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Schelling's Aesthetic Ecology: From Poetic Consciousness to Tragic *Phronēsis*

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
For the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in German

by

Matthew James Cooper

Dissertation Committee:
Professor John H. Smith, Chair
Professor Catherine Malabou
Professor David Pan

2023

Dedication

Für Margarethe und Josefine

*Mit dem freyen, selbstbewußten Wesen tritt zugleich
eine ganze Welt – aus dem Nichts hervor – die einzig wahre und gedenk-
bare Schöpfung aus Nichts*

G.W.F. Hegel [Schreiber]

Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus

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Vita

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FIELD OF STUDY

German Idealism, Aesthetic Idealism, Ecocriticism, Environmental Humanities

Abstract of the Dissertation

Schelling's Aesthetic Ecology: From Poetic Consciousness to Tragic *Phronēsis*

by

Matthew James Cooper

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University of California, Irvine, 2023

Professor John H. Smith, Chair

Aesthetic Ecology considers the way that F.W.J. Schelling reconceived the relationship between human philosophical consciousness and the natural world by looking at the capacity of art to mediate and transform these terms. I propose Schelling's aesthetic idealism as crucial to the project of bringing clarity to recent philosophical engagements with art and nature, as well as giving historical depth to our contemporary discourse around thinking ecologically in the current moment, in which the problem of the human relation to the environment is becoming exponentially urgent in the face of the climate crisis. I show that German aesthetic philosophies of the *Goethezeit* are indispensable resources for nurturing and rethinking our ecologically interconnected world, conceiving of the agency of the environment, and respecting the nonhuman. I begin by reconstructing Kant's attempt to objectively ground knowledge in schematic and symbolic hypotyposes by creating a necessary link between concepts and language. I argue that Kant privileges an aesthetic notion of the symbol, and nature, viewed

aesthetically, reflects a preconceptual unity of consciousness and sensible intuition. I then turn to Schelling's transcendental philosophy and his early *Naturphilosophie* (1795-1800), where he demonstrates that the schematism and the idealism of the self cannot be completely disentangled from the aesthetic activities of nature; such creaturely organisms as corals, crabs, and spiders participate in the aesthetic ecological systems of sensing and perceiving otherness that form the conditions of possibility for the very transcendental perspective that aims to elucidate them. In Schelling's view elaborated in the *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800), it is in works of art that philosophical consciousness is put in touch with the strange otherness of these aesthetic ecologies. Finally, I turn to Schelling's moral and political philosophy where he views history through an aesthetic lens as a tragic drama. I argue that Schelling invents an aesthetic ecological ethics in his analyses of the particular constructions of time, freedom, and nature in Attic and modern tragedy in the symbolic figures of Prometheus and Faust. I conclude that Schelling's tragic ethics are capable of motivating environmental action with a necessity that eclipses individual interests. For tragedy requires that we reorient our understanding of moral praxis, and that we deliberate with deference to the unforeseeable consequences of our actions on a transforming environment while respecting a multiplicity of moral claims, including the moral claims of future unknown Others.

Introduction

The argument of this project is that an aesthetic view of the world is essential to developing an ecological perspective; this aesthetic ecology entails a shift away from the perspective of the universal thinker alienated from the natural world to a multifaceted view where the subject is embedded 'in' nature through a community of reciprocal relationships. An ecological perspective, then, accepts a multiplicity of subjectivities and the agency of contextual differences; the urgent need for an ecological shift in philosophy calls for a model in which we acknowledge and sustain the living house of nature. In this ecological turning, the environment breaks through, appearing at first in those moments that the great author of climate fiction Amitav Ghosh describes in *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*, writing, "Who can forget those moments when something that seems inanimate turns out to be vitally, even dangerously alive? As, for example, when an arabesque in the pattern of a carpet is revealed to be a dog's tail, which, if stepped upon, could lead to a nipped ankle? ..." (3). For Ghosh, that this sudden gesture breaking through the environment surprises us, is a result of our "deranged" perspective that assumes nature as a static backdrop for human affairs. An ecological perspective accepts that our potential is embedded in the flourishing of the environment. Future humans will not be surprised that the environment is alive and they will necessarily participate in the ecological community of nature because such a shift in perspective is the condition for the survival of humanity. As Ghosh puts it, "The humans of the future will surely understand,

knowing what they presumably will know about the history of their forebears on Earth, that only in one, very brief era, lasting less than three centuries, did a significant number of their kind believe that planets and asteroids are inert” (3). That is, our capacity to take an ecological viewpoint is an existential question facing humanity; however, ecological thinking is nothing new: the ‘derangement’ in our relationship to nature took place within the last 300 years, or as new realists contend, only since Kant’s epistemocritical turn resulted in a radical shift away from a concern with ontology: as Bruno Latour puts it: “what we call ecology is in effect an alteration *of the alteration* in our relations with the world” (14). There is a trend in contemporary thinking around the environment and aesthetics that argues we have unwittingly returned to a pre-Kantian, pre-modern ontological aesthetics that bears an uncanny resemblance to precritical asubjective relations to the world; unable to exhaust the chaos of the phenomena in nature and history by means of the concept, we have entered an extra-linguistic reality unbound by the limits of human experience in a venture beyond what can be presented, what can be given form. Objectivists claim that the ontological chasm between thinking and being has not so much been bridged, but that the two poles have collapsed into one another and we have been thrust into a world without us. In the anthropocene, nature has been irrevocably sullied by human consumption, and paradoxically, nature’s dimensions can no longer be given definition by way of a human consciousness of it.

For many, Kant is the antagonist in this story; for my project of aesthetic ecology, however, with a Schellingian interpretation, Kant made an important positive contribution. Before the speculative turn, approaches to ecocriticism typically sought to articulate the interdependence of human and environment; as Timothy W. Luke puts it, it was nevertheless the inability to “look beyond the rigid divisions of nature and society or humanity and ecology” (xix)

that prevented ecological criticism from formulating ecological life; ecocriticism was unable to overcome the dependence of the “new ecological human” on compromising the nonhuman being that makes it possible (Luke xix-xx). In resolving nature by affirming the freedom of human reason in its independence from the nonhuman, ecocriticism was unable to articulate the strange otherness of nature. It is the argument of this project that German Idealism, and specifically F.W.J. Schelling’s approach to nature by way of aesthetic idealism, offers us a way out of the dilemmas that ecocriticism presents us with today. In his early work, Schelling shows us that the subject-centered philosophy of transcendental idealism, the philosopher’s abstract concepts, the pure intuitions of time and space, and sensible intuition, are all embedded in the aesthetic activities of nature; our human consciousness of nature is a result of the activities of sensing and perceiving of differences that emerge from the ecological tensions and dissonances produced by the dynamic Earth itself. As Gabriel Trop puts it, “Schelling describes the *a priori* constitution of sensuous perception—the conditions that govern the possibility of an intuition (*Anschauung*)—as a dynamic that is already present in a potentially subjectless *physis*” (143). The imperceptible forces moving a potentially subjectless *physis* make themselves visible in aesthetic ecological discourses by producing external differences that can be sensed and perceived. In Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie*, Trop continues, “The internal and subjective dynamics of sensibility are thus exteriorized, and what is most internal to a subject’s condition of possible experience, e.g., the pure forms of space and time in Kant’s Transcendental Aesthetic inheres in the material ground of an exteriority” (143). That is, for Schelling, the transcendental perspective is a result of the very aesthetic ecology that the subject ventures to explore and bring to consciousness.

Schelling has been held up recently as a thinker that goes beyond the nature/culture opposition of post-Kantian ‘correlationism.’ In recent Schelling reception, it has been recalled

that Schelling's position respects "ontological excess," or "the excess of objectivity"¹ where what exists is in excess of our conceptual thinking about it; for Schelling, this imperceptible excess of the ground makes thought possible, but the ground can not be exhausted by thinking. In his early work, the absolute subject, this unknowable condition of thinking, is conceived of as an elusive "intellectual intuition" that precedes sensible cognition akin to a dreamlike state or a condition of being that evades consciousness like death. In the positive philosophy of his later work beginning in the 1820s, Schelling calls this unassimilable kernel of being, that which cannot be conjured by thought beforehand, an *unvordenkliches Seyn*. This dissertation will explore the key insight that spans Schelling's entire oeuvre; namely, that this *Abgrund* of being is revealed in the creative work of art in all of its astonishing strangeness. This thread linking creativity to being is discernible across the often recited periodization of Schelling's philosophy, uniting his *Naturphilosophie* with his *System of Transcendental Idealism*, as well as his philosophy of history and his aesthetics.

Already in Schelling's early *Naturphilosophie*, where he is interested in applying philosophy to natural science, his view is essentially that nature is not reducible to a priori laws and hence is involved in creative processes of change. For this reason, as Paul Collins Hayner puts it, in *Reason and Existence: Schelling's Philosophy of History*, "the essential elements of aesthetic idealism were already present in this formulation of the philosophy of nature" (50). In Schelling's view, nature is the gradual unfolding of the absolute subject in partial expressions of the temporal real world of objects. That is, nature wields a poetic conatus and the dynamic Earth is in constant upheaval, producing motion and change. The Earth itself generates aesthetic movement through its creative activities of presenting and sensing these changes. The

¹ In *Philosophies of Nature after Schelling*, Iain Hamilton Grant cites William Wallace with this formulation already in 1894 (16).

philosopher of nature can only apprehend these transformations and material differences if they consider the Earth participating in an infinite creative activity.

The Earth is active in the real creative process, and yet it only appears phenomenally to consciousness in its unfolding as the partial expression of differences. For that very reason, the transforming natural world appears inverted to our intellectual activity when we try to know nature as an entirely conditioned object. In Schelling's view, the ecological dissonances that animate the real morphology of nature are the result of an imperceptible activity of a self-organizing Earth. Our task then is to perceive and trace the activity of the Earth as it makes itself visible in natural forms engaged in aesthetic ecological discourses. For Schelling, phenomena can only be apprehended as work in process, as phenomena coming into being from a state of concealment. It is precisely the work of art that unites the imperceptible creative activity in a concrete form.

Out of this concealed character, nature embarks on the adventure of becoming conscious of itself in art; in a reverse fashion, art begins consciously, reintegrating itself with nonconscious materials becoming nature. Art takes consciousness as its starting point and makes it concrete. The ecology of objects in a still life painting, for example, often products of both human craftwork and nature, are animated by the portrayal of conscious activity. Even lowly still life paintings, Schelling says, that take "completely inorganic objects without inner life" (*PoA* 143) as their material, allude to something higher and give the activity of a subject, while not present, a unique and particular sensuous form. The still life "gives us a glimpse into the spirit of the person who produced this particular positioning of objects" (*PoA* 143). The subject that lives amongst the items in a still-life painting cannot be perceived independently of the objects and the particular way they are presented and interrelated. The consciousness of a subject is thereby

made sensuous “by expressing the traces of activity and existence (*eines Handelns und Daseyns*) that are not portrayed along with it” (*PoA* 143) in and through this particular conglomerate of objects. The work of art animates the life of the subject by giving imperceptible activities a particular sensuous and perceptible form.

For Schelling, the work of art unites activity in a concrete expression as much as it unites a subject-centered philosophical consciousness with the objective world; in this way art transforms our relationship to nature. Our consciousness can never fully grasp the object of intuition; fragmented into a multiplicity, nature conceals itself from our philosophical concepts. However, for Schelling, in creative works of art, we assemble the fragmentary pieces in a way that reveals the being of nature. This aesthetic relation to nature, where the artwork provides the point of contact with the world at large beyond determinate conceptualization, Merleau-Ponty calls a “poetic consciousness.” In the late 1950’s, in a lecture on Schelling given during the first of three courses he would give on “The Concept of Nature,” Maurice Merleau-Ponty says, (according to the fragmentary transcription of a student auditor)

Schelling is trying for a nonprosaic conception of consciousness, wherein consciousness is entirely clear to itself and knows the object at which it aims, an object that is nothing other than its aiming. A poetic consciousness recognizes that it does not possess its object totally, that it can understand it only by a true creation, and that it creates clarity by an operation that is not deductive but creative. Poetic consciousness, overcome by its object, must get hold of itself again, but without ever being able to separate itself from its history. (50)

Interestingly, it is precisely this opacity of being, what Merleau-Ponty calls the over-Being, the *surreal* or *Übersein*, that has made Schelling attractive to contemporary thinkers developing new

approaches to realism. The return of the strangeness of nature, the “over-realism” dominating ecological thought today, is timely and urgent in the face of the twenty-first century climate crisis. Schelling’s philosophy has appropriately been held up as a body of work that holds indispensable resources for respecting the alterity of nature and the development of new ecological approaches to thinking and relating to nature because he thinks the intellect together with this strange otherness in nature. What is missing, however, from recent discussions of Schelling’s engagement with nature is the essential role of art that puts us in touch with a natural world that evades our conceptualization in Schelling’s aesthetic ecology.

Ecocriticism

Ecology has a rich and varied history in twentieth century thought encompassing many different perspectives. The term ecology was coined by German zoologist Ernst Haeckel in 1866,² but the idea of ecology was already very much alive in the 18th century as Donald Worster, in his history of ecology, *Nature’s Economy: the Roots of Ecology*, puts it: “[ecology’s] modern history begins in the eighteenth century, when it emerged as a more comprehensive way of looking at the earth’s fabric of life: a point of view that sought to describe all of the living organisms of the earth as an interacting whole” (8). It comes as no surprise then, that there are many perspectives on thinking ecologically. Recent approaches to ecology consist of such radically opposing points of view ranging from deep ecology to social ecology and dark ecology; splintering further into ecohermeneutics, ecophenomenology and ecotranslation, to name just a few. The ecological perspective, as Worster puts it, “fragments into many views, sometimes leading in thoroughly incompatible directions” and “has been defined by different people for different reasons in

² See Worster, Donald, “The Ecology of Order and Chaos”

different ways, all of which we must sort through as we come to rely more and more on ecology for guidance in our own time. The study of the earth's household of life has opened not one but many doors" (8). An immensely important perspective in this ecological household is the field of ecocriticism. Ecocritique tries to establish new ways of relating to nature by critiquing the contingency in our relations to nature. That is, from an ecocritical perspective, nature is not a given, and we are free to rethink the conditions and the hidden potential in the ordinary perception of nature. Timothy W. Luke defined his *Ecocritique* in the 1990's in terms of alternative unrealized potentialities:

my ecocritiques rethink ecology by exploring the totality of all human/machine, human/animal, human/plant interactivities as power/knowledge relations, and argue that there are many other alternative forms for creating our built environments, high technologies, and economic communities. Building the concrete expressions of such alternatives would reconstitute the our nature/economy/culture equations, materially and symbolically, without perpetuating much of the ecological destruction that mars their operations today. (xii-xiii)

Luke tracks a tendency in ecology to congregate in two camps, anthropocentrism and biocentrism, and he seeks to go beyond "radical anthropocentrism or fundamentalist biocentrism in survivable communitarian ecologies within which people dominate neither other human beings nor their fellow nonhuman beings" (xiii). On the fundamentalist biocentric side, Luke is critical of "deep ecology's unusual fetishization of wilderness, as well as its anachronistic fascination with mythologized preagricultural peoples" (xiii). Luke describes the mythology of groups coming out of deep ecology that are intent on destroying technology and advanced civilization as something out of an ecodystopian novel that "limits its chance for greater strategic

success inasmuch as it celebrates revitalizing not merely ecosystems and human cultures that prevailed during the preindustrial era, but rather those that existed in preagricultural times” (xiv). The calls for shutting down unsustainable technologies and our dependence on perpetual economic growth have only become more exasperated and legitimated since members of the Earth Liberation Front used arson in the nineties to demotivate environmental destruction using ecoterrorism to take away economic incentives.

