Steven Shaviro. *Without Criteria: Kant, Whitehead, Deleuze, and Aesthetics*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009, xvi + 174 pp. ISBN 978-0-262-19576-8

The predominant established approach in the genre of the review is to offer a brief explication of the work under review and then a critique, summarizing an assessment of the contribution or possible attacks on possible shortcomings. The provocative title of Shaviro's book, however, is enough to raise expectations even before reading the work. This is intensified by the trio of names in the subtitle, in connection with aesthetics. This volume, among other things, ranks with a whole range of titles devoted to trios of 'great names'. One of the pioneers of this 'subgenre' was Roland Barthes with his *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*. What do the three philosophers in the title of the book under review have in common with each and also with aesthetics? In aesthetics, Kant's founding role and the position of his still relevant and provocative *Critique of Judgement* are indisputable. Whitehead, however, wrote no work devoted particularly to aesthetics (only two chapters in his *Adventures of Ideas* are explicitly concerned with the field). And Deleuze? He is the author of a monograph on the painter Francis Bacon, two books (related to each other) on film, and *A Thousand Plateaus*, the allegedly aesthetics-oriented second volume of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (written with Félix Guattari).

Will the volume under review, then, perhaps be an inquiry into influences? In other words, will its author ask how Kant influenced the other two, in the spirit of Jorge Luis Borges's 'Kafka y sus precursores' or T. S. Eliot's 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', or how the works of these later authors influenced our reading, in the sense of the selectivity and the interpretation, of their predecessor? The relationship between Whitehead and Kant is demonstrable to the extent that Whitehead's co-author of the monumental *Principia Mathematica*, Bertrand Russell, recalls in *Portraits from Memory*, with a slight reproach, that Whitehead was always inclined to Kant, with the implicit suggestion that for Russell this was always incomprehensible.[1] Whitehead referred to Kant many times, often critically. Deleuze published the monograph *Kant's Critical Philosophy* and quotes Whitehead several times, mostly in *The Fold*, whose chapter on the event is largely 'Whiteheadian'.

In this respect the reader has relatively well-founded expectations. But what is suggested by the main title, *Without Criteria*? Whereas in Kant the free play of mental faculties (that is, without criteria) emerges as the essential characteristic of aesthetic judgement, in Whitehead the reader's imagination will be challenged

[1] Bertrand Russell, 'Alfred North Whitehead', in *Portraits from Memory and Other Essays* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956), 100–101.

by the absence of criteria in the evocation of the categoreal scheme of *Process and Reality*, of concepts of the eternal object, the actual occasion, the nexus, and society, just as in Deleuze's understanding of the concept in *What Is Philosophy?*, with a plane of immanence and constitution, and so forth. But all the more, then, we can expect something new. Let us now consider the actual book under review and compare the extent to which the reader's expectations are met or are disappointed or will change in the course of reading, and where they will lead.

Shaviro begins his detailed comparison of two philosophers, Martin Heidegger and Whitehead, one of whom does not appear in the subtitle. The author presents his book as a 'philosophical fantasy', that is, as a notion of alternative history (or alternative philosophy), whose main figure (or, as Michel Foucault says, founder of discourse) in the first half of the twentieth century is not Heidegger, but Whitehead. The idea is not a new one; the comparison of both these figures was made on the same basis (the primacy of Being versus the primacy of Becoming) by Ilya Prigogine with Isabelle Stengers in *Order out of Chaos* (1984). Whitehead and probably also the author of the work under review are linked with the last-named work and also all of Deleuze's (and Guattari's) philosophy by the often only implicit, but therefore all the more urgent, vision of nonlinear systems (including human consciousness). In these systems linear, unidirectional causality and mechanic determination are not valid; instead questions that are considered by deterministic chaos theory, catastrophe theory, fractal geometry, and contemporary cognitive science and neuroscience predominate.

In the preface the author declares his selective reading of the three chosen authors, which results in their conjunction. He calls this 'critical aestheticism', referring to the fundamental nature of aesthetic synthesis as the basis of feeling, the fundamental act of Whitehead's cosmology. Nowhere in the book under review, however, does aesthetics as a contemporary philosophical discipline play the kind of role that its subtitle leads us to expect. Nor do we find here the kind of complexity of aesthetic experience which we know from phenomenological, analytical, hermeneutic, semiotic, or structuralist and poststructuralist aesthetics.

