Towards Incompossibility: The Philosophy
of Whitehead in Leibnizian Deleuze

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Abstract

Gille Deleuze consacrait un chapitre 《Qu'est-ce qu'est un événement ?》 dans *Le Pli : Leibniz et le Baroque*, un livre sur la philosophie leibnizienne. Dans *le Pli*, Deleuze expliquait la philosophie de Whitehead comme un successeur de la philosophie leibnizien, mais en même temps il soulignait la confrontation de Whitehead avec le philophie leibnizien. Mais qu'est-ce que c'est la confrontation ? Pourquoi Deleuze devait convoquer Whitehead dans son livre sur la philosophie leibnizienne ? En examinant les interprétations des concepts whiteheadiens par Deleuze, nous avons démontré que la confrontation entre Whitehead et Leibniz se trouve au concept de 《l'incompossibilité》 ; l'incompossibilité de monade leibnizien / l'incompossibilité de l'événement whitehedien.

Key Words: Incompossibility, Compossibility, G. Deleuze, A. N. Whitehead, The Fold

0. Introduction

Recently, the similarities in the philosophies of Gilles Deleuze and Alfred North Whitehead have been frequently discussed. One representative example in this context is definitely the joint paper by Isabelle Stengers and Roland Faber wherein the two compare the philosophies of Deleuze and Whitehead arguing that key terms such as 'event' or 'subject' have the same ontological level in both philosophies (1). Another relatively recent study by Steven Shaviro provides indeed a prudent comparison maintaining a very cautious stance with regard to the resemblance of both philosophies, but a comparable argument is raised in connection with the concept of 'object', namely that this term is treated on the same ontological level in both Deleuze and Whitehead(2).

As a trigger of these discussions, Deleuze presents his admiration of Whitehead and often refers to Whiteheadian terms. In Deleuze's book *The Fold-Leibniz and the Baroque*, he spends an entire chapter on Whitehead, which can be considered by other philosophers as the first strong evidence of the connection between Deleuze and Whitehead. However, previous studies have discussed the concepts of each of their philosophies as the same (Faber) or even after reading *The Fold*; they simply mentioned

these two philosophers' understandings about Gottfried Leibniz (Stengers). Therefore, by examining Chapter 6 in *The Fold*, this paper intends to clarify the reason why Deleuze often referred to Whitehead, and to discuss this circumstance from the standpoint of Whiteheadian philosophy.

1. Event

In Chapter 6 of *The Fold*, Deleuze describes Whitehead as a "successor" of Leibniz and "the last great Anglo-American philosopher" (*dernière grand philosophie anglo-américaine*) (Deleuze1988:103 = 2006:86). This expression implies that Whitehead was influenced by Leibniz. Deleuze also praises Whitehead as he made significant developments in metaphysics (like Leibniz) during a period when the study of analytic philosophy was becoming mainstream among Anglo-American philosophers. According to Deleuze, "With Whitehead's name there comes for the third time an echo of the question, *What is an event?*" (Deleuze1988:103 = 2006:86). In this regard, he depicts an event as follows:

> The Great Pyramid is an event, and its duration for a period of one hour, thirty minutes, five minutes···, a passage of Nature, of God, or a view of God. What are the conditions that make an event possible? (Deleuze1988:103 = 2006:86)

The example of the Great Pyramid also appears in Whitehead's book, *The Concept of Nature* (Whitehead2004:85ff). According to Deleuze, Whitehead shows how an issue can vary temporally as a passage (Whitehead2004:55ff). For example, as Whitehead states, time is not internal; rather, it is measurable. It is an extension as well as an element that constructs an actual event (Whitehead2004:74ff). Thus, an event is both temporal and spatial. Whitehead also argues that Nature consists of such events and it fills the world (Whitehead2004:52, Whitehead1978:18). Whitehead later refers to an event as an "actual occasion" in his book, *Science and the Modern World*, and as an "actual entity" in his work, *Process and Reality*. It is noteworthy that God was also regarded as an actual entity; therefore, Nature and God (or a view of God) were also considered events. Through his arguments about Whitehead, Deleuze first raises the question of "What are the conditions that make an event possible?" and then commences by expressing the compositions of an event.