Ecocriticism can be traced back to Kant’s ‘critical’ perspective of humanity’s relationship to nature. Kant showed that we cannot access a distinct and untouched wilderness of nature directly from within it at the end of the eighteenth century in Germany with his critical project by focusing on the freedom of the transcendental subject in its epistemic relation to nature. In a note written in 1769, at the very close of his pre-critical period, Kant wrote, “Wenn ich etwas in der Natur verstehen will, so muss ich mit meiner Erklärung nicht aus der Natur herausgehen. Will ich aber die gesamte Natur verstehen, so muss ich außer ihren Grenzen sein” (“If I will understand something in nature, then I must not go outside of nature with my explanation. But if I will understand nature as a whole, then I must go outside its boundaries.”; *Reflexionen* 3980; *Notes and Fragments* 109). That is, mechanical nature can be understood without any abstraction from the present: in a mechanical model, discrete objects act on one another as external forces in a relationship of efficient causation like billiard balls; however, to realize a free and unconditioned knowledge of nature, the subject of reason must view nature from a speculative position beyond its boundaries. The rational philosopher then views nature *as if* it were an organized totality; however, that organization itself cannot become an object of experience. This free ground of the transcendental subject’s epistemic perspective is, for Kant, one that determines the way that the forms of nature appear to the subject of knowledge and hence the unconditioned

principles of metaphysics supersede the mechanical rules of physics. Kant's development of the active "unconditioned" subject free from mechanical nature is crucial to ecology. In the free act of thinking, the subject can abstract the intellect itself from the thing upon which it reflects so that the intellect becomes the ground for a system of nature which is not merely contingent; ground and thing become thereby posited in opposition. This oppositional relationship between nature and freedom is the first step in unconditioning the mechanical model of nature into an aesthetic ecology.

Kant's problem investigated in the first *Critique* is the natural perplexity of reason. If left to our own devices, humans constantly fall into contradiction with regards to metaphysical questions. Kant investigates why we have a natural predisposition for metaphysical thought, why we naturally seek the speculative ideas of reason, when the search for their existence only creates confusion. It is natural and felt as a lack that we want to know everything, the origin of the world, the supreme authority etc. The problem of limits plagues metaphysical questions that, if left unconstrained, can never find an end in some unconditioned resolution. As Kant writes in the first sentence of the Preface (to the first edition) of the first *Critique*, "Human reason has the peculiar fate in one species of its cognitions that it is burdened with questions which it cannot dismiss, since they are given to it as problems by the nature of reason itself, but which it also cannot answer, since they transcend every capacity of human reason" (Avii). If reason and metaphysics are necessary and unavoidable in experience, Kant ventures to find an objective foundation for a science of metaphysics that would clarify the hidden errors and deceptions that haunt it. In Kant's estimation, metaphysics runs into contradiction because it seeks the ideas of reason in the empirically real which reduces metaphysics to "a groping among mere concepts." Kant distinguishes then between concepts and ideas; in Kant's terminology, concepts refer to the

categories that confer universality to the principles of understanding; that is, concepts function in connection with the understanding and finitude and are not as exalted as the absolute ideas of reason: traditional metaphysics degrades the ideas of reason by looking for them in the empirically real. On this account, metaphysics tries to formulate answers to questions that are beyond human capacity for knowledge and in doing so can only run into contradiction. Kant's answer is to forbid inquiry into these metaphysical questions and to discipline metaphysics with the critical method.³ A consequence of Kant's critical method is that the ultimate essence of nature is off limits to our finite understanding.

The *Critique* then draws strict boundaries for the ideas of reason,⁴ expelling them from experience and giving them a merely regulative use, rather than constitutive. This expulsion of the real by Kant and the problem of non-identity did not originate with Kant and they have not been resolved or overcome even today. Theodor Adorno interpreted this *Verbot* on inquiries into the metaphysical questions of reason in his *Aesthetic Theory* as our inheritance of what he calls "the shudder," a partition that separated the primordial world from the chaotic threat of the outside.⁵ The absolute point of reason is, for Adorno, an afterimage of the human fear of nature in the primordial world, when, in their powerlessness, primordial humans respected "the shudder," a real boundary demarcating non-identity or whatever still resisted signification. For Adorno, the presence of such a shudder is repressed in the modern world, but it persists in the

³ "to deny that this service of criticism is of any positive utility would be as much as to say that the police are of no positive utility because their chief business is to put a stop to the violence that citizens have to fear from other citizens, so that each can carry on his own affairs in peace and safety" first *Critique* "Preface."

⁴ Ideas in the Kantian model are imagined as a vanishing point beyond the horizon of experience that nevertheless orients all the finite lines and otherwise independent figures of the empirically real (figures that would be shaped by the understanding and sensibility) toward a single point so that they coexist in a single unified world when viewed from a certain perspective. This absolute point is the projection of the idea of the whole that orients the totality of everything that exists towards it and yet has no contact with empirical reality; nevertheless, in orienting the empirically real, it offers coherence. This absolute point, the projection of the idea of the whole, bestows metaphysics with an objective foundation and systemic unity, a "secure course" that is not merely contingent and can compete with the universal principles of the natural sciences since such regulative ideas give metaphysics a transcendental or "absolute" standpoint.

⁵ Adorno alternatively refers to the enlightenment concept of totality as "the grotesque heir of mana" (84).

form of a constant threat of the dissipation of truth from the wholly enlightened world. In *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*, Timothy Morton's "ecocritique" sides with Adorno on this point, promoting an aesthetic distance from nature as to avoid devouring it. Like Kant's disinterested viewer of art, Morton writes, "the aesthetic promotes nonviolence toward nature... [Art] stops us from destroying things, if only for a moment" (25). Morton goes so far in this vein that he renounces "nature": "Ecocritique is similar to queer theory. In the name of all that we value in the idea of "nature," it thoroughly examines how nature is set up as a transcendental, unified, independent category. Ecocritique does not think that it is paradoxical to say, in the name of ecology itself: 'down with nature!'" (13). Morton's ecocritique focuses on the particular, the nonidentical, over the universal.

New Realisms and Dialectical Naturalism

There are two broad points that motivate my dissertation. The first point is that philosophy, and specifically aesthetic idealism, can make important contributions to the environmental humanities today by providing objectivity to our conceptions of nature; that is, an ecocritical approach can objectively elucidate the human relation to the nonhuman as well as the contexts in which this relationship is embedded. The second point is that any ecophilosophy requires an aesthetics to avoid reducing the concrete differences of the natural world to human reason. These two points are the explicit themes of this introduction which I consider a response to trends in thinking ecology to either reject philosophy or to reject aesthetics. The more current trend in ecological aesthetics, in approaches like speculative realism and object oriented ontology, is to reject idealism and the human subject out of hand. Such approaches to ecological aesthetics

present us with the complex interrelatedness of the nonhuman world without resorting to removing the subject from the environment as in critical idealism. From a Schellingian perspective, however, new realisms are more explicitly than intrinsically hostile to idealism. My intervention into new realist aesthetics asserts that speculative realism and object orientedness, just as much as the critical perspective, are stages in the process of becoming conscious of oneself and others. In his early *Naturphilosophie*, Schelling shows us that the subject-centered philosophy of transcendental idealism is derivative of the aesthetic activities of nature; by contrast, in the *System* of his transcendental philosophy, rather than reject Kant's critical method, Schelling sees the transcendental perspective as a crucial moment in which consciousness makes distinct objects from the speculative worlds of intellectual intuition; and it is finally fine art and "aesthetic intuition" in the *System* that unites consciousness with the natural world and brings the philosopher's concepts closer to natural phenomena.

Nevertheless, the Kantian method of 'critique' has recently been abandoned altogether in aesthetics and in ecological thinking in favor of attempts at conceiving the excess of nature beyond a human perspective; we have heard the resounding calls for a correction to the anthropocentrism of critical approaches; it is claimed, nature and culture have become *too* interrelated. For example, Bruno Latour has promoted a new ecological aesthetics that rejects the deformation of nature by culture. For Latour, the perspective of the human subject has twisted the objects of its gaze under the heading of 'nature' as a category for externalizing the significance of things whereby the real things are suspended in advance. Things in nature viewed from a critical perspective become mere allegories for our human subjectivity. We only concern ourselves with these things to the extent that they mean something *for us*; Latour claims, western

art reflects such contorted forms of nature by giving the example of landscape and still life paintings:

Someone who is looking, for example, at a still life (the expression itself is significant) is entirely programmed so as to become the subject in relation to this *type* of object, whereas the objects – for example, oysters, lemons, capons, bowls, bunches of gold-tinged grapes arrayed on the folds of a white tablecloth – have no role other than to be presented to the sight of *this particular type* of gaze. (17)

Latour rejects the concept of nature completely for the things nature signifies do not exist outside of this relationality organized by human perspective. Nature, as a mere reflection of culture staged for our perspective, has no connection to the “real world.” Latour seeks the world of chaotic ‘real things’ existing beyond the stability provided by human conceptual unification:

If ecology sets off panic reactions, we now understand why: because it obliges us to experience the full force of the instability of this concept, when it is interpreted as the impossible opposition between two domains that are presumed actually to exist in the real world. Above all, don’t try to turn ‘toward nature.’ You might just as well try to cross through the plane of the painting to eat the oysters that gleam in the still life. (20)

For Latour, we can in fact enter the “real world” and devour the oysters if we are willing to relinquish the subject-nature relation. Latour seeks access to the real things unaltered by conceptual mediation, real things as an objective presence amongst themselves beyond the subjective interpretation of things *for us*. Latour’s realism lets things be without imposing a stable concept from an outside perspectival understanding that would give the law of form to chaotic sense impressions. Latour argues against conceiving of nature in its relation to culture or

any framework that might predetermine our sensitivity to and perception of nature.⁶ ‘Nature’ has become too bogged down as a mere appendage of culture. Nature is not really its own domain, but the flipside of a split Nature/Culture concept. Latour then proposes not even a reframing of nature, but an explosion of frames. By relativizing the significance of this human frame and situating it within a context of the many kinds of framing that exist in the world we get a richer and more heterogeneous pluriverse. It is not a kaleidoscopic view, but a relinquishing of the “scopic regime” and perspective altogether. Latour proposes the concept of the “world” and the activity of worlding as an attractive alternative to Nature.⁷ To get rid of the correlation between nature and culture, Latour writes, “I propose simply to use the term *world*, or ‘worlding,’ for this more open concept, defining it, in an obviously very speculative fashion, as that which opens to the multiplicity of *existents*, on the one hand, and to the *multiplicity* of ways they have of existing, on the other” (35). By disavowing the unity of the subject, we enter a world sensitive to multiplicity. However, my project aims to show that formulating and presenting this strange otherness and multiplicity in nature was precisely the project of the aesthetic philosophies of German Idealism, albeit by another method.

The second intervention of this introduction is into less contemporary approaches to nature. Here I am thinking of the more German idealism friendly approaches to nature in the work of Murray Bookchin and Hans Jonas. My critique of these thinkers of nature is that they neglect the aesthetic dimension of the human relationship to nature. Bookchin’s dialectical naturalism and the environmental ethics of Hans Jonas do a lot of work to explore and expand

⁶ “The difficulty lies in the very expression ‘relation to the world,’ which presupposes two sorts of domains, that of nature and that of culture, domains that are at once distinct and impossible to separate completely” (Latour 15).

⁷ Donna Haraway proposes worlding, which can take the form of science fiction and various “speculative fabulations,” as a way to make legible human and non-human entanglement as “mortal earthlings in thick copresence” (*Staying with the Trouble* 4) without removing the subject from the environment.

our imagination of the way that the human is embedded in nature, however they have no corresponding aesthetics.

The interrelatedness of nature and society was a major key to social ecologist Murray Bookchin's work. Bookchin elaborates ecology through a wide lens by grounding it in a historical context; for without context, we are left with arbitrary mystical proclamations such as "interrelatedness." Bookchin takes a Hegelian approach to ecology in a method he calls "dialectical naturalism" developed over the second half of the twentieth century. This dialectical approach to nature is an important corrective to what he perceived as problems with idealistic and materialistic interpretations of dialectic and "it enriches our interpretation of nature and humanity's place in the natural world" (Bookchin 26). The search for direct access to nature beyond human reason is, for Bookchin, a dangerous mystical response to cold instrumental reason. The romantic impulse to reject Kant's transcendental framework and seek access to things themselves has always been a part of Kant reception. For the young Hegel and Schelling, around 1800, a major contention with Kant's critical project was that it presupposed the method or the "instrument" of "critique" that was external to the object of investigation. For the objective idealism Hegel would develop, there is no outside, rather negativity, "otherness" or the non-identical, is internal and experienced as something that comes from within, driving further development. As Hegel put it in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, instrumental reason tries to catch the absolute "like a bird caught by a lime-twig" (47). That is, external instruments deform nature by imposing a cage, treating "being" like a thing without considering how the instrument transforms the object under investigation. However, unlike realism, for objective idealism, the way "being" is mediated must be incorporated rather than denied; the way mediation transforms "being" cannot be avoided; rather, the transformation is the spirit of existence and must be taken

into account. From this perspective, realism represses the subject or self of nature by treating nature like a thing or an artifact and displaces the transformative capacity of the aesthetic presenting activity of the consciousness of a subject. For the young Hegel and Schelling, it was, on the contrary, precisely the development of self-consciousness that they sought to explicate in order to describe not just some particular object, but rather “the action whereby the object *as such* comes into being” (Schelling, *System* 139).

Self-consciousness puts an end to the understanding that, in Jean Hyppolite’s words, “always grasps parts in an external relationship to one another, and when it posits a totality it conceives it as an entity apart from multiplicity” (5); because self-consciousness emerges in between the unity of life and the multiplicity of living forms, it perceives the forms of nature no longer as external ‘things’ but as the reflection of the consciousness that senses them. That is why, for Hegel, as he states in the *Jenenser Logik*, nature “does not develop itself in the same form as spirit; it is only spirit for the spirit who is conscious of it, it is spirit in-itself, but not for-itself” (qtd. in Hyppolite 5) and as Hyppolite puts it, “The development of consciousness has a creative and dynamic role in the Hegelian dialectic because, as he says in his Jena writings, spirit is ‘that which discovers itself,’ and nature is only the scene of the self-discovery of spirit” (5). Life appears in between nature as infinite productivity and natural forms as finite products (or, in Spinoza’s terms, between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*). The sensing self strives to establish itself as merely for-itself, a distinct individual drawn against the external totality of life, but spirit overcomes the opposition of the One and the Many by positing the absolute as the internal contradiction that drives self-actualization. For Hegel, this opposition of the one and the many is not a deviation and rupture of an indifferent absolute; this opposition is the qualitative and concrete essence of the absolute. Hegel conceives of the absolute “as a negative power, an

internal activity which posits division and opposition within itself in order to negate it” (Hyppolite 7). It is the negation of the opposition that spurs self-actualization when spirit overcomes the division in discovering itself as in and for-itself. And for Hegel, like Schelling, art is a crucial medium for reconciling the opposition between thought and natural phenomena. Hegel writes in the *Einleitung* to the *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik* that it is the sensuous form of fine art that differentiates it from philosophy and religion. Fine art differentiates itself:

in der eigentümlichen Art, daß sie auch das Höchste sinnlich darstellt und es damit der Erscheinungsweise der Natur, den Sinnen und der Empfindung näherbringt. Es ist die Tiefe einer *übersinnlichen Welt*, in welche der *Gedanke* dringt und sie zunächst als ein *Jenseits* dem unmittelbaren Bewußtsein und der gegenwärtigen Empfindung gegenüber aufstellt; es ist die Freiheit denkender Erkenntnis, welche sich dem *Diesselts*, das sinnliche Wirklichkeit und Endlichkeit heißt, enthebt. Diesen *Bruch* aber, zu welchem der Geist fortgeht, weiß er ebenso zu heilen; er erzeugt aus sich selbst die Werke der schönen Kunst als das erste versöhnende Mittelglied zwischen dem bloß Äußerlichen, Sinnlichen und Vergänglichen und dem reinen Gedanken, zwischen der Natur und endlichen Wirklichkeit und der unendlichen Freiheit des begreifenden Denkens. (“Art’s peculiar feature, however, consists in its ability to represent in *sensuous form* even the highest ideas, bringing them thus nearer to the character of natural phenomena, to the senses, and to feeling. It is the height of a supra-sensuous world into which *thought* reaches, but it always appears to immediate consciousness and to present experience as an alien *beyond*. Through the power of philosophic thinking we are able to soar above what is merely *here*, above

sensuous and finite experience. But spirit can heal the breach between the supra-sensuous and the sensuous brought on by its own advance; it produces out of itself the world of fine art as the first reconciling medium between what is merely external, sensuous, and transient, and the world of pure thought, between nature with its finite reality and the infinite freedom of philosophic reason.”; *Werke* 13:21; 314-315)

Subjective idealism engendered the feeling that the intellect holds the subject at a distance from nature with methodological instruments, stopping reason at the moment of intellectual alienation from the natural world. This instrumental kind of reason is not implicated or even included in the world of objects that it investigates. For example, when Fichte defines reason in his *Wissenschaftslehre*, “It follows from the mere thought of a basis or reason that it must lie outside of what it grounds or explains. The basis of an explanation and what is explained thereby thus become posited—as such—in opposition to one another” (9). Cognition on this count is defined as the activity of abstracting things from the intellect itself which forms the ground of what exists, and in doing so posits ground and existent in opposition; this method separates reason out from the things connected in experience and posits the self or the freedom of spirit (the ground) in strict opposition to the things (the existent) in nature and the sensible world. Fichte’s subjective idealism posits the transcendental Ich as the ground of nature, denigrating nature by reducing it to a mere “Nicht-Ich.”

