning, Munster and Stavning Thomsen, *Immediations*, passim.

21. I have dealt with the question of the world as medium elsewhere (Murphie, "The World as Medium"). In fact, Whitehead's philosophy is found everywhere throughout media and communications, computing and networks, on all sides of the questions involved. To perhaps oversimplify, his earlier work with Russell proved crucial for the development of computing, cybernetics, cognitivism, and so on, and indeed for many metaphysics and ecologies of practice of media and communication as clear signal and ordering. His later work on process challenges this.

22. These tensions are quite explicitly played out in the 1940s development of cybernetics and subsequent 1950s and 1960s cognitivist developments, much of which involved media. See Jean-Pierre Dupuy, *The Mechanization of the Mind: On the Origins of Cognitive Science* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000).

23. On this see also Massumi's excellent discussion of the capacity to affect and be affected and his discussion of the weakness of ideology in the context of media and power. Brian Massumi, Brian and Mary Zournazi, "Navigating Moments: A Conversation with Brian Massumi," in Mary Zlournazi (ed.), *Hope: New Philosophies for Change* (Sydney: Pluto Press, 2002), 210–24; Brian Massumi, "Immediation Unlimited," in Manning, Munster and Stavning Thomsen, *Immediations*.

24. By "transmission," Whitehead does not seem to have meant something like the transmission of "information about." He certainly would not have meant the transmission of secondary qualities separate from the actual occasions or entities involved in the transmission, as if the occasion itself was entirely left behind by such a transmission, in favor of some kind of secondary representation of it. Indeed he blames "the transmission theories for light and sound" for introducing "the doctrine of secondary qualities" (MT, 132). Rather, for Whitehead, what is transmitted are aspects of the previously satisfied (finished) occasion itself. This is a *direct* transmission, in touch with immediacy in process, more of a series of occasional transportations/gatherings than a "mediation." Massumi writes here of the primacy of "transition"—"In immediation, *transition precedes transmission*. Things are not in transition when they are being transmitted; there is transmission when things make a transition." Massumi, "Immediation Unlimited." This is remarkably close to what became Claude Shannon's view of information, as shall be discussed later in this chapter.

25. Here the work of Brian Massumi has been crucial. Only two ways in which potentials, tendencies, limits and thresholds are deployed in general technical culture

are, firstly, in rigorous concepts of limit that allows differentials to come into engineering, crucial to most technics from bridge building to weapons systems, and, secondly, in derivative capitalism and finance, and alongside that, derivative forms of life and the generation of life. Randy Martin, *Knowledge LTD: Towards a Social Logic of the Derivative* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015).

26. I will define speculative pragmatics as ranging somewhere between any active double becoming of metaphysics and ecologies of practice—always found in media, communication, the like of computing and indeed technics of all kinds—and Massumi’s more rigorously ethical understanding. The latter is as follows:

The thinking of the thing must be open to the unplayed-out in advance: it must be speculative. The image of thought at issue here is an odd bird: a speculative pragmatism. Speculative pragmatism must actively affirm—accompany—the potential of what it thinks. The philosopher cannot take a seat of judgment outside or above. She must take the plunge. She must mutually include her own thought/activity in the process at issue. Brian Massumi, “Undigesting Deleuze.” *LA Review of Books*, November 8, 2015, available at: <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/undigesting-deleuze/#!>

27. Brian Massumi, *Ontopower* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 22ff.

28. Michael Dieter, “The Becoming Environmental of Power: Tactical Media After Control.” *The Fibreculture Journal*, 18 (2011), available at: <http://eighteen.fibreculturejournal.org/2011/10/09/fcj-126-the-becoming-environmental-of-power-tactical-media-after-control/>.

29. Technically, in some senses media trump Capital, and perhaps philosophy, both of which depend on media and communication in order to build specific kinds of process.

30. On the one hand, I would not want to conflate actual occasions with the like of nano objects. This would be to conflate a speculative proposition with actual objects, and of course, speculatively, one way of understanding actual occasions is that any supposed nano object would still be made up of a potentially infinite number of actual occasions. On the other hand, thinking in terms of actual occasions would mean thinking nano objects differently, in terms of societies of occasions, or simply events and processes.

31. The relations between media and metaphysics are generally fascinating and fraught and arguably the key to much of the twentieth and twenty-first century. However, this is a topic for elsewhere.

32. A key point here is that technical development, consciously, or less consciously if derivatively influences that can be traced, takes up many points of philosophy, recomposes them to suit, and then effectively uses an often debauched version of the concepts involved within what can be highly impactful technical developments. We need to be able to enter into this process speculatively as much as we need to be able to pursue the “philosophically correct.”

33. Anonymous, “Tiny Graphene Radios May Lead to Internet of Nano-Things.” *Sciencemag.com*, available at: <http://sciencemag.com/tiny-graphene-radios-may-lead-to-internet-of-nano-things/>

34. Andrew A. Kosove et al., *Transcendence* [motion picture] (Hollywood, CA: Alcon Entertainment, 2014).

35. One of the fascinatingly troubling aspects of such events is the powerful ambiguity of the relations between actual technical power and male fantasy.

36. Faber, "Immanence and Incompleteness."

37. *Ibid.*, 102.

38. A question I will develop elsewhere, in an essay titled "Media Alive."

39. Faber, "Immanence and Incompleteness," 107. There are obvious resonances with many other more processual philosophies from many different cultures here. The main answer to the question, "why Whitehead?" obviously might be "it doesn't have to be at all." Although a second answer might emphasize not his pre-eminence in Western philosophy, but rather, in this setting at least, his importance to Western technical culture—and not always necessarily for the good, especially considering his early philosophy—as it has formed (this again calls for different philosophical influences—a call it seems to me to be clear within Whitehead's philosophy). It is not enough of an answer, but there are also ways in which Whitehead's philosophy hollows out much of the Western culture that he not only inhabited, but in which he was highly influential.

40. I am not suggesting such resonance is precise in philosophical terms. Indeed, the imprecision, which one can see as serial translation or what Massumi points to as transition within transmission, is the point.

41. Larry Page in Drew Olanoff, Drew, "Google CEO Larry Page Shares His Philosophy At I/O: 'We Should Be Building Great Things That Don't Exist.'" *Techcrunch.com* (May 15, 2013), available at: <https://techcrunch.com/2013/05/15/google-ceo-larry-page-takes-the-stage-at-ceo-to-wrap-up-the-io-keynote/>

42. In Whitehead's case, evil is precisely the destruction or limitation of creativity or of the novelty that provides ongoing value in events, precisely as this value and these events sustain the richness of a processual world. Given that for process philosophy the past perishes, novelty is easily lost. So the processual creativity that takes up and sustains novelty is necessary to the very continuation of the world. At best novelty forms complex differential webs of shifting patterned contrasts. Evil is that which either works against the ongoing coming together of the new or works destructively within its production.

Its [the synthesis of time's] good resides in the realization of a strength of many feelings fortifying each other as they meet in novel unity. Its evil lies in the clash of vivid feelings, denying to each other their proper expansion. Its triviality lies in the anaesthesia by which evil is avoided . . . Evil is the half-way house between perfection and triviality. It is the violence of strength against strength. (*AI*, 277)

Google here seems both virtuous—in its potentialization of a "realization of a strength of many feelings meeting in novel unity"—and profoundly evil—the latter on both counts of vivid feelings denying proper expansion (only one aspect of this is the limiting of expansion beyond the Google empire) and of triviality in anaesthesia (the return to data as nearly always somewhat blank, of low intensity). Facebook is arguably worse. See Keith Robinson, "Deleuze, Whitehead and the Reversal of Platonism" in Keith Robinson (ed.), *Deleuze, Whitehead, Bergson: Rhizomatic Connections* (London: Palgrave, 2009), 140–42; for Whitehead on evil see Matthew S.

LoPresti, “The Inappropriate Tenderness of the Divine: Mono No Aware and the Recovery of Loss in Whitehead’s Axiology,” in Roland Faber, Michael Halewood, and Deena Lin (eds.), *Butler on Whitehead: On the Occasion* (New York: Lexington, 2012), 261.

43. A different example to the actual occasion here might be concepts drawn from behaviourism, as these come into technical design in gaming, interfaces and, famously, poker machines. Another example would be various concepts of cognition as symbolic processing, in which the brain and the computer are seen as equivalent in some way.

44. Another discussion would be necessary to trace the movement of Whitehead’s process philosophy through to, for example, Bateson’s thinking, from there to cybernetics in general, and from there to the much more familiar like of Shannon and Weaver, and cognitivism, or, differently, to notions of embodied mind, or French philosophy, and from both of these and more to the many diffuse and varied take ups of many concepts and technics in contemporary culture.

45. Jude Jones, “Provocative Expression: Transitions in and from Metaphysics,” in Faber, Henning and Combs, *Beyond Metaphysics?*, 259.

46. See Judith Jones on intensity, and contrasts and patterns of intensity in this regard. Her 1998 book, *Intensity: An Essay in Whiteheadian Ontology*, is one of two very different but equally complex works that take intensity seriously as the basis for world. The other is Massumi’s *Parables for the Virtual* from 2002.

47. As Massumi has noted in personal conversation, eternal objects are neither eternal nor objects. Rather they are a kind of stored excess of potential.

48. Massumi, *Ontopower*.

49. Jones, *Intensity*.

50. Here “mentality” is, in fact, that which tends toward novelty in any occasion. The physical tends toward a repetition of process with less novelty. Both are always involved, in different degrees.

51. A society is not “social” in the usual sense, but rather any gathering of actual occasions in which there are intensities, or contrasts (Whitehead actually writes of common “forms,” which could be thought as patterns rather than something like Platonic forms) in common—thus a social order. A personal order is not “personal” in the usual sense. That which Whitehead calls “personal order” is rather any order in which the collective relatedness of a society continues through time. Loosely put, a personal order’s defining qualities are its temporal nature, its emphasis on the mental pole or the creation of novelty, and also perhaps that it heads toward abstraction. Neither the social nor personal are necessarily or even that often human. See Debaise, *Speculative Empiricism* on all these.

52. From a slightly different perspective, we all experience something like this all the time. The immanence of the communicative event always involves a feeling of power. It always involves something of a struggle over what it will become, at each moment, and then what it will become next. At the same time, there is always a participation in the powers and compositions that form this event, by all that is involved in that event. No better example could be given than academic discussion in the many situations in which it might be found.

53. Psychologist Derald Wing Sue defines microaggressions as “brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to certain individuals because of their group membership.” It is radical but not impossible to imagine this occurring at the level of membership of ongoing process in concrescence or the formation of Whiteheadian (non or more than human) societies. Derald Wing Sue, *Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation* (London: Wiley, 2010).

54. Faber, “Immanence and Incompleteness,” 102.

55. Manning has an even more critical understanding of technology than is presented in this chapter.

56. Erin Manning, *The Minor Gesture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 2.

57. Haraway, Donna, “Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin.” *Environmental Humanities*, 6 (2015): 159–65; available at: <http://environmentalhumanities.org/arch/vol6/6.7.pdf>

58. Debaise, *Speculative Empiricism*, 55.

59. See also Massumi on “that which communicates with immediate fact.” Massumi, “Immediation Unlimited,” 1; PR, 3.

60. Murphie, “On being affected.”

61. Roland Faber, “The Sense of Peace: A Para-doxology of Divine Multiplicity,” in Catherine Keller and Laurel C. Schneider (eds.), *Polydoxy* (London: Routledge, 2011), 36–56.

62. It is interesting to note how tightly bound the circles of ideas and practices are here. Shannon’s earlier, very famous paper of 1938, which was also his Masters’ thesis, references Whitehead’s 1898 book on universal algebra in the third footnote (as a way of accessing the logic of Boole). Shannon’s paper was key, for example, to the idea of on/off switches. Coincidentally, 1938 was also the year *Modes of Thought* was published.

63. For a subtle, non-Whiteheadian analysis of the Shannon and Weaver model, see Steven Maras, “FCJ-080 on Transmission: A Metamethodological Analysis (after Régis Debray).” *The Fibreculture Journal*, 12 (2008), available at: <http://twelve.fibreculturejournal.org/fcj-080-on-transmission-a-metamethodological-analysis-after-regis-debray/>.

64. See also Christoph Brunner and Jonas Fritsch, “FCJ-124 Interactive Environments as Fields of Transduction.” *The Fibreculture Journal*, 18 (2011), available at: <http://eighteen.fibreculturejournal.org/2011/10/09/fcj-124-interactive-environments-as-fields-of-transduction/>.

65. Quoted in John Horgan, “Profile of Claude Shannon, Inventor of Information Theory.” *Scientific American Blogs*, July 26 (2017): <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/cross-check/profile-of-claude-shannon-inventor-of-information-theory/#>.

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## Chapter 6

# Thinking with Whitehead about Existential Risk

James Burton

### THINKING EXISTENTIAL RISK

Nick Bostrom defines an existential risk as a threatened destructive event that would be global in scope and terminal in intensity, such that it “would either annihilate Earth-originating life or permanently and drastically curtail its potential.”<sup>1</sup> He and other researchers associated with the Future of Humanity Institute (founded in 2005) argue that the topic has received scandalously little attention. They attribute this neglect to a number of factors, including the multidisciplinary nature of the problem,<sup>2</sup> observation selection effects and other forms of cognitive bias such as “scope neglect,”<sup>3</sup> the relative newness of many of the types of existential risk they identify, and, more generally, “an aversion against thinking seriously about a depressing topic.”<sup>4</sup> Perhaps the strongest overall factor—and the greatest fundamental challenge for thinking about and addressing the risk of existential catastrophe—lies in the fact that, by default, we have never experienced or witnessed one. Thus, Bostrom emphasizes, given that “there is no opportunity to learn from failure,” the “reactive approach” must be abandoned in favor of a “proactive approach” when dealing with the threat of existential catastrophe.<sup>5</sup>

In this chapter, I take as read that existential risk, as well global catastrophic risks generally, demand our serious attention, and that they do indeed pose special or unique difficulties to attempts to think and address them. However, I also propose that the question of *how* we think about existential risks, in light of these special difficulties, is of fundamental importance, and that this question is not fully answered by elaborations of the various cognitive biases that have had and could always have an effect on such thinking, despite the importance of reminders such as those provided by Yudkowsky.<sup>6</sup>

Another way of putting Bostrom's statement that there is no scope for a reactive approach in relation to existential risks is to say that there is no opportunity here for adaptive change (which in some contexts would be termed "evolution") to take place. The difficulty we face is, in the conceptual vocabulary of Gregory Bateson, the impossibility not only of first-order learning by trial and error, but also of second-order learning, or "deutero-learning."<sup>7</sup> Because "error is always biologically and/or psychically expensive," organisms reduce the amount of trial-and-error learning necessary by "learning to learn" more efficiently: "we (and all other biological systems) not only solve particular problems but also form *habits* which we apply to the solution of *classes* of problems," allowing them to be "solved in terms of assumptions or premises, fewer in number than the members of the class of problems."<sup>8</sup> The notion that existential risk demands a "proactive approach" could be re-stated in these terms: existential risk presents us with the challenge of learning how to acquire the adaptive effects of deutero-learning without the benefit of the first-order learning through which we have become accustomed to developing them—effectively, a problem of third-order learning.

Meeting such a challenge can be expected to entail the kinds of capacities, acquired through millennia of deutero-learning, that are often discussed as autonomous properties of human thought or mind (abstract reasoning, reflective intelligence, deductive and inductive logic, and so on). Yet it should also entail a certain wariness of the habits such properties entail, as well as the dangers of leaving out other facets of mind acquired by feedback loops such as intuition, feeling, and unconscious modes of engagement with the world. As Bateson puts it, part of the efficacy of those hard-programmed analytic and cognitive habits often taken to be essential to learning depends upon a kind of meta-habit of not examining them.<sup>9</sup> The FHI approach to existential risk seeks to jolt us out of one meta-habit of not considering the (human-caused) end of humanity as a problem that needs addressing—in the process asking us to re-examine other psychological biases affecting the way we think (or do not think) about this issue. Here I want to ask whether this approach, heuristically valuable though it may be, introduces its own set of potentially restrictive biases, to the neglect of other modes of thinking that might be valuable to the challenge of addressing existential risk. Primarily, I want to explore what gains, if any, there may be from considering existential risk through the lens of a process-based metaphysics such as Alfred North Whitehead's.

This is an experiment, and as such is not undertaken with any sure expectation of success. At the same time, it is, of course, not an exercise undertaken arbitrarily. There are a number of reasons, intuitively at least, for thinking that Whitehead—who describes the lectures which compose *Process and Reality* as an attempt not only to provide a coherent metaphysical system but also to

repudiate certain prevalent philosophical habits of thought—might be helpful in this context.<sup>10</sup>

To begin with, at the broadest level, we might anticipate that a process-based framework would be particularly well suited to any attempt to establish the criteria for the occurrence of events of a certain class and their complex relationships to prior events. My hope is that Whitehead's conceptual scheme and vocabulary may help address some concerns I have about the downplaying of the processual dimension of risk and catastrophe effected by the categorial and probability-based schema of Bostrom. At the same time, Whitehead's enterprise is ultimately underpinned by what he terms a rationalist "adventure of hope"—the faith that there are no elements in experience that are not "intrinsically capable of exhibition as examples of general theory" (PR, 42)—placing it, at least broadly, within the same rational spirit that informs current and recent thinking on existential risk.<sup>11</sup> On this basis, we may have at least initial cause to hope that such a speculative philosophy would be of value in attempting to explore an area in which uncertainty must be accepted and respected as fundamental—the consideration of necessarily future and unprecedented events—yet in which greater accuracy of understanding is nevertheless urgently desired and sought.

## THE BECOMING OF EXISTENTIAL RISKS

Thinking about existential risks is necessarily a speculative undertaking. But there are many different ways of being speculative, and the very conditions of a problem that requires speculation seem to point to the value of trying different modes, while exercising our best intuitive and intellectual estimations as to which might bear fruit.

The particular speculative mode developed by Bostrom and taken up by a number of other thinkers of existential risk begins with the attempt to categorize types of existential risk (within a more general categorial scheme of types of risk). This then forms the basis for making judgments about the probability of the (primarily near future) occurrence of these types of risk, and for thinking about ways of lowering these probabilities. This approach has clear heuristic value in establishing existential risks as not only demanding, but also amenable to calculation, analysis, and planning in ways that may conceivably translate into pragmatic policy-making and other forms of collective preventive action.

This may well be a viable direct route to locating existential risks within the spheres of research and policy we can reasonably deem most likely to have a chance of mitigating them. Yet it nevertheless encourages us to neglect certain aspects of possible existential catastrophes—primarily their

processual character—in ways that I would suggest could be to the detriment of attempts to address them in the long run. Experimenting with restoring this processual dimension by describing existential catastrophe and existential risk in Whiteheadian terms is not a matter of “correcting” an oversight: there is nothing in Bostrom’s schema that takes any aspect of reality to have a fundamentally non-processual mode of existence. Rather, the worry is that this schema lends itself to ways of thinking that tend to bracket or neglect the processual, a reduction that is commonplace and efficacious in many contexts of everyday and scientific thinking, but which can on certain points have a nontrivial effect. Identifying and seeking to recover the nontrivial losses in this reduction is the first aim of the following re-description of existential catastrophe and risk in Whiteheadian terms.

Henri Bergson, another process metaphysician, often referred to this kind of reduction as a “spatialization” of what are more aptly considered temporal aspects of reality. Whenever we treat something of a temporal or processual character as though it were divisible into homogeneous units—whether implicitly in thought and language, or with the aid of diagrammatic forms that represent time as a spatial dimension—we spatialize it. Whitehead agrees with Bergson that spatialization is reductive, in that it promotes an analysis of the world “in terms of static categories,” even as it is simultaneously “the shortest route to a clear-cut philosophy expressed in reasonably familiar language” (PR, 209). In many cases and contexts, this reduction can be considered irrelevant or trivial. But whether as a direct impetus or indirect influence, the spatializing habit can have a nontrivial effect on attempts to understand the fundamental nature of reality, or any aspect of reality in which this fundamental nature is at stake: “The simple notion of an enduring substance sustaining persistent qualities, either essentially or accidentally, expresses a useful abstract for many purposes of life. But whenever we try to use it as a fundamental statement of the nature of things, it proves itself mistaken” (PR, 79). Bostrom’s categorial and typological framework provides a “useful abstract” in this sense, but should not be taken as a “fundamental statement of the nature” of the things in question.

Let us try the experiment of putting existential risk and catastrophe in Whiteheadian terms. At the heart of Whitehead’s metaphysics is what he refers to as the “concrecence” of “actual entities.” Anything conceivable as a singular unit or object, any Cartesian *res vera* (PR, xiii) can, in Whiteheadian terms, be considered an actual entity or an actual occasion.<sup>12</sup> The reason Whitehead uses the terms “entity” and “occasion” interchangeably is that an actual entity “exists” only at the moment its concrecence is “satisfied”—that is, the moment it is realized by or in relation to some other entity as an entity or thing: it is already passing out of being at the moment of this satisfaction, which is only identifiable in relation to it. Given that actual entities are the

basic units or things of Whitehead's universe, anything conceived as having some reality from a human perspective—anything we are likely to treat as a thing, entity, or occasion in the more everyday senses of these terms—is likely to consist in Whiteheadian terms, as a collection or convergence of many different actual entities. Perhaps in implicit recognition of this fact, Whitehead reserves a separate terminology for such a collection, referring to it as a “nexus” or “society”: “In our reference to the actual world, we rarely consider an individual actual entity. The objects of our thoughts are almost always societies, or looser groups of actual entities” (PR, 198). A molecule, for example, must be “some kind of nexus of actual occasions” (PR, 73). The same applies to a person. To the extent that we conceive of a person as having consistence over time (and, indeed, to the extent that they *do* have some such consistence or persistence, regardless of our perception or conception of them) as somehow being the same “person” at one moment after another, and having done so throughout their lifetime, we are considering a nexus. This kind of nexus is for Whitehead a “society,” in that the actual entities—or subordinate nexuses—which constitute it are related by a “social order,” for example, by which one cell in a body is replaced by a cell of a corresponding type, or by which organs and mental activities continue to interact in such a way as to refer to orprehend a particular body or person that is, through this prehension, grasped as the same from one moment to the next, day by day and year by year.<sup>13</sup>

Since both existential risk and existential catastrophe are complex phenomena (whether considered from a metaphysical or anthropic perspective), I will use these terms (“nexus,” “society”) to describe them here. However, the fundamental metaphysical relationship between concrescence and actual entity/occasion gives us the fundamental structure involved in a process-oriented approach: anything constituted, recognized, or perceived as a particular “thing” is what it is only as the realization of a process, a becoming, and not as having some static or eternal existential status outside of this process.

For any putative existential catastrophe—say, the result of an impact event between our planet and another astronomical object—even if we limit our attention to those aspects of the impact with a direct destructive effect on human life, we treat it as a nexus of occurrences ordered by their common relation to the occasion of the impact. This type of nexus is what Whitehead terms an “event.”<sup>14</sup> The continued existence of the impacting object itself, over time (as of the Earth, or any organism or object whatsoever) would be a nexus of the “social” type; the nexus which included its position and trajectory relative to Earth prior to the collision would of course be one societal nexus particularly pertinent to any attempt to prevent the impact (though, likewise, one could consider the nexus of its salient effects, including powerful winds, shock waves, thermal intensification, tsunamis, earthquakes, all of

which could be analyzed further as societies with subordinate nexuses and societies, down to the molecular level, or equally to the biographical level of their effects on groups of human and nonhuman societal nexuses).

