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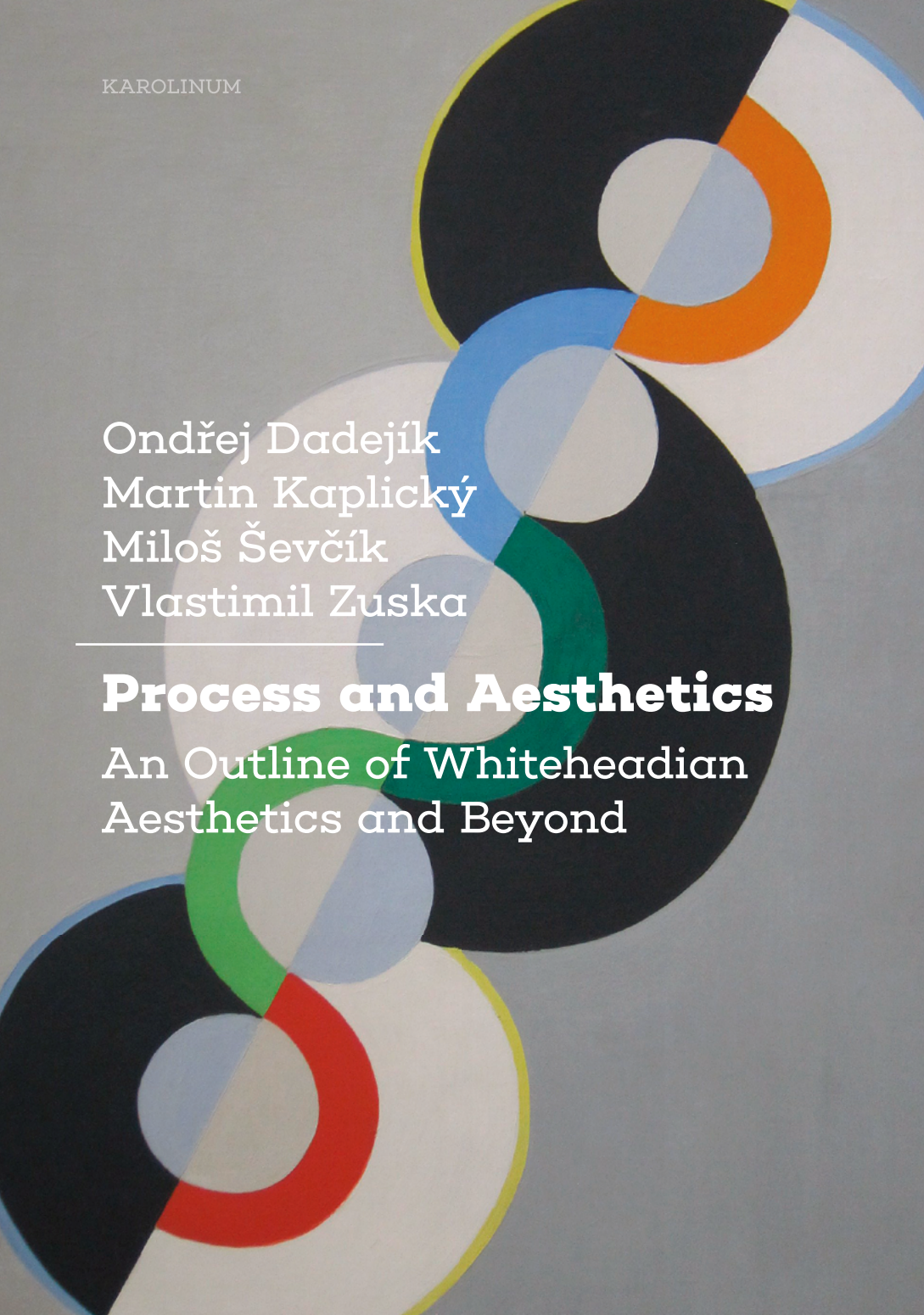

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Process and Aesthetics

An Outline of Whiteheadian Aesthetics and Beyond

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Preface

The aim of this book is to contribute to a discussion of form and some of the main motifs of aesthetic theory based on the process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead. Whitehead did not write any books or articles dedicated to aesthetics specifically, but aesthetic motifs permeate his entire philosophical opus. One could thus say that Whitehead's aesthetics is implicit in his philosophy. Nonetheless, this absence of an explicitly formulated aesthetic theory is probably the reason why Whiteheadian aesthetics have not attracted the attention of aestheticians. Most attempts to reconstruct Whitehead's aesthetics have come from process philosophers. But even in the context of process philosophy, aesthetics has never occupied a central position. Whiteheadian aesthetics has therefore long remained overshadowed by process-oriented theology, theory of education, and psychology.