The first chapter, with the same title as the volume itself, begins with Kant's theory of beauty, which Shaviro describes, with relative persuasiveness, as a theory of affect and singularity. With a comparison of Kant's judgement of taste and Whitehead's concept of proposition as 'an element in the objective lure proposed for feeling'[2] or as a nondeterministic change, he achieves a reconceptualization of Kant's factors of disinterestedness and nonconceptual

[2] Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, corr. ed. (New York: Free Press, 1978), 187.

feeling (pleasure) through the lens of Whitehead's philosophy of the organism. Following Whitehead, Shaviro declares a shift from the Kantian conception of the world emerging from the subject to the philosophy of organism, in which the subject emerges from the world. Kant's fundamental insight, adopted by Whitehead (but also by Husserlian phenomenology or the phaneroscopy of C. S. Peirce), Shaviro sees in the constructing or constituting function of each act of experience or, as Whitehead says, occasion of experience. He understands Kant's judgement of taste as the auto-affecting of the subject by the objective datum that it grasps, which he finds to be almost a paradox (how can one talk, in the context of an objective datum, about auto-affecting?), but this auto-affecting can, without paradox, be said to be similar not only to the reflected pleasure of the *Critique of Judgement*, but also, for example, to George Santayana's beauty as objectified pleasure and Richard W. Lind's 'meta-interest in perception'. From the singularity of the experience of beauty and other characteristics, Shaviro derives the possibility of breaking free from criteria that block innovation and change, and he thus anticipates the 'affective tone' of the rest of the book under review.

In Chapter 2, the author presents key concepts of Whitehead's 'speculative philosophy' in a series of oscillations between Kant on the one hand and Whitehead and Deleuze on the other, giving more space to Kant. Through a chapter in Deleuze's *The Fold* ('What Is an Event?') he gets not only to 'event', but also to other related concepts, in particular, 'nexus' and 'becoming', and demonstrates that lasting objects are events as well (quoting Whitehead's examples of the Pyramid of Cheops and Cleopatra's Needle). In this connection, two remarks are in order: his explication of a nexus as a 'multiplicity of becomings' (p. 18) may lead to confusion with Whitehead's definition of multiplicity in *Process and Reality*, which says: 'A multiplicity has solely a disjunctive relationship to the actual world.'[3] The purely disjunctive relationship of multiplicity is unable to ensure the cohesion of a nexus. Moreover, Whitehead's atomic becoming calls outright for a comparison with Deleuze's conception of becoming (for example, in *A Thousand Plateaus*), where he talks about the line or the block of becoming and the transition 'between' points of linear temporality. It is this intermediate position of becoming in Deleuze that does not appear at this relevant point in Shaviro, nor in Chapter 4, where it would be even more fitting, and therefore the potential remains unused. The conclusion of the chapter, possible and virtual differentiation, the transition from Kant's transcendental idealism to Whitehead's and Deleuze's transcendental empiricism and the legitimacy of

[3] Ibid., 30.

asking questions about the possibility of the new and of changes in the universe, is more convincing.

Chapter 3 reveals and confirms whom in the triumvirate of philosophers Shaviro believes to be most important. Kant serves as the background of differences for an exposition of Whitehead's philosophy, corroborated with references to Deleuze. This chapter thus forms, from the perspective of the aesthetician, the provisional centre of the whole volume, and meticulously defines the field of aesthetic relations, which is much wider than the now commonly understood sphere of aesthetic objects and aesthetic reception, often, particularly in analytic aesthetics, reduced to the experience of the work of art or, as the case may be, to its properties, whether non-aesthetic or supervenient. Neither Kant's transcendental aesthetics nor Whitehead's philosophy is aesthetics in the sense of a 'science of beauty', or, as the case may be, of the aesthetic. In Kant it has to do with the way in which the 'thing in itself' acts on us and therefore is part of the theory of knowledge. Whitehead, according to Shaviro, links Kant's transcendental aesthetics to the third *Critique*, that is, the critique of aesthetic judgement, but on another basis.