We could in theory extend our description to infinitesimal degrees in these terms. What I want to point to is that, for any putative existential catastrophe—for an astronomical impact event as much as for a terrorist attack using nanotechnology, or a nuclear holocaust—there is a societal nexus corresponding to the process of which it is the posited outcome. There are some species of existential catastrophe for which this would be largely irrelevant to us—for example, the scenario described by Bostrom in which it turns out we are living in a simulation, and those running it decide to shut it down.<sup>15</sup> But for most of the species of existential catastrophe in whose culminating process we might hope to intervene, it is the nexus or society of its coming-to-be that is likely to be most worth our attention.

This nexus or society can be understood as the material or actual set of processes—consisting in subordinate nexuses and others within those, to whatever degree of detail we find it helpful to try to identify them—corresponding to any particular estimation of an existential risk. That is, estimating the probability of an existential risk can be considered an estimation of the likelihood that one such nexus exists, is in process toward its eventual satisfaction. Attending to this nexus, seeking to locate it, speculating as to and seeking out its components and their advance, would be the operation of an attempt in these terms to mitigate a given species of existential catastrophe.

Bostrom and others' identification of existential catastrophe and risks as particular events, amenable to categorization and probabilistic calculation, has heuristic value in calling for attention to, and beginning to search for advantageous ways to develop mitigating strategies against them. However, such an approach simultaneously (if inadvertently) encourages us to think about given existential catastrophes in binaristic or atomistic terms, as possibilities which will either come to be the case or not, in a manner which risks diverting our attention away from the processes by which this might occur, and which make their probabilities dynamic over time.

One retort to this might be that it should be perfectly reasonable to expect us to be able to employ probabilistic thinking and more concrete, process-sensitive analysis respectively in their proper contexts. That is, we should be able to apply the former in contexts where we are concerned with the concept and likelihood of existential risk(s), and the latter in contexts where we are more concerned with intervening in factors that seem to be converging to increase the probability of some specific existential catastrophe occurring. I would suggest, however, that this would be an extremely difficult distinction to maintain in any sustained way. Not all of the feedback loops that go into the development of our thinking and reasoning (indeed, not even the

majority of them) are conscious—and neither, indeed, are the relevant factors affecting either our own or nonhuman decisions for the realization of some particular nexus such as a given existential catastrophe. It is neither mystical nor irrational to recognize that an invocation to base our evaluations on “reasons rather than untutored intuition”<sup>16</sup> *can* only ever be met in part, and *should* only be pursued as far as there is useful scope for acting on the basis of reason alone.

Let me offer an example of an area in which I think the probabilistic approach of the prevalent thinking on existential risk—that is, this tendency to encourage an approach which would lead us, consciously or unconsciously, into the habit of treating existential catastrophes as atomistic events isolated from the processes of their coming-to-be, rather than nexuses—can cause problems that might be addressed by the supplement of a more process-based approach.

A recurrent feature of discussions of existential risk to date is the drawing of relatively firm distinctions between terminal and nonterminal global catastrophic risks. This is a virtually inevitable result of Bostrom’s proposal to categorize risks by type, according to discrete levels (rather than gradations) of intensity or scope. This might seem to be assuaged by the way existential risk is included within the larger category of global catastrophic risk, rather than set apart as a wholly independent category. In Bostrom’s original schema,<sup>17</sup> there are risks that are considered global but nonterminal (endurable), such as the thinning of the ozone layer, and terminal risks that are not considered global, such as genocide: a putative catastrophe would have to be both global and terminal to be placed in the existential risk category. In a later, revised scheme,<sup>18</sup> the global category has been further subdivided to include categories of risk that are trans- and pan-generational, and the “terminal” category has been replaced with “crushing.” On the one hand, this revision indicates a sensitivity to the range of possible catastrophic events that have a non-negligible chance of occurring, and the fact that a catastrophe can be devastating for large portions of humanity without qualifying as existential. On the other hand, however, it functions to reinforce the “special” status of existential risks and the sense that, however great another catastrophe might be, an existential catastrophe should always be of massively greater concern. This is also reflected in the edited collection of essays *Global Catastrophic Risks*,<sup>19</sup> where the editors recognize the sensitivity (and controversy) surrounding the question of how much worse an existential risk should be considered compared to a nonexistential global catastrophic risk, broadening their scope in order to “lay a broader foundation of systematic thinking about big risks in general.”<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, the core of the approach remains that “existential risks share a number of features that mark them out as deserving of special consideration.”<sup>21</sup>



An argument that has been used repeatedly to emphasize the greater importance of existential risks over others is Derek Parfit's reasoning that the difference between a nuclear war that destroyed 100 percent of humans, and one that destroyed 99 percent, would be far greater than the difference between the nuclear war that destroyed 99 percent and the avoidance of such a war altogether. (That is, the survival of a tiny number of humans with the potential to propagate the species into the future is infinitely preferable to the survival of none.) This is based on the reasoning that the eradication of 100 percent of humanity should be taken to include all possible future generations, whereas the eradication of 99 percent would not. This sets up an oppositional relationship between existential and nonexistential risks: "One might consequently argue that even the tiniest reduction of existential risk has an expected value greater than that of the definite provision of any 'ordinary' good, such as the direct benefit of saving 1 billion lives."<sup>22</sup>

This kind of reasoning, often couched in terms of utilitarianism, also involves a degree of game theory, whereby the value assigned to a smaller quantity of lives, for example, 1 billion, is much smaller than that assigned to a much larger quantity, for example,  $10^{16}$ , thus making sacrificing the former to preserve the latter ethically preferable to preserving the former at the (possible eventual) expense of the latter.<sup>23</sup> However, while there may be no urgent need to refute this in theory,<sup>24</sup> its application in practice would depend on the emergence of conditions in which this binaristic choice could be actualized. Whether and how likely such conditions are to emerge seems to me much more open to question. Furthermore, the possible argument that even situations in which this *seemed* to be a binary choice would require us to act for the greater good, given the stakes, are suspect, given the extent to which actions taken in the name of the greater good have throughout human history led to the destruction of life on massive scales, and could thus at least as easily be expected to contribute to an existential catastrophe as mitigate one.

While situations can be conceived in which these conditions are met—such as Bostrom's imagining of a "rogue state" scenario in which a preemptive strike against a sovereign nation is necessary to prevent it causing an existential catastrophe<sup>25</sup>—it seems likely that for most varieties of existential risk, there is a good chance that many non-crushing global catastrophes could form part of the nexus constituting the coming-to-be of a particular existential catastrophe. A straightforward example would be global warming. Bostrom gives the thinning of the ozone layer as an instance of an endurable (i.e., nonexistential) global catastrophic risk. But this delineation can only be made after the fact: had the "ozone hole" not been recognized and made the target of direct global action in the 1980s, or had the Montreal Protocol not succeeded, the production of ozone-depleting chemicals might have been the

primary factor in the occurrence of an existential catastrophe. While it is correct that a short-term thinning of the ozone layer can be considered endurable, while a longer-term erosion, within certain quantifiable parameters, would be crushing or terminal for humanity, placing them on opposing sides of a categorial line encourages us to think them in opposition, neglecting the way in which each is implicated within the other: an existential ozone-depletion catastrophe arises out of a nonexistential one, and addressing the latter reduces the risk of the occurrence of the former.

For other species of existential risk, the possible relations are likely to be much more complicated, but still in ways that I think the categorial approach may encourage us to neglect. For example, the “rogue state” scenario, or one arising from the “deliberate misuse of nanotechnology” to “eat up the biosphere or destroy it by other means such as by poisoning it, burning it, or blocking out the sunlight”<sup>26</sup> could be considered a societal nexus partially constituted by numerous prior global catastrophes whose mitigation might have led to its avoidance. In this hypothetical scenario, it seems highly plausible that, as is the case with many historical acts of terrorism, those behind the deliberate misuse of nanotechnology might be responding to certain geopolitical conditions of injustice and inequality: these might include military invasions and conflicts, widespread poverty, the uneven global distribution of the effects of climate change—all enabled or permitted by other human institutions and powers with the capacity to intervene. Furthermore, it should be possible to identify a number of putative existential catastrophes which, though differing in kind, might include these diverse global catastrophes as significant elements within their concrescence. There are likely to be many nonterminal global catastrophic risks that would constitute elements in the nexus of a number of putative existential catastrophes in formation. It would, therefore, make sense to direct attention toward identifying and addressing these, and viewing this not as a subtraction of resources and attention from the putative actual entities that constitute given putative existential catastrophes, but as part of the wider challenge of addressing existential risks.

This may seem, from the prevalent existential risk perspective, to advocate what Bostrom denigrates as frittering away altruism on “a plethora of feel-good projects of sub-optimal efficacy.”<sup>27</sup> There are several reasons in addition to the above for suggesting this is not (or at least not necessarily) the case, and that there are additional benefits to the task of reducing at least some species of existential risk, direct and indirect, in tackling such global ethical challenges as world poverty, health, poor living conditions, environmental damage, social inequality, military conflict, and other non- or not-yet-existential threats.

For one thing, as Bostrom notes, addressing many species of existential risk is likely to require a lot of advocates and resources. He thus expresses

the hope that “some of the global movements that emerged over the last half century—in particular the peace movement, the environmentalist movement, and various global justice and human-rights movements—will increasingly take on board more generalized concerns about existential risk.”<sup>28</sup> Surely recruiting the voices, efforts, and resources of those committed to such movements is likely to be facilitated by including the challenges of those various forms of global catastrophe in which their primary interests reside, as part of, rather than in competition with, the challenge of addressing existential risk. The notion of asking activists and oppressed groups to set aside their primary concerns in favor of the “greater good” that is the survival of humanity as a whole seems to me not only politically or ethically unjustifiable but also hopelessly impractical—especially given that, for many such groups it is precisely the struggle over who or what counts as “human,” and who is viewed as representative of humanity that is at stake.<sup>29</sup>

Secondly, while some form of game theory might eventually come into play, depending on the probability and type of existential risk in question, there is and will continue to be a great degree of ignorance shrouding all thinking about future risk, regardless of the partial achievements of efforts to pierce it. For this reason there must be some ethical value in the intuitive judgment that any kind of suffering on a mass scale is not only worth addressing in itself, but also as a possible precursor of a more totalizing existential catastrophe. Bateson developed his thinking on deutero-learning in complementary response to a paper by Margaret Mead, in which she advocated that researchers work “in terms of values which are limited to defining a *direction*” rather than toward “defined *ends*.”<sup>30</sup> It seems to me that such a “directional” approach must at least be part of our thinking of and approach to existential risk, such that any kind of global catastrophe should at least be evaluated as a potential element in a putative future existential catastrophe. There would, of course, equally be much danger in making this a fixed law or presumption, and it could promote the very kinds of biased judgment that Bostrom and Yudkowsky,<sup>31</sup> for example, want us to avoid. But we may bear various forms of cognitive bias in mind and look for them in our thinking without abandoning intuition altogether.

Finally, and perhaps most simply, even if we identify it as a reasonable probability that a number of global catastrophic risks are *not* going to play a part in the later occurrence of an existential catastrophe, there is arguably even greater reason to see some of these as potential elements in the development of situations that would be *worse* than the actualization of an existential risk. Bostrom includes such scenarios in his categorial scheme under the designation “hellish.” Examples of scenarios that could be considered worse than the eradication of humanity include “permanent and extreme forms of slavery or mind control,”<sup>32</sup> “horrible incurable diseases,”<sup>33</sup> and extreme, permanent

totalitarian regimes. As Bryan Caplan notes, “it is tempting to minimize the harm of a social disaster like totalitarianism, because it would probably not lead to human extinction . . . But perhaps an eternity of totalitarianism would be worse than extinction.”<sup>34</sup>

At the very least, all of this would seem to point to the value and efficacy of addressing global catastrophic risk holistically in such a way as to include its existential and nonexistential varieties. Nothing in the categorial and probabilistic scheme of Bostrom and others directly opposes this, and indeed, there are moments at which it is advocated. This may be taken as manifest in the decision to publish a book on global catastrophic risk rather than existential risk, for example. However, to the extent that the latter ultimately comes across as a book on existential risk with some attention paid to the other sub-categories of global catastrophic risk, and to the extent that notions which seem to oppose this special category to others crop up repeatedly in discussions of the topic, the mode of thinking that underpins them seems to bring with it the kinds of risks I have pointed to above.

Whitehead’s system and vocabulary are of course not the only way to get to this position. However, I would suggest that by encouraging us to think carefully about the relation between being and becoming—in putting us within a certain process-sensitive mindset—they begin to affect the way we think about a given phenomenon or subject, such as existential risk, in subtle but potentially important ways. Beyond this, the detail of the conceptual vocabulary with which Whitehead develops his metaphysics, and which I have barely touched on thus far, offers great scope for more careful description of particular putative or potential existential threats in processual terms, should the attempt be deemed worthwhile.

### **TECHNO-SCIENTIFIC BIAS AND NON-SCIENTIFIC RESOURCES: PROPOSITIONS**

Before concluding, I would like to consider from another angle, but one also partially informed by Whitehead, the special problems existential risk poses to being thought.

I noted in the introduction to this chapter that Bostrom posits an “aversion” to thinking about such a depressing topic as one of the reasons so little attention has been directed to the possible occurrence of existential catastrophes. A possibly related factor, highlighted by Yudkowsky,<sup>35</sup> is “scope neglect.” This is the phenomenon whereby people treat a small number of negative occurrences (e.g., deaths) as though they were worse than a much larger number. Such thinking (or feeling) was expressed by Kurt Tucholsky, among others, in attributing to an imagined French diplomat the following statement:

“The death of one person: that’s a catastrophe. A hundred thousand deaths: that’s a statistic.”<sup>36</sup>

Among speculations as to the reasons for this bias, which has been documented in a number of psychological experiments, Yudkowsky cites a common saying in this field of study, that “people do not evaluate events, but descriptions of events.”<sup>37</sup> This should prompt us to consider the implications of the particular conditions underpinning the Bostrom/FHI mode of describing existential risk in comparison to other such modes. The hypothesis of this chapter thus far has been that describing large catastrophes in terms of their probability within a categorial scheme of risk has nontrivially different effects on the way we evaluate it compared to a more process-sensitive mode of description (many of these effects being heuristically valuable, but a few giving serious cause for concern). Other modes of describing occurrences that threaten the extinction of humanity, as found in the many narratives constructed on the theme in mythology, religion, literature and other media, will have different conditions and implications for the ways we evaluate them. Yudkowsky, in fact, highlights this sphere, though primarily, it seems, in order to associate it with flawed thinking, when he suggests that “the cliché phrase *end of the world* invokes the magisterium of myth and dream, of prophecy and apocalypse, of novels and movies.”<sup>38</sup> Faced with prospects of destruction on scales that literally transcend their capacity for understanding and rationality—“the brain cannot multiply by 6 billion”<sup>39</sup>—humans turn to the sphere of the transcendent to look for ways to deal with them. This turn to the transcendent is generally seen as a hindrance or distraction within research emerging from the FHI. The prevalent existential risk approach represented by Bostrom et al. seeks to bring existential catastrophe back within the immanent realm of thinkability by developing means of rendering it calculable and amenable to analysis, and exposing the cognitive biases that form obstacles to this enterprise. However, we might also wonder whether wholly avoiding this recourse to the transcendent is either possible or desirable as part of the challenge of mitigating existential risk.

There is a clear techno-scientific bias in existential risk thinking to date, manifest first of all in the general position that the kinds of existential risks with which it is principally concerned are new to human history, dating roughly from the appearance of the possibility of global nuclear war in the mid-twentieth century.<sup>40</sup> This effectively brackets out from the category of significant existential risks any perceived threats to the survival of humanity that have arisen in past religious and mythological contexts, such as large-scale floods, earthquakes, volcanoes, and the divine agencies often taken to be behind them. But such a dismissal would seem to run counter to Bostrom’s own recognition, in justifying the speculative dimension of his own approach, that “*If we don’t know whether something is objectively risky*

or not, then it is risky in the subjective sense. The subjective sense is of course what we must base our decisions on.”<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, the result is that past cultural responses to such risks are effectively ruled out as potentially useful resources for facing current and future challenges of existential risk, even if Bostrom recognizes that religious responses may not have been “unreasonable” within their historical cultural contexts.<sup>42</sup> This bias is underscored in the list of possible “general improvements” Bostrom hopes may increasingly help mitigate existential risk: “developments in educational techniques and online collaboration tools, institutional innovations such as prediction markets, advances in science and philosophy, spread of rationality culture, and biological cognitive enhancement.”<sup>43</sup> While it is reasonable to assume that techniques such as “sacrificial offerings, persecution of witches or infidels, and so forth,”<sup>44</sup> are unlikely to be of much use in facing existential risk in the future, to regard superstition-based ritual as the only potential resource to be found in such contexts (or to dismiss such contexts on the basis that they *include* such elements) seems needlessly restrictive.

How might we envisage an approach that would be neither exclusively rationalist in this way, nor limited to impractically superstitious responses to the transcendent dimension of existential risk? That is, how might we go about rejecting or overcoming the apparent dichotomy of immanence and transcendence that this opposition implies, and which is found widely in modern thought (often manifest in excessive rationalism or scientism on the one hand, and dogmatic or obscurantist mysticism on the other)?

Whitehead’s conception of God may initially seem to offer one prospect of addressing this problem. Despite being undertaken, as noted above, as a rationalist adventure, seeking to provide a descriptive system adequate to both objective and subjective experience as part of a single extensive continuum (like Bergson, Whitehead rejects a dominant opposition in nineteenth-century philosophy between realism and idealism, anticipating later philosophers of immanence such as Gilles Deleuze and François Laruelle), Whitehead’s metaphysics nevertheless has room for a God who/that is essentially not religious. However, the primary functions of Whitehead’s God seem to be in enabling the creative advance of all existence, and in preserving or “saving” all that, by virtue of its processual coming-to-be, must also pass out of existence.<sup>45</sup> For this reason, it is arguably of little value in any endeavor concerned with affecting or (re)directing the direction or historical unfolding of specific situations as they impinge upon the human. Thus for help in addressing the question of existential risk, we must turn elsewhere.

Of greater value to the challenge of thinking about existential risk, I think, is Whitehead’s discussion of propositions. For Whitehead, a proposition “is the unity of certain actual entities in their potentiality for forming a nexus” (PR, 24). The notion of attempting to address existential risks by postulating

or trying to identify the nexus-in-formation that may be leading in the direction of a given existential catastrophe, contributing to or constituting its coming-to-be, as described in the previous section, could be described as a propositional mode. Whitehead terms the constitutive actual entities of a proposition its “logical subjects,” while definite eternal objects (e.g., the principle that humanity can come to an end, the fact of the passing or perishing of all actual entities, the potential for this or that mode of destruction) are its predicates. In this sense, a proposition has actuality in the actual entities it involves, as well as in the actual entity in which its thought or expression consists, and yet can still be the basis of logical or theoretical speculation in the senses in which philosophers, scientists, and other thinkers more commonly use the term. As Whitehead puts it, “a proposition is a new kind of entity. It is a hybrid between pure potentialities and actualities” (PR, 185–86).

Whitehead is critical, however, of the logic-centered philosophical approach to propositions that has treated them purely in terms of true/false expressions, geared toward the making of judgments. “The main function of propositions in the nature of things” he writes, is not to facilitate belief, “but for feeling at the physical level of unconsciousness. They constitute a source for the origination of feeling which is not tied down to mere datum. A proposition is ‘realized’ by a member of its locus, when it is admitted into feeling” (PR, 186). In terms of this distinction, the prevalent mode of discussing existential risk can hitherto be said to have been propositional in the narrower sense—seeking to establish the basis for making yes/no or true/false judgments and logical, calculable estimations of probability. If, however, we appreciate the value of propositions in Whitehead’s sense, then we may look for propositions relevant to the challenge of thinking and addressing existential risk in the kinds of places that the probabilistic existential risk approach tends to exclude as irrelevant and/or irrational: in mythology, religion, intuition, literary, and other media and narrative modes—Yudkowsky’s separate “magisterium of myth and dream, prophecy and apocalypse, novels and movies.” After all, there is no reason for seeing such “unscientific” realms as incapable of constituting useful resources (intellectual, affective, or otherwise) for thinking and addressing existential risk—any more than we would expect to find scientific or analytic thought and discourse free of either cognitive bias or speculation.

The propositions found in such cultural resources concerned with threats to humanity, from *Atrahasis* and other ancient flood myths to J. G. Ballard’s *The Drowned World*, from Plato’s *Timaeus* to *The Planet of the Apes*, may well all turn out to be “non-conformal” to the actual world of an entity concerned with it, rather than “conformal” (“non-conformal” and “conformal” being Whitehead’s adaptations of “false” and “true”). It is quite likely that none will conform fully to the nexus of a given existential catastrophe (though by the

time we knew this it would be too late, from a human-survival-oriented point of view, for it to matter); there is, however, plenty of scope for thinking that the propositions found in such loci might conform to some or other element in the actuality of existential *risk*, as the thinking, feeling, acting in relation to the possibility of such catastrophes—and that they may therefore be of value to attempts to shape or affect these responses and approaches. Even so, in contrast to the way propositions are deployed in a standard mathematical or logical treatise (such as Russell and Whitehead's *Principia Mathematica*), even failing to conform to actuality would not render a proposition without value within this broader perspective:

The conception of propositions as merely material for judgments is fatal to any understanding of their role in the universe. In that purely logical aspect, non-conformal propositions are merely wrong, and therefore worse than useless. But in their primary role, they pave the way along which the world advances into novelty. Error is the price which we pay for progress. (PR, 187)<sup>46</sup>

Within this paradigm, error is of (great) potential value. In the context of an actualized existential catastrophe, error in the approach to mitigating it is terminal. But errors regarding, for example, the course of its development, the question of “which one will get us first,” or the different factors in its concrescence, may all contribute to the population of a conceptual and affective picture of existential risk that may have diverse roles to play in our multi-modal attempts to mitigate it.<sup>47</sup> Every proposition brings something new within our scope:

When a non-conformal proposition is admitted into feeling, the reaction to the datum has resulted in the synthesis of fact with the alternative potentiality of the complex predicate. A novelty has emerged into creation. The novelty may promote or destroy order; it may be good or bad. But it is new, a new type of individual, and not merely a new intensity of individual feeling. (PR, 187)

This may be one general approach to tackling the problem described at the outset of this chapter, of achieving the adaptive results of Bateson's deuterolearning without the benefit of first-order trial-and-error learning. This is a form of learning based on error without trial—on virtual error, or error as the general field of hypothetical possibilities from which actuality will continually emerge. It might be considered a cousin, as it were, of the species of thought experiment on which analytic thinking (including that of existential risk) often draws—but expanded to include feeling, error, uncertainty as valuable aspects of both the resource in question and the effects derived from it.