Although Whitehead's thought has often served as a source of inspiration for new systems of aesthetics (works by Susanne Langer or Charles Hartshorne), there have been few attempts to systematically develop his theory of aesthetics. Donald Sherburne undertook the first such attempt in *A Whiteheadian Aesthetic: Some Implications of Whitehead's Metaphysical Speculation* (1961). Among later attempts, let us note Steven Shaviro's *Without Criteria: Kant, Whitehead, Deleuze, and Aesthetics* (2009) and Steve Odin's *Tragic Beauty in Whitehead and Japanese Aesthetics* (2016). Each reconstructs Whitehead's aesthetics from a different perspective. Sherburne bases his approach mainly on Whitehead's notion of propositional feeling and reconstructs Whitehead's aesthetics based on a close reading of the aesthetic theory of Benedetto Croce. Steven Shaviro's main starting point is Whitehead's notion of beauty as a process of harmonization,

and he compares Whitehead's ideas to those of Kant and Deleuze. Steven Odin bases his book on the idea of beauty as a "penumbral shadow and the tragic beauty of perishability" and compares this Whiteheadian motif with traditional Japanese aesthetics. And while one might dispute some of their particular conclusions, we believe their books are valuable contributions to a better understanding of Whitehead's aesthetics. These texts also helped form our own views on the subject.

Our book aims to provide another angle from which Whitehead's aesthetics might be reconstructed. We pay special attention to the notion of aesthetic experience, which we analyze from the perspective of certain antinomies, such as abstraction versus concreteness, immediacy vs. mediation, and aesthetic contextualism versus aesthetic isolationism. For our interpretation of Whiteheadian aesthetics, the concepts of creativity and rhythm are crucial. Using these concepts, we interpret the motif of the processes by which experience is harmonized, the sensation of the quality of the whole, and directedness towards novelty.

In chapter one, we introduce Whitehead's philosophical method of descriptive generalization. This method assumes that every philosophical system is based on a particular entry point. We show that for Whitehead, this entry point was aesthetics. This is why his entire philosophical system was imbued with aesthetic ideas and also why the various concepts that constitute the scaffolding of his system can be used to reconstruct his aesthetics.

In chapter two, we compare Whitehead's and Dewey's philosophical systems to show that both thinkers viewed aesthetic experience in terms of complex rhythms. We also show that they help us to better understand both the differences and the continuities between everyday experience and art. This chapter draws on two studies published in Czech – namely, Ondřej Dadelík's "Překonávání dualismu života a umění ve filosofii Johna Deweyho a A. N. Whiteheada" [Overcoming life-art dualism in the philosophy of John Dewey and A. N. Whitehead] (*Acta universitatis Carolinae: Philosophica et historica*, Studia aesthetica, 2018) and Martin Kaplický's "Whitehead versus Dewey: O filosofii, rytmu a estetické zkušenosti" [Whitehead versus Dewey: On philosophy, rhythm, and aesthetic experience] (*Acta universitatis Carolinae: Philosophica et historica*, Studia aesthetica, 2018).