One response to this scientific method was to join the romantic cult of intuition and to succumb to the impulse to flee society and reason altogether and search for a direct intuitive experience of nature. According to Bookchin, “intuition” as a ground for beliefs in concepts like the interconnectedness of human and nature, dislodged from any discursive intellect become

arbitrary; Bookchin argues further, “precisely because intuition and mystical beliefs are so cloudy and arbitrary—which is to say unreasoned—they may also ‘connect’ us with things we really shouldn’t be connected with at all namely, racism, sexism, and an abject subservience to charismatic leaders” (3). ‘Ecologistic’ ideology can be dangerous when connected with anti-intellectualism and unrestricted by rational critique. Bookchin puts forward dialectic as a form of reason that is not strictly opposed to the phenomena it investigates and nevertheless avoids dangerous mystical intuitionism as much as cold mechanical reason.

Dialectical reason describes identity as it arises in a creative moment of self-differentiation or what Hegel calls “determinate negativity,” and thus being always carries within it an inner potential to incorporate new experience in relation to identity in a process of becoming. Dialectical reason is able to do this by incorporating non-identity into reason; what this means is that, what something is, is informed by what it is not, or what it used to be; what something is and what it is not are not posited in a total opposition, but rather the strange unassimilable otherness is bound up with identity in a more fundamental ground. Dialectical reasoning resists the temptation to either collapse the natural and intelligible worlds or to put them in the irretrievable opposition of an ontological excess.

Bookchin argues that dialectical causality⁸ is necessary for ecological thought because it dispels the dangerous false dichotomy of instrumentalization or intuitionism: “This dialectical naturalism offers an alternative to an ecology movement that rightly distrusts conventional

⁸ “A distinctive continuum emerges from dialectical causality. Here, cause and effect are not merely ‘correlations,’ to use a common positivist term; nor are they clearly distinct from each other, such that a cause externally impacts upon a thing or phenomenon to produce an effect mechanically. Dialectical causality is cumulative: the implicit or ‘in itself’ (*an sich*), to use Hegel’s terminology, is not simply replaced or negated by its more developed explicit or ‘for itself’ (*für sich*); rather, it is absorbed into and developed beyond the explicit into a fuller, more differentiated, and more adequate form—the Hegelian ‘in and for itself’ (*an und für sich*). Insofar as the implicit is *fully* actualized by becoming what it is constituted to be, the process is truly rational, that is to say, it is fulfilled by virtue of its internal logic. The continuum of a development is cumulative, containing the history of its development” (Bookchin 20-21).

reason. It can bring coherence to ecological thinking, and it can dispel arbitrary and anti-intellectual tendencies” (15). For Bookchin, an ecological society would actualize the potentiality of humanity’s ‘inner logic,’ which rests in the human capacity to “intervene actively, consciously, and purposively into first nature with unparalleled effectiveness and to alter it on a planetary scale” (31). The actualization of this potential is the first step in bringing necessity and perspective back to the tendency in ecological thinking to either collapse the social with the natural world, or put them in total opposition. Dialectical naturalism avoids the fixed dichotomy of intuitionism or instrumentalism and sets the human on the path to what Bookchin calls a ‘free nature’ in an ‘ecological society’ (33). Dialectical naturalism, however, runs the risk of erasing the differences of nature in the name of human identity. To the extent that Bookchin sides with resolving this conflict with difference once and for all with inner logic, he disconnects his “dialectical naturalism” from the unassimilable kernel of nature, its aesthetic dimension and the contradictions that give it life. To the extent that Bookchin sides with reason, he is not open to the transformations of a poetics of aesthetic ecotranslation. On the contrary, it is the argument of this dissertation that Schelling’s proposal of art as the arbitrator of reason and difference avoids this subsumption of nature to reason. For Schelling, it is only in art that “the rational as rational becomes something phenomenal or sensuous” (*PoA* 29); and it is in works of art that nature and freedom are made into particular sensuous forms.

Aesthetic Idealism and Ecology

In subjective idealism, the opposition of nature and freedom gets caught up in opposing human freedom to nature; nature, then, gets determined as that which resists the subject. In showing that

the human subject and nature are united in a higher contrast in the artwork, Schelling transforms the two terms subject and nature; nature is “unconditioned” and freedom is no longer predicated on excluding its other in the shape of the unfreedom of a mechanical nature. In Schelling’s 1800 *System*, he showed how idealism encompasses the real; he argues that the real is a result of a limitation on the ideal presenting activity of a self and so the two, the subject and the real, only arise in conjunction. The concept is not imposed onto an objective nature from outside, disfiguring it, rather the concept arises out of a split between the finding activity of the intuiting entity and what it finds, or what is intuited. Concepts and intuitions are always taken together as mirror reflections resulting from the turning of the absolute onto itself so that it might perceive itself; the real only appears out of the schism in nature whereby the sensing activity and the passivity of what is sensed start to disentangle themselves when the absolute reflects on itself. This creative aesthetic activity of sensing and presenting otherness is embedded in the differential systems of the ecological world. Nature is no longer the receptacle for the refuse of spirit but an active and creative agent of change. That is, nature, such creaturely organisms as corals, crabs and spiders, are presented as artists in forms. Their creaturely sensing and intuiting activities, this discourse of nature, forms the ground of the philosophical consciousness of nature and constitutes the conditions of possibility for transcendental idealism and the moral subject’s freedom to act.

As we are always already submerged in limitation, we cannot grasp the absolute; the absolute is an unmediated totality with no predicates; however, art, in tracing the discourse of freedom and nature, gives this ineffable excess a concrete form. For Schelling, freedom and nature are not separate things, but rather constitute a discursive tension that animates the aesthetic development of the subject and nature. In the third *Critique*, Kant had wanted to throw

a bridge from freedom to nature, across that “great chasm that separates the supersensible from the appearances” (81). The younger generation in Germany would take aesthetics as both the end and starting point of nature, making this contradiction itself, that nature is not what it appears to be for us, the motor of a dialectical development in objective idealism; however, this contradiction is not filtered out by an instrument or a critical method, but rather, contradiction itself becomes the essence of reason.

In Schelling’s early work, the human being in its relationship to nature is characterized broadly by the common thread of creativity. Human consciousness is a result of the creativity of nature, and in turn, our becoming consciousness of nature is an adventure animated by human creativity. As Merleau-Ponty puts it,

for Schelling, everything is born starting from us; Nature is lent to our perception. We are the parents of a Nature of which we are also the children. It is in human being that things become conscious by themselves; but the relation is reciprocal: human being is also the becoming-conscious of things. Nature leads, by a series of disequilibria, toward the realization of human being, which in turn becomes the dialectical term of it. Only in human being is the opening of the process determined, and only in human being does the process become conscious. But we can say that human being is the *Mitwissenschaft* of Creation; it carries traces of all that Nature has been, it is the recapitulation and the contemporary of creation.

(43-44)

It is easy to see why, in his search for a medium that could unite consciousness with the poiesis of nature in their creative dimensions in the *System*, Schelling will propose the artwork. However, Schelling’s creative view of nature is not a crude metamorphosis of nature into art.

Consciousness is always differentiating itself from what it senses creating a schism whereby ‘things’ in nature are posited as external to the self’s sensing activity. Consciousness is the breaking up of the activity of sensing and finding from what is sensed and found. By contrast, aesthetic intuition makes this philosophical consciousness concrete once again. The oscillation between intellectual intuition and the critical philosophical consciousness of a subject that differentiates itself from this external totality, are reunited in “aesthetic intuition”; as Schelling puts it, “if aesthetic intuition is merely transcendental intuition become objective (*Denn die ästhetische Anschauung eben ist die objektiv gewordene intellektuelle*), it is self-evident that art is at once the only true and eternal organ and document of philosophy, which ever and again continues to speak to us of what philosophy cannot depict in external form” (*System* 231). Aesthetic intuition is a poetic consciousness that unites what is other with our consciousness of it in the creative element of the artwork. In this way, aesthetic intuition is the becoming conscious of the obscure ground of the absolute while always remaining open to the indeterminacy of its otherness. The aesthetic view brings art and nature together in a relationship in which they are mutually inherent. Nature inheres in art, and in turn, art inheres in nature. Schelling’s notion of *Indifferenz*, and the aesthetic ecology of art objects not disconnected from the natural world that he develops out of its tensions, its disequilibria and aporias, reveals the deep entwining of art with nature.

Art and Ecological Ethics

Schelling’s practical philosophy is typically understood to be found in the 1809 *Freiheitsschrift* which coincides with a shift in his thinking away from a concern with art. However, in my view,

Schelling's earlier aesthetics already highlight the crucial role that art plays in the life of the moral subject and in cultivating ethical praxis. This neglect of the role that art plays in the reception of Schelling's practical philosophy reflects a deep prejudice in philosophy to keep these spheres separate. It is the thesis of the final chapter of this dissertation that any new ecological ethics requires a corresponding creative and aesthetic dimension. This is a significant departure from traditional ethics. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, for example, Aristotle distinguishes praxis from poetics, strictly separating *Phronēsis* (practical wisdom) from *Poiēsis* (making art). *Phronēsis*, sometimes translated as prudence, is confined to the contemplation of action, the capacity for deliberation involved in bringing about the good by way of praxis where acting well is an end in itself. *Phronēsis* is the wisdom to perceive and bring about the good by practice alone; whereas, *poiēsis* involves creating something that admits of being otherwise. That is, in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, aesthetics and the creative realm of poetics are viewed as separate and distinct from practical wisdom and ethical action; Aristotle claims, "Both a thing made and an action performed belong to what admits of being otherwise, but making and action are different" (1140a) and this division enjoys a continued influence on environmental ethics today.

In the late 1970's, Hans Jonas developed a new environmental ethics and political theory in his *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age*. In this text, he criticizes the cordoning off of the human ethical sphere in traditional ethics to intrahuman action. He argues that in traditional ethics, all human actions on the nonhuman world (outside of perhaps animal testing to some extent) and on nonhuman things are considered ethically neutral. For all traditional ethics, as Jonas puts it, "Ethical significance belonged to the direct dealing of man with man, including the dealing with himself: all traditional ethics is

anthropocentric. For action in this domain, the entity ‘man’ and his basic condition was considered constant in essence and not itself an object of reshaping *techne*” (4). That is, human activity was presupposed by ethics to only involve other humans. Human ethical action was not considered in its potential to fundamentally alter the *poiesis* of an *ewige Natur* and so there are no ethical principles in the history of ethics to draw from in order to guide ethical action in relation to the nonhuman. Further, Jonas argues that all traditional ethics only concerned the humans of the present: “The long run of consequences beyond was left to chance, fate, or providence. Ethics accordingly was of the here and now, of occasions as they arise between men, of the recurrent, typical situations of private and public life. The good man was the one who met these contingencies with virtue and wisdom, cultivating these powers in himself, and for the rest resigning himself to the unknown” (5). All traditional ethics concerned merely the “proximate range of action” (Jonas 5) and so we have no practical theory that considers how our action might impact the future of human life on Earth. In light of the shocking realization of the last century that human activity has much further reaching consequences than those limited to the present or to our human domain, that terrible realization that human activity is in fact capable irreparably destabilizing the future biosphere, “reshaping *techne*,” with unknown and barely fathomable consequences, Jonas called for beginning the project of imagining the consequences of ethical action not merely on an intrahuman present, but imagining the relationship between our actions and an ecological future: he writes,

To be sure, the old prescriptions of the ‘neighbor’ ethics—of justice, charity, honesty, and so on—still hold in their intimate immediacy for the nearest, day-by-day sphere of human interaction. But this sphere is overshadowed by a growing realm of collective action where doer, deed, and effect are no longer the same as

they were in the proximate sphere, and which by the enormity of its powers forces upon ethics a new dimension of responsibility never dreamed of before. (6)

The undeniable vulnerability of nature and the suffering of human life set to escalate dramatically in the very near future is a fact that can no longer be ignored and a radically new ethical and ecological response is required that necessarily “alters the very concept of ourselves as a causal agency in the larger scheme” (Jonas 6). This reconception of causal agency beyond a merely intrahuman present puts us in touch with the necessary terrestrial condition that moves us to act with a regard for others and the constantly transforming constraints of a necessity that is higher than ourselves.

A major revision to traditional ethics in Jonas’ new environmental ethics is the deemphasizing of individual action and a turn to political theory; for in this new uncertain and ecological world, the weight of preventing the apocalypse lay far beyond the might of individual action. Because of the cumulative and aggregate nature of the destruction of the Earth, and the strange world of futurity that will suffer the consequences of our action, Jonas’ new ethics require new kinds of political action and wisdom. Jonas writes, “Public policy has never had to deal before with issues of such inclusiveness and such lengths of anticipation. In fact, the changed nature of human action changes the very nature of politics” (9). Normal procedures of representative government are incapable of integrating this wisdom because the future sufferers of unethical action today have at present no political representation: “the *future* is not represented, it is not a force that can throw its weight into the scales. The nonexistent has no lobby, and the unborn are powerless. Thus accountability to them has no political reality behind it in present decision-making, and when they can make their complaint, then we, the culprits, will no longer be there” (Jonas 22). Jonas’ proposal then entails a new political theory where

“the new imperative addresses itself to public policy rather than private conduct, which is not in the causal dimension to which that imperative applies” (12). Counterintuitively, this long-range responsibility requires not so much an acceleration of human action but rather developing humility and restraint in the face of “the quasi-eschatological potentials of our technological processes” where “ignorance of the ultimate implications becomes itself a reason for responsible restraint—as the second best to the possession of wisdom itself” (Jonas 22). For Jonas, previous forms of ethical life have become so diminished as to no longer be tenable; the sacred is no longer enough to move us in a nihilistic age, and neither is fear enough to move us to consider the small fundamental changes needed to stave off the merely collateral damages and the suffering of future unknown others.

In Schelling’s lectures on the *Philosophy of Art and Methode*, he argues that the courage that moves a moral subject to act with concern for the necessary consequences of their action is developed in the public life of art. For it was just such a practical wisdom that emerged out of the public life of ancient drama where, in Attic tragedy, the portrayal of action puts the audience in touch with the necessary consequences of fate, expanding the imagination of contemplative ethical action; as Paul Ricoeur has shown, the “gap” between poetics and praxis in tragedy forces the reader to deliberate and reorient their action:

one of the functions of tragedy in relation to ethics is to create a gap between tragic wisdom and practical wisdom. By refusing to contribute a ‘solution’ to the conflicts made insoluble by fiction, tragedy, after having disoriented the gaze, condemns the person of praxis to reorient action, at his or her own risk, in the sense of a practical wisdom in situation that best *responds* to tragic wisdom. This

response, deferred by the festive contemplation of the spectacle, makes conviction the haven beyond catharsis. (247)

In tragedy, there is the meeting of multiple horizons. We are forced to open ourselves to others' points of view and we must build a community out of characters who have suffered the most bitter injustices and punishments that are in turn themselves moved by blind passions that exceed them. In Attic tragedy there are always more forces at play than the clear intentions that move the one-sided characters to decide and to act. The wisdom that results from tragic conflict, *phronēsis*, develops in the audience an awe for the necessity of fate and develops a concern for the messy consequences of action. Unlike philosophical moral certainty, *phronēsis* describes the ability to perceive the shifting contexts of action, an awareness of the strange and monstrous fate to which we are bound, and the unconscious elements in acting and producing that exceed conscious awareness are revealed; this acknowledgment forges in me the conviction that I must bear witness to the potential suffering of Others outside of my view, to the suffering of unknown future strangers that have yet to reveal themselves and that I will never meet. It is precisely this aesthetic *phronēsis* that might reveal the concealed necessity of the consequences of moral action for the Earth itself: aesthetic ecology must involve such a tragic ethics that does not only consider an intrahuman present but a practice of restraint in the face of the knowledge that the consequences of our actions impact the future of human and nonhuman life on Earth.