On this basis, I would advocate mining the vast collection of cultural resources, both ancient and modern, relating to the theme of the end of the



human, the form it takes and the ways humans and other beings respond, for propositions of potential value to the larger task of facing the challenge of existential risk, which is as much a psychological and cultural problem as it is a techno-scientific one: in this sense, the conception of this project as multi- or transdisciplinary has not yet gone far enough. Even the most skeptic rationalist, one who deems such cultural resources to be almost certainly irrelevant to this task, would accept, we might hope, that they have the potential capacity to help reduce existential risk by “*one billionth of one billionth of one percentage point*,” which, according to Bostrom’s calculation of the value of addressing existential risk at all, would be “worth a hundred billion times as much as a billion human lives.”<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, though such an undertaking might require significant time and effort, nevertheless considered in relation to projects such as enhancing international counterterrorism initiatives, implementing comprehensive biosecurity strategies, developing global systems for overseeing nanotechnology research, or building “Noah’s Ark” refuges<sup>49</sup> and seed banks, such research has the extra advantage of being, to put it simply, cheap.

We shouldn’t expect to be able to anticipate exactly what benefits might be derived from such research (any more than one does with a given scientific experiment, so long as a working paradigm and reasonable hypothesis that useful findings are possible has been established). But undertaking the endeavor would in itself imply a slight loosening of the techno-scientific/rationalist bias prevalent in existential risk thinking to date (this is not to say that this bias is not for the most part sensible and efficacious; it is in what it risks excluding, rather than what it includes and prioritizes, that I find some cause for concern). But we can speculate that the value of this loosening is one effect into which, through a series of feedback loops, we might expect to gain further insight and understanding as such an endeavor is pursued. In particular, we should at least entertain the possibility that the long-term survival of humans in some or other (likely posthuman) form will ultimately depend upon our ability to let go, at least to some extent, of our fixation on precisely this goal of human survival, or at least our treatment of it as an absolute imperative, and our seeming dependence on instrumental means of achieving it. Indeed, who is to say that this is not the “Great Filter” that has been proposed as bringing about the extinction of complex, intelligent lifeforms elsewhere in the universe, such that we have not yet encountered them?<sup>50</sup> Might it not be that the fixation of advanced technological societies or species on the scientific rationality and technological reasoning that they credit with having got them there, is precisely what repeatedly leads to their (self-)destruction through the (mis-)use of their technological accomplishments? This may very well *not* be the case; but it is a possibility that at least deserves to be included in our attempts to think about how to think about existential risk.

## NOTES

1. Nick Bostrom, “Existential Risks: Analyzing Human Extinction Scenarios and Related Hazards,” *Journal of Evolution and Technology*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (2002), 1.2. Reproduced and available online at: <https://nickbostrom.com/existential/risk.s.pdf>. References to this chapter, originally published in the *Journal of Evolution and Technology*, use its own internal numeration of sections in reference to the pdf and html formats in which it circulates online. The scheme was subsequently refined to indicate that an existential risk would have to be not only global, but trans- and pan-generational, that is, not only decimating humanity at the time of its occurrence, but destroying or terminally impairing all future human generations. See Nick Bostrom and Milan M. Ćirković, “Introduction,” in Bostrom and Ćirković (eds.), *Global Catastrophic Risks* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 3 and Nick Bostrom, “Existential Risk Prevention as Global Priority,” *Global Policy*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (February 2013), 17.

2. Bostrom, “Existential Risk,” 23.

3. Milan Ćirković, “Observation selection effects and global catastrophic risks,” in Bostrom and Ćirković (eds.). *Global Catastrophic Risks* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Eliezer Yudkowsky, “Cognitive biases potentially affecting judgement of global risks,” in Bostrom and Ćirković (eds.). *Global Catastrophic Risks* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

4. Bostrom, “Existential Risks,” 2.

5. *Ibid.*, 27.

6. Yudkowsky, “Cognitive biases.”

7. Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 166–69.

8. Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, 274.

9. *Ibid.*

10. Among the “nine myths and fallacious procedures” in Whitehead’s list, probably most relevant here are the habitual “distrust of speculative philosophy,” the “trust in language as an adequate expression of propositions,” and the “belief that logical inconsistencies can indicate anything else than some antecedent errors” (PR, xiii).

11. Cf. Whitehead: “Rationalism is an adventure in the clarification of thought, progressive and never final. But it is an adventure in which even partial success has importance” (PR, 9).

12. Cf. Whitehead: “The actual entity never moves: it is where it is and what it is. In order to emphasize this characteristic by a phrase connecting the notion of ‘actual entity’ more closely with our ordinary habits of thought, I will also use the term ‘actual occasion’ in the place of the term ‘actual entity’ ” (PR, 73).

13. Social order corresponds to “that complex character in virtue of which a man is considered to be the same enduring person from birth to death” (PR, 90).

14. “I shall use the term ‘event’ in the more general sense of a nexus of actual occasions, interrelated in some determinate fashion in one extensive continuum. An actual occasion is the limiting type of an event with only one member” (PR, 73).

15. Bostrom, "Existential Risks," 4.3; Nick Bostrom, "Are You Living in a Computer Simulation?" *Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 53, No. 211 (2003): 243–55.
16. Bostrom, "Existential Risks," 4.3.
17. *Ibid.*, 1.1.
18. Bostrom and Ćirković, "Introduction," 3; Bostrom, "Existential Risks," 27.
19. Bostrom and Ćirković, "Introduction."
20. *Ibid.*, 4.
21. *Ibid.*
22. Bostrom, "Existential Risk Prevention as Global Priority," 19.
23. *Ibid.*, 18.
24. There are many grounds for at least questioning this reasoning, or at least the degree of difference derived from it between the destruction of human lives on massive contemporary versus pan-generational scales. For example, the inclusion of all potential future generations within the calculation of the number of lives destroyed seems to presume that no other factor intervenes in the near future to prevent the appearance of those  $10^{16}$  lives. In another vein, to suggest that the destruction of a potential future life is equivalent in value to the destruction of an extant life is dangerously close to arguments that equate abortion with killing—and could even be taken to imply that all of us have an ethical duty to procreate as much as possible. However, I see no reason to disagree in absolute terms with the idea that a pan-generational catastrophe would be considerably worse than one affecting a more limited (though great) number of lives: the concern here is how one determines one or the other *in advance* to be an outcome of particular circumstances or actions, and what actions this is then used to support or justify.
25. Bostrom, "Existential Risks," 9.3.
26. *Ibid.*, 4.1.
27. Bostrom, "Existential Risk Prevention as Global Priority," 19.
28. *Ibid.*, 27.
29. See Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—an Argument," *CR: The New Centennial Review*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (Fall 2003): 257–337 for an extended account of the epistemology and politics of what she sees as the ongoing struggle in modernity between the ethnoclass "Man" and humanity as a species.
30. Quoted in Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, 159.
31. Bostrom and Ćirković, "Introduction."
32. *Ibid.*, 4.
33. Bostrom, "Existential Risk Prevention as Global Priority," 28.
34. Bryan Caplan, "The totalitarian threat," in Bostrom and Ćirković (eds.), *Global Catastrophic Risks*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, 517.
35. Yudkowsky, "Cognitive biases," 105–7.
36. Kurt Tucholsky, *Lerne lachen ohne zu weinen* (Berlin: Ernst Rowohlt, 1932), 148. There are many versions of this expression: a very similar statement is commonly (possibly apocryphally) attributed to Joseph Stalin, while Yudkowsky ("Cognitive biases," 106) cites Hungarian physiologist Albert Szent-Györgi's statement that "I am unable to multiply one man's suffering by a 100 million."

37. Yudkowsky, “Cognitive biases,” 114.

38. Ibid.

39. Ibid., 115.

40. Bostrom, “Existential Risks,” 2.

41. Ibid., 2. Emphasis in original.

42. Bostrom, “Existential Risk Prevention as Global Priority,” 29, n. 35.

43. Ibid., 28.

44. Ibid., 29, n. 35.

45. These are the respective functions, in summary form, of the two dimensions of Whitehead’s God: a “primordial nature” constituting “the unlimited conceptual realization of the absolute wealth of potentiality” (PR, 343); and a “consequent nature” corresponding to the “realization of the actual world” (PR, 345), by which God constitutes the unity of all actual entities as they pass, “sav[ing] the world as it passes into the immediacy of his own life” (PR, 346).

46. On this basis, we might also consider as a probably non-conformal proposition with potential value as “lure for feeling,” a version of Whitehead’s God that would still have some capacity for the salvation of actual humans; this was a possibility raised in relation to environmental catastrophe in the presentation at the conference in Claremont that became the germ of this paper (*How Do You Make Yourself a Proposition? A Whitehead Laboratory*, Dec 1–3, 2016).

47. Equally, while propositions drawn from an ancient mythological text may have little to contribute to the challenge, for example, of developing “ecophagic devices” to counter a nanotechnological catastrophe (though who knows?), they might easily offer something of value to the challenge of designing “new institutions that can maintain and administer centralized global power without becoming oppressive” (and the possible blindspots in the thinking in such design that could unwittingly give rise to further threats)—two possible approaches to nanotechnology as a global catastrophic risk suggested by Phoenix and Treder, “Nanotechnology as global catastrophic risk,” in Bostrom and Ćirković, *Global Catastrophic Risks*, 497–98. In a similar vein, while scientific and analytic research (including, at least in passing, some of the work on existential risk) often recognizes that science fiction provides useful imaginary descriptions of possible emergent or future technologies that could give rise to global catastrophic threats, such as robotics and AI (Isaac Asimov), the technological singularity (Vernor Vinge), or nanotechnology (Neal Stephenson), we should not neglect what these and other less scientifically detailed works of science fiction might offer to pragmatic efforts toward risk mitigation in the propositions they offer touching on ethics, politics, culture, modes of thinking and feeling, myth, and so on.

48. Bostrom, “Existential Risk Prevention as Global Priority,” 19.

49. For a discussion, see Robin Hanson, “Catastrophe, social collapse, and human extinction,” in Bostrom and Ćirković, *Global Catastrophic Risks*, 373–75.

50. See Bostrom, “Existential Risks,” 8.2; Ćirković, “Observation selection effects,” 131–35); Stephen Webb, *If the Universe is Teeming with Aliens—Where Is Everybody? Fifty Solutions to Fermi’s Paradox and the Problem of Extraterrestrial Life* (New York: Copernicus, 2002).

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## Chapter 7

# Witness at the Slaughterhouse

## *Seeking Conflicting Propositions for Alternate Futures<sup>1</sup>*

Brianne Donaldson

*What if  
we are all as  
alone as these pigs  
and so turn our heads  
from their  
passing shadows  
in hopes that we are  
different?*

### CONFLICTING PROPOSITIONS

When you live in a town with a pig slaughterhouse, you smell it, and you taste it, “Like rotten bacon and dog food,” one colleague said, depending on what the processing plant was churning out that day.

You hear it, too, and I did not expect that when I accepted a job at a small liberal arts college in Monmouth, Illinois. This town of 9,000 residents is home to Farmland Foods, a pork production facility now owned by Smithfield, the largest pork producer in the world, which was purchased in late 2013 by a Chinese firm in the costliest takeover of a U.S. company on record. Outside the Shopko parking lot and adjacent to a strip mall with a frozen yogurt eatery and mail service center, you can hear the pigs squeal as they are offloaded, high pitched like a hundred rusty garage doors opening simultaneously with Descartes conducting.

Since the turn of the twentieth century when Upton Sinclair wrote *The Jungle*, pork slaughterhouses have been the collision site for American

industrialization, immigration, and national policies for food, farming, and trade. Sinclair's success in exposing the industrialization of the American workplace and workers—all "cogs in the great packing machine," as he called them—drove urban pork producers toward rural areas with fewer regulations, initiating a new transformation of the place and people in the heartland.

Specifically, Monmouth is the meeting place of strange bedfellows—from the working-class employees at the local pet food company to immigrant and refugee workers at the slaughterhouse to the professors and students strolling the picturesque campus with the exhaust of the town's industries blowing through. In spite of the community's small size, it is quite easy for these populations to remain separate—out of sight and out of mind, much like the 12,000 pigs trucked in each day to become transnational bacon.

In this chapter, I explore the ethical and political importance of bearing witness to the conflicting propositions within a rural slaughterhouse town. While this claim could readily expand to the unseen complexities hidden in any place, I am especially concerned with developing tools and practices of witness in higher education. Drawing peripherally upon Whitehead, Nietzsche, and Jain philosophy, I explore the concept of witness as an ethical art and pedagogical necessity in order to nurture citizens capable of engaging the contradictions of contemporary society and constructing less obstructive alternatives. A slaughterhouse town exemplifies the complexities lurking in most places and in most issues, if we train ourselves to look for them. In a part of the country many consider to be socially homogenous and politically provincial, pork production has quietly created a heartland that is religiously diverse, multicultural, technologically rich, and wielding global influence—all driven by a common demand for edible flesh that transcends race, class, gender, geography, and even national boundaries. Being witness to these conflicting propositions provides an opportunity to practice the art of ethical response and to develop educational strategies needed to create alternate futures.

## TO WITNESS MULTIPLE EXPRESSIONS

*The Petro truck wash  
disappears  
the day's DNA  
like a watery magician.*

*Grit floors  
and radial tires  
hosed clean*

*of trembling  
fury,  
absent evidence  
of what never was—  
laundering the morning deeds  
before the sun even rises above the town.*

Transport trucks of live hogs begin arriving at Farmland about 6 a.m., delivered through late afternoon. The first to the kill floor are those delivered too late the day prior. These bodies produce a city's worth of excrement daily, requiring the slaughterhouse to have its own water treatment facility. Pigs killed in the morning are asphyxiated in a gas chamber, on one of the world's most sophisticated kill floors. Each body then goes through a burning process to singe off hair, before workers remove blood, head, and organs. These waxy, unrecognizable forms are then sent to refrigeration to be dismembered the next day.

Pigs are acknowledged, not least by those who raise, transport, and offload them, to be one of the most sensitive and intelligent mammals in existence. While their natural lifespan is fifteen to twenty years, hogs raised for pork are fattened and slaughtered at six months old. Two rather bleak saving graces exist in this abbreviated existence: first, pigs who live longer than six months can grow grotesquely large, developing multiple health and bone disorders, due to genetic modification; second, their industrial shed environments provide no enrichment for social creatures who have been shown to solve jigsaw puzzles, answer questions with visual cards, express heightened empathy, know each other as individuals, and use a mirror to evaluate their environment, among many other capacities.<sup>2</sup> So full with mind-numbing boredom are their short lives that many go insane, falling into self-destructive and aggressive behavior—unsurprising, given their tremendous similarity to the human genome.<sup>3</sup>

If we follow Nietzsche's assertion that "*all movements are to be taken as gestures*, as a kind of language through which the forces understand each other," what are we to understand of these pigs' resistance and insistence at the offloading ramps?<sup>4</sup> As the ancient Jains of India recognized at the heart of their nonviolent philosophy (*ahimsā*), for which vegetarianism was logical and essential, "All beings are fond of life, like pleasure, hate pain, shun destruction, like life, long to live. To all life is dear" (*ĀS*, 3rd-1st c. BCE, I.2.3.4).<sup>5</sup> While Descartes would have us think that animals are unthinking, unfeeling machines whose cries are merely like gears grinding in a clock,<sup>6</sup> I suggest that each one of these bodies is an example of what Alfred North Whitehead calls an "expression" (MT, 20). These expressions are "founded on the finite occasion," radically singular as an "activity of



finitude impressing itself on its environment” (Ibid., 20). Their cries, like all animal sounds, including our own, asserts Whitehead, “excite the intimacies of bodily existence” (Ibid., 32). “Voice produced sound,” he reminds, “is a natural symbol for the deep experience of organic existence,” and daily the pigs assert their movement and vocalizations as evidence of such experience (Ibid., 32).

Expression, claims Whitehead, comes through the language of sounds from any kind of animal, as well as through the language of writing. And this language has two intriguing aspects: first toward itself, in that, as Whitehead says, “language is the expression from one’s past into one’s present,” and bears within it “the experiences which it symbolizes” (Ibid., 33). This is surely worth considering when we think of the pasts languaged in the sound-speech or movements of animals used for food. What particular pasts are cried out in the present? What experiences are symbolized in those calls? The second aspect of language, according to Whitehead, is its role in civilization, of becoming general enough to be considered more widely “important,” or of greater “interest” beyond the finite moment (Ibid., 31).

Here I want to think about expression as a peculiar mode of thought that might be akin to witnessing in a way that has both personal and public implications. The term “witness,” from Old English *wit*, meaning “to know,” refers to one who knows or attests, sees, or possesses *this* specific knowledge. It also includes the action of knowing, the verb of *testifying* or *protesting* (Latin *testis*), to certify, instruct, or to observe in a multifaceted way. It is the many-sidedness of the slaughterhouse town that ties the knot, and the pigs are only one thread.

In another thread, our own pasts loom large. For my part, I grew up a meat eater in rural Michigan, surrounded by the unspoken foundations of 4-H fairs and Amish communities that shrouded animal use and abuse in bucolic traditions. A series of events led me to encounter the realities of factory farming even in nearby family farms, and the more I learned, the less I could deny that factory farming and the meat, milk, eggs, and cheese derived from those creatures was emotionally grotesque, theologically abhorrent, philosophically indefensible, environmentally apocalyptic, and in every way a universal and absolute moral wrong of profound shame. While seeking my doctoral degree, which I hoped to put to use to undermine these systems, I worked as outreach coordinator in southern California for the international nonprofit organization Vegan Outreach. In that role, I distributed leaflets on factory farming to students from Bakersfield to San Diego, heartened by the organization’s pragmatic philosophy to reduce suffering without all-or-nothing purity, as well as students’ courage to consider the impact of inherited habits. I also participated in a civil liberty litigation opening California campuses for free speech, which I will say more about shortly.

In spite of this background, taking a gig in a slaughterhouse town is not for the faint of heart, however practiced one may be. Daily inhaling flesh in the air can tie anyone in knots if they consider the nearby cause. I struggled to hold together the uneasy balance of being an ethical and academic outsider whose vegan critique increasingly and paradoxically bound me more closely to other threads of this place, its history, and people, all of which would be easier to denounce. Yet, in my attempt to know all I could about how a slaughterhouse town runs, I had to meet its people, and so many of them shared with me candidly in formal interviews, slaughterhouse tours, trips to the ethanol plant, or riding shotgun in a million-dollar tractor harvesting a thousand acres of seed corn destined for the guts of livestock.

One local hog farmer invited me in for lemonade and we talked about her husband's death several years earlier, and of how she subsequently made a success of a farm that she never really wanted to manage. Along with her adult children, they now run their own private granary, enabling them to grind and store corn and soy grown on their own land, part of which goes to feed the hogs, a family business presently worth many millions of dollars. Of the 18,000 hogs they take to the slaughterhouse every year, she was proud of their low 5 percent loss rate, meaning that approximately 900 pigs die annually in the few months between being delivered to the farm as piglets and being trucked to the kill floor at six months old. Five percent is significantly lower than the average contract farmer, and looking over the numbers on paper together, as she poured me a second glass, I felt pulled between the real sorrows and tremendous ingenuity of the woman in front of me, and the elegance of printed statistics that hide hundreds of bodies who literally suffer to death before they can even make it onto transport trucks.

I visited the Asian African grocer on the town square serving the growing population of West African immigrants and Burmese refugees working at Farmland. I chatted with old-time locals at the main street pub who said they'd always hoped for a grocery store on the main drag, but that a shop selling Asian curry pastes and African chili peppers wasn't quite what they had in mind. I met with the local school district's head of grant writing, charged with securing yearly funding for the school's expanding Limited English Proficient, or LEP, student population. I met with nurses and police officers developing translation services for those community members who speak any of the fourteen languages used at Farmland. I talked with West African Muslims at the regional mosque carpooling to the kill floor, and the Christian aid organization resettling refugees in towns with slaughterhouse since English is not required. I sat in the Spanish mass of the Monmouth Catholic Church, serving a Latino population since the early 1900s, a community that surged in the 1990s when the kill floor closed its doors temporarily to force out the union and reopened with lower-paying positions that workers from Mexico,

Cuba, and Puerto Rico were glad to take. I spent two afternoons with the Burmese minister tending the community of refugees staffing the kill floor. On one hand, Monmouth is a new home for Christian refugees escaping the persecution of the Burmese military, and later the chaos of refugee camps. The Burmese community is almost entirely employed by Farmland. At the same time, the work is physically demanding and mentally draining. Each Wednesday, the minister tells me, they have a prayer group in which they pray for their families back home, pray for their success in this new place, for their children to do well in school, and for any other employer to come into the area who will hire workers who cannot speak English.

I always carried a pen and camera, jumping a fence to snag shots of the hidden waste facility, a dead-pile of pigs when riding with a local hog farmer past growing sheds. I jotted notes on bar coasters, in chats in the grocery store aisles, and at the local open mic night. “How many of the contrasts and contradictions of life can you take in without being disorganized, thrown, or broke?” process thinker Bernard Loomer asks.<sup>7</sup> Maybe too many, I thought at times.

The truth is that I wanted to burn the place down. I imagined paying one of the endless transport truck drivers to reroute to my pasture for a media event, staging a human chain at the gates, protesting with a persuasively worded sign, infiltrating the system and taking out the CO<sub>2</sub> machine that asphyxiated the pigs. It is one thing to accept the “perpetual perishing” (PR, 340) of time, or even Whitehead’s truism that “life is robbery” (Ibid., 105), but the socially sanctioned torture of animals from birth to premature death is another thing altogether, and all the more when you are within arm’s reach of the faces being trucked there. All this beside the seemingly benevolent exploitation of non-English-speaking workers, the environmental pollution associated with confined hog operations, the glut of land and resources used to grow corn and soy only intended for livestock consumption, and the gradual buy-out of middle America by foreign interests, millionaire farmers, and corporate agriculture.

I stood between those killed and those driving the killing; and at least in the case of some immigrants and refugees, those building new lives on the kill floor, all agents of America’s evolving heartland. The persistent challenge was how to offer an expression of witness between an absolute ethical affirmation of the inviolability of these marginalized bodies, “lives” according to Judith Butler, that “are not quite, or indeed are never recognized as lives” on one side, and the need to stay in relationship with the other bodies whom I sought to learn from and persuade on the other.<sup>8</sup> “The task of reason,” writes Whitehead, “is to fathom the deeper depths of the many-sidedness of things” (PR, 342). This activity of witness requires holding together conflicting threads of pigs, people, place, and personal experience if we are to understand the many expressions demanding their due.

## DEPENDING ON THE DISTASTEFUL

*I eat meat,  
she said.*

*I eat it.  
So I should see it,*

*As though the vision expunged the trespass  
in this mechanized terror.*

*Like darśana, I ask?  
The auspicious glimpse  
of a holy being,*

*as gazing upon a statue of Vishnu,  
or Buddha,  
even Jesus or Mary,  
or the Jain saint Mahāvīra,  
said to let dogs attack him  
while he sat meditating?*

*Maybe, she said,  
but these are no gods.*

*How can you be so sure?*

It is not popular to see the many-sidedness of things. Perhaps it never has been. The earliest Jain philosophers recognized this and put forth the concept of *anekāntavāda*, or non-one-sided view, to assert their superiority over rival views.<sup>9</sup> These competing claims included Advaita Vedānta's emphasis on all-one Brahman or the Buddhist notion of momentariness. Reality was both persistent *and* changing, according to Jain thought; like mashing up Empedocles's view on the unchanging elements with Heraclitus's continually changing river. One-sided views, Jain sages argued, are partially true, but incomplete. To prevent the violence of exclusive claims, according to this aspect of Jain logic, every assertion must be complemented by its opposing possibilities, in a practice of conditional assertion (*syādvāda*).<sup>10</sup> But first one must learn to anticipate that opposition.