In chapter three, we compare Whitehead's ideas with those of Henri Bergson. On this basis, we try to show how art reveals the form of immediate experience and how the aesthetic experience of art relates to truth. This chapter is based on the following studies by Miloš Ševčík,

published in Czech: "Umělecká tvořivost v úvahách A. N. Whiteheada a H. Bergsona" [Artistic creativity in the writings of A. N. Whitehead and H. Bergson] (*Acta universitatis Carolinae: Philosophica et historica*, Studia aesthetica, 2017), "Odhalování, harmonizace a rytmus bezprostřednosti ve Whiteheadových a Bergsonových úvahách o roli uměleckého díla a povaze estetické zkušenosti" [The disclosure, harmonization, and rhythm of immediacy in Whitehead's and Bergson's writings on the role of the work of art and on the nature of aesthetic experience] (*Acta universitatis Carolinae: Philosophica et historica*, Studia aesthetica, 2018), and "Rytmus jako proměna na základě opakování a potřeba její variace: K Whiteheadově pojetí estetické zkušenosti s uměním" [Rhythm as transformation based on repetition and the need for variation: On Whitehead's conception of the aesthetic experience of art] (*Algoritmy obrazov – obrazy algoritmov. K povahe výskumov v súčasnom umení* [Pictorial algorithms – algorithmic pictures], 2019).

The aim of chapter four is to explain in closer detail the processes which constitute aesthetic experience in a narrower sense. We approach this theme by analysing aesthetic experience from the perspective of the types of abstractive processes it involves and the complex types of experience it produces. This chapter is based mainly on two studies by Vlastimil Zuska, likewise published in Czech: "Rytmus a událost krásy" [Rhythm and the event of beauty] (*Acta universitatis Carolinae: Philosophica et historica*, Studia aesthetica, 2018) and "Proces abstrakce jako faktor v umění a estetický princip" [The process of abstraction as a factor in art and the aesthetic principle] (*Acta universitatis Carolinae: Philosophica et historica*, Studia aesthetica, 2017).

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I. Whitehead's Aesthetic Philosophy and Implicit Aesthetics

1. Aesthetic Experience as a Source of Philosophy

In a philosophical context, Alfred North Whitehead is known primarily as the creator of an original philosophical system (according to Gilles Deleuze, "the last great metaphysical system" of Western philosophy) based on a conception of reality as a set of closely related and interconnected processes. Whitehead seeks to show that the notion that the world as a set of stable objects with precisely determinable temporal and spatial coordinates could be the fundamental underpinning for a philosophical system of the highest generality is highly problematic. In his view, it is problematic because its basic elements are already highly abstract. The idea of a stable, independently existing solid object removes from its processes the interactions with the environment that co-determine what the object is. It ignores the fact that each real object undergoes, either slowly or quickly, noticeable changes. However, Whitehead's ontology stands in even starker opposition to an understanding of existing material objects, whether stable or changing, in the sense of the scholastic substance-action distinction, because the fundamental "building block" of Whitehead's universe is neither a substantial objectivity nor an idea, but an event. Consistent with this ontological and cosmological (the subtitle of Whitehead's magnum opus is "An Essay in Cosmology") scheme, in the conceptual being-becoming dichotomy, becoming is primary – in contrast with the prevailing tradition of Western philosophy, including that of Heidegger, for example.

The notion of temporal and spatial coordinates is, according to Whitehead, an abstraction of an originally given duration; in that framework,

we can distinguish various relationships between the individual components. From these relationships, according to Whitehead, we can then abstract linear time and geometrical space.[1]

Of course, Whitehead does not claim that linear time or geometric space are not useful concepts. On the contrary, he is well aware that they are key concepts that have made possible the unprecedented development of scientific knowledge and in many respects also orient our practical life. Their usefulness cannot be disputed. However, their universality and ease of application suggest, according to Whitehead, that we should see these abstract categories as unquestionable facts on which any philosophical reasoning should be based.[2] Whitehead points out that we should not forget their nature as abstractions; instead, we should consider them to be the most concrete things we encounter in the world. Whitehead criticizes this confusion of an abstract category for a concrete fact and calls it a "fallacy of misplaced concreteness." In his most extensive book, *Process and Reality*, he even maintains that the fallacy of misplaced concreteness is one of the two main dangers we face when constructing philosophical systems:

> This fallacy consists in neglecting the degree of abstraction involved when an actual entity is considered merely so far as it exemplifies certain categories of thought. There are aspects of actualities which are simply ignored so long as we restrict thought to these categories. Thus, the success of a philosophy is to be measured by its comparative avoidance of this fallacy, when thought is restricted within its categories.[3]