Literary fiction does not produce the self-certainty of philosophical consciousness; and tragedy in particular is not involved in forging universal moral certitude or even consensus building whatsoever. Tragic *phronēsis* is able to lobby for the speculative moral claims of future sufferers of our ethical actions and move us to be there for Others, even if, as Paul Ricoeur writes,

Perhaps the philosopher as philosopher has to admit that one does not know and cannot say whether this Other, the source of the injunction, is another person whom I can look in the face or who can stare at me, or my ancestors for whom there is no representation, to so great an extent does my debt to them constitute my very self, or God—living God, absent God—or an empty place. With this aporia of the Other, philosophical discourse comes to an end. (355)

This hermeneutic of the Other might help us imagine the existential condition of the necessary constraint on our actions; namely, that in spite of the burgeoning consequences of our free activities, future life must necessarily bear the brunt of the destruction so long as it continues to inhabit the Earth.

We can no longer act according to that old ethics of an intrahuman present as the consequences of our actions have become impossible to predict. The uncertainty, the monstrosity of cumulative effects, and the impossible to predict factors of cascading disasters caused by destabilized ecosystems grow unabated as the murkiness of our actions and their unintended consequences just get more turbid. We can no longer rely on an *ewige Nature* as a harmonious *poiesis* of the Earth presupposed as a stable backdrop for our human dramas. In putting our moral freedom to act in relation to the necessary condition of living on the Earth, in this tragic conception of history, we give our ethical action meaning in relation to this necessary force in an ecohermeneutic of life on Earth. Like Attic tragedy, literary fictions for Ricoeur imagine the existential mediation between the self and the world giving the Earth an existential signification:

The Earth here is something different, and something more, than a planet: it is the mythical name of our corporeal anchoring in the world. This is what is ultimately presupposed in the literary narrative as it is subjected to the constraint making it a

mimesis of action. For the action “imitated” in and through fiction also remains subjected to the constraint of the corporeal and terrestrial condition. (150)

Literary fiction externalizes and makes visible the beginning and end of an Earth that exceeds my own experience of it and gives meaning to the relationship between my actions and the end of the Earth; that is, art can nourish ecological conviction by putting us in touch with the cosmos beyond a subjective perspective. Literary fiction has the potential to give the Earth a visible meaning by creating a relationship between our actions and the unconscious forces of the Earth. In Schelling’s tragic conception of history, he develops an ecohermeneutic where our ability to act is not a psychologically isolated drama where the moral subject becomes aware of their boundless freedom; rather, tragedy reveals that our actions are always bound up in conflicts with the conditions of the universe. The historical life of the subject cannot be detached from this aesthetic ecology of the *unvordenkliches Seyn* of the Earth.

The Plan

In chapter one, I explore Kant's method of 'critique' that creates an objective ground for knowledge, clarifying the contradictions between intellect and nature. In the first *Critique*, the unconditioned subject differentiates the pure intellect from what it intuits and conditions, from what it senses in nature. In the *Critique of Judgment*, however, Kant introduces the idea that beauty provides a bridge between the free subject (morality) and nature by giving us an aesthetic experience of both. To the extent that Kant defines the aesthetic faculty as freeplay between the imagination and the understanding, he reverses the conditioning activity of the understanding, and art seems to gain special insight into preconceptual nature, as it reflects the original unity of consciousness and intuition. One of the main goals of my initial chapter on Kant is to explore the differences between schematic and symbolic presentation of concepts developed in the first and third *Critiques*, respectively. For Kant, schemata and symbols are objective signs in that they synthesize sensible intuitions with concepts before experience. In other words, Kant gives language or at least these specific types of sensible signs an objective ground in reason, creating a necessary link between language and the ideas they present. While both symbols and schemata are objective presentations of concepts, I found significant differences between them; I argue that the schematism is built on the philosophical logic of sameness while the symbol reflects an aesthetic ecology of qualitatively distinct signs.

In Kant's model of the schematism, the generality of the pure concept is never finally revealed in any particular sensible presentation. Rather, the concept regulates the possibility of

what can be given form, the concept forms the condition of possibility for the intelligibility of sensible intuitions. In this way, it can be argued that the schematism reduces the differences of all various particular manifestations of a concept ultimately to the same thing. By contrast, in a symbolic presentation, aesthetic ideas are reflected indirectly by putting different schematized images into an analogous relationship that lays bare a common principle. In the symbolic mode, one compares different aesthetic presentations of concepts and the similarity of their inner configuration. Quality seems to take on an autonomous moral interest through this aesthetic comparison of symbols as they reflect an interior will. The symbol exteriorizes this interiority of a moral will through an ecology of qualitative signs without reducing their differences as radically as the schematism does to a pure concept. The conclusion of my Kant chapter is that in the aesthetic view of the world and in the symbolic mode, we are better attuned to the particular qualities and differences located in art and nature. Nevertheless, in Kant's aesthetics, this potential autonomy located in the sensible realm of art and nature is ultimately restricted to a reflection of human moral interest. Only the human figure is capable of the harmonious expression of inner moral ideas that govern human beings in an external form. For Kant, it is ultimately the human figure that reflects the ideal of artistic beauty and freedom.

In chapter two, starting with Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*, I follow the tensions and dissonances of the aesthetic activity of nature that will become the condition of possibility for philosophical consciousness in Schelling's *System of Transcendental Idealism*. After considering the morphologies expressed in these aesthetic differential systems of nature, I turn to the *System* and Schelling's description of self-consciousness becoming aware of the entire ecological development. At this point, I turn to Schelling's aesthetics and claim that, just as in his *Naturphilosophie*, in his model of the symbol presented in the *Philosophy of Art*, the interiority

of the subject, those moral ideas that inwardly govern human beings, cannot be completely disentangled from the aesthetic activities of nature. Nature is not put in total opposition with the freedom of the moral human subject; rather, creatures in nature are involved in aesthetic ecological activities that form the very conditions of possibility for the transcendental perspective. While Schelling reception is quick to point out that Schelling's early *Naturphilosophie* takes the teleological judgment presented in Kant's third *Critique* as its starting point, I am more interested in Schelling's treatment of the role of transcendental idealism in his system as well as the schematism, and the relationship of philosophical consciousness more generally to nature and art. For Schelling, the abstract and schematic concepts of philosophy and the self-certainty that philosophical consciousness secures for itself are derivative of *Naturphilosophie* on the one hand, and on the other hand, philosophy must be made concrete once again by an aesthetic intuition that brings its abstract concepts closer to nature in works of art.

For Schelling, as with Kant, metaphysical concepts are indeed withheld from nature; however, they are also derived from the aesthetic ecological systems of nature. On the other hand, for Schelling, the transcendental perspective is only one step in a process of becoming self-consciousness, where, in aesthetic intuition, abstract and schematic philosophical concepts are made concrete in works of art. Art unites the philosophical self, the transcendental subject, with nature in a more fundamental ground, and Schelling's aesthetics transform both terms. For Schelling, the work of art unites activity in a concrete expression as much as it unites a subject-centered philosophical consciousness with the objective world; in this way art transforms our relationship to nature. Art takes consciousness as its starting point and makes it concrete. For this reason, in chapter three, I look to Schelling's treatment of tragic dramas as historical works

of art that form particular starting points of consciousness confronting difference. The thesis of my final chapter is that tragedy is important for ecological ethics because it requires that the audience develop a sensitivity to the contexts of action, and foments a reorientation of moral action. By presenting a higher necessity than the one intended by the tragic hero at the beginning, the poet develops a dynamic practical wisdom that does not reduce the multiplicity of interests to a universal ethic. I claim that Schelling's tragic conception of moral action is important for ecological ethics today because it is capable of respecting the moral claims of future unknown Others.

Schelling claims that there are three distinct stages of history: nature, fate, and *Vorsehung*. For Schelling, these three forms present us with particular constructions of time, freedom, and nature. The first epoch of history is not yet tragic, but we might say it contains the elements of tragedy in it as if still enclosed in the same bud. History in the first epoch is still nature, presented in the timelessness and tranquility of epic style. It is Prometheus that rebels against the gods and becomes the archetype of morality that ancient tragedy presents to us. In expressing independence from the gods, Prometheus is immediately bound and subjected to limitation; in this way, Prometheus presents to us the particular construction of the fate that lived in Greek tragedy and Prometheus initiates the ferocious battle between freedom and fate, and represents the entire species of humanity as a symbolic figure.

By contrast, Goethe's *Faust* is moved by the modern condition of what Schelling calls *Entzweiung*; in Faust's quest to calm his striving for a spiritual resolution, he spirals out of control tragically accumulating collateral damages for himself and others. As a representative of the modern moral subject, who desires an expression of freedom as a finite individual, the resolution that Faust seeks is eternally withheld from him. However, different from ancient

tragedy, for Schelling, Faust is a tragic figure that is a unique individual that carries a greater personal responsibility for moral action that is no longer bound by nature or fate. The character of modern literary fiction necessitates a more fundamental unity of the moral subject with the cosmos at large, a higher necessity that Schelling calls *Vorsehung*.

Chapter 1: The Aesthetic Ground in Kant

With reflective judgment in the third *Critique*, Kant creates a model outlining the real ebb and flow nature's formation. The complete dissolutions and sudden crystallizations, the patterns produced by the morphology of nature, are mirrored in the free aesthetic play between the understanding and the imagination in the contemplating subject. The symbolic reflection of reason in natural beauty provides continuity amidst the leaps of natural history. The aesthetic environment is not contained by the concept; the aesthetic is not a mere appendage of a centered rational mind, but rather fills out the concept and the limits of its plasticity. To use an architectural metaphor, if Kant's aesthetic model were a sculptural relief, the aesthetic is the solid background out of which the real figures and patterns are raised and sculpted in the foreground of determinate theoretical reason. Theoretical reason sculpts determinate shapes out of the aesthetic material. It is an illusion of the relief that they consist of different materials.

First coined in the mid eighteenth century by Alexander Baumgarten, the new science of aesthetics was initially related to its roots in theories of perception. Baumgarten took his *Aesthetica* from the original Greek *aísthēsis* meaning relating to the perception of senses. Baumgarten defined his aesthetics as the science of sensuous cognition. Aesthetic rationalists, like Baumgarten and Wolff, as well as Winckelmann, Lessing, and Mendelssohn, considered the pleasure of beauty a cognitive state tied to the qualities of the representations of natural objects themselves in the aesthetic experience. For aesthetic rationalists, beauty was located in the cognition of perceptible qualities in the object. That is, beauty arose from a discursive and

rational relationship between subject and object. Aesthetic rationalism takes the perfection of the sensuous presentation as the common property of beauty, arguing that pleasure arises for the subject who perceives beauty as, in Mendelssohn's words, "the sensuous expression of perfection." Therefore anything capable of expressing perfection concretely and being sensuously perceived could be the object of beauty for aesthetic rationalism. Beauty was not necessarily related to art or nature, as its guiding principle was an inner harmony, it was a free-standing descriptor of any cognition of sensuous perfection.

Kant claims in the "Preface" that what is at stake in the third *Critique* is the bridging of the incalculable gulf separating nature and freedom. Aesthetic experience is a reconciliation, the memory of a state before nature and freedom were torn asunder; aesthetic experience then is not a construction but an archeology attentively uncovering humanity's forgotten deep unity with the natural world; J.M. Bernstein reads Kant's aesthetics as a mourning for the original unity of beauty with truth and goodness: "Kant's reference to the supersensible marks a displacement of a (perhaps mythological) past into the beyond; the arche-tecture of architectonic blueprinting is not a bridge to span the 'great gulf' separating the realms of freedom and nature, but rather a sepulchre to stand over their lost unity" (18). However, this is only partially accurate; for Kant, the separation of the active subject from what it intuits is inevitable and important for theoretical reason where nature, as an object of possible experience, is given definition through the transcendental tension. Nevertheless, the repressed unity that arises with the aesthetic attention of the subject makes way for nature to speak in a way that anticipates the conceptual work of the determinate understanding in the transcendental schematism; where, we might say, with John H. Smith, the concept approaches infinitely close to the object at its limit.⁹

⁹ Smith shows that the conceptual boundary with empirical imagery in Kant's transcendental schematism reflects insights from calculus and the infinitesimal: "the continuous and infinitesimally small intensities that anticipatorily frame the nature of perception are, in fact, constitutive of reality as consisting of infinite gradations of qualities"

Aesthetic experience has a special kind of encounter with non- or pre-conceptual nature and its cognition. Art anticipates nature and vice versa, and hence our aesthetic view of the world is a condition of our reality. The difference in the content of art and understanding is merely a shift in focus, an illusion. The aesthetic is not a mode in which mere freedom or mechanistic nature alone reigns, but the play between them that cannot be reduced to either pole. It is my position then that the third *Critique* in some sense comes ‘before’ the first; and yet, the preconceptual aesthetic experience layed out in the third *Critique* upends the concept of linearity, of the ‘before’; the sequential temporalization of pure time is subsequently ushered in by the schematism; that is, aesthetic attention disrupts the purity of any genetic temporalization. Kant’s aesthetics posit a fluid prehistory of the concept where our experience of beauty marks the return of nature’s real indeterminate formation that has been over-determined and cemented in an abstract conceptualization by instrumental reason. The aesthetic is rather a fluid movement of structure and play, of solidification and dissolution, that belongs wholly to sensibility (the background and foreground of the relief are, ultimately, of the same material) and germinates the eventual conceptualization. This prehistory of the concept is a deep natural history of the attunement of mind with the the natural world before the submission of sensibility to the work of the understanding: art has access to this deep history of nature after nature has been dissected by the understanding; in art, imagination is in freeplay with the understanding, meaning that art reflects concretely the *ekstasis* of a consciousness stepping outside of its environment together with the creativity of the aesthetic environment.

Kant’s aesthetics tell the story of nature without submitting it to a conceptualization merely *for us*. An example used in the third *Critique* is the aesthetic attention to the many species

(114). We mustn't go beyond experience to verify the reality of perception; the concept approaches the sense impression as its limit. That is, “the infinitesimal ‘anticipates,’ or is the a priori condition of, whatever can count as ‘real.’” (Smith 111).

of grasses before they were consumed by the cow: “the species of grasses themselves are to be judged as organized products of nature, hence as rich in art, nevertheless in relation to the animals which they nourish they are to be regarded as mere raw materials” (240). Of course, we could use theoretical reason to analyze and determine nature in relation to the unconditioned consciousness of it within a web of contingencies and subsume its materials under the human categories. The cow similarly perceives grass instrumentally to the extent that it views grass as a means to nourishment. However, viewed as an organized product of nature without any instrumental or external purpose, grass is rich in art. In the aesthetic presentation, the purpose of grass torn from it by grazing animals and the human understanding is rejoined with the purposelessness of its being in itself. From an aesthetic perspective, the meaning of grass is united with its sensible presentation as a purposiveness without a purpose. Here, we see aesthetic attention uses the same materials without subsuming them to the conceptual apparatus merely *for us*. The aesthetic attention to nature follows from a new arrangement of faculties that Kant introduces in the third *Critique* and is one that reveals this prehistory of nature not by going out there into the world, but going deeper into the subject, contemplating the pleasure we feel when the complex relations of our minds reflect and manifest an attunement with the aesthetic objects that accompany that feeling of pleasure arising from the unity of meaning and being.

What the younger generation in Germany realized with the third *Critique* is that the aesthetic experience is the return of the preconceptual natural history of what has become our completely conceptually determined modern world. Reflective judgment is the backstory of how the concept and object become completely welded together and therefore, in aesthetic experience there is still the space of a freedom of play between them. That is, there is no static concept, only a not-yet concept, allowing for a play of universal and particular, ideal and real, firmly in the

realm of sensibility. In art and nature, reason is not yet abstracted completely from finitude and intuition. This amounts to an epigenetic relation between ideal and real where the part and whole have a mutually germanitive relation to one another.

On this account, beauty is the return of nature repressed by the conceptual overdetermination of excessively anthropomorphic philosophy. The aesthetic animates the material formation of the concept; conceptual determinations of theoretical reason, merely the results. As Schelling writes in a letter to Hegel on January 5, 1795:

I live and move at present in philosophy. Philosophy is not yet at an end. Kant has provided the results. The premises are still missing. And who can understand the results without premises? Perhaps a Kant, but what is the great crowd to make of it?...Kant has swept everything away, but how is the crowd to notice? One must smash it to pieces before their very eyes, so they grasp it in their hands. (*Letters* 29)

The attunement of nature and mind means that the preconceptual patterns in the manifold reflected in the experience of beauty, in the subjective aesthetic feeling of pleasure, is the trace of patterns, that is unity in difference, really existing in the sensible world. The beautiful formations of nature are not directed toward real ends for the purpose of our aesthetic pleasure, as raw materials *for us*; rather, they coalesce in patterns through the free formation of nature. To get at this living nature, Kant had to reinvent our way of relating to the world.