Anticipating opposition is as normal as breathing for those holding a minority view. While we may wish it otherwise, people benefiting from a dominant perspective or practice have little incentive to rock the boat of the status quo. Social change, and the evolution of consciousness and institutions,

often emerges from subordinate perspectives gaining access to, and eventual traction within, the mainstream.

At its best, the U.S. Constitution, namely the First Amendment, protects marginalized views from the tyranny of the majority—and also protects the majority from the tyranny of the minority—stating that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.” Their shortcomings and prejudices notwithstanding (but also too little understood), the founding fathers anticipated human limitations, and envisioned a democracy to serve the majority, while protecting the possibility of alternate views. In spite of their imperfect practice, the civil liberties laid out in the First Amendment have time and again enabled dissenting voices to challenge unjust laws, to argue against bias, to demand fair treatment, and to put forth persuasive moral arguments in courts and public spaces.

Some of these views can certainly be deemed distasteful. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), for example, is well known for defending individuals caught on the wrong side of tyrannical views or fears. The ACLU got its start in 1920, fighting illegal arrests and deportation of alleged communist sympathizers. The organization played a key role in the Scopes trial to teach evolution in schools (1925), fought against the unlawful internment of Japanese Americans (1942), challenged school segregation based on race (1954), defended women’s privacy in decisions regarding pregnancy (1973), and have continuously safeguarded LGBTQ rights, among countless other cases. What is easily forgotten, however, is that one of the defining events in the ACLU’s history occurred in 1978 when they defended a Nazi group that sought to march through Skokie, Illinois, home to many Holocaust survivors. The ACLU successively petitioned a federal court to overturn three laws that restricted the Nazi’s First Amendment right to assemble and share their views. The Skokie case offers a crucial reminder that civil liberties must be protected for all minority views, however distasteful we find them, if we want those liberties to be ensured for views we support or hold.

This fact became clear to me in 2009 when I was removed from a university campus in southern California for handing out leaflets on factory farming, as part of my job with Vegan Outreach. It is common that campus security officers, staff, and even professors do not understand free speech laws on public campuses or grounds. While most campuses did appreciate the law and permitted me to leaflet untroubled, I was frequently asked to stand in a certain designated space—usually well away from heavy foot traffic—or stay away from building entrances, or to leave campus altogether, all of which were violations of the First Amendment. Often these requests were justified to “protect students.”

But protect students from what? Being interrupted on their walk with provocative ideas? Being uncomfortable when confronted with a document asking them to consider information? Don't get me wrong, I did not set out to be a public leafletter; far from it. Not only had I cast mental pity upon some poor sap handing me a pamphlet in the past—even veered away to avoid contact—but I felt profoundly drained by too much social exposure and had never considered such a role. Nevertheless, campuses are precisely the place where provocative ideas can gain footing, and I overrode my discomfort with being “one of those people” when I took the job because I saw the impact among students hungry to think about their ethical identities, preparing to embark on paths of vocation, buying power, and productive civic skepticism.

Certain schools would adjust their policy merely by our initiating a formal communication. In 2009, we filed a legal case against one school system, whose restrictions spanned three campuses, and we won. For those who care about the ideas represented in those leaflets, this ruling would be considered a victory. For those who find the ideas foolish or threatening, the ruling might be seen as a loss. Opening any space for its rightful expression of free speech means that ideas that we do not like will gain access to that space. In as much as I could now leaflet freely, so could those with ideas on abortion, religious truths, immigration attitudes, homeless pets, minimum wage, among many other moral and social opinions. This diversity is precisely the point.

Free speech, press, and assembly is meant to protect citizens from an imposed homogeneity of ideas and beliefs. Explicit in these protections is (1) the affirmation that societies, communities, and individuals will be richer for the existence of diverse life visions, values, and ways of being human, even if one chooses to ignore them, and (2) that citizens, including adult-age students, are capable of evaluating what speaks for and against the propositions they encounter, and do not need to be protected from ideas, conceptual disturbances, ethical disputes, and moral opinions. This is especially true for contemporary students on U.S. campuses, where the primary purpose of the university, if it is to retain any value in society, must be to allow students' exposure to as many conflicting views as possible, and give them the tools to evaluate and respond to those views.

If a campus is to be a “safe space,” it should be safe in the sense of allowing students to encounter a proliferation of affronting ideas, and not a management of them. Of course, bodily safety is essential, and the causal relations between “hate speech” and harm remain woefully imprecise. But institutionalizing protection from intellectual offense, cultural insult, or hurt feelings is a shortsightedness that ultimately forecloses avenues of dissemination that may be needed by those with alternate perspectives, either now or yet to come. Students must be empowered to anticipate oppositional views and to actively practice engaging conflict in the boundaries of campus life.

As Whitehead puts it, “You must be free to think rightly and wrongly, and free to appreciate the variousness of the universe undisturbed by its perils” (AI, 93). As institutions, universities reflect many social ills and are far from ideal. Still, engaging conflicting propositions inside the university, or in its surrounding communities, prepares students to meet conflicts beyond those borders, where ideas and actions may be much more distasteful, homogenous, and dangerous.

Thus, it pains me when students seek action from administrators to police an intellectual space or to silence distasteful views. It pains me, not because I do not recognize the emotional harm and fatigue felt by students with minority identities or stifled perspectives who do not see a way to productively communicate their experience with others. A colleague of mine recently wrote on a public forum that she would no longer explain feminism to men who should educate themselves. Similar claims have been made in regard to race and those with social privilege. I certainly understand that exhaustion, and the temptation to refuse educating and persuading others about systemic advantage and suppression. As an advocate working against animal, human, and environmental destruction in agriculture, as well as militarism, there is no space I enter that is not full of distasteful dominating views. Yet, if I walk away from the conversation because people are not educating themselves with information that is readily available, or because they are biting into a hamburger, the status quo will reign. Well-informed advocacy requires entanglement with conflicting propositions.

There have been innumerable academic cases recently closing down free speech and debate. Each is complex and often speaks to a history of institutional discrimination and unaddressed multiplicity, subtle and explicit. The 2015 University of Missouri protests demonstrate the importance of preserving civil liberties to express minoritarian views. Without such a space, concerned students could not have assembled to raise grievances about a series of racially hostile events that had occurred over the previous five years. This made it all the more troubling when activist students and faculty sought to keep reporters out, a decision they later modified.<sup>11</sup> In December 2015, Erika Christakis, a Yale teacher and magister at one of the residential colleges, resigned after ongoing student backlash regarding an email she sent discouraging the administration from censoring Halloween costumes that might provoke cultural offense. She wrote in the letter:

Even if we could agree on how to avoid offense—and I’ll note that no one around campus seems overly concerned about the offense taken by religiously conservative folks to skin-revealing costumes—I wonder, and I am not trying to be provocative: Is there no room anymore for a child or young person to be a little bit obnoxious . . . a little bit inappropriate or provocative or, yes, offensive?

She continues:

American universities were once a safe space not only for maturation but also for a certain regressive, or even transgressive, experience; increasingly, it seems, they have become places of censure and prohibition. And the censure and prohibition come from above, not from yourselves! Are we all okay with this transfer of power? Have we lost faith in young people's capacity—in your capacity—to exercise self-censure, through social norming, and also in your capacity to ignore or reject things that trouble you?<sup>12</sup>

In 2016–2017, similar events took place at Trinity College, Evergreen College, Middlebury College, University of Delaware, Northwestern University, and Essex County College.<sup>13</sup> Sometimes students closed down free speech, such as when students at Claremont McKenna College blockaded a venue preventing pro-policing speaker Heather MacDonald and audience members' entry.<sup>14</sup> Sometimes university administration was the culprit as when students at Kellogg Community College were arrested for handing out copies of the Constitution without filing a student permit.<sup>15</sup> Even faculty have been chilling free speech, as in the recent call for the feminist journal *Hypatia* to retract Rhodes College professor Rebecca Tuvel's essay on transracialism, with an open letter signed by over 800 academics stating that the article's online availability caused ongoing harm.<sup>16</sup> The editor stood behind the article and peer-review process, but members of the editorial board issued a broad apology for the offense and the editor has since stepped down.<sup>17</sup> To my mind, the position espoused in this open letter is indefensible on three fronts. First, if the academy is no longer a space to explore, and to teach students how to explore, unpopular, controversial, and minoritarian views that bear on social issues in a structured way, it will finally fade into irrelevance. Second, there is nothing preventing any one of the 800 academics from picking up a pen and writing a robust rebuttal to Tuvel's piece, and emulating the tools needed to dispute a position by putting forth their superior alternative. Third, demanding the removal of an article from an online space to prevent mental discomfort merely closes the doors that alternate views and communities use to have their own voices heard. Rather than raise the tenor of debate, acts such as these foreclose multiple views, enfeeble democracy, and stunt ethical rigor.

Distasteful views are the soil of social evolution, and the practice of witnessing that I consider here requires that we all become tenders of the dirt. In Monmouth, I depended regularly on multiple people to permit me access to their perspectives and work, so that I might have the fullest understanding possible of a complex system that I ultimately want to dismantle. I rode with a driver-for hire to dump a semi-trailer's worth of corn into a Japanese-owned granary while he told me how pigs were smart and mean; how he couldn't



blame them for fighting back when he loaded them up, but ultimately “they’re just hogs.” I interviewed an undocumented worker who was employed at the slaughterhouse for a decade before they tightened their employment verification policies; “I could do every job at Farmland,” he said, “They gave me special training . . . I worked 60, 70 hours a week whenever I could because that’s what I came here to do.” I befriended a grain farmer, a self-identified Christian, who believed industrial animal farming was immoral, even as he knew that 80 percent of corn<sup>18</sup> and 70 percent of soy grown in the United States goes to feed livestock.<sup>19</sup> “I just grow it,” he said, “I can’t control what happens after that.” Each of these people shared aspects of their lives with me, their belief and hopes, their practical realities, economic strains, and personal vulnerabilities, some much more exposed than others.

In very real ways, my worldview and those of the people who tangibly participate at various levels in the machinery of industrial animal agriculture—and its concurrent system of worker exploitation and ecological destruction—are pretty far apart. But in keeping with *anekāntavāda*, from another opposing perspective, we have some things in common, whether those be our shared love of 1960s girl bands, our common understanding of loss and anxiety, or even our collective entanglement in systems from which we cannot fully extract ourselves. Like any good education should, asserts Whitehead, these conversations demanded “[t]he evocation of curiosity, of judgment, of the power of mastering a complicated tangle of circumstances” (AE, 5). Their stories confronted me with conflicting propositions of people who simultaneously have different and overlapping values to mine and there was much for me to learn in the space between.

As Nietzsche put it, “The surest way to corrupt a youth is to instruct him to hold in higher esteem those who think alike than those who think differently.”<sup>20</sup> I have feared that this acknowledgement, this sitting down with the Other, would make me relativist. But it has made me, I believe, a more informed advocate, better prepared to speak with colleagues or adversaries and strategize on behalf of my communities of concern.

The tension between relativism and resistance is epitomized in a recent documentary titled “Accidental Courtesy” (2016) chronicling African American musician Daryl Davis’s many years of meeting with and befriending members of the Ku Klux Klan in order to influence their transformation, represented in his substantial collection of KKK robes and memorabilia he has accepted from reformed members.<sup>21</sup> By extending the courtesy of listening, Davis suggests, even to personal narratives or ideology one finds disdainful, we may receive the courtesy in return, finding that in the mundane exchange of conversation, we may have the ability to influence others in profound ways toward our alternate vision. The film captures a meeting between Davis and Black Lives Matter (BLM) activists. Their goals are ostensibly similar—to

redress deep inequities and violence toward people of color that persist in U.S. culture and institutions. Yet, the BLM activists viewed Davis as selling out and wasting decades chatting with bigots rather than engaging in direct actions to confront systems, exemplified in the Ferguson, Missouri, protests after the shooting of unarmed eighteen-year-old Michael Brown by police officer Darren Wilson. BLM activists were heatedly skeptical of anything positive coming from dialog, while Davis believed that dialog was the foundation of eroding institutions of hate. What good does it do a black teen on the street getting arrested in Ferguson for Davis to become pals with a racist in Arkansas? On the flip side, how will society move forward together if “white people” or the Other are seen as one-dimensional enemies unable to change? What values and tools guide one’s attempt to master Whitehead’s “complicated tangle of circumstances”? (AE, 5).

## THE ART AND EDUCATION OF WITNESS

*Grandma told me that those  
animals were different,  
“Raised for food,”  
she said.*

*And I loved her  
lifting the lid—  
leaves of thyme and  
crushed marjoram  
stirred into butter  
as a best kept secret  
that left so much out.*

*Bodies frozen to  
truck metal in winter,  
knives that pried loose the  
pink flesh, still hopeful,  
stumbling toward  
a myth of freedom  
on limbs too weak to carry their  
longings.*

*That we might  
could tell the truth of this  
to our children  
and  
to one another.*

As an advocate, I see the value of two kinds of courage. The first is the courage to resist, and to put one's body in a public space on behalf of values one believes essential to the experience of being human-in-community. Sometimes there is no way to dialog, nor any person able to hear—especially when power is vastly askew. Boycotts, sit-ins, and protests become the embodied expression for that “sacred no” that erodes our hope in life and community. The second is the practice of engaged witness in which we practice turning toward the Other to understand their view on the world as well or even better than they themselves may. By this, we make ourselves vulnerable to the many-sidedness of things for the sake of advancing a more comprehensive alternative. These two modes can certainly work together, and there is also value in having the skillful means to know which is most needful in a particular circumstance. But it is important that students have the opportunity to develop and practice the skills needed for the second kind of courage.

So I put it to students in several ways. Make a website of the town, I assigned, with each student tackling an underexplored topic: Spanish-speaking immigrants in Monmouth, Burmese refugees, the history of minority students on campus, the evolution of women on campus, the town's founding, the Native American artifact collection, the cicadas screeching from the campus oak trees each fall, the crumbling cemetery on the corner, the slaughterhouse, the life of pigs.<sup>22</sup> In another class, students interviewed vegetarian faculty, students, and community members, creating a public art show in which they conducted interviews, took photos, and ultimately curated an exhibit featuring these alternate voices.<sup>23</sup> In another course, students studied a life form in their habitat first by its biology, then its myriad relations, cycles, and processes, and its history of existence to see how their understanding of something deemed so simple could quickly explode in complexity, transforming their vision of something once ignored.

Philosophy and religious studies has its share of crucial book knowledge, but all of it can become mere “inert ideas” (AE, 1), as Whitehead puts it in *The Aims of Education*, if it cannot translate into engagement in the world. “[T]heoretical ideas should always find important applications within the pupil's curriculum,” he asserts, “This is not an easy doctrine to apply, but a very hard one. It contains within itself the problem of keeping knowledge alive, of preventing it from becoming inert, which is the central problem of all education” (Ibid., 5).

This practice of witness is an essential task of higher education, a task that transcends discipline and specialization. As Whitehead describes, “Education is the acquisition of the art of the utilization of knowledge. This is an art very difficult to impart” (AE, 4). Developing the concrete skills of observing one's surroundings, looking for the unseen, speaking to a stranger, training

oneself to define terms through multiple sources, to create accurate citations, to use libraries and online resources to seek diverse perspectives, to evaluate the quality of those views, to strive to understand their deep motivating concerns—these skills are hard to acquire. They require time from faculty, additional in-class lessons, the articulation of relevance, skill-building assignments, scaffolded writing projects that build on one another, close grading, and expose professors to critical evaluations. Yet, these skills provide tools that are translatable to innumerable situations, essential for creating alternatives and responses to what we care about most. “In subsequent practice,” says Whitehead, students “will have forgotten your particular details; but they will remember by an unconscious common sense how to apply principles to immediate circumstances” (Ibid., 26).

Coping with the complexities, beauties, and tragedies of our worlds is a necessary undertaking for academics. Being witness to injustices and sorrows, often beyond our individual making, but of which we are a part, can feel immobilizing. Yet, that is the precise range of skills needed to embark on “a process of discovery,” writes Whitehead, “a process of becoming used to curious thoughts, of shaping questions, of seeking for answers, of devising new experiences, of noticing what happens as the result of new ventures” (Ibid., 32).

In my private moments at Monmouth, I invented new forms of what Whitehead might call “religion in the making”: lighting incense, writing, ritualizing an experience with a couple of Jägermeister shots on occasion, and even, when all else failed, reciting an ancient mantra of the Jains of India which is said to be the most powerful and efficacious. It was, I suppose, “a sort of groping experimentation,” as Deleuze and Guattari put it, that may not appear “very respectable, rational, or reasonable.”<sup>24</sup>

On an April morning in 2016, headed out of Monmouth for a six-hour trek to Minneapolis, the practice of witness emerged again. Passing transit trucks bound for the kill house was old hat. At 180 bodies per truck, the math added up fast, toward the thousands killed each day. Sometimes I even saw trucks loaded with genetically modified piglets from the regional breeding facility—1,800 per truck—bound for a local family farm as the new batch to be killed through in 6 months. Not expecting to pass much beyond the typical inbound loads that April day, I had only an old iPod, its grainy camera suddenly put to use to follow a truck strangely headed *out of town* and only partially full, as it lumbered toward the Iowa border, the largest pork producer in the nation, killing 4.2 billion pigs each year. Images from the camera joined words stumbling out of my mind creating a visual speech event that contained countless experiences and realities of the past, composed in a digital story a few days later, of which I put the words and selection of images here.

*Exit 261*

*I decided I would love you  
on highway 34 West  
headed to Burlington,  
on the second level of the  
Lenon Farms, Incorporated truck  
from Eureka, IL.*

*I pretended I had known you  
all along  
and here I was  
following close  
to be sure you arrived at the beautiful place  
we were going together.*

*When the truck hit a bump,  
you stumbled,  
pink flesh pressed cold and red through the metal slats,  
and I cringed,  
“We’re almost there,” I thought to you.*

*When you poked your nose through, I smiled,  
knowing its shape,  
eager for my hand upon your familiar snout,  
feeling your ear,  
now flapping through the oval cut-out in this bitter wind,  
from a thousand imagined strokes  
of that one spot that made you twist your spine with pleasure.*

*Reminding me again that all the stories were right  
when they said that the wise  
see Brahman or Krishna in all things,  
Jesus in a lamb, the memories of gods  
gone  
in all things  
manifest,*

*these bodies  
vibrant,  
electric with the truth of living,  
wanting, reaching, pain, and the tiny delights  
incarnating what cannot be seen,  
in the sacred sighs of skin touched  
by hand or thought.*

*Once I saw you, silly friend,  
stamp your feet and knock into the others,  
moving them out of your way.  
I knew you were impatient for greening grass,  
for the crackled straw you loved so well,  
the split rail fence you'd lean upon  
as the April evenings grew long into May, and June, and the rest.*

*Nearing the bridge at the Mississippi, the sun flared  
bright upon us both, and I knew you'd lift  
your face to soak it in, these rays glinting off the water  
that Mark Twain compared to  
medicine for the sick.*

*The driver moved over once,  
giving me leave to go,  
but I would not pass  
because I was with you,  
riding with you  
to that new place,  
though the fear and shit flecked  
upon my windshield,  
the stench through the vents,  
we would go together.*

*Over the silent currents  
where the bald eagles  
coasted in winter, roosted high  
above the pocket islands where  
Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn crawled ashore as  
you would scramble onto spring clover  
soon enough.*

*I knew you'd sleep first, shaking off the roughness of this ride,  
the uncertain sea legs, finding your footing  
on solid ground,  
shaded by redbuds  
and the leaning Hickory  
that would have to come down before too long.*

*I, too, was tired from wincing at every  
crush and tumble  
dreaming my head against your side,  
weary,  
a forgetful hand combing through the coarse hair of your belly,*

*after applying salve to places  
bitten raw by the truck's sharp teeth.*

*I would drift off to your grumbles of complaint  
slowed to grunts of  
ease nestled  
in the respite of friendship,  
patterned dandelions speckling the hillside,  
secrets shared amid  
creatures so little known.*

*Until the driver flashed his blinker,  
lumbering slowly onto Exit 261,  
the bodies heaved and rolling as though  
on a steamboat rocked by a fallen timber  
menacing under the water's surface,  
vital cargo transported to ruin.*

*The pictures suddenly grainy,  
as pink faded ashen,  
by distance between us that  
cannot be forgiven,  
but merely seen,  
toward a place that I cannot go  
and you should never have to.*

*Always wishing for you to tell me more  
and better  
the sounds and shapes  
of what it is to love  
the spectral forms,  
these ghosting stones,  
residing in the blind spots  
of being human.*

Such responses will not solve nor absolve the shadowed systems in which we are bound. But they strain to reflect the many-sidedness of our worlds, and exceed the surface of our inclinations, so that our utterances display an intimacy with the contradictions we experience. This “first-hand knowledge,” per Whitehead, “is the ultimate basis of intellectual life”:

To a large extent book-learning conveys second-hand information, and as such can never rise to the importance of immediate practice . . . The second-handedness of the learned world is the secret of its mediocrity. It is tame because it has never been scared by facts. (AE, 50–51)



**Figure 7.1 Looking out. U.S. 34, near Monmouth, IL. April 8, 2016.** Credit: B. Donaldson; full digital story at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=178VvLIBtw>.

The pursuit of first-hand knowledge, and the willingness to be scared by competing facts as they emerge in our communities, is perhaps another way of conceiving the practice of witness, “[T]hat eye for the whole chess-board, for the bearing of one set of ideas on another” (Ibid., 12). In this game, “Education is



**Figure 7.2 Lone pig on upper level of transport truck westbound, U.S. 34, near Monmouth, IL. April 8, 2016.** Credit: B. Donaldson; full digital story at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=178VvLIBtw>.



the guidance of the individual towards a comprehension of the art of life,” writes Whitehead, “and by the art of life I mean the most complete achievement of varied activity expressing the potentialities of that living creature in the face of its actual environment” (Ibid., 39). He continues, “Each individual embodies an adventure of existence. The art of life is the guidance of this adventure” (Ibid., 40). Providing tools for this journey is one of the supreme aims of education.

## LAST THOUGHTS

*Could I stop it if I sat outside the gates of the slaughterhouse,  
I asked him.*

*If I invited  
a thousand people  
to circle the building, and cordon off the entries?*

*If I synchronized plans to  
destroy the machines inside?*

*Paid drivers to reroute  
to pastures green?*

*Yes, he said,  
for an hour,  
or a day,  
even a week,  
you could stop it,  
and for those bodies it might make all the difference.*

*But the lines will resume,  
the machines be repaired,  
the trucks rerouted,  
and more will take the place of those spared.*

*Then what do I do?, I cried.  
And cried  
You write, he said.  
Dream  
a different world*

*into life.*

There was not one event that created industrial animal agriculture. This is true of all systems. They did not fall from on high, and their dismantling will require a multitude of responses, courageous expressions from you and I, from policies, access to and interest in alternatives, and cultivating new traditions by those who heed the resistant voices of pigs, or the equivalent callings that nag upon us. Such novelty, says Whitehead, requires the conceptual power to imagine an alternative and the practical power to effect it (MT, 30).