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1 Whitehead defines "duration" generally as "a certain whole of nature which is limited only by the property of being a simultaneity." See Alfred North Whitehead, *The Concept of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1920), 53. Whitehead believes it is important that this conception of duration is not static but undergoes development. For Whitehead, therefore, duration is the totality of nature, in the sense of the whole terminus of sense-awareness, and this whole is evolving simultaneously. This occurring whole is further articulated into partial occurring units, events. In his texts, Whitehead shows that through what he calls the "method of extensive abstraction," we can abstract terms used in physics and mathematics such as linear time, geometric space, straight lines or points based on the concepts of duration, the event, and their basic extensive relationships. See Alfred North Whitehead, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Natural Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1919), 101–146; Whitehead, *The Concept of Nature*, 74–98.

2 We may consider Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, whose introduction posits linear time and geometric space as the basic sources of all knowledge, to be an exemplary case of philosophical thought that considers linear time and geometric space to be basic givens. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 155–171.

3 Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*. Corrected Edition (New York: The Free Press, 1979), 7–8. Whitehead first mentions the fallacy of misplaced

The aim of philosophy is indeed, according to Whitehead, to create a system of general ideas, but one that will have the potential to fully explain concrete reality without succumbing to the aforementioned fallacy of misplaced concreteness. Whitehead is aware that this aim is not fully achievable because reality is always given selectively, through some sort of simplification, to our perception and our thought. We always pick out those features of reality that are important from our perspective. A fully adequate philosophical system would have to respect all perspectives from which reality might be seen, and this is not within the power of human-made philosophical systems.[4] According to Whitehead, all any philosophical system can do is approach the ultimate aim of creating a complete conceptual scheme. Yet developing the most general philosophical systems possible is justified since through their categorical schemes we can see reality from perspectives that are neglected by our established ways of seeing. At the same time, such philosophical systems enable a certain cognitive distance from established ways of categorizing reality. According to

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concreteness in *Science and the Modern World* in connection with his criticism of two principles that, in his view, had been mistaken for the basic characteristics of all concrete things. These principles are based on the assumption of the simple location of matter in space and time and the assumption that all objects have both a necessary and indispensable substance that determines what they really are and the more or less random qualities and attributes they can bind with in different situations. Whitehead does not doubt the usefulness of such principles, but he does not agree that they can describe reality in its actual character. In the following, he claims: "Of course, substance and quality, as well as simple location, are the most natural ideas for the human mind. It is the way in which we think of things, and without these ways of thinking we could not get our ideas straight for daily use. There is no doubt about this. The only question is, how concretely are we thinking when we consider nature under these conceptions? My point will be, that we are presenting ourselves with simplified editions of immediate matters of fact. When we examine the primary elements of these simplified editions, we shall find that they are in truth only to be justified as being elaborate logical constructions of a high degree of abstraction." See Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (New York: Pelican Mentor Books, 1948), 53–54. In *Symbolism: Its Meaning and Effect*, Whitehead uses this term again in connection with his critique of the concept of time as a pure succession of moments. He shows here that this concept of time is an abstraction from a more fundamental type of relationship, the conformation of new events to the current state of the world. Whitehead shows that the concept of time as pure succession is assumed in many philosophical systems as a fundamental fact (he mentions here the philosophies of Kant and Hume directly). This concept of time is therefore also an example of the fallacy of misplaced concreteness. See Alfred North Whitehead, *Symbolism: Its Meaning and Effect* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), 38–39.

4 In this connection, Whitehead says, "The besetting sin of philosophers is that, being merely men, they endeavor to survey the universe from the standpoint of gods. There is pretense at adequate clarity of fundamental ideas. We can never disengage our measure of clarity from a pragmatic sufficiency within occasions of ill-defined limitations. Clarity always means "clear enough." Alfred North Whitehead, "Remarks," *The Philosophical Review* 46, no. 2 (March, 1937): 179.

Whitehead, the main purpose of philosophical systems should be to build on conceptions of reality that were once taken for granted, to encourage the search for previously neglected aspects of reality, and eventually to create conceptual schemes able to connect the previously established aspects of reality with the previously neglected ones. Based on this approach, philosophical systems should come as close as possible to concrete reality and be able to systematically organize the types of abstractions through which reality might be viewed. Whitehead summarizes this motif in his later book *Modes of Thought*: "Philosophy is the criticism of abstractions which govern special modes of thought."[5] A philosophical system that succumbed to the fallacy of misplaced concreteness would fail to criticize abstractions. Indeed, a set of abstractions in such a philosophy would be regarded as fully concrete and unquestionable.

