

Prologue

The Event of Whitehead

Leibniz inherited two thousand years of thought. He really did inherit more of the varied thoughts of his predecessors than any man before or since. His interests ranged from mathematics to divinity, and from divinity to political philosophy, and from political philosophy to physical science. These interests were backed by profound learning. There is a book to be written, and its title should be, The Mind of Leibniz.

(MT, 3)

Alfred North Whitehead's work is an event in twentieth century philosophy. In fact, if one believes the penetrating view of the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze (1925–95), Whitehead's work was one of the most important events of twentieth century's exploration of the universes of thought. Others, such as David Griffin (d. 2022), were expecting the twenty-first century to become a Whiteheadian century. Others again, such as Bruno Latour (b. 1947), have more recently discovered Whitehead as an alternative current of revolutionary thinking, profoundly renewing our capacity to recognize the ecological embeddedness of humanity and face the environmental challenges of the new century. The revival of interest in Whitehead worldwide, over the last decades, speaks to the importance of time for new developments to unfold and that the creativity in thinking may need patience to be recognized. But if a profound idea arises, it may lead to an unpredictable impact on our understanding of ourselves as human beings in the current cosmic horizon and for future reactions to the ongoing planetary predicaments.

Yet the voices of Deleuze, Griffin, and Latour, among others, are lights in the darkness. Are they prophetic, visionary of a future to come? Or will they remain lone calls in the desert? What are the reasons we even must acknowledge such an

alternative? Perhaps, we are bound to work through the ambivalence that follows any voice of creative novelty: that it may, involuntarily, just by the fact of its novelty, draw a battle line between yeas and nays. Some sensitive visionaries say that Whitehead's philosophy indicates a unique seismic event in the world of thought and for transformative activations of human and planetary potentials: in its meaning still barely touched; in its real importance still lying in the wait despite those prophetic annunciations of its bright future. Others find it less exiting: too much engaged in seemingly outmoded forms of thought, like metaphysics; not following the frontrunners of the philosophical industry, whether from the empires of phenomenology or analytic philosophy; too untimely, neither of (or too early for) poststructuralist liberation nor of late-modern completion. Others again are struck by the difficulties of the language in which Whitehead molds his thoughts: too many neologisms; too much terminological baggage; too Victorian in appearance; too many seemingly baroque figures of speech.

Nevertheless, if one cuts through the noise of distraction and finds one's way into the inner realms of Whitehead's unique universe of discourse, one cannot help but to be drawn to the immediate resonances with existential intuitions and a much-desired outlook on life and thought—as many voices have liberally attested over the last century. As if we suddenly are granted a language to express what we always wanted to articulate, think through, and argue for, while we were swimming in the murky waters of various thought patterns. For most adventurers who risk the encounter with Whitehead's text, its treasures feel like the advent of a new paradigm or a new lens by which we become enabled to understand our existence on Earth and in this universe with fresh eyes and minds. It all begins to make sense. Meaning appears like magic. It is like a baptism of fire, of spirit, of the flame of thought, enkindling not only our mind, but something closer to the visceral knowledge of hope, rekindling the remembrance of desires we might have felt, but seem to have lost: suppressed motivations not to succumb to apocalyptic helplessness in view of the current impasses of life on this planet. Filtering Whitehead through our layers of bad habits and disoriented learning, we may unlearn, untie caricatures of reality, and may even feel compelled to do something about that: to bring change to the exhausted planet and our cultural divides. Whitehead feels like balm in the overheated, burning sensation of wounds of misunderstanding and division. A way out. A new way. A revolution—not of violent overturning, but of gentle, profound reorientation of our deepest modes of thinking and moods of living.