Witnessing is an imprecise mode of thought and practice; a joining between the “interdependence of thought [with] its expressive activities” amid conflicting propositions (MT, 36). And it often can feel utterly useless, struggling to maintain a moral primacy for vulnerabilities that are not at all equal. The vulnerability of workers’ livelihoods, for example, when held against life itself, are not the same expressions of exposure, nor are they accompanied by the same sounds of sensory sorrow. But all of them *are* expressions. How does one balance these expressions within the practices of witness, with the aim through language, as Whitehead puts it “to convey the [particular] identities on which knowledge is based” (Ibid., 39)? How do we learn to tell myriad stories at once for their own sake and toward the “uprise of civilization” (Ibid.)?

“All struggle,” states Nietzsche, “and everything that happens is a struggle,” he assures us, “takes time.”<sup>25</sup> The recourse to time can sound like a recipe for passive patience by those in the status quo, even as it is a truism that tempers visions of tyranny born in the hope for immediate, coercive change. Nietzsche warned of the temptation to become the perpetrators of the very injustice we hope to transform, promising that “Whoever fights with monsters should see to it that he does not become one himself. And when you stare for a long time into an abyss, the abyss stares back into you.”<sup>26</sup> We stand amid the exclusions of the present imagining futures of less obstruction. Such “[i]magination is a contagious disease,” affirms Whitehead, “It can only be communicated by a faculty whose members themselves wear their learning with imagination. The whole art in the organization of a university is the provision of a faculty whose learning is lighted up with imagination” (AE, 97).

I suggest that the art and education of witness among conflicting propositions is a practice for faculty and students alike, and all citizens existing in multifaceted worlds. Our possible futures depend on resisting the tyranny of homogeneity in order to embrace the discomforting many-sidedness of things, toward productive disharmonies, proliferations of entangled freedoms that coexist and enrich with less obstruction. Our practices should reflect our improbable visions and state those goals unambiguously. We gift ourselves and each other with the tools and confidence to thrill to this uneasy task.

## NOTES

1. The poems throughout this chapter are my own and are published here for the first time.
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## Chapter 8

# Communities Keep the Dream Alive as Proposition?

Timothy Murphy

Like much of Alfred North Whitehead's philosophy, the concept of propositions functions in a way that is counterintuitive to common sense. In common discourse, propositions are akin to hypotheses. They are evaluated and deemed worthwhile to the extent that they conform to some truth or empirical reality. However, for Whitehead, propositions reflect a very different insight. He does not trust the notion that a proposition can reflect a self-sustaining objective fact, even with precise language (PR, 11). As is said in *Process and Reality*, "It is more important that a proposition be interesting than that it be true" (Ibid., 259).

Propositions are akin to what are known as potentials in Whiteheadian philosophy. For Whitehead, potentials are in some ways more important than actuality, because through them novelty occurs in our world. To say that it is more important that a proposition be interesting than true is to say that it is more important that it can serve as a potential for some novel value to become actualized than that it has already been actualized in the world.

In this essay, the knot I am wrestling with concerns the need for social transformation and its seemingly perpetually deferred actualization. In particular, this refers to the need to overcome capitalism and its many devastating impacts, especially on ecology and communities of color. As many have observed, criticisms of the systems in which we find ourselves tend to be stronger than the recommendations of alternatives, or those very alternatives do not currently exist within power dynamics that allow for their implementation. Where does that leave those of us who wish to overturn the dominant paradigms that structure our world? Could it be that the best we can hope for is the formation of communities that point toward that transformation and keep alive the dream that another world is possible?



My hypothesis is that these communities of hope are acting as propositions for the world, real potentials that—while not yet true—are indeed interesting. It is not essential that they “be” the proposition as an actuality. What matters is that they “hold” the proposition for the sake of the planet in order that it might be felt positively at some point.

By hope, I do not mean its often-used popular synonym—optimism. Optimism is that ever-American instinct that even if progress is not a straight line, nevertheless little-by-little we see gradual improvements over time. Optimism is a fundamental faith in temporal progress over the long term. Such optimism flies in the face of historical inequities, which not only remain stable, but are sometimes exacerbated through time. While some things become better, some things become worse. Hope, as I understand it, is grounded in a conviction that things that happen did not have to be the way they are, nor does the future necessarily have to look like the present, only more so. Following the process-theologian Monica Coleman, who herself uses a popular phrase from the African American religious tradition, it is about “making a way out of no way.”<sup>1</sup> Hope is the potential for surprising, unexpected transformation in the form of novelty despite the present lack of evidence; it is the affirmation philosophically of real potentials for feeling. This understanding of hope is fully consistent with communities as proposition; I suggest that it is crucial in their function of articulating that another world is possible.

One can rightly ask whether this is a sufficient answer. Many organizations certainly focus on actualizable reforms that concretely improve the quality of life for many people and communities. These efforts include advocacy for policies such as requiring living wages for workers, restricting oil drilling within a certain distance from homes or schools, and many other sensible reforms. Such efforts should indeed continue and receive assistance when there is a good chance that they can be actualized. They surely complement efforts for larger structural changes and sometimes build momentum for those larger changes to occur. If understood solely as a feeling without subsequent action, communities of hope would be a hollow answer to the desperate needs facing our world. Yet, rather than engendering a passive waiting for a better time to arrive, they demand a passionate expression of that not-yet world in spite of the evidence. Through the course of this chapter, the examples given lie decidedly among groups engaged in direct action for a better world, regardless of its immanent actualization or not. Rather than passive acquiescence, they elicit passionate action. Sometimes, to the shock of onlookers, the supposedly impossible becomes real potentials that may become empirically true.

The dilemma should not be misunderstood: my concern is *not* whether a full transformation is a historically achievable goal. In fact, a final, perfect transformation that is complete and unchanging does not even make sense in terms of process philosophy’s understanding of history’s open-endedness.

The proper question is whether such propositional communities, and especially their construction and perpetuation, are the best immediate answer for keeping the dream of a better world alive? Communities keeping the dream alive as a proposition points toward the collective effort to articulate the change they wish to actualize. If such communities are one critical way forward in a world of profound oppression and domination, then what are the necessary steps to build new communities of such visionary praxis, and/or strengthen existing ones?

### **THINKING ALONGSIDE SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND ACTIVIST COMMUNITIES**

Through teaching graduate seminary courses around the issues of poverty, inequality, immigration, and racism, I have found that students persistently come back to the question of “what’s the solution?” As part of these classes, students analyze how systems of power operate, learn new concepts for understanding persistent inequality (such as “thick injustice”), and apply those terms and concepts to challenges they see in our world.<sup>2</sup> I encourage classes to incorporate theological themes into this work, often looking at our understanding of structural sin, the meaning of salvation, the eschatological implications, the activity of the divine, and the role of religious communities and institutions. Conversations are fruitful and students better understand our world and their role in responding to injustice by the conclusion of the semester. Nevertheless, students are rarely satisfied.

When students push for potential solutions to seemingly unsolvable problems, sometimes a policy recommendation is possible. For example, in terms of diminishing gaping wealth disparities, a solution like the economist Thomas Piketty’s global tax on wealth and progressive taxation on income would, in theory, greatly reduce such disparities.<sup>3</sup> However, such solutions rarely sit well with students for long. Yes, a policy may be good on paper, but there is no viable way to implement it. Many such solutions require a bracketing of political viability or suspension of disbelief. Essentially, every solution that begins with “If only people would . . .” follows this paradigm; they are utopian.

Perhaps that is the point. The academy’s strength often lies in critiquing what is. A scholar learns in part to be able to analyze a system or school of thought to reveal its underlying assumptions and potential flaws. More often than not, seemingly rational justifications back up existing power systems and the status quo. These in turn deny certain values that process philosophy and liberationist ethics affirm, like multiplicity and difference. Unmasking these dynamics is itself an arduous task that requires persistent attention and

always risks ignoring some previously unacknowledged assumption. Fundamentally, it is well and good to critique what is. However, that method alone remains insufficient. A deconstructive methodology is essential to loosen up previously uncriticized assumptions. Yet, once these assumptions are broken down, what is left?

I am reminded of what my colleague Damayanthi Niles once said: “The problems are worse than ever, but the existing alternatives seem inadequate.” She was referring specifically to neoliberal globalization—the Cold War is long over, and institutionalized socialism in numerous states was lost and seemingly discredited. As the former U.K. prime minister Margaret Thatcher said bluntly in regards to free-market capitalism, “There is no alternative.” Even so, the problem extends beyond that particular example. State-sponsored socialism is not a viable alternative to free-market capitalism in light of the experience of the Soviet Union and its satellites. Democratic socialism remains compelling as a theoretical abstraction, but has never been successfully implemented on a national level for any durable length of time, much less on an international or transnational basis. More cooperative, grassroots socialist systems have remained small in scale. Likewise, each institutionalized system of racism that is at some point deconstructed intellectually and structurally finds another way to perpetuate itself. Chattel slavery became Jim Crow segregation. *De jure* segregation via policies like redlining became *de facto* segregation through white flight from cities. Affirmative action policies were coupled with a growing wealth gap between races and racialized mass criminalization of the New Jim Crow, which continues to this very day.<sup>4</sup> The problems are indeed as great as they ever were, but the solutions are difficult to come by.

Across several relatively independent movements and thinkers, I have observed a pattern of turning to community as the place where hope resides. This is especially true where hope for immediate resolution of grievances is not readily apparent. Allow me to provide three examples: the Dakota Access Pipeline organizing, the Black Lives Matter movement, and left-wing immigrant rights theorists.

The first example involves the Standing Rock Sioux Nation’s fight against the Dakota Access Pipeline. This struggle was not simply of a single indigenous nation rising up to resist the pipeline and its ecological and cultural threat. Over the course of 2016, we witnessed the largest intertribal gathering of support and solidarity since General George Custer’s defeat at the Battle of Little Bighorn over 140 years ago. While the immediate purpose of the activism was to stop the pipeline project and protect water, there was a second, long-term feature as well. Gathering in North Dakota involved encampments, prayer rituals, and direct actions, but it was perhaps equally about indigenous organizing. In fact, after the encampment dispersed and the

Obama administration temporarily halted construction (an apparent victory), various tribal organizers returned to their particular settings, promising to fight fossil fuel infrastructure projects in their own backyards. In the still-to-be-resolved cycles of legal victories, setbacks, suits, additional rulings, and reviews, it remains uncertain what the final fate of the Dakota Access Pipeline or other proposed pipelines will be.<sup>5</sup> Will water, as well as the communities that depend on it, finally be recognized as sacred and having value? “Water Is Life” is a chant, but it is also a proposition that implies that at some point, water will be treated with the respect that it deserves. In their actions and organizing, First Nation peoples became locations that hold alternative propositions around relationships with land, water, and one another.

One can see similar dynamics with the Black Lives Matter (BLM) organization. There are the regular expressions of outrage and grief amid the persistent killing of unarmed Black persons at the hands of police officers. There are demands for reforms of use-of-force policies and interruptions of daily life among the majority population that try to let such events pass swiftly from view. While organizing in response to state-sponsored violence against Black bodies is its public face, the formation of collective spaces of sharing through music, testimony, and cultural expression are important features as well. At the BLM actions I have witnessed, there follows a general pattern. First, an immediate grievance is given voice, which may involve several speakers informing attendees and the media about a specific instance. This usually includes the name of someone who was killed by police as well as the basic facts around the killing, for example, someone was having a mental health crisis, and the family called 911 to help the person in crisis. Criticisms of state-sponsored violence are invoked, including chants and testimonies of people who knew the victim. Sometimes, if there are clergy present, a prayer will be given for the individual, the individual’s family, and the community. But afterward, the tone of the event often changes. Instead of focusing on the grievance itself, the action often morphs into a witness of resilience and power among the community. This is often done through testimonies from an open mike, songs that people sing, and expressions of life through dance. What is implicit in all of this, and sometimes explicit, is a proposition that can be said in multiple ways: Black lives matter. We are not going away. We will endure. You cannot kill all of us. We will win. This sentiment is perhaps expressed most succinctly through a quote often repeated at these events and attributed to the Black militant activist Assata Shakur: “It is our duty to fight for our freedom. It is our duty to win. We must love each other and support each other. We have nothing to lose but our chains.”

The third touchstone comes from anarchic left-feminist scholars addressing issues of borders, immigration, and social movements. Authors Jennifer Bickham Mendez and Nancy A. Naples write on the need for cross-border

solidarity and the limiting factors to working together. Namely, activists between countries regularly have unequal access to power and decision-making in determining directions and steps forward in responding to militarized borders, xenophobia, and migratory priorities. In spite of these limits, Mendez and Naples maintain that “despite contradictions of power, the fabric of transnational connections and relationships among women’s movement participants and feminists can produce hybrid social arenas or ‘counterpublics’ where oppositional perspectives can be articulated, debated, constructed, and shared.”<sup>6</sup> This space of constructing and sharing alternative perspectives sounds quite similar to the proposition of communities keeping “the dream that another world is possible” alive.

Let us look at three propositions as expressed by different social movements. They are “Another World Is Possible” from the World Social Forum, “Black Lives Matter” from the Black Lives Matter movement, and “Water Is Life” from the Standing Rock indigenous movement. Each one of these statements, on their surface, can be read as functioning within a conventional understanding of propositions. That is, they can be read as propositional truth statements to be evaluated. The first suggests that our economic system does not have to be one driven primarily by profit and wealth accumulation; the second says that Black lives are valuable and worth protecting; the third makes the observation that life as we know it is dependent on water.

However, each of these statements also functions as proposition in the Whiteheadian sense. None of them are “true” in the sense of being actualized. Another world free from the domination of global capital does not currently exist. Black lives clearly do not matter to many institutions, including use of force practices in police departments. Water is not treated as life-giving but merely as a commodity to be sold, polluted, or used for other instrumental purposes. These statements are potentials that are meant to be positively felt for the sake of specific social projects. Rather than being objectively true, each proposition is saying something “interesting” in the Whiteheadian sense, envisioning a better world and encouraging others to mutually conspire to create a world in which these visions become reality.

## **RISKS TO COMMUNITIES AS LOCATIONS OF HOPE**

Seeing communities as propositions of hope has some significant appeal, particularly in that communities more readily persist across time, so that their holding of a proposition makes it more likely to be felt at some point. Even so, there are several risks in such a move. If not taken seriously, these risks threaten to undercut the potential of communities holding propositional potentials.

The first, and perhaps greatest, risk is in terms of the danger of communities falling into separatism. Many communitarian theorists, such as Alisdair MacIntyre, do not easily account for the reality that people exist in multiple communities. For instance, MacIntyre yearns for relatively small-scale communities unified around a shared vision that shapes their life together.<sup>7</sup> The result is that a community may not necessarily isolate itself from others, but it will only seek to share its perspective without maintaining a receptivity to other insights or potentials. In doing so, communities can become new autonomous subjects that isolate themselves from their actual contexts. In this way, they replicate the communitarian critique of political liberalism as emphasizing autonomous subjects, only on a larger scale. While MacIntyre is open to the reconstruction of a community, it only is possible from the internal deliberations of the community when facing a crisis, and not from external critique.<sup>8</sup> All that is to be positively prehended comes from the community. Such purity is impossible, for the turn to community is bound within the context motivating it, expressing certain dynamics internally and not becoming self-enclosed but remaining open to reconstitution. A turn to community that is uncritical of the relations beyond its constituents functions in such a way as to essentialize communities. Given that humans are participants in multiple communities across multiple lines, ignoring this complicated ingression of ideals from multiple communities locates these communities in abstraction from their real relationships.

For those inclined to communities with religious affiliations, Argentinian queer theologian Marcella Althaus-Reid warns of a second, related risk. She witnessed the rapid growth and gradual decline of what are known as “base communities.” These groups focused on being a vanguard-like witness of a liberating gospel. What Althaus-Reid notes in her critiques is that base communities were essentially reductionistic to their context.<sup>9</sup> Too much attention was required to build these communities, making them eventually irrelevant to the problems they were initially meant to address. What started as a response addressing rampant inequality and power in Latin American societies turned into an effort to revitalize flagging church participation. She suggests that focusing on building social movements that address concrete struggles can be a more productive project.

There is an uneasy tension at work here: As we can see, the risk of communities as propositions has everything to do with how they relate with their broader world. An isolated and inward-focused community is a recipe for any held proposition to remain unfelt by the larger world. Yet, if there is no community to hold a proposition regarding how the world can be different, we run the risk of a proposition being too diffusely felt to impact others. Because social movements ebb and flow through times of peak activity and demobilization, the idea that communities can be the receptacle to hold propositions

through the long haul remains compelling. This leaves us with the need for outwardly focused communities that have enough internal cohesion to endure across generations, but are not so unified in purpose that they become opaque to the people beyond them who they seek to influence.

One reason to invest our energy into communities as guardians of transformative propositions is frankly the lack of better options. As risky as they are, they are preferable to the alternatives. Let us consider an alternative in regards to the material location of certain propositions. One option is what we might call the “lonely idea-maker.” This is the academic or scholar who labors in research and in the writing of position papers, manuscripts, and so on. The goal of the lonely idea-maker’s writing is not necessarily to influence others now, or at least that is not the primary goal. The primary purpose of such writing is to be a gift to posterity. Like artists who become well known only postmortem, an individual’s work can lie dormant for years before finding resonance in a different context. However, as we saw with Thomas Piketty, an individual thinker may have a wonderful idea that either cannot be implemented or is ignored by others. Trusting that another will find an idea or proposition years later is a risk that sometimes bears fruit. Nevertheless, the strength of the singularity of vision possible in a single idea-maker cannot by itself tip the scales against communities holding propositions.

A modification to this option is the case in which a solitary researcher looks to pass their work on to others as a school of thought. This pattern is certainly true with philosophical schools, such as process thought, where there is almost an apostolic tradition of transmission. Students of process thought are often asked: Who did you study with, and whom did they work with? Many can proudly list a chain of transmission until one reaches back to the originating source. Of course, this option might strengthen the case for communities as propositions, if we define a community as something with a temporal dimension, rather than exclusively a spatial and relatively contemporaneous phenomenon. Either way, what we are seeing is that propositions require some continuity of transmission (both temporally and spatially) to increase their chance of enduring.

There is actually one school of thought that explicitly held a position akin to the one described above. For the early Frankfurt School of Marxist thought, the role of an intellectual is “to stress possibilities transcending the present order.”<sup>10</sup> This option was especially emphasized by the philosophers Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer. For them, their society had reached a point where the only option was to maintain a critique of what is, and in doing so hope that at some point the necessary nexus will emerge that allows for society’s transformation. Writing during and after World War II, they did not see a distinct *praxis* available for transforming society at it related to capitalism. They could not see a realistic subject that could embody an alternative, leaving them with the option for intellectual critique of what is.

A key difference, however, with the stance I am suggesting is that Adorno and Horkheimer suggest a focus that negates what currently exists.<sup>11</sup> Alternatively, I am proposing both a deconstructive and reconstructive move through affirming alternative potentials. The connection between the two proposals rests in the rejection of a guarantee of a better future. A better future is only a possibility, though an enticing one. By preserving the critique of society as it is without spelling out an alternative, Horkheimer and Adorno try to leave open a space for future shifts. One further parallel with my work is their willingness to consider religious communities as potential partners, despite being secular Jews. In fact, Horkheimer “argued that religion ought not to be understood solely as false consciousness, because it helped preserve a hope for future justice.”<sup>12</sup> Such “utopian hopes, although never fully realizable, must be maintained.”<sup>13</sup> My own project adds communities, whether of movements, religious groups, or ethnic groups, as the site where the Whiteheadian proposition “that it doesn’t have to be this way” or “another world is possible” resides.

One final challenge to the position I have suggested is what we might call the urgency option, which goes back to the question at the beginning of this essay of whether communities keeping the dream alive is sufficient. In effect, this can be described as the following mindset: the problems in our world are huge, so they must be fixed now. This perspective equates the necessity for social change with its immanent actualization. Sometimes, it is modified by delaying its full actualization but assuring its ultimate success. This often is coupled with a request to sacrifice now for the sake of the future transformation. This option is clearly present in many activist circles. Participants are encouraged to give of their time, money, and energy for the sake of the goal they are seeking to obtain. Often these sacrifices are admirable, in that they demonstrate the commitment of participants to a cause and their depth of support. Such actions can inspire others to believe that a goal is worthwhile, and mobilize others who may have otherwise remained passive observers.

However, if the promise of a new world is guaranteed, it can easily lead to justifying sacrifices that are less admirable, such as dismissing concern for family and friends, considering them to be a distraction from the cause, or even condoning the oppression of some groups for the sake of the eventual liberation of all.<sup>14</sup> If the eventual goal is a fully realized utopia, then almost anything can be justified in order to arrive at that destination. But if the goal is not achievable in any immanent or guaranteed sense, if it is more “interesting” than true, such sacrifices cannot be maintained. Furthermore, fighting against injustice and its motivation through anger, even rage, can be highly productive in short bursts. But as a long-term strategy, it leads to burnout, unhealthy dynamics within activist circles and between activists and non-activists, weakening efforts in the long term and alienating potential allies.

Given the respective strengths and weaknesses of the alternatives, I feel confident that communities are indeed one critical location of propositions



of hope. Up to this point, I have not suggested that such communities must be seen as religious. Indeed, this is not essential, though they may indeed have a religious element, and a religious center may help to maintain their persistence over time. Of course, my location as a minister in a congregation, a theologian who writes on ecclesiology, and someone who has served as an executive director of a progressive Christian nonprofit may prejudice this answer. Some might consider it wishful thinking or an attempt to justify my own work. But it is striking to see this dynamic of communities envisioning hope for some social transformation, what I have been claiming are Whiteheadian propositions, occurring in multiple settings. In the face of the necessary but impossible transformation from racial, economic, and ecological devastation, the actual option repeatedly comes down to finding collective ways to keep hope or dreams alive.

Admittedly, most religious congregations as currently configured do not have the scale to assume that their values will be positively felt and actualized. Most congregations are relatively small, often with less than 150 persons. As with the earlier critique of base communities or internally oriented communities, most are not extensive enough for their values to be felt beyond a relatively narrow span. Instead, the majority of congregations are more concerned with self-perpetuation and what will preserve the values that they formally espouse. This is why communities holding propositions must be defined broadly to include social movements and even schools of thought. If they are one critical way forward in a world of profound oppression and domination, then what are the necessary steps to build new communities of such visionary praxis (and/or strengthen existing ones)?

### **Building Communities of Visionary Praxis**

If communities are one critical feature for ensuring that propositions of social transformation are available for future actualization, then how are communities to be strengthened or maintained? As they say, past success does not guarantee future results. A successful effort of organizing communities does not prevent them from declining in the effectiveness of their vision, or even at times abandoning that vision. One famous example of this risk comes from the Back-of-the-Yards Neighborhood Council, founded by the community organizing theorist Saul Alinsky in the 1930s to support a “union organizing drive among the immigrant and African American packinghouse workers” and “neighborhood empowerment.”<sup>15</sup> While they successfully built a strong organization that addressed many grievances over the years, by the 1960s the Back-of-the-Yards Neighborhood Council had transformed into “an outspoken proponent of housing segregation.”<sup>16</sup> This should serve as a cautionary tale. A community that looks out for its own narrow self-interest

to the exclusion of all other communities or interests cannot long maintain the visionary praxis our world needs.