Deleuze also discusses how "something" comes from "chaos" by employing Whitehead's term "disjunctive diversity" (*diversité disjunctive*) (Deleuze1988:103ff = 2006:86ff). In Whiteheadian philosophy, an event (strictly speaking, an actual entity or actual occasion) arises from a "extensive continuum" (Whitehead1978:61), which is referred to as "disjunctive diversity." Deleuze then asks, "How can the Many become the One?" (Deleuze1988:104 = 2006:86). The argument that the One comes from the Many first appeared in *Process and Reality*. However, unlike Deleuze, Whitehead does not discuss how something can come from chaos (4). Therefore, the present paper analyzes the chapter based on the understanding that an event (the One) comes from chaos (the Many).

According to Whitehead, the universe is filled with events. The very events themselves construct the universe. The universe does not exist without events. In the universe, the condition that each event exists individually is called disjunctive diversity. Among the disjunctive diversity in the universe, a new event in space/time arises. We start to talk in turn from a standpoint of this new event. A new event happens from some data. Each data in an event is fragmental. A new event accepts fragmental conditions, and itself comes into the world as one. A new event requires spatiotemporally preceding data.

The following section examines how data is accepted as an event. Deleuze thus analyzes four components of an event: 1) Extension, 2) Intension, 3) Individual and prehension, and 4) eternal objects.

2. Extension and Intension

Regarding Whitehead, Deleuze writes, "That is clearly the first component or condition of both Whitehead's and Leibniz's definition of the event: extension" (Deleuze1988:105 = 2006:87). Moreover, according to Whitehead, an event (or an actual occasion) is an extensive entity (Whitehead2004:53, Whitehead1978:61). Deleuze explains that "Extension exists when one element is stretched over the following ones, such a connection of whole-parts forms an infinite series that contains neither a final term nor a limit (the limits of our senses being expected)" (Deleuze1988:105 = 2006:87). Furthermore, arguments concerning the extension of an event are reasoned by "the method of extensive abstraction" (Whitehead2004:80ff). There is a limit when an event is analyzed through the method. On the other hand, without the method, an event contains infinite

events and it is contained in infinite events (5). In addition to extension, the method of extensive abstraction can also distinguish duration as another condition of an event. By observing an event chronologically or by "the minute, the second, and the tenth of a second," the relationship of inclusion among one another is shown. Thus, the method of extensive abstraction derives abstract measurable standards from the extension (as well as the duration) of actual events.

Deleuze also introduces intension, which is the second component of an event. According to Deleuze, intension of an event possesses "height, intensity, timbre of a sound, a tint, a value, a saturation of color" (Deleuze1988:105 = 2006:87). An event is a concrete entity that contains extension and duration as well as intension, which is the intrinsic degree that structures an event (this will be discussed as eternal objects later in this paper). Based on this definition, Deleuze explains that an event includes two components: extension and intension. Furthermore, Deleuze considers an event as a "vibration" (such as an audible wave (*onde sonore*) or a luminous wave (*onde lumineuse*)) (Deleuze1988:105 = 2006:87).

3. Individual and Prehension

Deleuze describes one of the third components of an event: the individual. According to Deleuze, "the confrontation with Leibniz is the most direct" (Deleuze1988:105 = 2006:88) and he also states:

> For Whitehead the individual (*individu*) is creativity, the formation of a New. No longer is it the indefinite or the demonstrative mood, but a personal (le personnel) mood. If we call an element everything that has parts and is a part, but also what has intrinsic features, we say that the individual is a 'concrescence' of elements. This is something other than a connection or a conjunction. It is rather, a prehension: an element is the given, the 'datum' of another element that prehends it. Prehension is individual unity. (Deleuze1988:105 = 2006:88)