Hypotyposis

The symbol is a particular way of presenting a concept where meaning is united with its sign; that is, symbols make pure concepts sensible: what Kant refers to as “hypotyposis.” In introducing the symbolic in §59 of the third *Critique*, Kant writes, “All intuitions that are ascribed to concepts *a priori* are ... either **schemata** or **symbols**, the first of which contain direct, the second indirect presentations of the concept. The first do this demonstratively, the second by means of an analogy.” According to Kant these two types of hypotyposes, these two ways of presenting concepts as either symbols or as schemata are not merely subjective representations, but are signs that synthesize sensible intuitions with a concept before experience.

Symbols had been used previously, by logicians for example, as a purely discursive mode of reasoning uncontaminated by empirical sense. Kant contrasts his new definition with this prior sense, writing, that symbols are not

mere characterizations i.e., designations of the concepts by means of accompanying sensible signs, which contain nothing at all belonging to the intuition of the object, but only serve them, in accordance with the laws of association of the imagination, and hence in a subjective regard, as a means of reproduction; such things are either words, or visible (algebraic, even mimetic) signs, as mere expressions for concepts. (Third *Critique* 226)

Kant was sensitive to empiricist attacks on rationalism and sought to give certain sensible signs an objective ground in reason. Previously, symbols were not considered to be especially different from other kinds of notations and words that are used as arbitrary signs to merely express a radically heterogeneous concept; that is, logicians used symbols as sensible signs that referred to ideas, but whose sensible presentation in the sign had no necessary relationship to the ideas. The

concepts in the old model of symbolic notation were located elsewhere beyond the presentation of their sign, and they descended down and expressed themselves as needed in the sensible notation. Kant transforms the symbol here by connecting it with intuition and perceptible qualities. In some ways, he is building on the transcendental schema developed in the first *Critique* and he seems ambivalent about the difference between the schematic and symbolic presentation of ideas, seeing the difference as a matter of degree rather than kind, saying only that both schemata and symbols are modes of intuitive hypotyposis and are *a priori* synthetic signs, meaning that, for both, the sensible sign is joined with a concept before experience. I will first give a quick interpretation of schemata from the first *Critique* and then contrast it with the new model of the symbol presented in §59 of the third *Critique*.

Schematization of the Categories

Schemata, developed in the first *Critique*, are adequate and direct demonstrations of the pure concepts of the understanding, the third thing that mediates understanding and sensibility. Schemata are projected by the transcendental schematism, also known as the productive imagination, and do not produce an empirical object, they project a pure time-image, which opens the possibility of the visibility of empirical images that also contain the inscription of time (a kind of memory of the pure intuition). As pure time is the medium of inner sense, the schemata are the projection of inner sense; schemata externalize and give determinate form to pure inner sense. The creation of these time-images is a function of the productive imagination. Schematism, or the productive imagination, unifies the object with a concept by way of a direct time determination of the categories. The products must be distinguished from images in a simple sense because there can be no sensible intuition adequate to a pure concept. The

productive imagination produces rather pure images, schemata, which are different and must be kept separate from empirical images. The difficulty in the synthetic procedure of the schematism lies in the radical difference in the domains of the concept and sensation; pure concepts of the understanding are *a priori* in the mind, they lie absolutely outside of experience. Whereas the perceived object, empirical imagery, is a unity of the manifold of sensations that affect my inner sense, given immediately in intuition. It is difficult to imagine how the sensation can be received outside of experience. This is done with the homogenous factor of the pure intuition, the form of forms: time.

The problem is the modulation between concept and objects given by sensibility in intuition. It is the power of judgment that transitions between the other faculties; however, it is in the schematism where sensible objects can be subsumed under a concept. For example, my perception of a dinner plate is inflected with my imagination's production of the concept of the pure circle: "the empirical concept of a plate has homogeneity with the pure geometrical concept of a circle, for the roundness that is thought in the former can be intuited in the latter" (A137/B176). The empirical image is a second order determination of the pure concept; however, the schematism of concepts results in an impasse, pure concepts of the understanding, the categories, cannot be encountered in any sensible intuition but only thought. The concept and its sensible presentation stall at a relative identity and the subject remains trapped in autoaffection.

The generality of the pure shape of a circle cannot be finally represented in a particular representation but makes the appearance of circles in empirical imagery possible. How then are the pure concepts of the categories realized if the category cannot be intuited through the senses? Cannot be encountered in the image? Kant says a mediating representation is required, a third

thing, that is homogenous with the category as well as the appearance. This mediating representation must then be pure and sensible; what Kant names the transcendental schema. The link in the schematism is really time. Time is the condition of possibility for representation. Time is the formal condition of the manifold of inner sense, thus of the connection of all representations in me and simultaneously determines my encounter with empirical imagery: “A transcendental time determination is homogenous with the category (which constitutes its unity) insofar as it is universal and rests on a rule *a priori*. But it is on the other hand homogenous with the appearance insofar as time is contained in every empirical representation of the manifold” (A139/B178). The transcendental doctrine of the power of judgment shows the possibility of applying pure concepts of the understanding to appearances in general as a temporalization: “Hence an application of the category to appearances becomes possible by means of the transcendental time-determination which, as the schema of the concept of the understanding, mediates the subsumption of the latter under the former” (A139/B178). The schematism is the procedure. The schema is a product of the imagination. The synthesis of the imagination when producing schemata has no particular intuition as its aim. The example Kant uses is the image of 5 points for the number five as opposed to the pure image of number in general which cannot be represented in any particular empirical image. An empirical image cannot attain the generality of the concept. The schematism is a hidden art of the soul, but the products, the schemata, can be presented in thought; number is a pure time image derived from the ideal projection of succession, and confirmed in demonstrable empirical images, a drawing of five points, which is effectively a kind of temporalization of pure time. We could call it the memory of time.

For Kant, this scene produced by the imagination is nevertheless chaotic in its flow of fragmented images without a secondary level of unification: reason. While the principles of

understanding only work in relation to sensible intuition, absolute principles of reason are independent of sense and technically do not need intuition at all. Reason does not even come into contact with intuition, but it unites the fragmentary conceptual determinations of sensible intuition with the totality of ideas like “the world” and “the soul.” Many opposed to rationalist metaphysics in Kant reception have wanted to do away with this leap to reason altogether, seeing reason as a superfluous level of metaphysical unification. According to Henry E. Allison, the distinct unity provided by reason plays an important role, however. Allison writes: “Even though it remains the understanding that does the unifying, the ideal, projected unity at which it aims differs in kind from any unity attainable by the understanding alone and is the distinctive contribution of reason” (*Kant’s Transcendental Idealism* 310). Reason accomplishes this ideal unity by providing a goal for the understanding even if it is out of reach. While the faculty of understanding is finite (direct, discursive, fragmentary), reason projects a unity and the idea of the whole “which precedes the determinate cognition of the parts and contains the conditions for determining *a priori* the place of each part and its relation to the others” (A645/B673). However, a paradox arises in that ideas, which are infinite totalities that precede cognition *a priori*, cannot be represented by us in time, and yet ideas must be demonstrated from our finite perspective in time, for time is the condition of the possibility of representation. Reason has no connection with intuition; ideas cannot be intuited in time. Ideas must somehow both be present and absent from our finite perspective and in our schemata. Transcendental illusion then necessarily arises with the projection of reason because there is a danger of confusing this ideal projection of the whole with the finite determinations it merely orients in the intuited sensibility of the real. This is why metaphysics runs into contradictions in seeking out the reality of God, the soul, or the origin of everything. The discursive understanding is directed towards an *a priori* idea of totality in reason

that is not discursive. The keeping separate of reason and the deception that arises here is doubly important because the correction of the distortion in our perception generates the regulative principles necessary for the proper objective cognition of nature.

Speculative Ideas of Reason

Already in the first *Critique*, in the “Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic,” “On the final aim of the natural dialectic of human reason,” Kant points to a need for indirect representation for regulative ideas of merely speculative reason such as “the concept of the world in general” or “God.” Such speculative ideas are absolutely necessary for guiding our understanding of experience; however, it is just as critical that they not be construed as existing in our experience of the real. These ideas, “mean nothing more than that reason bids us consider every connection in the world according to principles of a systemic unity” (A686/B714) (which must be presupposed absolutely *a priori*). The theoretical cognition of nature is a determination of these regulative ideas, known in their systematic unity, order, and purposiveness of the world’s arrangement.

Kant insists that ideas are supersensible; they do not even have corresponding objects of sense. If such ideas are supersensible, it remains unclear how they enter any sensual presentation. Ideas lie completely beyond the bounds of experience. Strictly speaking, they do not exist; however, they are absolutely necessary in that they orient our understanding towards a goal. In the first *Critique*, in the “Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic,” “On the regulative use of the ideas of pure reason,” Kant uses a metaphor borrowed from optics to describe how it is that an idea can be unrelated to any sensible object, and nevertheless provide systemic unity to

concepts of the understanding that provide said objects. Kant claims ideas do this by orienting all the concepts of the understanding around a single absolute point of convergence: the illusory *focus imaginarius*. This imaginary point must be considered an optical illusion; that is, it does not exist in the realm of the real, it is an ideal observation. There is an ideal dimension in our observation that tricks the understanding into metaphysical experiences. However, if we correct for the distortion in our vision, knowing that the appearance of the totality is an optical illusion, we can bring our experience of the real into focus and proceed with the correct use of the empirical understanding. To be deceived is only to take the illusion of the ideal unity to be really truly existing, to take ideas of reason as constitutive of the real. Rather, ideas of reason, ideas like “God” “the soul” “the world,” should only be considered in their regulative use. They provide a goal and systematic unity for the understanding; and in doing so they tempt the understanding to strive beyond the bounds of experience and fall for their deception. This illusion must be corrected for in our vision by the mere transcendental use of reason.

The transcendental ideas are never of constitutive use, so that the concepts of certain objects would thereby be given, and in case one so understands them, they are merely sophistical (dialectal) concepts. On the contrary, however, they have an excellent and indispensably necessary regulative use, namely that of directing the understanding to a certain goal respecting which the lines of direction of all its rules converge at one point, which, although it is only an idea (*focus imaginarius*) – i.e., a point from which the concepts of the understanding do not really proceed, since it lies entirely outside the bounds of experience – nonetheless still serves to obtain for these concepts the greatest unity alongside the greatest extension.

(A645/B673)

If the idea, this point of total convergence, is taken as constitutive, as really existing as in traditional metaphysics, we fall into deception and dialectical contradiction; however, if we are not deceived and take the ideas of reason for their necessary but merely regulative use, we see the illusion for what it is and properly organize experience.

Michela Massimi has compared Kant's *focus imaginarius* to perspectival drawing in art. The vanishing point in renaissance painting orients all the lines around a single point of convergence so that otherwise independent figures in the painting coexist in a single unified world when viewed from a certain perspective, giving us a window into a coherent reality. Massimi interprets ideas then as "standpoints" writing that "ideas should not be mistakenly hypostatized into causes, objects, things acting as ideal grounds for the unity that reason seeks out. Kant uses instead the language of 'standpoint', '*focus imaginarius*' and 'rules' to explicate the regulative role of ideas of reason" (75). The idea is a "standpoint," an *a priori* opening outside of the scene of time and experience from which the imagination projects the temporal encounter between the understanding and intuition.

If we may backtrack to the domain of the understanding, we remember that in schematizing pure concepts, the imagination subsumes particular sense input under a general representation. The imagination makes it possible that a sequence out there, say thunder and lightning, can be recognized and brought under a category, i.e. causation, by way of a transcendental time-determination; but, now we see how it is that reason brings the temporal determinations of the understanding into a coherent image from a *universal, even absolute, standpoint*. The imagined standpoint from which the scene is projected provides the reference point around which to construct all the categorial determinations of the schematism; reason orients the understanding's cognitions around a vanishing point beyond the horizon so that we

form a single totalized picture of experience that unites the various cognitive determinations. For Massimi, ideas of reason are an abstract space in which the understanding's cognitions take place; what she terms the "perspectival space of reason" is not coordinated from any particular point of view, but rather "the function of the *focus imaginarius* is to create such an abstract space, where individual judgments delivered by the understanding can attain the unanimity and universality that they would otherwise lack" (Massimi 76). The standpoint from which we properly view the finite relations between category and sensible intuition in the understanding is coordinated by ideas of reason completely removed from the finite picture like the vanishing point in a renaissance painting. The vanishing point was a technical trick that appears to bring the beyond of the horizon into the painting by organizing the lines of the painting around a point that is imagined beyond the horizon. The vanishing point animates the finite objects of the painting by uniting them in a single image of reality in much the same way the human mind constantly connects the many changes in perception into a unity of experience; reason stands outside of experience in order to unite such phenomena in motion. Similarly, for Massimi, Kant is able to bring the ideas of reason that lie beyond experience together with the understanding and intuition in time as an infinite point of orientation that does not have any discourse with the real. Again, it is not a finite perspective that is generated by ideas beyond the horizon of experience, rather a universal, and further absolute and objective, perspective. The category, say of causality, in my understanding is brought into the same scene with particular and still fragmentary sense input from the manifold of impressions out there, say thunder and lightning, as a determination of pure and sensible homogenous time, and the multitude of the understanding's cognitions are unified by ideas of reason. Reason unites the multiplicity of discursive fragmentary schematic conceptual determinations, such as the storm outside of my

kitchen and the circular shape of the plate I am washing in the sink, in the same totality of “the world.” However, the world itself cannot be an object of intuition.

The schematism filters out difference from the pure image, and its work is embedded in an abstract perspectival space of the absolute standpoint of reason with the upshot that the things that do appear form a cohesive totality. This focus beyond the horizon, however, was not without attacks. The disconnect between reason and intuition will prove to be the major point of contention with Kant’s epistemology for Schelling and Hegel and they will seek to unite the absolute of reason with sensible intuition. Hegel, for example, interprets transcendental idealism’s rendering of the absolute to be more than lacking:

The intellect as the capacity to set limits, erects a building and places it between man and the Absolute, linking everything that man thinks worthy and holy to this building, fortifying it through all the powers of nature and talent and expanding it *ad infinitum*. The entire totality of limitations is to be found in it, but not the absolute itself. [The Absolute is] lost in the parts, where it drives the intellect in its ceaseless development of manifoldness. But in striving to enlarge itself into the absolute, the intellect only reproduces itself *ad infinitum* and so mocks itself.

(Differenzschrift 89)

For Hegel, Kantian reason cannot escape an intellect that reinforces fixed oppositions and therefore remains lost in itself; what Kantian reason senses is merely an autoaffection. For an absolute reason, the opposition between a focus and finite lines would be suspended, whereas Kant’s universal standpoint forces the subject to view the scene from a perspective of opposition.

As Hegel puts it:

To speculation, [on the contrary] the finitudes are radii of the infinite focus which irradiates them at the same time that it is formed by them. In the radii the focus is posited and in the focus the radii. In the transcendental intuition all opposition is suspended. All distinction between the universe as constructed by and for the intelligence, and the universe as an organization intuited as objective and appearing independent, is nullified. Speculation produces the consciousness of this identity, and because ideality and reality are one in it, it is intuition.

(Differenzschrift 111)

In transcendental intuition, for Hegel, identity is posited in the manifold. In each of the finite lines of the painting inheres an infinite focus, and in the focus, the finite lines. Much like the experience of holding a postcard of a renaissance painting, Kant's subject is trapped in a static relationship with the object; the perspective of the viewer is determined in advance, and the sensible world, deprived of the motor of negativity, is dead.