There remains a significant question regarding communities as propositions: to what extent is their task to actualize potential propositions through their embodiment, and to what extent are they charged with making such propositions more positively felt in their wider world? This expresses the long-running debate within what is known as prefigurative politics. Said in another way: “Should we push for transformation within existing societal structures, or should we model in our own lives a different set of social and political relationships that might someday form the basis of a new society?”<sup>17</sup> The focus on embodying alternatives stands in tension with an emphasis on strategic politics that seeks to make actual changes in institutions and systems.

While embodying alternatives was popularized in the United States with the 1960s countercultural movements, made famous by the phrase “Be the change you want to see in the world,” it has arguably been present in a variety of movements around the world for centuries and continuing into today, including elements of the Occupy Movement, Quaker communities, and Mohandas Gandhi’s *ashrams* in India.<sup>18</sup> The obvious risk, once again, is self-isolating, in which the response, positive or negative, from one’s larger world becomes irrelevant. Such a move risks a community becoming a windowless monad where influence from all the flaws of the world would be excluded. While I am sympathetic to an approach that emphasizes the means and ends of social change, it does not seem feasible or wise to seek a self-enclosed existence from the larger world. For one, it is impossible to live this way and reflects a misunderstanding of our world. As Whitehead indicates, even a negative prehension leaves its mark on occasions. As he explains:

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. (PR, 227–28)

There is no space from which an outside influence can be fully avoided. Only through being honest with such influences can communities healthily dismantle them as part of their radical visionary praxis.

At the same time, we should not dismiss prefigurative communities and argue for a purely incremental, strategic approach to social change. Prefigurative communities are often at the forefront of social movements. Their members are willing to make sacrifices of time and commitment for the sake of causes that seem to be all-but-impossible tasks. As a gift to activist organizations, those formed partially through their participation in prefigurative

communities often constitute a significant portion of activists in wider social movements as well. Without them, it is questionable whether such broader movements would have the necessary passion to demand structural changes.

It is not possible to draw a definitive line between when actions should emphasize their expressive, witnessing function of certain values and when they should prioritize their practical, measurable impact. Both are important, but such decisions will always be contestable, even among those who profess similar values and goals. There is no final escape from agonistic, or passionate, struggle. Even so, there can be complementary functions between communities that express more strategic efforts and those expressing more visionary propositions. Of course, this will lead to tensions in tactics and short-term goals. It is worthwhile to ensure that the way we reach a destination has some substantial overlap with where we are trying to go. Whether this requires a fully deontological position where means and ends are identical is beside the point. What matters is that if part of the goal is an improved general quality of life, the process by which this is realized should include a decent quality of life for those seeking to implement it.

In terms of social transformation, one must decide what constitutes an appropriate timeframe for measuring relative efficacy. I am finding it increasingly appealing to think in relatively long durations (long from a human perspective, anyway). We can set a broad range of 50–100 years. This is certainly longer than our dominant economic timescales, which are often measured through the quarterly reports of large corporations. Slightly longer, but only just so, are federal politicians in the United States, who think in two-year increments. This range matches congressional election cycles, with an example being how Congress often passes laws for which benefits go into effect immediately, while the costs to their constituents do not go into effect until they are well out of office. An example of this dynamic was the 2017 debate on health care reform, where the threatened loss of Medicaid coverage for millions would have been delayed for several years in hopes of reducing mobilized resistance. Thinking in slightly longer timescales are groups like nonprofits. Yet, even their strategic plans rarely aim beyond three to five years, especially considering the vicissitudes of grant funding, which inhibits long-term planning.

A 50–100 year timeframe is long by contemporary standards, but it could easily be extended further. One alternative we could turn to is the seven generation principle among First Nations, whereby an action should only be taken if we can estimate that it will benefit our descendants seven generations hence. This would put us in the 150–200-year range. Those who wish to have even further extended timeline horizons can look to Whitehead, who suggested that “if you want to make a new start in religion, based upon ideas of profound generality, you must be content to wait a thousand years” (AI,

172). It does not seem reasonable to ask communities to account for such a span of time in their planning, and possibly out of lack of imagination, I struggle to envision what life might look like in seven generations. Planning in the range of 50–100 years allows for several generations to enter the scene while still reflecting a timeframe where the youngest of those living may see the fruits of their efforts.

Ultimately, the exact span of time we use to measure progress is less important than the recognition that propositions are oriented toward the not-yet. They may not be readily actualizable. They are not true as objective claims of actuality, but they are “interesting” to the extent that they suggest alternatives to the challenges we face in our world. There are many different ways in which propositions can be expressed. Whether one’s work is rooted in solitary research, developing an intellectual school of thought, actively working for propositions to be positively felt now, or developing communities of living hope, propositions are persistently offered to the world. The goal of this essay is modest: to show that communities are a legitimate way to sustain propositions for an alternative future. For all their risks, it is difficult to imagine a context in which communities are irrelevant to said propositions’ perseverance. Real potentials that are available for actualization require some context in which they are felt. There needs to be some location from which they can be prehended. Communities of hope and visionary praxis help keep the dream alive; they gift us with propositions. In the face of capitalism’s desire to commodify everything (whether it is water, immigrants, or Black bodies) and its willingness to use force to maintain itself, communities stir up alternative desires by holding these propositions in trust.

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3. Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), 493–539.

4. See Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: New Press, 2012).

5. As of June 2017, a U.S. federal court ruled that the approval of the Dakota Access Pipeline violated the environmental review process. See “In Victory for Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, Court Finds that Approval of Dakota Access Pipeline Violated the Law.” *Earthjustice*, posted June 14, 2017, <http://earthjustice.org/news/press/2017/in-victory-for-standing-rock-sioux-tribe-court-finds-that-approval-of-dakota-access-pipeline-violated-the-law> (accessed July 1, 2017).

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12. *Ibid.*, 56.
13. *Ibid.*, 278.
14. Jung Mo Sung describes this problematic dynamic beautifully. See Jung Mo Sung, *The Subject, Capitalism, and Religion: Horizons of Hope in Complex Societies* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011).
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16. Slessarev-Jamir, *Prophetic Activism*, 77.
17. Mark Engler and Paul Engler, *This Is an Uprising: How Nonviolent Revolt Is Shaping the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Nation Books, 2016), 272.
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## Chapter 9

# Geology Not Chronology

## *Problems of Naming in Education*

Matthew Goulish

### THE INFLUENCE THAT NAMING EXERTS ON SEEING

A problem I face as a teacher of writing and studio arts, engagements in which I try to speak about creative production in ways that encourage it by elucidating how I perceive and receive each work, involves the challenge of fitting words to experience. Every description interprets. Art critic Jerry Saltz has written of the dominance of “Zombie Art History.”<sup>1</sup> By this he meant, I think, terminology persistently applied to objects and experiences better understood through more exact language and exacting observation, by “less abbreviated signs.”<sup>2</sup> Critics, curators, and teachers alike deploy one such abbreviated sign, the term “sculpture,” when describing an increasingly unwieldy category of constructed object or event. The acceptance of shorthand naming, the rejection of the need to slow down and allow a closer scrutiny of the object in question as well as the determining effects of the name used to label it—the influence that naming exerts on seeing—one suspects involves the acceptance of academic disciplinary, thus departmental, boundaries. Whatever the motives of (zombielike) persistence beyond felicitous lifespan, aside from issues of misdefinition, the problem of the name can ensnare us in a limbo of conceptual miscategorization. I cannot consider it without recalling the passage from Alfred North Whitehead’s *Science and the Modern World*, in its final chapter on *Requisites for Social Progress*.

We are too exclusively bookish in our scholastic routine. The general training should aim at eliciting our concrete apprehensions, and should satisfy the itch of youth to be doing something. There should be some analysis even here, but only just enough to illustrate the ways of thinking in diverse spheres. In the Garden of Eden, Adam saw the animals before he named them: in the traditional system, children named the animals before they saw them. (SMW, 247)



## TO DESCRIBE THE THING MADE AND THE ACT OF ITS MAKING

The condition of insistent naming in which we find ourselves indicates our mired state in a new form of traditionalism. In *Wandering Significance*, Mark Wilson characterizes this predication problem as concerning the concept. He uses the word “amphibolic” to describe the problem’s quality of growing in two directions at once.<sup>3</sup> The conceptual suggests a shared definition across physical and mental, or concrete and intangible, valences. Through an act sometimes referred to as “classical gluing,”<sup>4</sup> the term contrives to describe both the thing made and the act of its making. A sculptor sculpts a sculpture. Maker, action, and object share a name. The conceptual and linguistic predication implicitly encompasses the physicality of the action and the maker’s state of mind. The state of mind consists in sets of actions shared by all who undertake the project that shares the name. If we try to define commonalities, we reach a regression of simplifications concerning surfaces, dimensions, materials, methods of altering, and qualities of attention. We believe that communication necessitates this rounding off of edges, that such generalities pose no threat to serious inquiry. As I think that one can discern the frame of mind of the maker in the made, or so the made would seem to want us to, I propose instead to begin by beginning with that, dispensing with any other category or concept, and turning to more pointed predicates in response to the acts of actual works: clearing, patching, effacing, glossing, serving, opening, illuminating, extinguishing, solarizing, removing, matching, reaching, preparing, feeling.

## MOVEMENTS TAKEN AS GESTURES

I find encouragement for this alternative lexicon in Whitehead’s ideas about the value of feeling, the proposition as a lure for feeling (PR, 185), in the reconciliation of what the nomenclature releases, allows, and makes possible in process and thought. In movements taken as gestures, language becomes the mode through which forces understand one another.<sup>5</sup> Gilles Deleuze renamed the baroque object objectile, after and in acknowledgement of Whitehead’s shifting subject to superject.<sup>6</sup> Deleuze claims that these turns propel object into event, situating becoming on a temporal continuum. But it goes without saying that pragmatic tests of accuracy, or to borrow a term from the poet Wallace Stevens, “appositeness,”<sup>7</sup> all bear on the simple act of naming. A knot begins to take shape, as this balancing act between appositeness and unfolding of feeling presents itself as the first of several questions to follow in the wake of a seemingly cheerful proposal for unleashing vocabulary: the

problem of replacing one predicate with another. As I understand Wilson, the conundrum of conceptual predication has its roots in the grammatical. However vital the nuancing of meaning in name shifting, the unity of the object does not dislodge. It seems we seek a way to consider relation as product, and an understanding of the “sculptural” act as the production of a relation through mediating, expressive materials. If the deferral of categorization constitutes a problem, it does so by way of the reinscription of unity, even, as Deleuze postulates, in a shift from spatial to temporal modalities. Do we find license to excuse such uneasy reinscription in “the promise of a wider method”?<sup>8</sup>

### A DISCOVERY PRECEDING ITS SUBJECT

The Deleuze strategy, after Whitehead, rechristens the thing named with a nuanced, extended version of the original. Objectile remains in proximity of object as superject remains in the orbit of subject. The new label contains both new and old. It upgrades without abandoning the earlier version, to retain commonalities while introducing novelty. With this doubling strategy in mind, I will venture further into the knot by following an urge always to disrupt formulations that lead to the subject’s, and by extension the self’s, unity. I recall the art historical approach that theorist Branslav Jakovljević describes as “geological, not chronological, which enables one to recognize the synchronization of different strata contained within each of its [history’s] ‘periods.’ ”<sup>9</sup> Not chronology (after) but geology (atop), because timelines generate the optical illusion of the *post hoc ergo propter hoc* fallacy—that event X by virtue of preceding event Y always appears to bear a causal relation to it. I mean to question the way that objectile only always follows after object, superject after subject, as a holdover perhaps of Socratic structures of argumentation. If we call that problem the case of chronology, what difference might we hope that geological strata accomplish? In posing the question I hope to begin to spin a proposition, a discovery preceding its subject. Over the years I have grown attached to one reliable creative constraint: take it literally. Does every stacking up suggest synchronization? Does stacking up “satisfy the itch of youth to be doing something”?

### UNLIKELY STABILITY

Artist Alberto Aguilar and his family will serve as a case study. Aguilar trained as a painter, but over the years his work took a conceptual turn as he learned to negotiate the needs of a family by including the participation of his four children in his creative processes. Together they discovered the series

titled *Domestic Monuments*, a play of sculptural and photographic impulses involving stacking up household objects in unlikely yet stable arrangements and photographing them. The work suggests a sustainable practice, transparent, transformative, and workable in the everyday. Visible strata, taken literally: sculpting, stacking, rushing, arranging, recording. Remaining, as Stevens wrote: “flickering in the area between is and was.”<sup>10</sup>



**Figure 9.1** ALBERTO AGUILAR *Ball Corral*, 2017 (Wooden chair, soccer balls, hula hoop). Courtesy of the artist.

## INCLUSION AS COMBINATION

The value of retaining the original name lies in the recognition of its evolutionary, inclusive, emergent potentials, in the ability for sculpture to be this now, to become something novel while retaining connective strands to its history. In my more structuralist moments I want to propose a dual name for each artwork, a parallel, hyphenated label: stacking-sculpture. Ever drawn to the recursive, I confess my attraction to stacking up names to best describe stacked up objects. The stacking-sculpture of *Domestic Monuments* makes visible the strata-relations of the language and object, the historical and the novel side-by-side. I propose combining rather than replacing names as an act of relation making, so that the novel term expands the traditional nomenclature with an inclusion however disjunctive. I propose this inclusion as an act of combination, in light of Whitehead's opening salvo in *The Aims of Education*.

In training a child to activity of thought, above all things we must beware of what I will call "inert ideas"—that is to say, ideas that are merely received into the mind without being utilized, or tested, or thrown into fresh combinations. (AE, 1)

## THE NAME THAT OPENS A FUTURE

The phrase "thrown into fresh combinations" offers one way of understanding these ruminations around the knot of naming. Novelty converses with the past, in fresh combinations of objects with objects, soccer balls with ladder-back chair and hula hoop; in fresh combinations of words to describe the aggregate invention; in fresh combinations of states of mind and family relations in the acts of making. These elements in combination do not necessarily follow one after the other in causal relations, although they may certainly interact, aware of and responsive to one another. The overcoded aggregate gives me the impression that it has turned its face toward me, displaying its strata in cross-section, a stable structure of forms, substances, and expressions, of compressed or linear circles folding back on themselves.<sup>11</sup> As a teacher apprehending a student's work, the name I call it, the category in which I locate it, opens or closes its future. An effort at crafting a label that functions both as apposite and as a lure for feeling indicates close attention, to the object made and the state of mind of the maker. Each work comes into existence on an "already doubled surface."<sup>12</sup> If we look closely, may we detect and call it by its already doubled name?

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*Part III*

**EXPERIMENTING WITH  
PROPOSITIONS**





## Chapter 10

# Under Construction

Susanne Valerie [Granzer]

### PART ONE: THE QUESTION: HOW DO WE MAKE OURSELVES A PROPOSITION?

#### The Idea of the Whiteheadian Laboratory

At the very beginning of my invitation to participate in the Eighth International Conference of Whitehead Research Project, 2016, was the following question: “*How does the work of A. N. Whitehead help us to not only just think differently, but also act, live, communicate, and learn differently?*”

These initial lines immediately come to the point in “*How Do We Make Ourselves a Proposition?*” What an elementary, never-ending question if one takes it literally. Just breathe in and out. The statement may apply to the physical dimension. Does it not actually get under the skin? Does it mean anything less than the physical departure from oneself to oneself? Propositions would then no longer be abstractly recoverable, but would indeed go right through our bones. Then it just went through my head, the main question of this conference would be a kind of crucial question, that is, about the mode of our existence.

Being an artist, in particular an actress, and teaching acting at the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna, the additional specific labeling of this conference as a *laboratory* and its basic idea with the provoking question “*How Do We Make Ourselves a Proposition?*” as well as the unusual proposed formats “*Knot, Juncture, Vector*”—all this struck me immediately.

Spontaneously, much of it seemed familiar to me from my artistic background and the processes in the theater. As a demand for participants in an academic conference it was unusual; it was coded differently. Ergo, primarily no intellectual asceticism? Rather, a laboratory situation with oneself and the

others as part of the experiment, and thus open to all possible and impossible experiments? In other words, a conference as a site of physical participation? With a different kind of thinking? With the interpretation of *truth* not as something abstract in general, but as a sensory co-consummation with others? A laboratory for the discovery and the admission of differential forces—of the factual, of sentiment, of passion—all of which play their games with us, drive us, and direct us, usually unnoticed? Because it continued: “A *proposition, for Whitehead, is not a logical assertion. It is a ‘matter of fact in potential’* (PR, 22). *Not confined in the interiority of a subject, it ‘awaits’ in a world for ‘a subject to feel it’* ” (Ibid., 259). This description is consistent with the process on stage. Theater only takes place by the actors exposing themselves, and in this staged artistic process it becomes evident that we are all per se always already exposed *and* not self-contained. Bodies worldwide are intertwined, open, and extended—going beyond their own skin. Apart from this, on stage it becomes evident that speaking is not abstract, but a physical action, a bodily process. A sentence’s potential is thus always more than its logical statement. The performative power of language bursts what is already known and knowable and creates its own reality. It opens an insecure zone in which the imponderable and scandalous may and should exist, in which A no longer equals A with certainty, and which abrogates the sentence of the excluded third. In this way everything that is spoken is always also loaded with emotions, impelled and driven by this or that desire, by interrelated relationships and contradictions (consciously or unconsciously). In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche writes: “Most of a philosopher’s conscious thinking is secretly guided and channeled into particular tracks by his instincts.”<sup>1</sup>

What will emerge from the formats and experiments of the 2016 Whitehead Research Project if this complexity and inconsistency is the potential that is discovered and risked together in an open-ended way? What happens when a university conference abandons its agreed codes and turns them into a laboratory? Does it consequently become a field like the theater, an arena into which one has to venture insecurely in order to put one’s faith in the laws and processes there, like the actors in the creativity of their acting? They would charge what has been said with their entire physical existence in tone, gesture and imitation, attitude and expression, for example, and thereby subversively convey far more and often something different from what is to be understood from the wording.

“*As such, it [a proposition] cannot be reduced to its verbal content or any judgment upon it*” (PR, 11). Precisely. Because what would the play on stage be without the complex variety of its levels and entanglements? What would its plot be without errors, intrigues, and short-circuits, without the precipice and without the vision of yet unrealized possibilities that promised the hope and the adventure of the uncertain? To create an image of Heidegger’s

translation of *aletheia* with *unconcealment* (*The Essence of Truth*): everything that is said is like an iceberg whose tip towers above of the surface of the water, but whose by far larger part is hidden, unseen in the darkness of the water. Only in the crash, only in the physical collision is its dimension revealed. Precisely, this vulnerability and danger zone is the site of creativity that actors must risk and which never ceases to inspire them anew. They have to engage themselves in it physically. It is the provocation and potency of their acting.

At a conference, what does such an experiment look like *practically*; that is, *in fact*? This was the question and the provocation from the Whitheadian Laboratory, which was further concentrated in “a proposition is a ‘lure for feeling’ for a collectivity to come” (PR, 25). Such words warm an actor’s heart. Yes, of course. What would the theater be without the other, without the others? Its constitutive prerequisite, its benefit, its joy, its dilemma consists in this. Its structure is per se dialogic. Even the spectators are fellow actors. Together with the actors, their potentially creative participation generates the performance. The isolation into which lecturers not infrequently slip at conferences, because they lose the addressee and forget who they are speaking to, would ruin any theatrical performance and leave it to die of boredom. Apart from which, what would a theater be that is not charged with libido *and* does not charge up libidinally? What would it be without the gesture of seduction? It would be frozen stiff in mere representation, however virtuoso it may be. Otherwise, the actor throws out a bait with his words, spoken as well as unspoken, and with his body, that is, with his entire sensuous existence, and hopes that the audience will bite. He is looking for a catch. He fishes for the spectator. Of course, not only, but also. To put it more seriously, he can never short-circuit what has been said in it. He has to charge it with its artistic potential and then hand it over, release it, allow it to expand into its own life. To the others, to the partner, to the other character, to the spectator. By whom it is heard anyway, interpreted in one way or another, registered in one way or another. Understood, misunderstood. To his favor, to his disadvantage. Concerning the character, concerning him as an actor. This field is vast, unwieldy, inevitable. It is always a process, a dialogue, an adventure, with joy and fear as a motor and a brake. Theater is an exposed art, a mirror of our existence, never graspable in its complex multifacetedness. It is sensually incarnate, intellectual. It always calls for head and heart and gender, because the brain slides into the trousers, and the heart into the head. The body’s intelligence switches with the confusion of feelings, and in the midst of the storm of emotions there is clarity of insight. The artist must accept this gamble, and it never ceases to accompany him in his art for all his life.

*Being on stage* is thus anything but being monologically interlocked in one ego and finalized in something already known. It proves ineluctably to

be exposed. As I said, it is always addressed to others, and the potential of each statement only comes alive in a process that remains subject to the risk of what can suddenly and unexpectedly happen. The passions, fears, desires, and hopes that drive a character, the chaos of their instincts, cannot be ascetically neutralized, and the actor himself cannot stand aloof, uninvolved, as scientific objectivity would have us believe. Rather, he is intensively involved, despite the simultaneous professional distance, which does not permit him to forget all the others who are part of his play either. They belong to the success of the play just as much as the potential for the dissonant, the contradictory, the illogical, *and* the willingness to fail. Without all these aspects of openness and curiosity for an insecure, fragile zone, creativity is undermined. Thus, the artist must always be willing to engage not only theoretically, but also physically/sensually with possibilities that cannot be assessed in advance and cannot be known, with which he had not reckoned and by which he can be surprised.

This was a risk that this conference was ready to undertake, or so I understood their idea and the signals of the challenges formulated in the *Whiteheadian Laboratory's* call for proposals. Based on my background, I could therefore read their main sentence "*How Do We Make Ourselves a Proposition?*" as a secret, artistic shibboleth of the actor, and its unusual formats of *knot*, *junction*, and *vector* as his familiar playmates. Consequently, my curiosity for this research project with its targeted laboratory situation and my pleasure in participating in it was great. The question was only: how?

## PART TWO: THE LABORATORY: HOW DO WE MAKE OURSELVES A PROPOSITION?

### My Idea for the Whiteheadian Laboratory

To summarize my first lines: Being an actress myself, I have long been haunted by the idea of being exposed to the outstanding nonrepresentational power of art. Creativity provokes a crack, and that is where life can come in as a never-ending adventure. I call this event the gift of acting—crossing over the German and English meanings of the word as a poison and a present—a gift that shakes myself, my self. This is disturbing and a blessing at the same time: a joyous shock, a shocking bliss. Surrendering oneself to this exceptional happening with all its vulnerability and surprise is not the result of an intellectual journey. It is the experience of a multidimensional process of being open to an implicit bodily knowledge of how to feel, to sense, to respond; how to become and "not be reduced to verbal content or a judgment upon it," as was stated in the conference proposal. Such events arise from

beyond the subject, beyond personality, and do not allow for preconceived thinking. It is rather a listening to the power of the new, a kind of surrender to surprise, the as-yet unknown, with the risk of a caesura, the danger of not being fully under control—a control which we usually privilege because we prefer the illusion of being able to avoid the drama of life, of desire, of loss, of hope, of dislocation, and finally the drama of death. In fact, it is a kind of abyss, an in-between mode, charged with both dread and pleasure, which cannot be ignored by an artist on stage. In *Adventures of Ideas*, Whitehead describes this phenomenon as follows: “the work of art is a message from the Unseen. It unlooses depths of feeling from behind the frontier where precision of consciousness fails” (AI, 271–72).