Whitehead's universe can be an epiphany—or arouse one! Irresistible lies his expansive perception of all kinds of possible layers of life and thought in the wait—in such moments. And a cloud of feelings persists: of a great mystery that connects all of his thought in the background, as we ride it through the heavens and hells of our own exploration. Many reasons can be put forward for this impression. There are islands of poetic intensity in Whitehead's language that, in the midst of dense discourses, can appear like a *fata morgana* or a liberating release of tensions. The immediacy

of connections impresses itself on our inquiries when one begins to see, feel, and comprehend them pervading any thought of any field or magnitude with any other thought, never neatly dividing reality into compartments. Settled sedimentations become reconnected as a redeeming flow and sudden vibrations penetrate through any walls of disconnection. Whitehead's thoughts, if you catch up with them, fly like darts over the boundaries of any limits of origination and control of dominions, always on the verge of leaving you behind in your own limitations—and then you *know*: they are *your* limitations, not that of the expanses of the realms of thought and meaning. And in the midst of the immense polyvalence of the technical language of Whitehead's philosophy, we are intruded by insights that are never just ready to be pinned down to one dull literal meaning, always smiling at our coordinate systems when we try to stabilize it as it escapes into uncertainty.

Perhaps, one of the reasons for such adventurous connectivity within Whitehead's thought and its resonances with our searches and feelings, if we find access or are hit by the darts of the eros of its musings, lies in the propensity of Whitehead's interests to never settle at any magnitude or intensity or field of consideration. Perhaps, we should use the artistic technique of “overpainting” to discover what the secret of Whitehead is in this regard—as he has done with a significant text of Plato's *Timaeus* (ca. 360 BCE). Indeed, I will adopt Whitehead's own admiration for the universal genius of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716) as an expression of the deeper reality of his own work. Take the epigraph of this Prologue; now “overpaint” it by exchanging “Leibniz” with “Whitehead”:

Whitehead inherited two thousand years of thought. He really did inherit more of the varied thoughts of his predecessors than any man before or since. His interests ranged from mathematics to divinity, and from divinity to political philosophy, and from political philosophy to physical science. These interests were backed by profound learning. There is a book to be written, and its title should be, *The Mind of Whitehead*.

Indeed, what follows is the attempt to write *this* book!

This pursuit comes with strings and limitations attached. The “mind” of a philosopher—of anyone, really—is, of course, not accessible to anyone, neither by the mind itself in question, nor—if you believe Whitehead's own understanding of these matters—even for God. I don't claim a god's-eye view; and no one could. Whitehead's own reference to the “mind” of Leibniz must be taken in a different sense. Not as an expression of hubris; rather, the symbol of “mind” triggers the connotation of the expansive nature of vast *networks* that the text of Leibniz/Whitehead draws in its reach, its inner workings, and metaphoric latency, together, which always may escape our knowledge or only be remembered in the dark recesses of our lost access to the past and concurrent history and literature. Yet “mind,” here, also, and even more so, indicates the *intuition* necessary to collect all of the details of thinking into one seamless whole,

one smooth horizon in which they gestate and birth a garden or forest or mountain or valley or river or ocean of thought. It is this intuitive unification of the multitude of connections in Whitehead's work, from mathematics to divinity, from political philosophy to cosmology, that will be the subject of the following considerations.

What I am trying to say is this: Plenty of introductions to Whitehead's work have been produced and a multitude of specific investigations of all kinds of aspects of his work fill the annals of philosophy or other areas of thought and disciplines between liberal arts and the sciences, pedagogy and religion, psychology and sociology. My exploration of the Mind of Whitehead does not compete with either of them. It tries to listen to the threads of certain tunes that the text of Whitehead's work weaves to a creative "composition" so that, if it can be "intuited" as a whole, as *one* symphony, its patterns and pervasive symbolisms may begin to vibrate, vibrate together into specific harmonies and flows of themes that reveal a fabric of the "mind" that permeates their accords and polyphonic interweaving.