On Intuition

Rationalists had used reason to grasp things in themselves, empiricists used sense perception to grasp appearances. In the first *Critique*, Kant seems to split the difference. We have seen how reason has a major role in orienting the encounter between sense and understanding. Now we will take a quick look at the irreplaceable role that empirical perceptual sense plays. The rational procedure alone is not enough to orient oneself in thought. The pure intuitions of time and space as well as sensible intuitions are nonconceptual components that serve up empirical perceptions to the understanding. For Kant, time and space are the mark of the real in us; these pure

intuitions are *a priori* conditions for any appearance, hence they simultaneously form both sense impressions and our experience of them; the objects determined by our understanding are formed through the subsumption of the perceptually real to an indirect conceptual schema, and the objects so formed are permeated with the real through their spatial and temporal dimensions. For time is the *a priori* form of my inner sense that synthesizes the manifold. As we have seen, pure intuitions provide the infinite and sensible form for the projection of schemata; now, it is becoming apparent that, as the inscription of the real, time also grounds those imaginative worlds formed by the conceptual understanding in the abstract perspectival “space” of reason. The renaissance painting we said was viewed ideally in a static abstract space from a “universal standpoint”; but intuition cannot be avoided and locates the imagined scene in a particular real point in time and space. The role of space is instructive here as the condition for external form; it is impossible to imagine an appearance that does not occur in space: it is impossible to organize sensory experience without the *a priori* intuitive spatial coordinates of left and right. Space and time are infinite, pure intuitions, and they are not subject to conceptualization; pure intuitions are not like the schematized concept, i.e. “number,” but rather the preconceptual form and condition of appearances out of which the concept of “number” is conceived. We can view theoretical reason as the activity of breaking up the unity of pure intuitions into the constitutive pieces of concept, finite temporalization (history) and spatialization (the Earth). Intuitions are pure and sensory in this way; they are infinite and inexhaustible, and yet they ground the imaginative worlds of understanding and reason to a particular time and place in direct connection with the sensibility of the representing subject that connects them to an indirect non-perceptual conceptualization.

In his 1786 essay, “What Does it Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking,” Kant makes use of an analogy to imagine how the rational procedure works in tandem with the pure intuitions to organize empirical experience in a way that leaves the imprint of the real on our perspectival drawing of the schemata. Here, it becomes clear that Kant’s subject is not a mere spectator, set against the real, outside the scene of the painting, as the younger generation contends, but takes part in the real, is the embodiment of time and space. The two poles, reason and pure intuitions, can be reconstructed through the experience of the astronomer who would orient their position on Earth by coordinating the feeling of immanent differences in intuition, in the spatialization of left and right, in a discourse with a reference point beyond the horizon of experience, by looking to the North Star. To orient oneself on the Earth by looking to celestial bodies requires a constant mirroring action of calculating and organizing terrestrial bodies in relation to my own feeling of left and right, which necessarily presupposes the pure intuition of space. The stars above can provide a reference point, like the ideas of reason they have a totalizing viewpoint of the Earth, but they are no use to me in ordering experience without my subjective *feeling*, without a correspondence between this reference point and the exteriorization of my intuition as outer sense that gives reality to the pure spatial coordinates of left and right. I cite Kant’s example at length:

To orient oneself means to use a given direction in order to find the others - literally to find the *sunrise*. Now if I see the sun in the sky and know it is now midday, then I know how to find south, west, north, and east. For this, however, I also need the feeling of a difference in my own subject, namely, the difference between my right and left hands. I call this a *feeling* because these two sides outwardly display no designatable difference in intuition. If I did not have this

faculty of distinguishing, without the need of any difference in the objects, between moving from left to right and right to left and moving in the opposite direction and thereby determining *a priori* a difference in the position of the objects, then in describing a circle I would not know whether west was right or left of the southernmost point of the horizon, or whether I should complete the circle by moving north and east and thus back to south. Thus even with all the objective data of the sky, I orient myself *geographically* only through a *subjective* ground of differentiation. (5)

Here we see the conceptual schema of a circle (in spite of the ideal orientation provided by the sun) is still lost in an abstract space without a subjective ground that inscribes the figure with real coordinates in time and space; without externalizing my subjective intuition of outer sense, without externalizing the pure intuition of space into a finite space external to my intuiting activity in which I can view the circle as an object of sensible intuition, I cannot determine its objective ground in reason. Both poles, intuition and reason, are necessary in guarding objective experience from ideal illusions. Kant continues:

and if all the constellations, though keeping the same shape and position relative to one another, were one day by a miracle to be reversed in their direction, so that what was east now became west, no human eye would notice the slightest alteration on the next bright starlit night, and even the astronomer – if he pays attention only to what he sees and not at the same time to what he feels – would inevitably become *disoriented*. But in fact the faculty of making distinctions through the feeling of right and left comes naturally to his aid – it is a faculty implanted by nature but made habitual through frequent practice. If only he fixes

his eye on the Pole Star, he will be able not only to notice the alteration which has taken place, but in spite of it he will also be able to *orient* himself. (5)

Kant goes on to extend this analogy to thinking and logic. Pure reason is the North Star beyond all the bounds of experience. Ideas of reason do not exist in experience; rather, reason denotes “that immeasurable space of the supersensible, which for us is filled with dark night” (7). Reason has the role of orienting all the concepts of understanding in a systemic unity as the projection of the totality of all objects of possible experience. The regulative use of reason’s ideas are necessary and felt as a lack. We have the feeling of a necessity that there be totality, an “unlimited being” or a “soul” a “world.” However, we are deceived if we construe such ideas as constitutive. Rather, we ought to view ideas as the point of orientation for the realm of appearances, which are nevertheless shot through with perceptual sense impressions of the real, *felt* through our own subjective senses, our “natural” intuition of space and time. Only with these compromises is pure reason able to bring an experience of the real into a true focus.

The Aesthetic Encounter of Nature

In Kant’s aesthetics, however, the extreme beauty of natural patterns, like mineral crystallizations, are not directed toward real or external ends like the Sun, or even toward the direct aesthetic pleasure of our senses. The pleasure we experience is the indirect resurfacing of an original attunement of our formal power of ordering and the patterns lending themselves to our power of imagination. In the third *Critique*, Kant allows nature this active living character and discovers that nature is not causally determined but formally purposive. The aesthetic mode and reflective judgment reveal nature’s purposive living character that is plastic and not

dominated by a nature/human opposition. Aesthetic attention to nature reveals that the human abstracting activity of theoretical reason, finding the coordinates of the sun by means of the difference in my own subject, is a reflection of preconceptual patterns of finding activity and self-differentiation in nature. Hence, the aesthetic reveals a congealing of determinate forms and the fluidity of natural formation:

By a free formation of nature, however, I understand that by which, from a fluid at rest, as a result of evaporation or separation of a part of it (sometimes merely of the caloric), the rest assumes upon solidification a determinate shape or fabric (figure or texture) which, where there is a specific difference in the matter, is different, but if the matter is the same is exactly the same. Here is presupposed what is always understood by true fluidity, namely, that the matter in it is to be regarded as fully dissolved, i.e., not as a mere mixture of solid parts merely suspended in it. The formation in such a case takes place through precipitation, i.e., through a sudden solidification, not through a gradual transition from the fluid to the solid state, but as it were through a leap which transition is also called crystallization. (third *Critique* 222)

Kant risks connecting mind with nature here, destabilizing the heliotropic metaphor of reason and introduces a plastic nature. If our mind is attuned to real patterns in sensibility, there is a generality located in the sensible that is not allowed by the understanding's schematization where it is only the concept that can provide regularity in categories. The schemata are rules that determine image formation; and yet, the operation of the transcendental imagination must involve an original pre-conceptual aesthetic kind of reflection, for without this preconceptual play, we would have a concept without any sensible presentation. The contemplation of the

patterns of sensibility, which already implies unity in difference, must in some minimal way precede the universality of the concept. This is the plastic aesthetic space where we reflect and compare the patterns that inform the imagination and path we must take to arrive at a concept. It is this preconceptual activity covered up by the over-determinations foregrounded by the understanding that aesthetic judgment allows to resurface as the understanding's material.

In the third *Critique*, the determining ground of aesthetic judgment is a feeling of pleasure; however, it is not a raw feeling, not a direct sensation or a reaction that would causally follow from sensation, but rather a pleasure that arises through the harmonization of complex relations amongst the faculties. The feeling is subjective in the sense that this harmony is located in the subject and not the object; it is nevertheless objective and sharable in that the harmonious state is felt by anyone experiencing that same arrangement of sensations under the same configuration of faculties that accompanies beauty. The feeling of aesthetic pleasure cannot be conceptualized in the way that direct determinations of the understanding are by subsuming sensations under a concept in the transcendental schema because aesthetic pleasure has nothing to do with determining the object. Aesthetic judgment does not determine the object, and yet, the object cannot be removed from the sensory experience that accompanies the feeling of beauty. This subjective feeling of beauty then requires a new way of thinking and Kant connects the feeling of aesthetic pleasure to life and what he calls purposiveness without a purpose.

Reflective judgment in the third *Critique* has often been interpreted as building an additional level onto the foundational structure of theoretical reason, i.e. reflective judgment depends on the determinations of the schematism, i.e. the symbolic involves an analogy and comparison of already schematized images; however, it is my position that the symbol is the germinating impetus for the schematism and the aesthetic appearance of beauty is a reappearance

of the prior unity of nature and freedom; beauty is the trace of the preconceptual movement in a totally conceptualized modern world. Beautiful imagery harks back to the preamble to the subordination of intuitions to concepts in the understanding. This aesthetic reversal of the order of things creates a fluid foundation for thought and introduces instability in the heliotropic structure of reason, a play of structure and movement. The reflective judgment begins first of all with a harmonization of the faculties that produce a feeling of pleasure, unified not by subordinating the imagination and intuition to the understanding, but unified by the free play between them. In the following we will contemplate whether this reversal, in Kyriaki Goudeli's words, "may potentially break Kant's transcendental standpoint and open new insights into the notion of experience and the relation between man and the world" (40).

Kant is adamant that the schemata are not empirical (they are the transcendental conditions of the possibility of experience). It is true that both the imagination and time in the first *Critique* belong to sensibility, but they also determine sensibility: in synthesizing intuitions the imagination forces the particular to conform to the concept. In the transcendental schematism, sensibility is subordinated to (or at least subsumed in) the understanding; in Goudeli's words, the "imagination works under the tutelage of the understanding" (43). First of all, the imagination is reduced to this subordinate position in the realm of the sensible when it synthesizes the manifold of impressions to the subject's inner sense in the forms of time and space. Secondly, the imagination works under the tutelage of the understanding again when it produces the transcendental schemata that the understanding uses to subsume sensible intuitions under a concept. It has been argued that the third *Critique* reverses this hierarchical relation of the understanding over the imagination; reflective judgment gives sensibility independence on this account. Some go as far to argue that Kant becomes "post-critical" in the introduction to the

third *Critique* when he introduces a new transcendental principle, the purposiveness of nature, that is generated out of the autonomy of intuition.

Henry E. Allison has argued against any “radical revision” of Kant’s third *Critique* that would render it already Hegelian, already post-critical, writing: regarding “whether the *Critique of Judgment* contains something like an abandonment of the basic commitments and principles of the first *Critique*. I shall argue that it does not and that in the third *Critique* Kant is best seen as building upon rather than attempting to reconstruct his original ‘critical’ edifice” (“Is the *Critique of Judgment* ‘Post-Critical’?” 79); however, Goudeli points out that the third *Critique* supports two different readings and, for our purposes, elaborates what Allison might call the “revisionist” position. Goudeli shows where we can find the reversal of the metaphysical situation at work in the first *Critique* whereby the understanding is put on equal footing with a new kind of imagination. According to Goudeli, the two readings are a result of Kant wanting to hold on to some kind of concept in reflective judgment even if it is indeterminate and unfit for cognition. Kant’s reflective judgment, “oscillates between a powerful undermining of the understanding’s authority, and an attempt to restore its status. Kant both abolishes the concept and keeps it in an indeterminate form” (Goudeli 47). Kant then does open up what Allison refers to as the revisionist reading of the third *Critique* only to hesitate and attempt to salvage the critical position. The thrust of the revisionist position is that Kant expands beyond a mere leveling of sense by the transcendental, that he offers some level of autonomy to finitude in the free play of the imagination and the understanding. In Goudeli’s estimation, while Kant “in his search for a principle of the judging-power actually does exceed his transcendental field, he eventually retreats back to it” (48). In Kant’s power of judgment in the third *Critique*, the imagination in its new role, if only for a moment, is not subordinate to the understanding but

works through the free play between the faculties. Because the imagination is equated with sensible intuition, this amounts to the power of judgment stepping outside of finite transcendence. Sense is no longer fitted to the understanding, erasing all difference; rather, sensible intuition is a site of the activity of the new faculty of cognition that has nothing to do with cognition. Goudeli argues further: “Imagination, in its free interplay with the understanding, differentiates and discriminates the manifold; it moulds its own forms for its own pleasure, and not under the command of the understanding” (48). Nevertheless, the configurations produced by the new free activity of the imagination in the free play of the faculties encounters materials produced by the determinations of the other faculties, and aesthetic judgment still seeks harmony with the understanding, albeit in a new way.

The unity achieved here to satisfy the understanding is not based in a conforming to homogenous categories, the fitting of finitude with an external concept that descends down from beyond the horizon of experience in order to be revealed, necessarily sacrificing all difference in the particular to satisfy the universal; this visibility, as we have seen, that is guaranteed by the supersensible heliotropic metaphor hides its tracks in the naturalness of the Sun. In the aesthetic, rather, “it is a unity emerging from the playful interaction between the two faculties, in which neither assumes a pre-dominant role” (Goudeli 49). The agreement with understanding is no longer a consequence of the regular running of things by the determinant cognition and in the dynamic of mutual interaction “the universal is never ‘there,’ cut off from the particular, but it is, rather, always inherent in it” (Goudeli 50). The understanding cannot be satisfied by an application of the concept or the idea of totality because the whole is now generated by the parts, and cannot be applied to them from the outside. This means additionally that temporality is not demonstrated as a linear sequence but in the playfulness of the imagination as simultaneity,

making possible more complex configurations of subjectivity. Imagination, in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, is an intuitive activity generated by the particular ultimately confronting the subject with the unifying power of their own cognitive faculties, shaking the metaphorical grounds of reason.

Aesthetic Judgment

In “the dialectic of aesthetic taste,” Kant connects beautiful objects to a supersensible substratum that provides the judgment thereof with universal validity, based on formal purposiveness.

Purposiveness is the *a priori* principle unique to the power of judgment in the third *Critique*, making the faculty of judgment irreducibly distinct; judgment, nevertheless, has a connection to reason, and the aesthetic ideas of reflective judgment play an analogous role to the determinate ideas of theoretical reason which seek unity in totality and systematicity. Both kinds of guiding principles, purposiveness and totality, point to a supersensible ground that is an unknown and non-present source of the apparent order and design we observe before us in nature.

Purposiveness, however, reflects the living self-organizing character of nature. To consider nature as productive of life in itself, is to imbue it with purposiveness; to consider nature from an aesthetic perspective in reflective judgment is to determine its form as purposive, but its content as indeterminate. It is this purposeless purposiveness that unexpectedly makes the aesthetic a special mirror of nature.

The teleological judgment of nature in the third *Critique* is different in kind from the determinate use of concepts in the first *Critique*. If we recall, the schematism in the productive imagination produces determinate empirical images through a direct application of the pure and

sensory medium of time. The pure image of a circle drawn by the temporal succession determines the way we experience particular circular objects, like dinner plates; however, the pure image of the shape is never entirely expressed in any particular instance: the empirical image is a kind of incomplete memory of the pure temporal shape. The pure image is the generative source of its many appearances rendering time a “pure” genetic source. The pure intuitions of time and space inscribe these shapes with the real. Reflective judgment, by contrast, lends by analogy a purposiveness, a relation between the parts and the guiding principle of the whole. The whole, in the teleological purpose of reflective judgment, is now generated by sensible parts. As a result, not only are supersensible principles reflected in the aesthetic experience of art and nature, but there is an epigenetic relation between part and whole, where each germinates a transformation in the other: there is no pure origin.

Art reflects the generative underlying ideas of our cognition indirectly, by rearranging, relating, sensory patterns in a way that is free from the mechanism of sensible charm. Genius mirrors the indeterminate idea, suppresses the mechanical relation to sensation instituted by the understanding in its temporal imagery and allows a new community of organizations to surface. The presentation was theorized by Kant to take the shape of a symbol. For Kant, symbols reflect the movement of the underlying idea in the flow of imagery produced by harmonizing our cognition in free play with this new configuration generated by the sensible intuition in the imagination.