Whitehead believes the relationship between concreteness and abstraction is also tied to another main pitfall the construction of a philosophical system must avoid: the assumption that philosophical systems must be built on clear and distinct axioms that represent the only foundation upon which a consistent system of more complex statements can be built. In this regard, Whitehead notes that "the verification of a rationalistic scheme is to be sought in its general success, and not in the peculiar certainty, or initial clarity, of its first principles."[6] He rejects here the idea of a philosophy based on a few fundamental claims that are taken to be self-evident, clear and distinct, and which constitute the basis on which further, equally clear and distinct conclusions can be deductively established. A conceptual system of this type is in fact built on the basis of these fundamental assumptions, which are conceived as self-evident. However, such conceptual schemes do not permit us to examine their fundamental assumptions with cognitive distance. Because these notions appear clear and distinct in consciousness, they are considered given and self-evident. Clear and distinct knowledge, however, according to Whitehead, represents only a minute part of our experience, the vast portion of which is based on processes that take place below the level of awareness and are therefore not usually given clearly or distinctly in consciousness.[7] For this reason, Whitehead claims that "the accurate expres-

5 Alfred North Whitehead, *Modes of Thought* (New York: Free Press, 1968), 48–49.

6 Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 8.

7 Conscious experience, according to Whitehead, constitutes no more than a small part of our experience and is characterized by an intense focus on nothing but a particular part of an organism's environment. This enables the organism to apprehend that part of the environment

sion of the final generalities is the goal of discussion and not its origin."[8] An axiomatically constructed philosophical system is particularly prone to succumbing to the fallacy of misplaced concreteness because what appears to us to be clear and distinct is often not reality in its concreteness but our habitual ways of perceiving it and thinking about it.

The axiomatic construction of a philosophical system is susceptible to the fallacy of misplaced concreteness because such philosophical systems present themselves as merely mediating the obvious facts or principles from which they then derive their basic categories and principles. By contrast, Whitehead claims: "Metaphysical categories are not dogmatic statements of the obvious; they are tentative formulations of the ultimate generalities."[9] Thus, according to Whitehead, the aim of a maximally general philosophical system is, first and foremost, to create a categorical scheme, a conceptual network through which the connections may be shown between what appears to us as obvious and those features of reality that are not so obvious and yet fundamentally influence and determine what we experience. The aim of philosophical systems is therefore not to recapitulate what is given to us clearly and distinctly, but to attempt to discover new features of reality that are hidden in the background of conscious perception and to point out the connections between these newly formulated features and what is given to us clearly and distinctly. The main problem of philosophical systems that have succumbed to the fallacy of misplaced concreteness or to the conviction that philosophy can be construed by means of the axiomatic method is not only that their fundamental concepts conceal their abstract nature and are mistakenly considered to be the most concrete concepts we could encounter. Their main problem is that they only make reality visible in those features which they emphasize, neglecting all the other features that do not

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very accurately, in great detail. At the same time, however, much of our experience is displaced into the background. Conscious experience is therefore inherently highly selective. See, for example, Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: The Free Press, 1967), 180. Whitehead's broad conception of perception is also related to this motif. Whitehead understands it not only as the registering of clear and distinct objects, but also as the perception of one's immediate past and future; the background awareness of one's own organic states, which manifest themselves as a certain emotion accompanying the perceiver's overall situation; and the perception of the overall atmosphere of a given situation, which constitutes the background to the recognition of specific objects. In chapter three, devoted to a comparison of Whitehead's and Bergson's reflections on art and aesthetic experience, we show that it is art and aesthetic experience that have the potential to exemplify such a broad conception of perception and its two primary modes – causal efficacy and presentational immediacy.

8 Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 8.