As discussed in the previous paragraph, Deleuze considers that the Whiteheadian individual evolves as a chronologically new entity that is regarded as "a personal mood." Even though Ford and Shaviro identify this point as "pan-subjectivism," Whitehead obviously assumes that every event is personal and subjective (6). In

addition, the individual carries the intensive components as above, which Whitehead calls "concrescence" (Whitehead1978:26). In this case, concrescence indicates the act of "growing together" in which various datum or elements of intension are gathered into an event. According to Whitehead, concrescence also occurs when a personal and subjective event "prehends" (Whitehead1978:23ff) (7). As will be shown and explained later 'prehension' is one of the most important terms for the philosophy of Whitehead.

Furthermore, as previously mentioned, when the One comes from the Many, it implies that a new event appears. Whitehead regards this as the creative formation of an event or the formation of "novelty." An event with subjectivity accepts multiple elements and by admitting such elements, evolves into a new event. In this case, Whitehead refers to this acceptance of an event as "prehension." Through prehension, an event becomes more individualized and it eventually satisfies such individualization to become the datum for a subsequent event. Deleuze states that "The vector of prehension moves from the world to the subject, from the prehended datum to the prehending one" (Deleuze1988:106 = 2006:88). In this regard, the prehended datum is a component of an event as well as of other events. Thus, as Deleuze notes, "the data of a prehension are *public* elements" (Deleuze1988:106 = 2006:88).

When an event has accomplished its individualization, it becomes the prehended datum for every other event, and thus becomes "public" (Whitehead1978:21). Additionally, an event that has completed its individualization is simultaneously subjective and personal. Whitehead notes that such an event is a unique and particular "*private* element" (Deleuze1988:106 = 2006:88, Whitehead1978:21) that "expresses immediacy, individuality, and novelty" (Deleuze1988:106 = 2006:88). Moreover, an event continuously accepts each of new public element and privately produces events. Deleuze demonstrates that "the event is inseparably the objectification of one prehension and the subjectification of another; it is at once public and private, potential and real, participating in the becoming of another event and the subject of its own becoming" (Deleuze1988:106 = 2006:88).

Finally, Deleuze summarizes the three other characteristics of prehension that appeared in Whitehead's categories in 1929: "the subjective form" (*forme subjective*), "the subjective aim" (*visée subjective*), and "self-enjoyment" (Whitehead1978: 22ff). First, there is the subjective form. As noted earlier, every event includes subjectivity that implies that a subjective event actively prehends the datum. According to Deleuze, "It is the form in which the datum is folded in the subject, a 'feeling' or manner, at least when

prehension is positive" (Deleuze1988:106 = 2006:88). In addition, Whitehead mentions that there are two types of prehension: "positive prehension" and "negative prehension" (Whitehead1978: 23ff). In positive prehension, an event accepts any data and intension, whereas negative prehension accepts restrictive data and intension while excluding certain data and intension. Furthermore, Whitehead renames "positive prehension" as "feeling." That is, prehension indicates that an event subjectively includes data and intension or as Deleuze concludes, it is "folded in the subject" (Deleuze1988:106 = 2006:88). The subjective form explains the above-mentioned condition that the subject prehends data and intension.

Second, there is the subjective aim. When an event is subjective, as Whitehead notes, it should include the aim of becoming a certain individual. An event should be able to prehend both positively and negatively. Hence the event is an entity of the final cause (Whitehead1978: 24) or as Deleuze writes, "the passage" "from one prehension to another" (Deleuze1988:106 = 2006:89).

Finally, there is self-enjoyment, which is the "private element" of an individualized occasion. The subjective form and the subjective aim are placed along with self-enjoyment. "Novelty" belongs to this private element of occasion, whereas the public element adopts any data and intension that is public, or as Whitehead calls it—the "eternal" (Whitehead1978: 289ff). In this regard, Whitehead expresses his philosophy while contrasting reality and eternity. According to Deleuze, "For with Leibniz the question surges forth in philosophy that will continue to haunt Whitehead and Bergson: not how to attain eternity, but in what conditions does the objective world allow for a subjective production of novelty, that is, of creation?" (Deleuze1988:107 = 2006:89). Deleuze also shows how Whitehead depicts the formation of novelty, and writes that it was "a teleological conversion of philosophy" (Deleuze1988:108 = 2006:89).