The Symbol

Unlike the demonstrable determinate similarity between pure circles and plates or the causal relations between thunder and lightning, the symbolic puts disparate determinate images into an

analogous relationship that makes their unifying principles sensible. Ideas can be reflected or indirectly presented symbolically in this way as the common principle generating different images. In spite of the fact that the condition of my finite ability of representation is that I remain in time from a human perspective, symbolic reflection opens the possibility for presenting ideas of reason beyond my human horizon because in the mode of symbolic reflection I ruminate on the common conditions that generate the schemata. In the symbolic, one compares different images and their relationships to ideas by way of analogy.

That is, the symbolic reflection of ideas can only be made indirectly: Kant writes, “The power of judgment performs a double task first applying the concept to the object of a sensible intuition, and then, second, applying the mere rule of reflection on that intuition to an entirely different object, of which the first is only the symbol” (Third *Critique* 226). So first we have to schematize at least two concepts, and then a kind of reversal takes place in which the two different schematized images are put in an analogous relationship to their common principles in order to reflect their supersensible idea. The example Kant uses here is the inner law of moral freedom presented in symbolic representations of the state:

Thus a monarchical state is represented by a body with a soul if it is ruled in accordance with laws internal to the people, but by a mere machine (like a handmill) if it is ruled by a single absolute will, but in both cases it is represented only symbolically. For between a despotic state and a handmill, there is, of course, no similarity, but there is one between the rule for reflecting on both and their causality. (Third *Critique* 226)

Here we have a kind of play between multiple already schematized images, the state, the body and the machine. In option 1, the state is a monarchy represented symbolically by a body with a

soul because both images have a similar ratio of parts to free will. Whereas in option 2, a totalitarian state has a different configuration of wills. There is only one will that dominates all the others, and so it can be symbolically represented by a machine like a handmill that has many parts but is similarly only moved by a singular will. The analogies lay bare the common generative principle of both images through the analogy, and their principle is an interior will that would otherwise have no corresponding object or sensible presentation. The symbols give us a rough presentation of what is ultimately unrepresentable.

The symbol has much broader implications when Kant discusses sensible qualities animated by intentions and moral interest. The symbolic presentation bestows sensible qualities with something like consciousness by analogizing them to the observers' own inner configurations or faculties. Kant writes:

we often designate beautiful objects of nature or of art with names that seem to be grounded in a moral judging. We call buildings or trees majestic and magnificent, or fields smiling and joyful; even colors are innocent, modest or tender, because they arouse sensations that contain something analogical to the consciousness of a mental state produced by moral judgments. (§59)

In the aesthetic view, sensible charm is conjoined with moral interest Kant writes, “without too violent of a leap,” and the symbolic image appears as something analogous to a mental state. If much too anthropomorphic, it seems at least interesting that what Kant terms “aesthetic ideas,”¹⁰ are now being generated by the particular qualities of nature and art when related by analogy to the inner intentional structure of the viewer; it is true, Kant's examples are excessively anthropomorphic, and the symbolic might be considered to limit the scope of art to the revelation of the “supersensible substratum of humanity” aka the soul, sacrificing all difference. But it is

¹⁰ See third *Critique* 218.

also possible that the generation of the idea out of the sensible sign has further reaching and more interesting consequences. In the symbol, meaning is generated out of the particular qualities and contextual differences, for example, the particular greenness of the field evokes the inner feeling of joy. That is, the particular aesthetic choices of artists matter. The particular qualities of the artwork have significance. In the schematism, the greenness of the grass is not an attribute of the grass at all but merely a universal conceptual determination; green is in the concept. In the symbol, by contrast, the particular qualities of the presentation generate their own meaning; that is, rather than treating grass like a thing and determining its significance instrumentally from a merely subjective perspective, in the symbolic, grass generates its own meaning. The aesthetic ideas of grass become perceptible symbolically to consciousness by reflecting the attunement of the viewer's faculties to the free formation of nature, measured only in the feeling of joy.

Goudeli points out that a consequence of the new configuration of the free play of the faculties is that the form of reflective judgment constructed in the analytic "cannot conform to logical form" (51), making the deduction and dialectic doubly important as Kant must invent a new way of securing necessity outside of an application of the concept. That is, Kant must ground aesthetic ideas without pitting the concept against phenomena in a total opposition. In Goudeli's words, this "provides new aspects of transcendental patterns of thinking and its implications on the conceptualization of experience" (52). §59 is the important conclusion to the dialectic of aesthetic judgment and the close of the entire critique of aesthetic judgment where Kant declares beauty as a symbol of morality.

The symbol has nothing to do with cognition or with objects per se. The symbolic is rather a reflection of aesthetic ideas. In symbolic hypotyposis, disparate determinate images are

put into an analogous relationship that makes their homogenous determining principle apparent as a reflection. Ideas can be realized symbolically in this way as the common principle generating an ecology of schematized images. In spite of the fact that the condition of my finite ability of representation is that I remain in time, symbolic reflection opens the possibility for presenting atemporal ideas of reason because in the mode of symbolic reflection I ruminate on the subjective conditions of schemata. I reverse the flow of the infinite horizon that determines my mental imagery by relating disparate imagery of finitude and making their common generative idea appear in a reflection of purposiveness. Pure time and subjectivity, the infinite, morality, appear as more complex indeterminate configurations in the very midst of our going through finitude in the free play between the imagination and the understanding. Time, space, and subjectivity no longer function regularly or in a determinate way, but rather “appear” as such, as the hidden origin of the image that separates the finite standpoint from the infinite source. As we will see in the next chapter, in Schelling’s aesthetic idealism, the symbol also generates meaning from the perspective of nature; however, for Schelling, the particular qualities of phenomena are not a mere reflection of “the supersensible substratum of humanity.” Schelling will also consider such intuitions of the infinite, of time and morality, as they appear sensuously in aesthetic ecological discourses; yet, for Schelling, the concrete differences in the sensuous forms of time and morality that make their appearance in nature and history emerge from the aesthetic activities of the ecological world itself.

Chapter 2: Schelling and the Poetic Consciousness of Nature

In this chapter, I examine the way aesthetics transformed the concept of nature and the subject's relationship to it as a result of an elevated significance given to art in Germany in the period around 1800. F.W.J. Schelling (1775-1854) was a co-founder of both early German Romanticism and Idealism, sharing ideas with Fichte, Goethe, Hegel, and Hölderlin. He is known for his *Naturphilosophie* (1797) that subjectivized an active living nature, allowing for a fundamental unity of nature and mind. He is also well known for a fallout with Hegel; in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel criticized Schelling's static use of the formula $A=A$ bitinglly as "the night in which all cows are black." Although Hegel's dialectical philosophy would go on to make identity dynamic, an inner reflection of the subject that incorporates difference, my position sees Schelling's identity phase as a pivotal step bringing opposites together, a translation of the world of beings into a world of becoming. Crucial to this development was the influence of aesthetics. Schelling, Hölderlin and Hegel related reason to aesthetics as early as 1796/7 when they defined their project in the so-called "Oldest System Program of German Idealism" as the need to mythologize rationality, or, as the document says poetically: "Ich möchte unsrer langsamen an Experimenten mühsam schreitenden – Physik, einmal wieder Flügel geben" ("I should like to give our physics, progressing laboriously with experiments, wings again."); Hegel, *Werke* 1:234; 161).

Schelling's main works on aesthetics, *System of Transcendental Idealism* and *Philosophy of Art*, were developed under the continuing influence of the early romantic program to undermine dualism through creation. The *System* was written in late 1799 and published in 1800 on the verge of Schelling's break with Fichte which would be cemented the following year with the publication of Hegel's *Differenzschrift*. The *Philosophy of Art* consists of posthumously published lectures that Schelling gave in 1802-3 in Jena and again in 1804-1805 in Würzburg. The lectures were given during a period in Schelling's thought that is typically isolated by critics under the heading of "identity philosophy." Schelling published the second issue of his new *Zeitschrift für Spekulative Physik* in April of 1801. The second half of the volume contained a philosophical sketch titled "Darstellung meines Systems der Philosophie." This sketch is typically understood to mark the beginning of Schelling's *Identitätsphilosophie*, which animates his thought at the very least between the years 1801-1805. Schelling understood the Identity system initiated here in the *Darstellung* as unifying and grounding the two poles of his earlier philosophical approaches, the philosophy of nature and transcendental philosophy. Schelling came to see the two approaches of his own thinking as merely elaborating opposing sides of the one philosophical system: *Identitätsphilosophie*. While the *System of Transcendental Idealism* of 1800 had already brought *Naturphilosophie* and transcendental idealism together, the identity philosophy continued this project by making the oppositional relation between subjective and objective sides itself a regulative idea.

Interestingly, the identity philosophy, that period in Schelling's thought where he is arguably thinking most intensely about art,¹¹ is typically considered in the Schelling reception to coincide with a shift away from a philosophy that puts aesthetic experience at its center

¹¹ In texts such as *Bruno* (1802), *Philosophy of Art* (1802-1805), *Methode* (1803), "Über das Verhältnis der bildenden Künste zu der Natur" (1807).

(associated with the *System* completed in the first months of 1800 and pre-1800

Naturphilosophie work). The *Darstellung* of 1801 inaugurated the *Identitätsphilosophie*, a period in Schelling's thought in which philosophical knowledge and reason take precedence over the phenomenal and sensuous world, or so we are told. The identity philosophy, lasting until a break with identity metaphysics marked by *The Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom* published in 1809, is often criticized for erasing difference in the name of reason and philosophy. The early *Naturphilosophie* and the positive philosophy of his later work that bookend Schelling's identity philosophy have been recently held up as rare blips in post-Kantian philosophy that reject the privileging of the negativity of language and reason. Yet the periodization of Schelling's work and the apparent disunity of these ways of thinking betrays a deeper interdependence where the aesthetic has merely been "sublated" (*aufgehoben*), to use Hegel's term; in Schelling's *Philosophy of Art*, the lectures on aesthetics that Schelling would give spanning the entire identity period, aesthetic sensible content is mediated in language and art forms that recapitulate the productivity of nature into a structure of being as such that contains the contradiction of non-identity immanently within it. In other words, art becomes the trace of the *indifferenz* of consciousness and what it senses as the strange otherness of the natural world.

What starts to emerge at the end of the 1800 *System* is that the development of the self-consciousness of a moral subject out of nature is a particular historical form of freedom that has different faces and can never disentangle itself entirely from nature. The gradual unfolding of the moral subject's freedom to act in the domain of practical philosophy is intimately bound to the *Naturphilosophie* that describes real changes in nature. The life of the subject mirrors its natural history even if, as Paul Collins Hayner points out, "history is the scene wherein the absolute expresses itself in the human subject as the subject's freedom to choose, to separate

from objectivity, to subordinate objects to freedom and become self-conscious” (50). For Schelling, real nature and ideal history are both temporal expressions of an absolute identity. In spite of the separation of the moral subject from nature that characterizes the *Entzweiung* of modern culture, the two are shown to be united in a more fundamental ground, a revelation that transforms both terms. This fundamental dissonance and unity is presented in the creative work of art. The development of the real in nature and the life of the subject in history are interrelated aesthetic activities; they cannot be adequately thought in isolation nor are they reducible to one another; hence Schelling’s famous dictum: “Die Natur soll der sichtbare Geist, der Geist die unsichtbare Natur seyn. *Hier* also, in der absoluten Identität des Geistes *in* uns und der Natur *außer* uns, muß sich das Problem, wie eine Natur außer uns möglich seye, auflösen” (“Nature should be Mind made visible, Mind the invisible Nature. Here then, in the absolute identity of Mind *in us* and Nature *outside us*, the problem of the possibility of a Nature external to us must be resolved.”; *Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Natur* SW II, 56; 42). For Schelling’s aesthetic view in the *System of Transcendental Idealism*, the unity of the natural and spiritual worlds consist in the mirroring of the presenting activity of consciousness with the product of its creativity, making aesthetics central to both nature and the life of the subject:

It is therefore postulated that this simultaneously conscious and nonconscious activity will be exhibited in the subjective, in *consciousness itself*. There is but one such activity, namely the *aesthetic*, and every work of art can be conceived only as a product of such activity. The ideal world of art and the real world of objects are therefore products of one and the same activity; the concurrence of the two (the conscious and the nonconscious) *without* consciousness yields the real, and *with* consciousness the aesthetic world. The objective world is simply the

original, as yet unconscious, poetry of the spirit; the universal organon of philosophy—and the keystone of its entire arch—is *the philosophy of art*. (12)

In the following, we will follow these opposing directions of Schelling's philosophical investigations, and these two opposing directions will structure the following two chapters. The rest of the current chapter will consider Schelling's theoretical approach to the objective and real side of nature. The chapter that follows will then consider the ideal side in his practical philosophy and history. That is, the two chapters begin at opposing sides of an ideal-real structure. What I intend to show is that Schelling reveals nature and history in their creative and developmental processes to be works of art. In the present chapter, I will first consider his relationship to Hegel which has had a major influence on reception history. I then compare the aesthetics of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* with Kant's subject-centered reflections on the beautiful in nature. Here I follow Schelling's insight that nature constitutes the condition of possibility for any idealism of the self; I consider the development of the philosophical consciousness of a transcendental subject in his *System* as a mirror of the aesthetic ecological morphology of nature. I then consider the hierarchical opposition that this philosophical consciousness of nature implies and the possibility of what Catherine Malabou calls "metamorphosed metaphysics" making consciousness concrete once again in the work of art and symbolic nature.

Hegel and Schelling

There is a lot of work underway to repair Schelling's bad reputation. After his fallout with Hegel, Schelling was characterized as an obscurantist: the philosopher of the irrational ground of

existence, the philosopher of the abyssal night of the preconceptual about which nothing can be expressed. For Schelling, the differences of “the existent” are always anchored in a more fundamental ground that never comes fully to light. As Žižek puts it,

A *doxa*—a cliché, even—on Schelling is that in his philosophy the subject can assert its self-presence only against the background of an obscure, dense, impenetrable *Grund* which withdraws-into-itself the moment it is illuminated by the light of Reason: *logos* can never fully mediate/internalize this Otherness of the Ground—in its elementary dimension, *Grund* is nothing but the impediment of an Otherness which maintains forever its externality... (6)

The fault lines between Hegel and Schelling are too often obscured by putting their philosophies in total opposition: Hegel as the philosopher of spirit and the concept, over against Schelling as the philosopher of nature beyond human conceptual unity. Ultimately, what made Hegel’s philosophy original around 1802 was making concrete the blind forces of nature that are anterior to the qualitative differences of existence in Schelling. Hegel transformed Schelling’s reliance on pure activities (such as intellectual, productive, and aesthetic intuitions) that drive the absolute in nature and history to become conscious of itself; Hegel transformed these abstract forces by turning them inside the absolute as an internal contradiction; rather than thinking of external differences as mere deviations from the absolute, for Hegel, we cannot think of intuitions or forces apart from their concrete and qualitative expressions. For Hegel, life itself is the dialectic of the individual and the totality of life, or as he puts it in the *Science of Logic* “the omnipresence of the simple in a multiple externality” (qtd. in Hyppolite 6). The One and the Many must be thought as a contradiction internal to the life of the subject, that in turn consists of a vital immanence that evades the attitude of ordinary perception and the understanding. The Absolute,

for Hegel, does not exist ‘before’ its qualitative deviations as a blind productive force that is itself formless, a force that merely drives all external phenomenal form to take shape; rather, the Absolute as subject is posited as an internal contradiction and the negativity that leads to self-development. The Absolute does not exist before its predicates; in Hyppolite’s words, for Hegel, “it is the life of the predicates that creates the subject. An Absolute posited apart from its development cannot be anything but an empty intuition” (19).¹² This is the basis for Hegel’s critique of Schelling’s reliance on ‘forces’ and intuition.

For Hegel, it is only through the mediation of the negativity of language in the form of the concept that we can access the singularity of sensuous content. For Hegel, no immediate knowledge of singular sensuousness appears through the negative grid in the form of the concept. Language is the mediation that introduces negativity into sense-certainty; however, in conceptualizing sense content it contradicts the content, cancels and sublimates it. Hegel writes, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, “language—which has the divine nature of directly reversing the meaning of what is said, of making it into something else, and thus not letting what is meant *get into words* at all—” (66). Negativity results in the concept, and there is no way of getting at something like preconceptual being. To speak of a singularity, is to already gather it in the form of the concept, and so it is a kind of nonsense to speak of something you cannot articulate; Hegel writes: “Consequently, what is called the unutterable is nothing else than the untrue, the irrational, what is merely meant [but is not actually expressed]” (66). For Schelling, on the other hand, there is a blind productivity of the absolute that is anterior to philosophical reflection on it and the way we get in touch with it is the work of art.