From this basis of my knowledge and exploration of art *and* the fragility and the exposed condition of the actor, I wanted to develop a brief experiment for the laboratory situation of the conference. I have always been interested in passages from Nietzsche’s *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, the (obligatory) reading for the conference, and formulations such as: “*The true world of things is hidden from us: it is unutterably more complicated.*” Or “*Studying the body gives some idea of the unutterable complication.*” Among the three formats on offer—*knot*, *juncture*, and *vector*—I decided on a *knot*, in the description of which I could immediately recognize a great deal. *Knot* was described as: “*A paradox or temporary impasse in your work, life, thinking, or creative practice that might become newly productive if staged in a way that opens it to a collaborative exploration in or between language and other modes of expression.*”

### The Knot Format

I structured the way in which I would wrestle with the *knot* that I had chosen into four steps. As a *first step*, I decided to start with a story of a young drama student who was struggling unsuccessfully with a monologue, and who broke out in tears of refusal at the moment of creative, felicitous play. I thought that strange, and that paradoxical reaction gives rise to my laboratory mode with its special setting. After reading the story, as a *second step*, I asked participants to write down a word connected to the text they had just heard on one of the prepared notepads and to then, without saying anything, to put the folded sheet into the bowl. As a *third step*, somebody draws a note, reads out the word on it, and throws the dice to determine how long they are to talk about it.

The dice, a huge yellow one—which I bought on purpose from a toy shop—had only three black dots; that is, only one, two, or three minutes of speaking time was allowed. The speaker would be interrupted by the shrill noise of the egg-timer exactly when the time was over, even if the sentence

had not been finished. If a participant felt the urgent need to go on with the topic, they could say “I continue” while throwing the dice again for additional time.

The time given for a public presentation and its experimental mode was thirty minutes. “*Five to fifteen minute activations of knots or junctures by presenters. The proposal is to give ample time through discussion to disentangle or reconnect.*”

I had hoped that the episode of the young drama student might illustrate both a *paradox as well as a temporary impasse in my work and creative practice as an actress and acting coach*. To begin with the format of *narrative* was also part of my experiment, since, in contrast to other cultures, stories have no status in our academic setting. I wanted to use a few rules of the game to give the traditional discussion a different *gestus* and thereby, in a different way and more than usual, to involve the participants themselves *sensually* in the story they had heard. I hope to communally and experimentally initiate something from the topic of WRP’s latest conference, not just to think differently, but also to act, live, and communicate differently.

The props I needed were: a bowl, pens, memos, an egg-timer which made a shrill noise, and the dice with its three black dots. I could easily bring it all with me from Vienna.

### First Step: The Blindfolds

In the morning, on Friday December 2, it time for my contribution. I was briefly introduced, went forward with a book and stood in front of the table set up at the front of the conference room, as close as possible to the participants. I kept my props hidden in a carrier bag. That was part of the dramaturgy of my experiment. Just like in the theater, you do not give everything away at once.

Before I started reading the short story about the paradoxical stalemate in a drama school classroom, I asked all the participants to close their eyes. Black blindfolds would have been even more effective, but I thought of that too late. The switching off of the sense of sight was the gateway to my experiment, because the sense of hearing is the *primary* sense with which the unborn person first perceives their environment and because it is the *primary* sense that the actor has to work with. Their main task is not, as one might think, speaking, but above all hearing. Listening to the text, the role, the author, the partner, the audience. The dialogic structure of the theater is anchored in listening, from which comes speaking with the heart and the head, in which the whole body is involved. To bring Heidegger back into it: language speaks. Not how an actor *wants* to say something, but how he is to be *understood*: from the perspective of the theater, that is the primary precondition for “How

Do We Make Ourselves a Proposition?” If an actor wants to manipulate and control the language, it loses its dimension. They cannot *manufacture* it alone, *on purpose*; it must develop *of itself*. Speaking is a complex process, and for the actor it is not a theoretical discourse, but a physical practice.

To draw attention to the sense of hearing, to establish strange codes from the start, seemed to me a possible beginning for my experiment. Because when does everyone sit in a conference with their eyes closed? Maybe one or two eyes surreptitiously droop with fatigue or even take a proper nap, but everyone at the same time?

The participants were ready to go along with it and closed their eyes. This changed the atmosphere in the room. Somehow it became quieter. In addition, seen from the outside, the closed eyes resulted in an unusual picture of community. In no time my imagination just tied black blindfolds around their heads and the image of a concentrated audience was perfect. Now I could start on the story. It was taken from the first pages of my book *Schauspieler außer sich*, published in English by Palgrave Macmillan in 2016 as *Actors and the Art of Performance: Under Exposure*.

## Second Step: The Story

### *Hits / Auditorium X / Double Stalemate*<sup>2</sup>

Hannah J., a drama student, is struggling with one of the long monologues in Friedrich Schiller’s romantic tragedy, *The Maid of Orleans*. There’s no way to sweeten the experience; the rehearsal is grueling for everyone involved, and not for the first time. Each attempt at the play is polished and conventional. It is full of clichés, caught up in itself, locked into itself. Working on the play is like running a treadmill; it is not getting anywhere. A stalemate. A curse.

Admittedly, the text is difficult, awkward. The language and the piece itself have an unfamiliar feel. They raise more than one aesthetic and thematic question. Nowadays, other theatrical forms have led to a radical caesura in classical drama; even Nietzsche’s *The Twilight of the Idols* attacked Schiller as “the Moral-Trumpeter of Sackingen.”<sup>3</sup> The power of Logos has been dislodged by the logic of the fragment.

[. . .]

The fact is, the girl is struggling on stage. She can’t find a way into the text, the role, the situation or the emotions. Her words are made of paper, her body of clay. There is no flow, no groove, no play. Everything still feels constructed, fabricated, empty. It stumbles, falters, stagnates and gets stuck. But why?

[. . .]



It is not pleasant to see this reflected in her face. The “no talent” verdict hangs in the air, that diffuse ghost that haunts so many beginners. Today, she seems to have reached the bottom, rehearsals may be stopped any second now. Why torture ourselves any longer?

### *Turning Point, Peripeteia*

Suddenly, without any warning or transition, the situation on stage changes. The young actor’s figure grows—it becomes large, larger—it grows beyond its own actual size, suspends all perspective and—although she cannot lose her real size, her biological measurements—suddenly she fills the space; she penetrates the stage, feels it, fills it—until her limits burst, explode.

At the same time a spell is cast, there’s a sudden draw—as if time had suddenly condensed where only a second ago it was dragging on so laboriously. Boredom has disappeared completely now, as has dry uniformity. There is no longer a chronometer ticking out the seconds that march continuously straight ahead to the beat. [. . .] freed from linear order, time runs backwards and forwards simultaneously; jumps erratically. Past and future are both equally alive. It’s as if time had been given wings.

The classroom has become still. No chairs move, no hectic movements, no furtive glances toward the clock, no rustling of stealthy searches for chewing gum, a piece of candy or some other trifle. All of that is forgotten. Not even a cell phone rings by mistake. Even they are silent now, everything hushed.

[. . .]

All past misery is liquidated. The figure on stage no longer seems nondescript, her face no longer cramped, but clear, lively, diaphanous. All at once. Language and words open up. All strain is lifted. The words flow swiftly, playfully, as if they had just been formed. They reanimate the body from head to toe. [. . .] The event of the play evokes and revokes, hides and reveals, becomes a curly question mark that the audience cannot escape. Reversing inside and outside, its borders blur like time; or like the very space of the moment, without dissolving their differences into the diffuse.

### *Turn Around*

Right in the middle of this, liberated, expanding and gathering, in the middle of this dissolution of interior and exterior—in less than the blink of an eye—the next turn, the next wrinkle in time. This time it takes the form of a demolition, a completely unexpected interruption of play. Over. Finito. Done. Curtain! Abruptly, with no warning, unforeseeable. Just as starkly as before, with just as little transition.

Why does Hannah J. stop?

Why now, at this moment of all times?

Anger wells up. Anger and frustration. Why is she willfully destroying the moment, just when her acting is truly felicitous? It's beyond comprehension. Ridiculous. Before, one would have understood. There were plenty of times when she could have stopped; when perhaps she even should have stopped. Everyone would have been relieved; everyone was hoping she'd stop. But now? Now of all times, the second everything starts going well! Why? For no apparent reason, the actor on stage bursts into tears. But they are not Joan's tears, they belong to Hannah J. Clearly flustered, she cannot carry on, cannot continue.

Once again, the auditorium becomes still. It's a different kind of stillness, an awkward stillness due to an incomprehensible, obviously intimate act which would have been better without witnesses. A confusing act, unsettling and not at all sentimental. Embarrassment is in the air. Nobody really knows what to do. But no one laughs or makes any of their usual jokes. The tense stillness continues. After a while the tension is broken by a tear-stained, but clearly stubborn voice that obstinately declares, much to the surprise of all present: "If that's acting, I don't know if I want to become an actor!" First there's surprise, then irritation.

A bizarre reversal. A strange and unexpected turnaround. It turns our expectations upside down; it's incomprehensible, disconcerting. To go through all that agony, to resist becoming discouraged and giving up when the play is going so badly and then, of all times, to stop when the play begins to flow! To break the effortless stream of creativity that cannot be constructed or made, that needs to come of its own. And instead of being happy to have felt it, instead of riding the wave, the *kairos* of the moment—obvious resistance. Resistance so strong that it leads to an interruption of play; so strong that it makes Hannah J. break into tears and speak out against her own desire to become an actor.

[. . .]

Discreetly, the class leaves the rehearsal, leaving the student and her teacher alone.

### Third Step: The Experiment

Here I broke off the story, unpacked my props, put a metal bowl, pens, pieces of paper, and the cube with the three black dots on the small table in front of me; for the time being I kept the egg-timer, which makes such a raucous noise, in my hand. You have to have theatrical moments. They are also enjoyable. Hopefully. During this action I explained the experiment. As already described, I asked everyone to write one word, or at most two, in connection with the text they had just heard on one of the prepared slips of paper, fold it, and throw it into the bowl. As the next step, anyone who wanted to and

was prepared to, would draw one of the slips, read out the word written on it, and throw the dice for the time they had to talk about the word they had just drawn. The number of dots would be the time: one, two, or at most three minutes. I would set the egg-timer exactly for this time, so that it acoustically signaled the end of the speaking time. These were the steps in the experiment series in the lab.

A *laboratorium* is usually understood as a place for scientific research. One thinks of physics, chemistry, medicine, pharmacy, technology. Not of philosophy and art, and not of a conference of academics either, even if it is called a research project. As an actress, the word laboratory immediately makes me think of bizarre images from films, of smoking test tubes, of experiments à la Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. So it would be better to trace the etymology of the word. It refers to *labor*, *laboris*, which means *labor*, *exertion*, *effort*, *strain*, even *complaint*, *adversity*, *hardship*. In its declinations as an adjective, *laboriosus*, there are *laborious*, *troublesome*, *industrious*, *tortured*, and the verb *laboro* is translated as *oppressed*, *plagued*, *in need*, *suffer*, *work*, *exertion*, *endeavor*. This is how it is given in my old Latin-German school dictionary.

One might conclude from this that working in a lab seems to be anything but a quiet, secure position, and I must admit my heart beat a little faster when I went on to my next action. What would result from the *knot* in the narrative and my experiment in connection with it?

The atmosphere in the room was animated and open. There was laughter; the notes were collected, written on, folded, and then put into the bowl. When everyone in the room was finished, I tipped the folded notes onto the floor to mix them like a lottery, collected them, and put them back in the bowl. With the big yellow foam rubber dice—which I had bought in a toy shop just because it looked great—stretching up into the air, I looked around the group and asked who was ready to make a start. At first it was quiet. In Austria that would not have been suspicious. A first threshold of shyness and restraint has to be overcome, and it is almost a rule that the discussion leader will jump in here and build a bridge for the participants with a first contribution. In the academic world of America I had had different experiences. Here one was free, spontaneous, open, familiar with public question and answer. Unprejudiced. Now it was a little different. A hesitation was in the air, a sort of hesitation. At least it seemed so to me.

As it was still quiet after my first question, I repeated it three times—and the scene from Goethe's *Faust* came to me in a kind of flash—that's how it is with actors—in which he says "Three times you must say it, Then."<sup>4</sup> And finally a young man came up with an interesting remark. Unfortunately, you cannot hear it on the recording, because the microphone was still too far away from him. But I remember it because it was extremely surprising. He said: "One just has to make a start and be the first to *sacrifice* oneself." Yes, he

literally said *sacrifice*. A strong word even if it was meant ironically. Why *sacrifice*? What did this mean in the context of this lab? What had happened to him? What aggregate condition had the laboratory character of this setting provoked? Despite all the openness, as a result of the rewriting of the customary codes, had the ingrained ascetic ideal of the sciences registered and provoked an obviously physically unpleasant situation? When the young man threw the highest score, *three*, so he had to talk for three “long” minutes about the word he had drawn, there was noticeable, general laughter and sympathetic embarrassment among the participants. Somehow I was reminded of the story I had read out in lecture theater X. Hadn’t something from the *knot* format surprisingly repeated itself for a moment? Even if this “actor,” unlike Hannah J., did not recoil but did exactly the opposite and voluntarily *sacrificed* himself, that is, exposed himself to an unfamiliar setting. Might one not read a temporary dead end from the word *sacrifice*, which flashed up and was productively turned around and answered by the audience of “fellow actors,” creatively responding in the form of laughter? The loud noise of the egg-timer finally interrupted his very good speech—and again produced general laughter.

In conclusion, another brief episode from the lab, from which I only want to take one aspect. It concerns the dice and the rolling of it, the throwing, and how it falls. At the beginning I told the auditorium that I had deliberately chosen the most child-friendly dice. On the one hand, this is related to the playful character of the theater and on the other to the three metamorphoses of Nietzsche’s Zarathustra, “how the spirit becomes a camel, and the camel a lion, and the lion at last a child.”<sup>5</sup> The child is innocence, forgetting and playing; a big affirmation. Lots of virtues that actors need on stage. In the act of creativity they are always exposed to the paradox of the simultaneity of the active and the passive, which in Nietzsche’s sense means the affirmation of chance by the combination of the dice. “To know how to affirm chance is to know how to play.”<sup>6</sup>

Before the second experiment started, one of the presenters expressed the wish to throw the dice in place of the next candidate. Keeping rules open and changing them completely for the sake of experiment was of course welcome and exciting. So a young student volunteered for this next attempt. She drew one of the pieces of paper, read out the word written on it, and now all eyes turned to her “fellow-actor.” He weighed the dice carefully in his hands, checked the sides, its weight, and one could clearly see a theoretical test throw in his face, because he was obviously doing everything with the aim of throwing the dice so it ended up with the face with just *one* black dot upward. This testing was followed by suspense, backed by a lot of laughter—he threw the dice, and the trick actually worked. Could we not now hear Nietzsche’s faint, far away laughter over pity and sympathy? By the way, there was

always a lot of laughter throughout the whole series of experiments. *Incipit comedia*. Gay science.

### PART THREE: BEING ON STAGE: BECOMING A PROPOSITION? <sup>7</sup>

#### Artistic Notes

Usually art is interpreted from the perspective of theorists. These are always spectators and not performers. They reach the event of art through aesthetic contemplation and gain their “truth” from analysis. Aesthetic artists operate under different conditions and look through different eyes. They are physically-sensuously exposed to the zone of their own artistic experiences and thus directly involved in the events of art. That makes a difference. This proximity gives rise to a different “truth” from one that emerges from the distance of mere contemplation. Theoretical and poetic (poietic) reason do not produce one and the same thing. One excludes the affectivity of the mind and the intelligence of the body as a site of knowledge for the phenomena of life; the other listens to them.

Thus artists may be rather helpless, if not reluctant, in the face of the Kantian interpretation of an artistic method “without any interest.” Is their premise not the opposite of “disinterested pleasure,” and not one of easing separated from desire? And is the Schopenhauer-Freudian view of art as the satisfaction of a drive, in which it becomes the instrument of sublimation compensating for unfulfilled wishes, not too short-sighted? Going further, for artists, does not art prove to be the positively stimulating drive of their life, the joyous excitement of their will to live, the desire for growth, for the growth of existence from which it does not want to free itself, because art is “*une promesse de bonheur*”?<sup>8</sup>

Is it not precisely *this* desire, for example, that can be released by actors and realized on stage? At the price of ruthlessness against oneself, which turns into the desire and power of creativity. One is a precondition for the other. This is the neuralgic point that gets under the skin. The question remains, why do actors ultimately want to be more than just celebrated mimics? Why? Is it not precisely that their acting is not motivated and stimulated by a compensation and satisfaction drive alone, but by a desire as a promise of happiness, which to their mind is understood as their *amor fati*, even if they have never heard of Nietzsche’s words? In the joy and release of their creative powers in acting, are they not spontaneously affirming the dignity of an event that has grasped them with force, that possesses their will, and to which they make themselves available in order to lend it a sensual expression

in their existence as an artist? Are they not repeatedly called to the stage by the affirmation of *these* potentials?

This is one side of artistic experience at the heart of the theater. Its flip side looks different. It is dark and disturbing. It provokes fear rather than joy. The extreme openness and exposure on stage attacks our very concept of security. In the sudden flashing of the potential of life that outruns itself, an insoluble contradiction emerges: the dichotomy and the entanglement of the active and passive. Their undecidability in the twilight of triumph and failure, of “perpetrators and victims.” The arena of the theater as a dramatic venue of the liberated subject?

What does this mean? To be delivered? To whom? To what? To oneself? Acting and being dealt with? By what? Who or what is directing me? Has me? What comes over me here, that I no longer have myself in hand, and that makes me act outside my intentions? Beyond my will. This can be frightening. You become a stranger to yourself. That is frightening. An action that evades the will and is no longer rationally justifiable can alienate and generate resistance. Better not to let oneself in for such passages. Better remain celibate. Asceticism is a better arena.

### Notes on Theater ≈ Philosophy

Deleuze writes, “Becoming stranger to oneself, to one’s language and nation, is not this the peculiarity of the philosopher and philosophy, their ‘style,’ or what is called a philosophical gobbledygook?”<sup>9</sup>

*Gobbledygook* is immediately understandable to theatrical ears. It is also animating, enticing. It sounds like play, something playful, like breaking ranks, without a call to order in the air. It tastes of a mix of turbulence and diversity, in whose chaos creativity awaits. Actors know this. But theatrical understanding stumbles and is left behind by a sentence like *becoming alien to oneself*. One is used to executing things, far less so with questions about the phenomena of those executions. Philosophy as a source of ideas for theatrical work gets little hearing. This is the weak point of actors. As if thinking were an enemy of art, a thief of talent. Are old prejudices against thinking in play here, as an unconscious heritage and act of resentment of the ancient Platonic accusation that poets lie?

But does not the provocative *becoming alien to oneself* catch the idiosyncrasy of theater quite as Deleuze describes it for philosophy? Is it not *fundamentally* its “style,” its artistic credo? Is not the decisive criterion suddenly to be sidelined in the light of the stage? Into unfamiliar terrain. Onto shaky ground. In a moment, from one moment to the next, losing the ego as a center of self-determination, as it were losing the ground under the feet of thinking—and beginning to tumble. In this unstable state, in this tumult of

one's own existence, spontaneously to grasp that what is happening here in the turn to of the potential of creativity will not come to an end, and that all other theater is just convention oriented on bourgeois recognition and not on the risk of transformation through art.

“To believe that will has power over potentiality, that the passage to actuality is the result of a decision that puts an end to the ambiguity of potentiality (which is always potentiality to do and not to do)—this is the perpetual illusion of morality.”<sup>10</sup>

Exposure on stage spins actors into complex experiences of body and soul. The effect can be liberating, may even be euphoric, but can also inhibit and alienate. As a caesura, the sudden imperative can be painful. A defense mechanism can set in that seeks to protect the fragility which becomes virulent in the creative intensity of acting. In this vulnerable zone the instability of human existence, which we normally overlook in everyday life, breaks through. It confronts us with the indistinguishability between doing and not doing, between action and inaction, and presents our existence in the conflict between power and impotence. This paradoxical simultaneity of active and passive, which is the basis of the artistic (poietic) act, injures the concept of being the autonomous subject of one's actions. The mirror is struck from the actor's hand and breaks. This does not happen through a statement, theoretically-abstractly, but sensually-physically. Suddenly the personality now only functions as a mask of the person. With subversive power it is transferred into a presubjective life, with nothing else to be done except to surrender to it, to give oneself to it, to “sacrifice,” to “give oneself up.” How to become a proposition? Is this a narcissistic affront?

In a series of discussions with the film-maker and writer Alexander Kluge, the poet and dramatist Heiner Müller speaks of a “symbolic death”<sup>11</sup> in the theater. On the one hand, theater is the site of a possible journey through time, in order to make collectively experienced knowledge visible and capable of being passed on. Above all, however, theater is a place of *transformation*. Of dying. And since we are all exposed to death, it is the general fear of this final transformation that most elementally unites actors and spectators. So the specific effect of theater is based not on the community and presence of the living, but rather on the community and presence of potentially dying people.

Is the theater thus fundamentally a tragically determined arena? Its paths primarily fear, its passion primarily terror? Suffering and pain as people's main potential for understanding?

That sounds familiar. Life is cruel. People are cruel. *Ananke*, the *Moirai*, fate wreak havoc. Greek tragedy—together with the philosophy of the beginnings of our European culture—is full of it. But is the sudden change, the *peripeteia* in tragedy, that is, its decisive turning point, not Janus-faced? Does it not promise happiness as well as unhappiness? Is it not we ourselves who

are generally fixated on misfortune, and ascribe it greater weight and duration, as if with its appearance misfortune had been settled once and for all, and happiness were only a mirage?

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* contain many tales of horror. But in the very last of them, misfortune and happiness are not just antithetically separated, but intertwined. It is said that Caesar was murdered in the Senate when Venus, unseen by anyone, tore his soul from his limbs to prevent it from dissolving into air, and she bore Caesar's soul in her arms up into the firmament, where it has since sparkled as a star.<sup>12</sup> The tragedy of Oedipus is familiar to us. His fate innocent, his self-blinding and self-exile cruel and merciless, no question. Less well known is that in *Oedipus on Colonos* his tragic destiny undergoes a surprising twist at the end of his life, because Providence grants him a merciful death:

"It was a messenger from heaven, or else  
Some gentle, painless cleaving of Earth's base;  
For without wailing or disease or pain  
He passed away—an end most marvellous."<sup>13</sup>

Even in the face of the most extreme horror, absurdly, hope of becoming that counteracts everything tragic may simultaneously shine out. The end of Seneca's dramatization of *Medea* is a stark example. After Medea has killed her two children, Jason cries out: *Medea!* And she responds to the devastation of all previous life so far with a single word, a single statement: *Fiam*, she says, *I will be*.<sup>14</sup>

*Fiam*, the as yet unrealised possibility?  
*Fiam*, an impossibility become real?