By summarizing Deleuze's statements, Leibniz focuses on achieving eternity, determining the appearance of the world in each monad or discovering harmony. Meanwhile, Whitehead emphasizes that each event attains actual novelty instead of eternity, and he aimed to discover "something" in addition to harmony in each event. Therefore, the present paper suggests that this "something" could be what Deleuze considers as a "confrontation" between Leibniz and Whitehead, which will be discussed later in the paper.

4. Eternal Objects

The fourth and final component includes the eternal objects or "ingressions." As stated earlier, an event possesses the subjectivity and the aim, and it continuously prehends and becomes the datum for subsequent events: "things are endlessly being altered; …Events are fluvia" (Deleuze1988:108 = 2006:90). However, "From then on, what allows us to ask, 'Is it the same flow, the same thing or the same occasion? It's the Great Pyramid…'" (Deleuze1988:108 = 2006:90). Deleuze responds as follows:

> A permanence has to be born in flux, and must be grasped in prehension. The Great Pyramid signifies two things: a passage of Nature or a flux constantly gaining and losing molecules, but also an eternal object that remains the same over the succession of moments. While prehensions are always current forms (a prehension is a potential only in respect to another current prehension), eternal objects are pure Possibilities that are realized in fluvia, but also pure Virtualities that are actualized in prehensions. (Deleuze1988:108 = 2006:90)

Deleuze introduces Whitehead's concept of "flux" or "passage" of Nature in an event and designates eternal objects as possibilities and virtualities in the event. As he notes, Whitehead considers that eternal objects are positioned to maintain stability for a fluid event (Whitehead1978:40). When an event prehends various data and intension, its intension is referred to as "eternal objects." On one hand, a subjective event prehends various data and eternal objects; on the other hand, in ingression, eternal objects enter a subjective event (Whitehead1978:22ff). Nevertheless, no eternal objects are subjective nor do they actively enter into an event. In fact, only through prehension can an event accept datum and an eternal object. Furthermore, as Deleuze states, to prehend only eternal objects is called, "conceptual *feeling*" (prehension) (Deleuze1988:108 = 2006:90, Whitehead1978:44). Deleuze also mentions that "With Leibniz, the situation hardly differs" (Deleuze1988:108 = 2006:90) from the concept of eternal objects in Whitehead and "Sometimes these can be Qualities, such as a color or a sound that qualifies a combination of prehensions; sometimes Figures, like the pyramid, that determine an extension; sometimes they are Things, like gold or marble, that cut through a matter" (Deleuze1988:108 = 2006:90). Similar to the concept of eternal objects, Deleuze writes about Leibniz as follows, "Figures, things, and qualities are schema of permanence that

are reflected or actualized in monads, but that are realized in flux" (Deleuze1988:109 = 2006:91). This is why Deleuze refers to Whitehead as a successor of Leibniz.

5. Reading Whitehead and Leibniz through Deleuze

This section examines why Deleuze discussed Whitehead while referring to Leibniz. In addition, it clarifies the "something" that we discussed at the end of Section 3; that is, the conception of Whitehead, not only as a successor but also as a confronter of Leibniz (see Deleuze's example of music about Whitehead (Deleuze1988:109ff = 2006:91ff). Deleuze also mentions that an event is a vibration, "Vibrations of sound disperse, periodic movements go through space with their harmonics or submultiples" (Deleuze1988:109 = 2006:91) and in explaining the extensive condition of the event, he states that "The sounds have inner qualities of height, intensity, and timbre" (Deleuze1988:109 = 2006:91) to depict intension of an event, that is, eternal objects. Moreover, he states that "These are active perceptions that are expressed among each other, or else prehensions that are prehending one another" (Deleuze1988:109 = 2006:91).