The core or starting point of Whitehead's philosophical enquiry is therefore not fundamental ontology (as in Heidegger), ethics (as in Emanuel Levinas), or knowledge (as in Kant), but aesthetics as a 'critique of pure feeling' (p. 47). Every experience – and Shaviro rightly emphasizes that experience in Whitehead also concerns 'lower' levels of complexity of existence rather than merely organisms with consciousness – is affective and therefore emotional and each of its culminations must be aesthetic even when the 'subject' of the actual occasion or occasions of experience is a subatomic particle. In this connection Shaviro does not differentiate between affect and emotion, which I see as one of the problematic places in the book under review, though he does, in a note, refer, on the one hand, to the coalescing or the interchangeability of these terms in Whitehead, and, on the other hand, to the distinction made by Brian Massumi (affect is unconscious, whereas emotion is conscious and derivative), but Shaviro does not consider it important for his purposes (p. 47). If, however, the 'third actor' of the book is Deleuze, it would be reasonable to see affect, for example, as in the work written with Guattari, where it is a 'construct' that goes beyond subjectivity,[4] and the linking of this concept of affect, for example, with Whitehead's concept of the 'superject'.

[4] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 164: 'affects are no longer feelings or affections; they go beyond the strength of those who undergo them'.

On the basis of the real constitution of each actual occasion (that is, the 'building block' of Whitehead's universe), in which we can distinguish the actual entity in the position of the subject, the datum, and the subjective form of prehension, Shaviro emphasizes the subjective form of prehension as a source of novelty and continues in his explication of Whitehead's conception with important consequences. As opposed to the dualistic conception of the perception-feeling sequence, he advocates the primacy of feeling, which, in Whitehead, is more fundamental than cognition (the affective tone precedes identification and categorization), and he comes to the tentative conclusion that feeling is identical with positive prehension and is always vector-like (that is, it has a concrete direction and intensity), moving from what is determined to what is meant to be determined. In these places, also with regard to aesthetic experience in the narrower, 'non-Whiteheadian', sense, there is hardly any mention of the important factor of negative prehensions or of the partly derived problem of the aesthetically positive feeling of discord, such as appears in the chapter 'Beauty' in *Adventures of Ideas*. Similarly, the vector-like character of each positive prehension would demand more detailed analysis, again with regard to *Adventures of Ideas* and the prehension of individuality ('that' which is separated from qualitative details) as intensive and complex experience and then mainly with regard to the passage about the real internal constitution of the actual occasion in *Process and Reality*, which is well worth quoting:

> The second stage [the supplemental, the first being the responsive, and the third being satisfaction] is governed by the private ideal, gradually shaped in the process itself; whereby the many feelings, derivatively felt as alien, are transformed into a unity of aesthetic appreciation immediately felt as private. This is the incoming of 'appetition', which in its higher exemplification we term 'vision'. In the language of physical science, *the 'scalar' form overwhelms the original 'vector' form*: the origins become subordinate to the individual experience.[5]

A conscious aesthetic experience (the subject of aesthetics generally understood) is indisputably one such higher exemplification and it is fair, on the basis of this assessment of Whitehead's or on its application, to liken it, for example, to Kant's reflected pleasure. In sum, we would say that in this pivotal chapter Shaviro goes into greater detail and pays greater attention to the primary literature, but not sufficiently so. In the conclusion of the chapter he even somewhat contradicts the main title of his book, because he finds in Whitehead the criterion of experience in the form of intensification and intensity of emotions,

[5] Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, corr. ed. (New York: Free Press, 1978), 212, emphasis added.

just as, according to him, 'Whitehead's immanent criterion for order can only be an aesthetic one' (p. 66). The investigation of the differences between Whitehead and Kant, the explication of 'radical monism' in Whitehead, and the promise of further inspirational research, however, predominates.

The next chapter, 'Interstitial Life', leaves the field of aesthetics and discusses the question of knowledge, which may be summarized as 'What can we know?' This question gives rise to other questions, primarily about the nature of subjectivity, lived time, and double causality (mechanistic and teleological). The author traces the radicalization of Kant's subjective principle in Whitehead (with the assent of Deleuze) as the explanatory principle of creativity and novelty, which enters into experience and opens the 'dangerous' future, because novelty and creativity are inherent features of life, introduced into the interstices between two causalities, as between the past and the future. The author, well informed, does not hesitate to criticize even evolutionary biology and the prevailing paradigm of Neo-Darwinism (in the work of Maturana, Varela, Lovelock, and others), which 'makes do' with mechanical causality. The book is somewhat lacking in contrasting views, for example, those of Jacques Monod (*Chance and Necessity*), where one would find a whole range of points in common with Whitehead, and, what is even more surprising, the author talks about his own 'Whiteheadean implicit reading of Darwin' (p. 95n14) and yet we have Whitehead's own explicit reading in *The Function of Reason*, which Shaviro does not mention. Similarly, the Whiteheadian substitution of the cognition preceding form of the subject in Kant by subjectivization brings to mind Lyotard's 'subject *in statu nascendi*',[6] where the affinity with Whitehead's and also Deleuze's understanding of the conscious aesthetic experience is evident, and observing it could intensify the aesthetic part of the chosen topics. Regrettably, the other merits of this and the previous chapters, for example, the concepts of the actual whole, useful for the interpretation of the aesthetic object, of the actual work of art, and of the restructuralization of personality in the aesthetic experience, are not considered by the author, because the aesthetic dimension vanishes from his 'subjective forms of prehension' after Chapter 3.