### Notes on knot, juncture, vector

What is exciting in the art of the theater is that the situation of the actors reflects the exemplary situation of people, but not just through the course of the stories that are told in the drama. More fundamental to each aesthetic format is the fact that with their entire existence actors are and have to be the basis of their art *incarnate*. With all their senses, with all their thinking, with all their feeling. They cannot shield anything, cannot mask anything, and the stage knows no compassion. Actors stand outside, exposed in their entire physical existence. As said at the beginning, one could well utilize the vote of the Whiteheadian Laboratory "How Do We Make Ourselves a Proposition?" for them and their art. Likewise its formats of knot, juncture, and vector as their habitual practice. Actors cannot protect themselves like scientists by pretending objectivity.



The question that arises here is whether, through the prescribed neutralization of their desire, scientists are not secretly committed to an ascetic ideal in whose coding academic meetings are also ritually organized—a kind of training that has been assimilated and has conditioned scientists' bodies. Then when the codes are being infringed, like before a recording in a film studio, red letters quickly flash up: *No Entry!* It may well need many laboratories and experiments and a long transcription down into the cells until, for example, a format such as *vector* becomes recognized practice, so well described by the Whiteheadian Research Project as “*a move out from junctures into a wander-line that is oriented by a proposition, and in that sense directionally constrained, but at the same time open-ended in a way that invites new takings-form on the fly.*”

It is easier for the actor *and* more difficult. Transcriptions down into the cells are part of his practice. But he, too, must struggle with asceticism. Better to fight *for* asceticism. He may not have to cause the body and its affects to “disappear” as an ideal, which would be an obvious absurdity, but he must not lose himself in intoxication or self-indulgence and showmanship by allowing the act to overflow. At all times he needs to know what he is doing and what is happening, in order paradoxically at the same time to be surprised by what he is doing and what is happening with the others in the play. In this contradiction lies the origin of the new, of becoming, growth, without which his acting would turn into arbitrariness and mere self-interest. Uninhibitedness is the enemy of the theater.

Sober intoxication is the asceticism of the actor. It is his stance, his *epoché*, in the midst of his emotions. That means, fundamentally, that in the name of his art the actor would be professionally obliged to cultivate the entire area of his self, and the quality of his acting would go hand in hand with the revision of himself. For this he needs analysis. Distance from himself. He must reactivate all the basic processes of life for his art on the basis of an exhaustively acquired craftsmanship with the greatest care, intelligence, knowledge, openness, and freedom. One might well say he has to learn them anew. Listening, looking, speaking, answering, perceiving, moving, and always with every breath as if it were a matter of life and death—and in fact it is indeed also about his life, this one, here and now on the stage.

If one interprets theater not just mimetically as a reflection and an imitation of reality, then the actor's art would be imbued with an ethos which, in the nature of the play, in its human, all-too-human reality, would drive people in an exemplary way beyond themselves. Into what man once might have become, and what comes over him as memory of the future.<sup>15</sup> This makes theater, this economically highly inefficient business, highly promising and future-proof. Does it not offer the luxury of an alternative to what is the neoliberal case today, and anachronistically experiments in an ennoblement of *Homo sapiens*? Theater would not be a vociferous but a noble art, and the

stage a place that made things porous worldwide, not primarily through the content, but primarily through the *how* of the play. Its catharsis would then not consist solely in the drama of the action, but also in the art of acting. From an art of acting as a *recollection of the potential of our human existence*—a gibberish that liberated itself to itself in an arena of conflict, play, and laughter. Is not Eros the pander involved in this passionate event, who connects the body and the soul, which are artificially separated only owing to fear and resentment, but ultimately are an old pair of lovers, in which each stimulates and liberates the most beautiful possibilities in the other?

Giorgio Agamben speaks of “experiments without truth,” to which philosophy and poetry can invite us. “Whoever submits himself to these experiments jeopardizes not so much the truth of his own statements as the very mode of his existence; he undergoes an anthropological change.”<sup>16</sup> In the intensity of such “experiments without truth,” on stage as in life, popular ideas and stereotypes break down, and what happens is no longer exclusively dependent on me as an “object,” or me as a “subject.” This is loss *and* profit, because the secret of creativity lies precisely in the loss of personhood, and the singular charisma of the actor radiates from it—but not, as is erroneously believed, from speculation on personal magnification. To this extent, imitation in the theater is not the actor’s only task, but life as it manifests itself in itself, as itself. A specifically singular and yet impersonal, indefinite, unlimited life can become an event in the play on the stage. In such moments, the field of mimesis is replaced by the field of immanence, in which metamorphosis gains its power and (one) life releases itself in its never-ending desire to engender, to design, to create itself. At its innermost core, the totally real has a *processual nature*, writes Whitehead.

The process is itself the actuality, and requires no antecedent static cabinet. Also the processes of the past, in their perishing, are themselves energizing as the complex origin of each novel occasion. The past is the reality at the base of each new actuality. The process is its absorption into a new unity with ideals, with anticipation, by the operation of the creative Eros. (AI, 276)

In this event, seen through theatrical eyes, the mask of Dionysus emerges,<sup>17</sup> a deity whose cultic rituals were the driving force for the emergence of the ancient theater and who is connected with the thrill of ecstasy: with all contradictions and hopes, with dying and death, with pleasure and happiness. With a life as a frenzy of immanence, which never ceases to stimulate and provide food for thought.

To devote oneself to this occurrence of existence in the labyrinth of a life, also in the face of the open resistance and subtle censorship of a time that had something completely different in mind. Is this not what art upholds as a possibility and why it is necessary? A promise in full knowledge of the

risk of having perhaps taken on too much. Either way. In the attempt to lend consistency to this passion, always getting older and younger, both at the same time. This includes not revealing its performative conditions, either in theater or in philosophy. That means not crippling its power to fracture in the structure of repetition, but keeping it alive and open, coming to no end with this process, but entrusting oneself to it, and allowing oneself to be gripped by it from head to toe, in which life always becomes a question mark, because in its occurrence a difference constantly gapes that adds something new to it, which again and again compels an answer. Ad infinitum.

What would the message of such a life be?  
 What would we be as a result of this message?  
 Outlawed.

## NOTES

1. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2002), 7.

2. This chapter includes parts of the following text of the author: Susanne Valerie, *Actors and the Art of Performance: Under Exposure* (London: Palgrave Macmillan 2016): [https://e-book.fwf.ac.at/detail/o:906#?q=Susanne%20Valerie,%20Actors%20and%20the%20Art%20of%20Performance:%20Under%20Exposure%20\(London:%20Palgrave%20Macmillan%202016\)&page=1&pagesize=10](https://e-book.fwf.ac.at/detail/o:906#?q=Susanne%20Valerie,%20Actors%20and%20the%20Art%20of%20Performance:%20Under%20Exposure%20(London:%20Palgrave%20Macmillan%202016)&page=1&pagesize=10). Copyright license Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0): <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.en>.

3. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin Books 1990), p. 78. Unless noted otherwise, this is the translation of *Twilight of the Idols* cited.

4. “Faust: A Knock? Enter! Who’s Plaguing Me Again? Mephistopheles: I am Faust: Enter! Mephistopheles: Three Times You Must Say It, then.” Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Faust I*, trans. Peter Salm (New York: Random House, 1985).

5. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Graham Parks (Oxford: Oxford Press, 2005), *The Tree Transformations*.

6. Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Continuum, 1983), 26.

7. This chapter is a revised version of parts of the text: Susanne Valerie Granzer, *Hybrides Begehren. Passagen zwischen Theater und Philosophie*, in *Performing Translation* (Hg. Werner Hasitschka) (Löcker Verlag: Wien, 2014). Reprinted with permission.

8. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1989), 104.

9. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?* Trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 110.

10. Giorgio Agamben, *Bartleby, or on Contingency*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 254.
11. Alexander Kluge and Heiner Müller, *Ich bin ein Landvermesser* (Hamburg: Rotbuch Verlag, 1996), S. 176.
12. Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus*, trans. F. Storr (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1912), 115.
13. Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus*.
14. From, Kluge and Müller, *Ich bin ein Landvermesser*, 72.
15. Arno Böhler, *Das Gedächtnis der Zukunft* (Wien: Passagen Verlag 1996).
16. Agamben, *Bartleby, or on Contingency*, 260.
17. The mask is a whole encounter—and *only* encounter; nothing but the opposite number. It has no back . . . It is the symbol and manifestation of what is there and is not there at the same time: the most immediate presence and absolute absence in one.” In Walter F. Otto, *Dionysos* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann. 1996), 84.

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## Chapter 11

# Choreographic Propositions

## *Grasping the Environmental Excess That Feels Like Nothing, Yet*

Diego Gil

The concept of the proposition as articulated by Whitehead can be of use in speculating about an expanded notion of choreography, construing the choreographic as a form of process stored in the everyday. This is a form of process that challenges the presupposition that creativity is a possession of the individual artist, the choreographer. Instead, the form of process carries its own autonomous creativity, that of an environment in the making. Whitehead would say that the “creative advance” choreographs an environmental subjective form of experience. Thinking choreography as a form of a propositional process also challenges what it means to move and feel through everyday environments. This is because propositions are always a lure to feel something novel, requiring a new calibration of the capacity to feel. Most importantly, it is because propositions emerge in excess of a linear logic of cause and effect architecting the tendencies of the environment. They emerge with a potential logic that reshuffles, unpredictably, what is actually given.

This chapter speculates pragmatically *with* and *through* the concept of “proposition,” with the aim of formulating an alternative vision of choreography. It invites us to envision a choreography that pulls the category of the body toward the becoming of what can be felt only propositionally. It also envisions the choreographic as a pedagogical tool to invest in those imperceptible processes that relay and give form to knowledge, long after their actual arc of experience has perished. So, without further delay, let the alter-choreographing begin.

Walking through an alleyway in Montréal, we may register a proposition for a choreography of feelings to come. There is a double momentum of the legs using the muscular force to advance the crunchy gravity of the

ice spreading through the ground; at the same time, the cold wind does not indicate itself through the movement of the nonexistent leaves and the quiet snow; rather, it makes itself present as an overall atmospheric quality of shrinkage. Then the tapping sound of a wooden door, a hanging internet cable, the rustling of a green plastic bag, some barking, and the overall direction of the alleyway twisted sideways. A proposition was stored across the angles of those activities. A vital seed for a future choreography of feelings to take palpable shape. Before proceeding to explain how and where the proposition was stored, let's hear some thoughts on the concept of proposition, by Alfred North Whitehead.

Whitehead says that propositions are the "tales that perhaps may be told about particular entities" (PR, 256). We have to understand that the tale is a tale of feeling, not necessarily a verbal sentence. They "are neither actual entities, nor eternal object, nor feelings" (Ibid.). "A proposition enters into experience as the entity forming the datum of a complex feeling derived from the integration of a physical feeling with a conceptual feeling" (Ibid.). The main contribution of a proposition is to indicate the conceptual feeling carrying the determination of the eternal object (the potential) to a particular set of actual entities, physically felt. Since the eternal object has an absolute "general" characteristic concerning the mode in which actual entities are determined (more about this general characteristic below), the proposition of the conceptual feeling selects particular actualities for the novelty of physical feelings to come.

The particular actual entities physically felt are the "logical subjects" of the proposition. And again, the "logical subjects" are not to be confused with a verbal thought. The "logical subjects" are a selected out of a distribution of felt actualities, energized by the conceptual feeling, which is the feeling that brings a force of determination that is more-than-actual, out of time, but immediate and immanent to the act of time making.

The force of the more-than-actual brought by the conceptual feeling is a "predicative pattern." We can say that, in a way, there is a mutual call from actual entities to eternal objects. The immediate sorting-out of a series of actual facts produces a reorientation for an eternal object to tweak the actual with its definiteness. By juxtaposition, the "predicative pattern" is a mode of the eternal object (the potential, out of time and space) that accompanies the selected out actual entities or "logical subjects."

Now, while we are walking through the alleyway in Montréal, the movement enacted by the mutual call between the "logical subjects" and the "predicative patterns" of the proposition can elude us. The choreographing experience between the actual entities of the tapping and rustling sounds honing a potential way of walking can feel like nothing, since according to Whitehead a proposition is not yet a feeling. If we want to register the choreographing

at the moment of its emergence, we need to practice an attunement to movement. Here, following Whitehead, movement is not considered the accidental displacement of an actual entity from one place to another. Movement is the becoming of every singular actual occasion, as well as the difference or contrast of every singular becoming of the many actual occasions, inter-related in one event of experience (PR, 80). Again following Whitehead, this perspective on movement departs from classic theories of knowledge. Since for a movement proposition to be registered, what is needed is an immersion in the manyness of the event of becoming, rather than a total body displacement across the concrete elements of the event. As André Lepecki argues, Western choreography was born of a kineticism—based in the epistemology of classical physics—which formed “a conception and perception of the dancer’s body and the dancer’s agency as being subservient to transcendental laws of (fluid) motion.”<sup>1</sup> He elaborates that classical physics formulated laws governing the motion of the bodies and, by extension, regulating conceptions of physical labor, which in turn have a direct impact on “those whose work embodies most directly the physicality of physics”: dancers.<sup>2</sup> The choreographic vision proposed here with Whitehead does not subsume the outcome of an experience in-the-making to a preestablished frame or universal law of physics. Even if the proposition does not feel like anything (yet), and it is not in possession of the agency of experiencer (the one being danced by the event)—it is nevertheless not subsuming the body to a transcendental law of movement and change. Because for Whitehead the concept of the potential is not a universal category separated from the actual. As mentioned previously, the “potential” and the “actual” shape, mutually and immanently, the movement of experience in-the-making, without a preexisting outcome envisioned. Moreover, the agency of the event is not imposed upon an inert accidental body, instead, the body becomes a distributed agency *through* and *with* the event in-the-making. Therefore, let’s move forward toward an articulation of the “predicative patterns” of the proposition—the potential side of it—so that we can further understand how it is mutually shaped by the “logical subjects” actually and physically felt.

It was said that the “predicative pattern” carries the conceptual feeling: a feeling that improvises with the novel forces of the more-than-actual. The physical feelings, on the other hand, are the modes in which the actual entities take account of themselves, affirming what is given, with a lesser degree of improvisation toward novelty. Whitehead continues to explain that when “the datum of the conceptual feeling reappears as the predicate of the proposition (. . .) the eternal object suffers the elimination of its absolute generality of reference” (PR, 258). And most remarkably, he adds that there is also an elimination of the datum of the physical feeling: “for the peculiar objectification of the actual entities, really effected in the physical feeling, is eliminated,



except in so far as it is required for the service of the indication. The objectification remains only to indicate that definiteness which the logical subjects must have in order to be hypothetical food for that predicate” (Ibid.).

I understand this quote to mean that under the perspective of a proposition, the physical feeling does not relate to its own actual entity, but orients toward the propositional feeling, toward “pure potentiality.” And due to the very turning of the physical feelings toward pure potentiality, potentiality becomes less general and undetermined.

Before continuing unpacking the implications of the last quote, it is important to know some more about what it means for pure potentiality to be general and undetermined. This will allow us to shine light into the unpredictable feature of the eternal objects that frees the eternal objects from falling under any essential law. Pure potentiality is the characteristic of the eternal object to refer “to the purely general *any* among undetermined actual entities. In itself, an eternal object evades any selection among actualities or epochs” (PR, 256). Pure potentiality is the general indeterminacy of the eternal object, because its ingression to the actual can’t be explained by the history of the actual condition. The ingression of the eternal object can’t be explained because its reason to ingress at a certain time and location exceeds the given conditions set by the actual elements. In this way, strictly speaking, the eternal objects are “pure potentials,” because they can return at *any* time and location, as an excess of what is given.

When an eternal object becomes the datum of the proposition, it refuses the linear and progressive perception of the actual situation. In this sense, when the proposition choreographs feelings, it does so by making the becoming of the event more perceptible. The choreographic proposition reminds us that becoming does not “involve the notion of a unique seriality for its advance into novelty” (PR, 35). What becomes is continuity itself, in a non-serial fashion: “There is a becoming of continuity, but no continuity of becoming” (Ibid.). The disruptive feature of becoming qualifies the agency of the event as something nascent, relational, and distributed. In sum, this is not a choreography imposed on the individual dancer of the everyday. What dances is the subjective form of the everyday event. Furthermore, we will see now that the given conditions set by the actual entities also contribute to the choreographic nascent agency of the event, by defining the disruptive ingress of the eternal object.

Whitehead says that when the selected out actual entities become “logical subjects” of a proposition, they do limit the general abstract potential of the eternal object. “Logical subjects” are what become *food to predicate* something about the conditions of the actual, which then limits the general scope of ingression of the potential. By becoming a logical subject that can predicate something of the eternal object, the actual entity gyres less around the

physical feelings and more toward the pure potential that in turn gets limited. What the proposition does, is to re-orient the physical feelings from the feeling of the actual entities among themselves, toward the excessive quality of the eternal object. The actual entity feels the capacity to call, assemble, and bring into a patchwork, the feelings of other actual entities.

In resume, the proposition—by selecting out the possibility for divergence to specific indexed actual entities—transfers a quality of abstraction to the actualities from the eternal objects, while also transferring a quality of concrete possibility to the latter. Simultaneously, the abstracted actual entities make the concrete mutual relatedness of the environment more intensively felt—as if each quantum of possibility which abstracts from actuality pulls with it the ripple effect of an advancing concrete realized environment, surrounding that particular zone of abstraction.

This rich and complex organization of environmental feelings is a choreographic proposition, one that diverges from the modern tradition of the choreographic that imposes agency upon the dancers' body. This is a choreographic proposition that thinks agency altogether differently than a unidirectional force from subject to object. It thinks agency as the co-composing of feelings—their choreography of a quantum of possibilities rippling the ground of concrescence—bringing into form a potential environment not yet actually existing. Erin Manning calls this a “choreographic *agencement*”<sup>3</sup>: a more-than-human ecology “not activated by decisions in the standard sense of being willed by the individual, but by the immanent creation, in the event, of points of inflection that affect the very tenor of movement moving.”<sup>4</sup> The points of inflection that Manning refers to are what I understand as the co-composing of feelings driven by their mutual call of “predicative patterns” and “logical subjects.” This co-composing is the movement moving that recalibrates what it means to feel across the thresholds of the actual and the potential, in that *zone of unknowability* called forth by a proposition.

The more-than-human ecology opened by a proposition does not erase the human capacity of perception to register it. The more-than-human ecology is what pulls the perceptual capacity of the human body toward the becoming of propositional feelings. The human is folded into a field of nascent micro-agencies that, inasmuch as they generate nexuses of relational feelings, also generate potential environments in excess of what is actually given. Following this logic, we can say that at the level of human perception, the encounter with the proposition is felt as a paradoxical mixture of an excess of realized surrounding actuality, which folds a rift that feels like nothing yet. The alleyway gives sky-blue iron back stairs, rounded windows, square light reflections, bricks, snow slopes, *a fully intensive not felt like nothing fold*, a brown cat, a voice, and a set of not locked swinging rear doors.

A choreographic proposition is a quantum of possibilities, with a degree of abstraction masked in the actual by the folded intensive environment of concreteness around it, which in turn lends anchor to its otherwise too abstract levity. The proposition is where the feeling is more unknown, because it is only an indication for a change that is in bud, to come. It is an actual call to feel for the future. It is a datum for feeling, not yet a feeling: “a proposition has neither the particularity of a feeling, nor the reality of a nexus. It is a datum for feeling, awaiting a subject feeling it” (PR, 259).

Another relevant aspect of a proposition is that, by remaining folded in the concrete world as something more-than actual, it can be activated later by other actual entities with similar logical subjects (similar pattern of selection of actualities). Processes set up some logical subjects as predicative patterns. And propositions can return later after their processes have satisfied their processual arc because of the predicative patterns.

Any subject with any physical feeling which includes in its objective datum the requisite logical subjects can in a supervening phase entertain a propositional feeling with that proposition as a datum. It has only to originate a conceptual feeling with the requisite predicative pattern as its datum, and then to integrate the two feelings into the required propositional feeling. (PR, 259)

The supervening phase of a proposition can happen immediately, at the very moment of feelings feeling their way into actualization. But it can also happen much later. The creative advance of the world composes actualities that will later be ready to resonate to the call of the proposition. The logical subjects—the group of the actual entities—would later attune to the predicative pattern of the potential. In other words, the elimination of the absolute generality of the eternal object, together with the indication of the rippled abstraction into the actual (again, the “logical subject-predicative pattern” relation) could be relayed across processes. Processes which happened not now and not here, but at another time, and somewhere else. Sometimes the actual world is ready to catch up with a potential presence. Sometimes the potential presence is ready to call an actual world into form.

Evidently new propositions come into being with the creative advance of the world. For every proposition involves its logical subjects; and it cannot be the proposition which it is, unless those logical subjects are the actual entities which they are. Thus, no actual entity can feel a proposition, if its actual world does not include the logical subjects of that proposition. (PR, 259)

Propositions are like potential choreographic indexes—not yet with the reality of a nexus—folded in the actual world. Indexes that are vector-like—like

a dance—living in potential and ready-to-activate something. However, they are also called by an actual world in creation. Their activation is a surplus of the world: “actual” *and* “potential.” One of the world poles can call the other. The proposition is a choreographic gesture that meets where the pure indetermination of the eternal objects (potential) and the stubborn determination of actual facts meet halfway. A proposition is a relational gesture—with a “nexus reality” and “tone of feeling” blurred by its quality of being a “datum for” the future (index). The index (or datum for a process to come) is what choreographs the shape of the actual and the potential.

Even in the most dominant planes of the everyday—those that match the relations of feelings with the identitarian and transcendental categories of the same (gender, race, class)—there are processes that could prepare a “supervening” mutual propositional call of the actual and the potential. Even in the everyday choreographies governed by neoliberal Western diagrams of power—those that capture the physicality of feelings and regulate it under the category of labor<sup>5</sup>—there is an excess indexed by the alter-proposition.

There is always a choreographic excess ready for propositions to activate the composition of novel feelings. Feelings that re-compose an actual and potential world. An actual and potential world that re-compose modes of feelings. This un-realized excess is always more than what neoliberal captures of modes of feelings can take. Because the creative advance that drives the seeding movement of propositions is always more anarchic than what a choreography of physical labor can manage.

What this complex philosophical vocabulary is trying to say is that “propositions” are seeds for feelings that remain at the middle (or in the midst or in the mix), on the ever actual and potential creative advance of the world. They are autonomous choreographic vectors loose in the jungle of the world-creative advance, ready to lure actual and potential “predicative pattern-logical subject” relations through feelings. So that feelings are re-continued to generate, differentially, with the novelty of a new eventful world. So that feelings are always lured to the limit of their complexity, there where they don’t know themselves what it means and what it feels like to feel. So that feelings are not considered as the creative element of the creative advance of the world, but they are thought as the non-created (anarchic), that lures for more autonomous creativity.

## NOTES

1. André Lepecki, *Singularities: Dance in the Age of Performance* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 145.
2. Lepecki, *Singularities*, 144–5.

3. The French word “agencement” is a concept by Deleuze and Guattari that is usually translated into English as “assemblage.” The problem with the word “assemblage” is that it does not connote the multiple agencies carried by their self-composing movement.

4. Erin Manning, *The Minor Gesture* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016), 126–7.

5. Lepecki, *Singularities*, 145.

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