9 Whitehead, *Process and Reality,* 8.

fit into their conceptual framework. Whitehead thinks that the goal of metaphysics is to create a conceptual scheme that will cover up as little as possible and be as close to the concrete as possible. As we have seen above, neither the deductive method of derivation from accepted axioms nor the creation of a conceptual network based on the classification of obvious facts is appropriate for the construction of such a scheme. The sought-after philosophical scheme may only be achieved through the imaginative elaboration of certain facts of our experience. In view of this, Whitehead claims:

> After the initial basis of a rational life, with a civilized language, has been laid, all productive thought has proceeded either by the poetic insight of artists, or by the imaginative elaboration of schemes of thought capable of utilization as logical premises. In some measure or other, progress is always a transcendence of what is obvious.[10]

Thus, according to Whitehead, a philosophical system is valid to the extent that it shifts and expands our ability to recognize and systematize previously unrecognized facets of reality and link them to others. To do so, it requires an imaginative elaboration of observed facts; that is why Whitehead suggests there is a link between philosophy and art in the quotation above.[11] According to Whitehead, both philosophy and art should strive to modify language and other means of expression, allowing us to express in abstract, generally understandable terms the most concrete experiences possible that defy expression in general form. According to Whitehead, both philosophy and art require the modification of a commonly used vocabulary because they seek to go beyond what we already know about the world and to make our experiences which we are not clearly aware of present for us. While art progresses through the presentation of a certain basic insight, philosophy seeks to build the most appropriate conceptual scheme to describe all the features of reality.

Based on the above, Whitehead considers the imaginative elaboration of our own experience to be an essential part of constructing a philosophical system, claiming that "the primary method of philosophy is

10 Whitehead, *Process and Reality,* 9.

11 He is even more explicit in *Modes of Thought*: "Of course all our terms of speech are too special, and refer too explicitly to higher stages of experience. For this reason, philosophy is analogous to imaginative art. It suggests meaning beyond its mere statements. On the whole, elaborate phrases enshrine the more primitive meanings." See Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*, 117.

descriptive generalization."[12] What are the basic features of the philosophical method Whitehead is putting forward and what role does imagination play in it? Whitehead compares this method to the take-off, flight, and landing of an aircraft and describes it as a comprehensive, self-reflective process with three basic phases or levels. The first level, according to Whitehead, is the plane of individual observations of reality (corresponding metaphorically to the aircraft's take-off). Every philosophical system, claims Whitehead, has its origins in a particular area of human experience, "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 a storehouse of human experience."[13] This plane of descriptive generalization reflects the unattainability of a neutral, all-seeing viewpoint. The construction of a philosophical system is always based on a limited area of human experience and in the first phase what is sought is a description that is as accurate and complete as possible.

However, if we want to create the most general philosophical system possible, we cannot make do with a description of a certain area of our experience, or we will never achieve the maximum generality that Whitehead demands of philosophical systems. Thus, based on the observation plane, we must proceed to the second phase, that of the imaginative experiment (metaphorically, the aircraft's flight), in which, on the basis of the material obtained, we create the general scheme of a conceptual system that is to be applied both within and beyond the area of investigation it came from. Thus, the meaning of the terms acquired in the original area are extended and modified. As Whitehead himself writes:

> The success of the imaginative experiment is always to be tested by the applicability of its results beyond the restricted locus from which it originated. In default of such extended application, a generalisation started from physics, for example, remains merely an alternative expression of notions applicable to physics. The partially successful philosophic generalisation will, if derived from physics, find applications in fields of experience beyond physics. It will enlighten observation in those remote fields, so that general principles can be discerned as in the process of illustration, which in the absence of the imaginative generalisation are obscured by their persistent exemplification.[14]

12 Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 10.
13 Whitehead, *Process and Reality,* 5.
14 Whitehead, *Process and Reality,* 5.

As can be seen from the above quotation, the second phase of imaginative generalization leads into the third phase – the re-observation of experience (metaphorically, the aircraft's landing), which, provided the conceptual system is successful, is deepened by being performed on the basis of a comprehensive system of concepts obtained through the imaginative elaboration of the original observations.[15] This process brings further facts that need to be linked once again with the conceptual system being created; as a result, there arise in turn new modifications of the basic concepts of the philosophical system being built, which must be incorporated before the system can reach its greatest possible explanatory potential.[16]

The account of descriptive generalization presented above gives rise to at least four interesting consequences: first, the phases of descriptive generalization mentioned above are closely interconnected. The starting ground of a philosophical system is chosen considering the possibility

15 As Whitehead himself states, it may turn out that the given categories are not suitable for describing certain areas of experience. In such a case, the generality of the conceptual system must either be fundamentally limited and its relevance retained within the scope of that a limited area of facts, or we must abandon it completely. See Whitehead, *Process and Reality,* 9.