A certain marginalization of the aesthetic continues in Chapter 5, which otherwise boldly tackles the difficult concept of God in Whitehead's metaphysics and compares its secularized form with the originally Artaudian concept of the body without organs in Deleuze and Guattari. Whitehead's God is not an

[6] Jean-François Lyotard, '*Sensus Communis*: The Subject *in statu nascendi*', in *Who Comes after the Subject?*, ed. Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, and Jean-Luc Nancy (New York: Routledge, 1991), 217–35.

a priori guarantee of the order of the universe as it is in Leibniz and Spinoza; God is only an established limitation of the irreversibility of the past and the openness of the future. God is part of the universe, not something transcendental and God is also the basis of a kind of process of selection of data, which is aesthetic in this universe. The interpretation of Whitehead's metaphysics, in which God guarantees coherence, culminates in the interpretation of God as the 'keeper' of the principal factor of the disjunctive synthesis. Two criteria of experience, 'luring' and the vectors of the subjective form of prehension, nonetheless appear: subjective harmony and subjective intensity. Although Shaviro mentions aesthetics only sporadically in this chapter, the core of the chapter – the role of the disjunctive synthesis in Kant and in Whitehead, and its necessity for the very existence of graspable existence – can provide inspiration when considering the constitution of the aesthetic object in the act of reception. We would mention, for example, the negative gestalts in Wolfgang Iser and in reception aesthetics.

The conclusion ('Consequences') defends Whitehead's position as a 'prophet of postmodern thinking' thanks to his dispassionate struggle against essentialism, the theory of meaning independent of context, and substantivism. Shaviro appreciates the method of imaginative generalization, which he likens (somewhat contentiously) to Deleuze and Guattari's method of philosophical assemblage. (It is true that Deleuze considers *Process and Reality* to be 'one of the greatest books of modern philosophy' precisely because of this method.)[7] The author actually defends Whitehead's relevance to contemporary thought by taking issue with the often proclaimed end of metaphysics, in other words, with the endeavour to convert understanding of the whole universe to a single principle. He identifies Whitehead's metaphysics with the aesthetics of existence, and seeks to persuade the reader not only of his strong bias for this metaphysical system, but also of his own detailed knowledge. This strong, even ultimatum-like, appeal to the aesthetic probably forced Shaviro to make a brief attempt at justifying the role of beauty in Whitehead's system and the absence of the category of the sublime, which holds sway in postmodern art (as Lyotard famously claimed). This passage, which is meant to crown his aesthetic analyses, is not, however, particularly convincing. Shaviro's reductive conception of beauty as harmony intended for contemplation is not faithful to Whitehead's understanding of beauty, which is broader than the category of truth. In addition, Shaviro's conception definitely does not represent the views of at least the second half of the twentieth century (for example, the views of Eddy Zemach and Mary Mothersill). Nor does it take into account 'Continental' aesthetics. Beauty as

[7] Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 284–85.

harmony with the aesthetic norm could also be explained using Whitehead's views, without the static conception that Shaviro employs to simplify both Whitehead and modern aesthetics.

How, then, does Shaviro meet the expectations raised by the title and subtitle of the book under review? He has indisputably demonstrated a rewarding 'close reading' of primary literature and broad philosophical erudition, and he has persuasively demonstrated the conjunction and disjunction not only of the main figures of a quite thrilling story about how three characters got rid of criteria. For contemporary aesthetics, however, he has not quite succeeded in exploiting the potential implicit in his own book. The inspirational quality of the book under review is, however, indisputable and the recent revival of process philosophy is to be welcomed.

Vlastimil Zuska
Department of Aesthetics,
Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague,
Celetná 20, 116 42 Prague 1, Czech Republic
vlastimil.zuska@ff.cuni.cz