Furthermore, according to Deleuze, "The origins of the sounds are monads or prehensions that are filled with joy in themselves" (Deleuze1988:109 = 2006:91). He also expresses the conditions of a Baroque concert of Leibniz as follows: "If we suppose that the concert is divided into two sources of sounds, …but is harmonized with those of the other [then it is] even better" (Deleuze1988:109 = 2006:91). In this example, Deleuze considers that each sound is a monad. Even though each monad creates different origins of the sounds, they harmonize with one another, and thus, the vibrations of sounds or periodic movements "go through space with their harmonics or submultiples." However, after this example of Whitehead to consider a concert or sound as an event, Deleuze notes that "There is a great difference that depends on Leibniz's Baroque condition" (Deleuze1988:110 = 2006:91). Notably, "For Whitehead it involves prehensions being directly connected to each other, either because they draw on others for data and form a world with them, or because they exclude others (negative prehensions), but always in the same universe in process" (Deleuze1988:110 = 2006:91). Here, Deleuze presents the difference between Whitehead and Leibniz. What is the difference?

As discussed in Section 3, for Whitehead, when an event prehends, it also prehends the prehended through previous events (data). Moreover, when an event negatively prehends, the excluded data exist simultaneously in the universe; that is, from the

perspective of the universe, the included and the excluded exist in the same process. On the other hand, Leibniz thinks, "to the contrary, monads exclude only universes that are incompossible with their world, and all those that exist express the same world without exclusion" (Deleuze1988:110 =2006:92). No excluded datum exists in any monads, and thus, it can be concluded that every monad uniquely expresses the world itself in each intension and "all compossible monads" include "a single and same world" (Deleuze1988:110 = 2006:92). In other words, for Whitehead, data that are not included in an event do exist, whereas for Leibniz, there is no datum that is excluded from monads —the monads themselves comprise the harmony.

For Leibniz, bifurcations and divergences are genuine borders between incompossible worlds, such that the existing monads completely include the compossible world that moves into existence. However, for Whitehead (and for many modern philosophers), bifurcations, divergences, incompossibilities, and discord belong to the same motley world that can no longer be included in expressive units, but only made or undone according to prehensive units and variable configurations or changing captures" (Deleuze1988:111 = 2006:92).

> Deleuze writes about Leibniz to recognize the incompossible data of monads. By drawing borders, it clarifies that each monad is capable of expressing their entire intensive world. Deleuze examines this point while assigning harmony to the Leibniz's term of "monad." In contrast, Deleuze discusses Whitehead and states that an event and incompossible data exist simultaneously, and they may or may not be prehended by subsequent events. As Deleuze states, "Caesar crosses *and* does not cross the Rubicon" (Deleuze1988:111 = 2006:93).

After these aforementioned arguments, Deleuze compares the Baroque and the neo-Baroque in the finale of the chapter. At this point, Deleuze has presented the condition of the Baroque in Leibniz in which every monad is completely harmonized. Conversely, in the condition of the neo-Baroque in Whitehead, each event is completely harmonized at the same time that incompossibilities exist. According to Deleuze, "We can better understand in what way the Baroque is a transition" (Deleuze1988:111 = 2006:92). The Baroque even assumes that "discords" are the harmony and hence, "They are resolved in accords" (Deleuze1988:111 =2006:92). Nevertheless, "With the neo-Baroque, with its unfurling of divergent series in the same world, comes the irruption of incompossibilities

on the same stage" (Deleuze1988:112 = 2006:93). For the neo-Baroque, discords remain as discords and exist separately from the harmonized events. In examining Leibniz, Deleuze states that "the Baroque universe witnesses the blurring of its melodic lines, but what it appears to lose it also regains in and through harmony" (Deleuze1988:111 = 2006:93). In contrast, Deleuze expresses the neo-Baroque in Whitehead as the disappearance of accords, and the transition "from harmonic closure to an opening onto a polytonality" (Deleuze1988:112 = 2006:93).