I have chosen twenty-seven of these thematic flows through the work of Whitehead in order to make a case for their unity in the "mind" of Whitehead. Any such attempt will be a simplification, of course, as all finiteness is simplification of a multiplicity and, as attested by Whitehead himself, "mind" itself is an instrument of simplification. Yet it is precisely in such threads of confluence that a meaningful unity of insight appears. Each of these threads is a "thick slice" through the whole of Whitehead's text; it presents an integrated plane at which, at every point, a connection to other threads and planes may be formed. So, with their multiple crossings—which are nodes of connectivity—a "seamless" horizon can form, the horizon of a "mind" that itself always remains in the background as the unifying mystery of the event in which this unity appears from darkness and manifests itself as meaningful expression of *one* cosmos of thought. Sure, it is the "mind" of Whitehead *as I intuit it*—a leap of imagination, necessarily, but not necessarily just a projection; rather like an interpreter of a symphonic work, it is *one* performance of its score.

There is another implication to this procedure of intuitive unification of a manifold of themes and threads with their mutual crossings and overlapping perspectives: They can only be discovered if they are liberated from any fixed patterns in which one may try to house their secret as statements of the *same* foundational thought or pool of thoughts. It has become one of the poisonous modes of grasping a philosophical mind to find the "little machine" that seems to inform all of its expressions: to scour the work for a "system" that then can be used to limit and sanctify, simplify and censure, what can be said to be the "true" thought of this mind and what must be dismissed as imprecision, failure, outlier, or folly. The history of interpretations of Whitehead is not immune against such seductions to find this clarity and seek this kind of simplification.

Is there a "process model" in Whitehead's work that one can "use" to create criteria for what a "process world" looks like? Is there some "systematic core" to Whitehead's

thinking that defines his philosophy, say, as metaphysics or English philosophy or rationalism, or the like? Are such “boxes” even helpful to define any philosophical revolution? Note that Whitehead thought of Plato (ca. 428–348 BCE) as a philosopher of primordial eminence, *not* because he was a systematizing genius but because of his intuitions, the depth of his contemplations, and his inclusive but open mind! Not limitation of thought or exclusion of diversity but expansion of the thought-space was Plato’s and is Whitehead’s world of thinking. So, for instance, although Whitehead admired modern philosophers like John Locke (1632–1704), Baruch Spinoza (1632–77), and G. F. Leibniz for their rational power, he also found the empiricist cauldron of David Hume (1711–76) to be of equal importance and geniality.

Whitehead’s own formulations of his project sometimes seem to further reductions to a tight scheme, for instance, when he, at the outset of his colossal work *Process and Reality* (1929), describes his philosophy as a “logical, coherent, and necessary system” (PR, 3), exemplifying all kinds of experience. It needs some detective work to unpack such dense formulations, axiomatic as they may seem, in order to discover the complexities behind them, the tentative and undogmatic character of their intuitions, the many folds in the use of the terms such a formula seem to define but really only combines for an imaginative leap (PR, 4). As I follow the diverse strings of Whitehead’s thought in this book, one will quite often find such a conceptual constellation to be a “face of the deep” (Gen 1:2) instead of a fixed box of mechanically interlocked parts and particles. Nothing in Whitehead’s text reveals its meaning independent from the context of its treatment in Whitehead’s conceptuality—and all of Whitehead’s universe of discourse, changing as it may over time, is related in ways that want to point to thinking as surprising happening rather than the schedule of a train of dogmatic statements.

Instead of the “little machine” that seems to constitute the organization in Whitehead’s thought, we must untangle the streams and strings of its ideas in their imaginal content as well as the relational nature of all of Whitehead’s conceptual constellations. In other words, we should not try to find a secret structure, which would only be a reduction, but rather to venture on a journey through a *text* that offers a complex connected landscape of interferences, mutually heightening meanings, and paradox cancellations, regularly upsetting the simplicities of our own presuppositions and limited horizons. We must *listen* to this text, the variety of appearances of words and their poetic intent beyond the prosaic definitions, the motley poetics of polysemy and uncertainty.