16 Whitehead's description of descriptive generalization is in many ways analogous to the root-metaphor theory Stephen Coburn Pepper formulated in the 1930s and 1940s. He too emphasizes that the value of a philosophical system does not lie in the consistency and self-evidence of its fundamental assumptions but on the explanatory power of the metaphorical insight the system offers. Like Whitehead, Pepper stresses that the foundation of philosophical systems on self-evident principles is cognitively unjustified, because by citing their self-evidence, the system actually renounces the need to substantiate the nature of the self-evidence any further. He then labels this interpretation strategy as dogmatism. Pepper's examples of dogmatism often coincide with Whitehead's examples of the fallacy of misplaced concreteness – for example, the assumption of the self-evident existence of linear time and geometrical space or the presumption of an independent knowing mind in contradistinction to extended substances. Like Whitehead, Pepper believes that each philosophical system is based on a certain metaphorical insight, a root-metaphor that is then elaborated into a system of its basic categories, which go on, of course, to be corrected and modified. In this respect, Whitehead's and Pepper's views on the basis of philosophical systems are fully consistent.
However, their conceptions show fundamental differences. Whitehead encourages philosophers to try to emend already-complete philosophical systems and integrate them with a system that draws closer to an adequate account of reality. Pepper emphasises that historically, four basic types of philosophical systems (formism, mechanicism, organicism, and contextualism) have been established which can never be fully reconciled due to divergences between their source metaphors; they thus constitute the basic discursive approaches to understanding reality. Pepper's work anticipated both T. S. Kuhn's scientific paradigms and Hayden White's four different historical strategies. See Stephen Coburn Pepper, *World Hypotheses: A Study in Evidence* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1942); Thomas Samuel Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962); and Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

of generating general principles and we formulate these principles in turn with an eye to their applicability outside the original field of experience. Thus, the individual phases of descriptive generalization cannot be understood as linearly evolving moments but rather as different moments of the dominant activity of one process, the process of unfolding the consequences that enable us to view reality as a whole through the characteristics derived from one of its areas. The basic task of descriptive generalization is therefore to find a unifying organizational principle that can be used to construct the basic categories of a given philosophical system and subsequently to describe areas not originally associated with this unifying principle. However, this unifying principle must prove its legitimacy by showing that it is able to uncover those features of reality that we recognize retrospectively as being fundamental, even though we may not be directly aware of them. Not every area and not every organizational principle will stand the test.

Hence, the main goal of descriptive generalization is finding a particular unifying principle that enables us to see reality in its greatest possible wholeness and concreteness. But is something like this really necessary? Is reality not already given to us in its wholeness through our perception? Whitehead claims it is not. The second consequence of the method of descriptive generalization is that the fact that our normal grasp of reality is necessarily selective is highlighted. Each organism focuses only on those features of reality that are or might be important in the context of its own activities. This is inevitable, of course, but we should not succumb to the illusion that our conscious experience allows us to see reality in its concreteness, fullness, and wholeness. Below the level of conscious cognition, according to Whitehead, there are a number of only vaguely sensed processes that give rise to conscious experience. These deep-rooted primordial processes occur without us being fully aware of them. The method of descriptive generalization allows us to consider processes that slip through a selective net of conscious experience. As Whitehead himself notes in a discussion of the relationship between philosophy and the selective nature of perception: "The task of philosophy is to recover the totality obscured by the selection. It replaces in rational experience what has been submerged in the higher sensitive experience and has been sunk yet deeper by the initial operations of consciousness itself."[17]

17 Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 15.