6. Conclusion

Why did Deleuze discuss Whitehead in Chapter 6 of *The Fold*? By comparing the similar but different concepts of Leibniz and Whitehead (and the accords/compossibility and discords/incompossibility), Deleuze presents a transition from Leibniz to the subsequent modern philosophers as well as from the Baroque to the neo-Baroque. The findings show that Deleuze depicts the transition of philosophy from the style of Leibniz to the style of Whitehead. He also demonstrates the history of thinking; that is, from the harmonized compossibilities of the Baroque to the incompossibilities. Finally, at the end of *The Fold*, Deleuze writes about the accords of the Baroque as well as the multiplicity and complexity of the neo-Baroque, and eventually points out that the "dissonances" are not "resolved" (Deleuze1988:188ff = 2006:157ff). He also suggests that Karlheinz Stockhausen is one of the typical contemporary composers who employ dissonances, and describes the transition of music. Nevertheless, Deleuze states:

> We are all still Leibnizian, …We are discovering new ways of folding, akin to new environments, but we all remain Leibnizian because what always matters in folding, unfolding, refolding.
> (Deleuze1988:189 = 2006:158)

References

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Notes

（1） For example, see Roland Faber: "The Infinite Movement of Evanescence: The Pythagorean Puzzle in Deleuze, Whitehead, and Plato." *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 21, No.2

(May 2000): pp. 171-199. "O bitches of impossibility! Programmatic Dysfunction in the Chaosmos of Deleuze and Whitehead" *DELEUZE, WHITEHEAD, BERGSON*, sous la direction de Keith Robinson (Macmillan, 2009), pp. 200-217. As his book, *Event and Decision, Ontology and Politics in Badiou, Deleuze, and Whitehead* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010).

Isabelle Stengers's work as an author and editor is as follows: *L'éffet Whitehead* (Vrin, 1994), *Penser avec Whitehead* (Le Seuil, 2002). In addition, *PERSPECTIVE—LEIBNIZ, WHITEHEAD, DELEUZE*, sous la direction de Benoit Timmermans (Vrin, 2006), and *DELEUZE, WHITEHEAD, BERGSON*, sous la direction de Keith Robinson (Macmillan, 2009).

⑵ Furthermore, Steven Shaviro, well known for discussing recent speculative realism, has written *Without Criteria, Kant, Whitehead, Deleuze, and Aesthetics* (MIT Press, 2009).

⑶ As Yamauchi introduces Deleuze as "the genius of misreading" (Shiro Yamauchi *Godoku no Tetsugaku*, p.15, Seidosha, 2013) in *The Fold*, there seems to be confusion among *The Concept of Nature* (1920), *Science and the Modern World* (1925), and *Process and Reality* (1929).

⑷ Deleuze discusses chaos or disorder in a manner different from Whitehead. Deleuze assumes that chaos is a precondition of the individualizing event, whereas Whitehead discusses that an event or occasion includes chaos and disorder (PR, p.112). We hope to compare such differences in future research.

⑸ "The method of extensive abstraction" is an inference for deriving geometrical elements, such as abstract points, lines, or planes, from an actual event as a concrete element. Some recent philosophers have discussed this method from the perspective of mereology and mereotopology. This method was revised and renamed as "extensive connection" in Chapter 4 of *Process and Reality*.

⑹ For details regarding the subjectivity of actual occasion or actual entity, see: Lewis S. Ford, "Panpsychism and the Early History of Prehension," *Process Studies 24*, 1995, pp.15-33 or Steven Shaviro, Chapter 3, Pulse of Emotion, *Without Criteria*, MIT Press, 2009.

⑺ See: Motonao Mori "On the Prehension—The birth of prehension in Science and the Modern World" *Process Thought*, No.15/2012, pp.12-22.