There are many ways in which Whitehead himself captures such an approach to his own work. Here are a few examples, visible throughout his later philosophical publications. In the first of these works, venturing into areas of metaphysics beyond philosophy of science, which occupied his publishing up to this point, *Science and the Modern World* (1925), Whitehead speaks of the non-contextual conceptual systematization of reality as the “fallacy of misplaced concreteness” (SMW, 51), that is,

taking abstractions, such as a simplified program, as concrete and real, and celebrate their exchange for the messy reality from which they are extracted—such as his own text and landscape of thinking. Yet the truth could not be further from this travesty, namely, that the excavated theory is the abstraction from the text or experience or reality. In the same book, and also in the following one, *Religions in the Making* (1926), Whitehead refers to the intrinsic *poetic* nature of becoming beyond any systematization or limitation to fixed patterns of being and thought as aesthetic reality that even deserves the epithet of *ultimacy*. In *Process and Reality*, the “systematic” heart of thought in Whitehead’s text is not any abstract pattern but *creativity*, expressing itself in uncontrollable modes of movement and becoming. In this book and in the concurrent two smaller volumes, *The Function of Reason* (1927) and *Symbolism* (1929), Whitehead emphasizes the importance of balancing any settled conceptual grasp on things with ever-new and fresh intuitions and perspectives in order for thought not to become the mere memory of a bygone age and a dead past. In these and the following book, *Adventures of Ideas* (1933), he adds that the congregation of ever-new constellations of concepts is a necessary procedure for avoiding dogmatic sedimentation and for rendering ideas relevant to our current intellectual and practical worlds. In this and his last book, *Modes of Thought* (1938), finally, Whitehead captures these persistently moving accesses to the landscape of thinking beyond any limited combination by marking the preference of a complete set of categories and forms of language as “fallacy of the perfect dictionary” (MT, 173).

I labor this point, because it is not generally accepted and understood that we gain a very different impression of Whitehead’s work and universe if we detach the text from pursuing systems and recur to the “unfiltered” text, its polysemy and polyvalence, its open and ambivalent meanings, not as a lack of concentration or a lapse of logical constancy but as the indication of its imaginative power and aesthetic complexity, of its poetics of intensity and harmony, venturing out into an immensurable world of becoming.

The *twenty-seven threads* chosen for this book represent what Deleuze and Guattari in *What Is Philosophy?* (1995) call “planes of consistency” (ch. 2), thick slices through the text that resonate in Whitehead’s work throughout its development and integrate diverse areas of thinking. At any point, they link, in their own complexity, to any given point in any other such plane—they tunnel and dig, they bridge and they swing, they swim and they fly, they jump and race, they magnify and they relax in exuberance.

The choice of the twenty-seven threads, weaving Whitehead’s “mind,” is informed by the impression that Whitehead connects to, with, and through them throughout the span of his work; that they comprise diverse elements of his conceptual developments and shifts over the span of his expositions of their themes. Other choices would have been possible, and many of these and other potential headings have been used by other authors and myself in earlier publications either introducing to or developing

Whitehead work. However, all of the ones adopted here will be so fundamental to Whitehead that the two criteria I am applying to my choices are neither failing for any of them nor necessitate any substitution in order to exhibit a symphonic universe of Whitehead's mind while it persistently expresses itself in the open-ended manifold of approaches and inquiries.

Take for instance "consciousness." Someone studying Whitehead's thought could highlight consciousness as a concept in science and philosophy that is of utmost interest today. But neither does Whitehead count it as foundational in his universe nor does he exclude it or downplay its profound importance. Rather, Whitehead understands consciousness as one of many modes of experience. Hence, in the web of this book "consciousness" will appear as "node" in the connex of *diverse* of its threads, such as *experience, knowledge, reason, mind, civilization, and evolution*. Or consider "peace"—an important desiderate for our planet today. In Whitehead's work, it has profound importance for the development of *civilization*, but also functions as a necessary counterweight to the cosmic adventure of *evolution* and *ecological* integrity, expressing the concept of *God* in Whitehead's terminology. But "peace" is only made accessible if it is also connoted with *poetics, religion, and mystery*, and in the constitution of the universes as a *cosmos* and of *nature* as a relational organism—again braided with diverse threads of thinking rather than being a particle with independent meaning.