The third consequence that descriptive generalization draws attention to is that no philosophical system is, in its essence, a description of a reality that lies outside and is fully open to subsequent description. For, according to Whitehead, a reality that lies outside awaiting description is an abstraction from a certain initially imaginative and metaphorical intuition that does not gain a veneer of self-evidence until a certain time has passed. In this case, a sharp boundary between the knower and what is known is presumed.[18] According to Whitehead, newly emerging philosophical schemes should strive to take advantage of the metaphorical insights of previous philosophies; at the same time, however, they should subject their basic assumptions and repercussions to critical examination, assigning to them the degree of abstraction they entail. But this requires a new type of insight, the discovery of a new organizational principle, new metaphors. Whitehead maintains that any major philosophical system is speculative in nature (it is a far-reaching hypothesis) and cannot claim to deliver a full knowledge of reality. The main contribution such a system can offer is a new systematic insight that seeks to reverse the "slow descent of accepted thought towards the inactive commonplace."[19] Thus, according to Whitehead, the value of a philosophical system lies not only in its capacity to illuminate different facets of reality, but also in the ability of its formulations to clear the way for new systems. Whitehead writes that "a new idea introduces a new alternative; and we are not less indebted to a thinker when we adopt the alternative which he discarded. Philosophy never reverts to its old position after the shock of a great philosopher."[20]

The fourth consequence is that if descriptive generalization is extended and modified with terms derived from the initial domain, we can say

18 According to Pepper's root-metaphor theory, the assumption of closed units of reality that only subsequently enter into mutual relations and into a relationship with a knowing subject is typical only for two of the four philosophical systems. For formism, the basic root metaphor is a similarity between the different elements of reality, and for mechanicism, the root metaphor is a cause-and-effect relationship between the essential elements of reality. For both of these systems, the assumption of distinct elements of reality is essential. Formism seeks to describe reality on the basis of categories of different levels of generality that express degrees of similarity among the items belonging to them. According to Pepper, for example, both Plato and Aristotle would be proponents of this type of system. Mechanicism, by contrast, understands the world in terms of causal interactions among its fundamental elements. The world is seen as a very complex, all-embracing mechanism, whose inner workings must be accounted for. An example of mechanistic reasoning, according to Pepper, would be the philosophical system of Descartes. See Pepper, *World Hypotheses*, 151–231.

19 Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*, 174.

20 Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 11.

that through a conceptual system constructed in such a manner, we may cast a fresh look not only at other areas of experience, but also at the initial domain because the meanings of the categories of the constructed philosophical system will have shifted to some extent from the original domains, making a certain cognitive distance possible within the framework of this hindsight.

Thus, the method of descriptive generalization described above is a way of creating a general conceptual network for a philosophical system that retains the closest possible relationship to the concrete and has, at the same time, the potential to avoid succumbing to the fallacy of misplaced concreteness. This is Whitehead's alternative to the philosophical-scientific methods of induction and deduction, which he believes often succumb to the fallacy.[21] However, imaginative elaboration also recalls a third method, notably developed by Charles Sanders Peirce – that is, abduction.[22] On the way to expressing what is most concrete, Whitehead thinks the imaginative elaboration of our own experience is indispensable because that which is concrete does not take the form of objects waiting to be described but that of the processes thanks to which we perceive those objects. These concrete processes are constantly active in the background of our interactions with our surroundings, so we cannot simply point a finger at them. Indeed, they are what makes any finger pointing possible. It is only by means of a metaphorical intuition that recognizes the fundamental principles of reality through the phenomena offered to conscious experience, that these fundamental concrete principles of reality can be approached. However, conscious experience is already highly selective and therefore abstracted, far removed from the concrete situation in its totality. Isolating an object is always a symptom of abstraction. According to Whitehead, concrete reality takes the form of a network of relationships in which we are implicated. Philosophy, therefore, is an attempt to formulate the structure of the total situation based on a group of differentiated fragments. It is in this respect that an analogy between art and philosophy is important to Whitehead. Both art and philosophy seek to link the obvious aspects of reality with those that lie in the background. That is why the ability of metaphorical discernment to trace the form of certain appearances to the form of other facts is crucial for both disciplines.

21 Whitehead, *Process and Reality,* 5–11.

22 Charles Sanders Peirce, "Abduction and Induction," in *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, ed. Justus Buchler (New York: Dover Publications, 1955), 150–156.