The twenty-seven threads or planes of immanence, expressive of Whitehead's "mind," are gathered into *six parts*. These parts highlight diverse dimensions or mutually crossing zones of Whitehead's universe rather than systematic parts or fixed areas of thought. While the names I have chosen for the threads are Whitehead's, their grouping to parts is mine. They differ not in specification but in the *perspective on the whole* of Whitehead's thought that gives us to think. *The Togetherness of Everything* reflects the ultimacy of connections at the basis for any universe to exist and to be thought about. *The Tree of Knowledge*, reminding of the mythological "tree" of the shock of knowing and insight as well as the evolutionary "tree" of formation and in-formation, explicates the layers of methods accessing reality—each, in a sense, "as a whole." *Faces of the Deep*, another reminder of the mythological beginnings, voices Whitehead's understanding of the universal but all-inherent primordality of "formative factors" and "activities" generating "a world." *The Tree of Life*, itself again a mythological reminder of life-forms unfolding in the evolutionary process of the universe, reflects the layers of existence on the planet Earth and beyond, constraining and coordinating our universe in its multiplicity of appearances. *In the Womb of Nature* follows the spheres of emergent patterns of cooperation and coordinations throughout the cosmos as an organization of organisms, exhibiting the tendency of arriving at a "civilized universe." Finally, the *Universals of the Universe* end where the first part began: at the universally present movements of self-creative formation that define our, and perhaps any, universe.

Although the process of writing can approach any of these six parts only serially, their content addresses the enveloped twenty-seven threads as *coinherent* dimensions of *one* vision that, in any specific question or issue or argument, always already form a unison expressive of the contours and vibrations in any thought we may miss by letting them be in the dark. If, for instance, a specific thought with its conceptual sphere will be introduced, such as that of “personhood” (to name another of Whitehead’s philosophically derivative terms), even if it appears only at specific places, it will need *all six* dimensions to understand the concept with its webbed intersections and the nodes by which it releases its meaning. Hence, “person” is a synthesis of dimensions of certain kinds of *becoming* and *knowing*, of reality in *experiences*; must be explored from diverse procedures such as *science* and *religion*; constitutes a concrete sculpture of *deep modes* of reality, such as being a *multiplicity*, and only captures a reality in the application of *creativity*; will be layered by *physical* and *mental* performances of becoming; expresses itself differently if adopted or adopting diverse patterns of *cosmic organization*; and, finally, by being set in the universal horizons of *evolution* and *continuity*—to just name a few connections or coinherences of its dimensions.

Each of these six overarching dimensions represented in the successive parts of this book is ordered in progression of their expansion from the more primordial to the more complex or diversified, from induction to deduction, from the early to the later, from the initial to the final, from the minor to the major, and so on. In this sense, each dimension of any thought or reality with its inherent threads related to it in Whitehead’s universe will instill the image of a process of expansion of horizons, modes, and magnitudes of increasing unification, and a cyclical reinjection of the united whole into the conditions of its process of becoming unified. Yet one could also follow each threaded dimension *backwards* into the early and primordial, minor and basic, so as to not succumb to the impression that “progression,” here, means subjugation or substitution or denigration or subsumption.

Each of the twenty-seven chapters, in turn, harbors a similar structural pattern of “progression,” but in reverse: from the more general to the more specific, from the ontological to the ethical, from the expansive to the focused, and so on. These *sections* of each chapter, generally between three and five, are headed with a suggestive, even poetic, but always precise and imaginative *quote* from Whitehead’s text, relating the content to us *in nuce*. While they are properly cited in their context in the respective sections, in themselves, they may, to the inclined reader, count as mediations for, and means of meditation on, the deeper, one may say, *felt*, content of the philosophical thoughtscape of Whitehead’s “mind.” They are complex metaphors of the ideas and complexes of ideas contracted into small syllables by which the universe speaks through Whitehead’s intuition and sings of its becoming and search for meaning. Their aesthetic impression is as important as their conceptual transmission of thought. If these section-headings are the voice of Whitehead, they are also the sound