¹² In another formulation, Hyppolite writes, “Hegel's view is that quantitative differences reveal the very nature of the concrete thing (*die Sache selbst*). The infinite, affirmed as ‘productivity’ but emptied of all concrete opposition, only offers an abyss in which all differences disappear. An intuition of development which remains a pure intuition and does not conceive of the obstacle in all its actuality and as something internal is not the intuition of ‘the spirit that never ceases to negate’” (7).

Hegel would come to see Schelling's reliance on 'forces' and intuition as powerless as early as 1802 because, as a pure activity, these drives and intuitions reduce the qualitative differences that they produce to mere deviations from the absolute; real differences become, in Hyppolite's words, "merely external effects." By contrast, Hyppolite claims, Hegel, "seeks to translate Schelling's aesthetic intuition into moral and social life. *By putting the concept before intuition, Hegel introduces historical development into the center of the life of the spirit.* Thus it will be remarked in the *Phenomenology* that the spirit alone is history because the development of consciousness is at the same time a historical process" (15). This assumption that Schelling relies on non-discursive 'pure' intuitions has been recently contested by Daniel Whistler in *Schelling's Theory of Symbolic Language: Forming the System of Identity*. In contrast to the typical characterization of romantic intuition, Whistler argues that, for Schelling, intuition is in fact discursive. For Schelling, intuition is a form of discourse. Interpreting Schelling's response to his reading of the "Preface" to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* in a letter to Hegel, Whistler writes,

Schelling insists that his notion of the idea is *already discursive*. Hegel's recourse to the concept adds nothing to what is already present in his *Identitätssystem*; it is in fact a regressive move which establishes a dualism between intuition and concept where previously there had been identity. The idea—as the indifference of concept and intuition—already contains a universal, conceptual, and so discursive element, as well as a particular element. (172)

In portraying Schelling as the real philosopher of the concept, however, Whistler disconnects Schelling's discursive intuition from its aesthetic dimension and the inherent contradictions that animate it. For Schelling's aesthetic idealism, the absolute shows its faces in the work of art; that

is, the rational ideas must be rendered by individual finite things in natural and historical works of art, in verbal arts as much as formative arts. Whistler smooths over this obstacle, writing, “Language replaces nature as the paradigm for Schelling’s philosophy” (183) and “Having pointed out the shortcomings of matter and art, Schelling then turns to the genesis of symbolic language” (Whistler 188). For Schelling’s philosophy of language that emerges in his aesthetics, however, language can never dissolve its aesthetic dimension. And neither is the work of art merely an “external effect” of the absolute but rather, as I intend to show, the medium in which existence as such takes shape. It is in concrete artworks that nature is revealed to the poetic consciousness, and in dramatic narrative forms that the historical action of the moral subject is animated.

For Schelling, the *Grund* is an *Abgrund*. While both Schelling and Hegel agree that there is no *conceptualizing* of this *Abgrund*, Schelling considers art to be its concrete expression. Merleau-Ponty described Schelling’s idea of an *erste Natur*, this obscure ground that evades all conceptualization, as “an effort to explain this pre-being, which, as soon as we arrive on the scene, is always already there. This excess of Being over the consciousness of Being is what Schelling wants to think in all its rigor. Schelling tries to describe this “over-Being” (*Übersein*, in the sense of the word ‘surrealism’)” (38). For Schelling, it is art that reveals this over-Being. However, before we can consider how art puts us in touch with this astonishing *surreal* otherness of Being, we will first need to follow the development of self-consciousness out of nature because it is consciousness that will form the ground of the symbolic work of art that can unite the primordial not yet conscious activity of nature with its concrete differential expressions and reveal it as such.

Art and Nature

For Schelling, objective existence arises out of a fundamental limitation that cuts into the activity of the absolute when a sensing self disentangles itself from what it senses. Beings only come to be as a result of this fragmenting of the *surreal* creativity of an absolute subject. In the *Philosophy of Art*, Schelling describes this rupture in the following terms: “Die erste Einheit in dem absoluten Wesen ist nun allgemein die, wodurch es seine Subjektivität und ewige Einheit in die Objektivität oder Vielheit gebiert” (“The first unity within the absolute essence is in general the one whereby it bears its subjectivity and eternal unity into objectivity or multiplicity.”; 118). It is in this moment of fragmenting itself in the multiplicity of objectivity, that *das absolute Wesen* becomes differentiated as just one side of a productive act, that the absolute first becomes to varying degrees recognizable to itself as something objective; namely, as *ewige Natur selbst*: “und diese Einheit in ihrer Absolutheit oder als die eine Seite des absoluten Producirens aufgefaßt, ist die ewige Materie oder ewige Natur selbst.” (“and this unity, conceived in its absoluteness or as the one side of the absolute act of production, is eternal matter or substance or eternal nature itself.”; *PoA* 118-119). In the *System of Transcendental Idealism*, as we will see, our human consciousness is conceived of as a reflection of this fragmenting of activity of the absolute, where, in our own sensing and intuiting activity, we become conscious when we differentiate our own sensing activity from the objects of our intuition. In this process of self-differentiation, the objects of our intuition initially become strange and opaque to our senses.

The absolute is fragmented in objectivating its productivity in *die ewige Materie oder ewige Natur selbst* creating a schism in the real world of nature as matter and the ideal world of art. Without this ideal-real structure there is no clearing in which the absolute self might come to recognize itself at all; Schelling writes, “Ohne diese würde das Absolute eine in sich

verschlossene Subjektivität seyn und bleiben ohne Erkennbarkeit und Unterscheidbarkeit. Nur durch die Subjekt-Objektivierung gibt es sich selbst in der Objektivität zu erkennen, und führt sich selbst als Erkanntes aus der Objektivität in sein Selbsterkennen zurück.” (“Without this the absolute would be and remain a self-enclosed subjectivity without being discerned or distinguished. Only through subject-objectivation does it manifest itself within objectivity and then as a recognized object guide itself back from this objectivity into its own self-recognition.”; *PoA* 119). The fragmentary objectification of the absolute subject is only a step in developing the materials for self-recognition. Ultimately, the self will turn back towards itself as a tentative unity in a *Selbstobjektwerden*, where the self is taken back up in an objective, however makeshift, presentation.

From another perspective, if the absolute were to exist fully present immediately in the objective world and not merely as a fragmentary real, all existence would be absolutely necessary and completely predetermined. The objective multiplicity of existents is construed by Schelling as an expression of the absolute that reveals itself piecemeal, in the different faces of nature. And hence, nature is a work of art that has yet to recollect these fragments in an absolute form; for Schelling also considers “the construction of art as the *real* manifestation or presentation of the absolute. Such presentation could not be designated as real unless it rendered the absolute by means of individual finite things” (*PoA* 83). Schelling then regards nature not merely as a passive thing but rather as an ecology of poetic forms that together act out the teleological expression of the absolute and, as we will see in the next chapter, as history.

Nature in the first instance does not perceive itself as such; rather, nature becomes fragmented in the yawning abyss of differentiated forms that never recollect themselves into a unity as such. Initially, lifeforms in nature are object-oriented; they have yet to co-opt the blind

productivity of nature for their own ends, and to turn back toward the self. Yet nature is creative in its origin; nature creates form spontaneously in itself in an autopoiesis; nature is “poetic” taking poetry in the etymological sense from the Greek *poiein*: “to make” something that admits of being otherwise. For Schelling, nothing is ultimately completely severed from the absolute and so nature also takes part in the poetic activity; the morphology of nature reflects the fragmenting of the absolute self in the formative impulse of lifeforms in nature as well as the development of creature artisans that sense and perceive the real differences in the poiesis of nature, subordinate its materials, and compel them to bend to their own artistic designs. Schelling does not allow creative activity to enter nature from the outside; conceiving rather “daß alle Organisationen, der Erde z. B., aus ihrem eigenen Schoß geboren.” (“that all organizations, of the Earth for example, are born in their own womb.”; *Darstellung* §153).

Beauty and Aesthetic Ontology

In Schelling’s aesthetic view, artworks create a language for this otherness of nature in reflecting the schism of the poiesis of nature and our consciousness of it. In Schelling’s aesthetic view of nature, it is the eternal difference of art and the poesy of nature¹³ that is reflected in art. For Schelling, art is the invention of a language for difference, and indeed for the nonhuman. For, as Merleau-Ponty says in his Schelling lecture, “The philosophy of Nature needs a language that can take up Nature in its least human aspect, and which thereby would be close to poetry. Art is the objective realization of a contact with the world, which itself cannot be objectivated” (45). It is my position that Schelling’s aesthetics provide a crucial addition to ecological thinking today

¹³ “poesy is that whereby a thing possesses life and reality within itself; art is that whereby it is within the one producing” (*PoA* 85).

precisely because he shows that art is able to take up nature in its least human aspect, and in this sense art is *correlated* with nature. Schelling is critical for ecology today because he delivers on an exploration of extrahuman ontology through art and language without subsuming nature to a subject-centered conceptualization.

In Kant's aesthetics, we can only talk about aesthetic experience from a human perspective. For Kant, in pure aesthetic judgment, nature is not about thinking or teleological judgments, nor is it about conceptually determining objects, "rather, one must consider the ocean merely as the poets do, in accordance with what its appearance shows, for instance, when it is considered in periods of calm, as a clear watery mirror bounded only by the heavens, but also when it is turbulent, an abyss threatening to devour everything, and yet still be able to find it sublime" (third *Critique* 152). Nevertheless, Kantian aesthetics are subject-centered; it is only in the play between our understanding and imagination that aesthetic experience is judged; beauty arises from the play between an indeterminate concept and a sense impression in the subject. For the most part, nature is the place Kant will look for this play. However, the aesthetic judgment of a subject does not affect nature. Crustaceans are indeed forms that evoke beauty. Crustaceans are specifically "free beauties" for Kant because we have no determinate concept for them; however, this only means that in our aesthetic judgment the indeterminate concept of a crab and the impression of the crab put our faculties into a freeplay. Beauty is not a result of the activities of crustaceans themselves nor does it affect their objective being. Beauty only affects the human subject that freely contemplates, activating the harmony of the understanding with the imagination. The artistry of crabs themselves, something like a crab artist, is unintelligible to Kant.

In the third *Critique*, in his discussion of “free” and “adherent” beauty, Kant juxtaposes the way humans, plants, and animals can be presented aesthetically to our judgment of taste and evoke in the subject the experience of beauty. In presenting these figures to our aesthetic judgment, there are various configurations that stimulate our faculties through the harmonious mediation of interiority and exteriority. In Kant’s discussion, flowers and birds are examples of forms of beauty that have no cemented concept of what they ought to be *for us*, or at least only the botanist and ornithologist know what that determinate concept is. For this reason, flowers, birds, as well as crustaceans, are free natural beauties (*pulchritudo vaga*) evoking a beauty that “presupposes no concept of what the object ought to be” (third *Critique* 114). Even if the botanist does indeed have a concept for the purpose of flowers, “the botanist, who recognizes in it the reproductive organ of the plant, pays no attention to this natural end if he judges the flower by means of taste. Thus this judgment is not grounded on any kind of perfection, any internal purposiveness to which the composition of the manifold is related” (third *Critique* 114). Wild natural entities for which we have no concept of a determinate end (or for which we suppress our understanding of a purpose) and judge aesthetically as a sensible manifold in free play with an indeterminate purposiveness are “self-subsisting” beauties: “Many birds (the parrot, the hummingbird, the bird of paradise) and a host of marine crustaceans are beauties in themselves, which are not attached to a determinate object in accordance with concepts regarding its end, but are free and please for themselves” (third *Critique* 114). The horse by contrast has a definite concept as a working animal; that is, horses have a predetermined purpose or concept of an end: the “good” or perfect horse is one that can do a lot of work. This makes the horse appear to us in accordance with the purpose we think a horse ought to have: the horse is a means to the end of the work-to-be-done. Our concept of an end for the horse, makes it difficult for us to contemplate

it as a free beauty. *For us*, the horse is only capable of adherent beauty (*pulchritudo adhaerens*). The end of being good combined with its beauty “does damage to its purity” (third *Critique* 114) and the horse is only capable of a conditioned kind of beauty that adheres to a definite concept: horses are “objects that stand under the concept of a particular end.”

Because there can only be a true harmony of the inner moral ideas expressed outwardly in the human, the human is really the only figure of ideal beauty. Kant claims that only humans are capable of “ideal beauty” which “has the end of its existence in itself.” Kant views ideal beauty as the externalization of internal moral ideas as a symbolic harmony that is best expressed in the representation of the human figure as “The visible expression of moral ideas, which inwardly govern human beings” (120). Kant provides no concrete examples of ideal beauty, but one might consider Leonardo’s invention of the autonomous portrait as just such an exteriorization of an inner disposition. Leonardo’s autonomous portraits make visible in unique expressions of the face, what he calls in his *Notebooks*, “the motions of the mind.”¹⁴ The Mona Lisa’s subjectivity is exteriorized in the playfulness of her facial expression that makes her inner character perceptible to us. Unlike portraits that were procured for the sole purpose of documenting an empirical likeness for posterity and hence determined by the expressed purpose of producing academically correct presentations, the portrait of Mona Lisa expresses her candid personality, and she is apparently animated by an interiority and her own free will.

In Schelling’s aesthetics, however, the subject is not independent of nature; the interiority of the subject, those moral ideas that inwardly govern human beings, cannot be completely disentangled from the aesthetic activities of nature. The way that the interiority of the subject is portrayed in early modern portraiture as independent of nature and cordoned off to this intrahuman sphere characterizes the particular historical condition of modernity and what he

¹⁴ See John Pope-Hennessy, *The Portrait in the Renaissance*

calls *Entzweiung*. However, uniting this subject with nature in a more fundamental ground, Schelling's aesthetics transform both terms. As Heidegger puts it in the Schelling lecture course, *Schelling's Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom*, commenting on Schelling's conception of freedom:

The root of the earlier opposition 'nature and freedom' is 'torn up.' This means that nature is not something absolutely spirit-less and, above all, freedom is not something absolutely nature-less, the mere egoity of the 'I can.' Thus, the members of the earlier distinction 'nature and Spirit' become more related, nature becomes spirit like and Spirit becomes nature like, and the opposition seems to dissolve in a compensation. True, this opposition dissolves;—but the opposition in which freedom now stands—becomes at the same time more essential and profound. Now it is no longer a matter of understanding human freedom as distinguished from nature. As long as this is the intention, thought's effort moves in the direction of showing that man's freedom consists in his independence of nature. (60)

For Schelling, artistic activity is intrinsic to all living forms and the morphology of nature. All movement in nature is aesthetic because it involves the differentiating of a potential "self" from its environment. It is this aesthetic process that leads to the formation of life in nature. In his *Naturphilosophie*, Schelling describes nature in its first movements stepping outside of itself, when poiesis in nature becomes an ecstatic artist in the creative activities of animals. Schelling says, in the *Philosophy of Art*, "the so-called artistic impulse of animals is nothing other than a specific direction or modification of the general formative impulse" (PoA 163).¹⁵ Nature is made

¹⁵ Because I am ultimately interested in the relationship between art and nature, I will cite examples taken from the *Naturphilosophie* that Schelling references in his lectures on aesthetics.

objective through the pure affirmation of identity in creatures whose creative impulse expresses itself as one with their body. For Schelling, crustaceans are the embodiment of poiesis in that their creativity expresses itself in the formation of their body. There is a unity of active self and natural object that can be seen in corals, crabs, and oysters, as well as some insects whose hard coverings are both the product of the formative impulse and at the same time the agent of that activity. These two aspects of creation are perhaps most clearly united in corals whose undeniable artistry is united with the body of the corals themselves. This affirmation gives way to discursive ecological systems when the self-differentiating sensing and perceiving activities of these creatures creates divisions in the self. It is the task of *Naturphilosophie* to follow these nascent acts of signification. As Gabriel Trop argues:

it is the latent and imperceptible order of nature that *Naturphilosophie* seeks to sensuously make present: an internal, invisible and even unconditioned dynamic that can only be externalized and rendered visible through the mediation of differential systems. This invisibility of the phenomenal world presences itself discursively through the investigation of mechanical, chemical, and organic operations, and following these orders of discourse becomes tantamount to tracing the movements of the forces through which the phenomenon itself comes into being. The philosopher must analyze the discursive forms of these primordially non-discursive movements—movements that are thus aestheticized inasmuch as they thereby become differentiated and capable of being sensuously perceived.

(143)

For Schelling, poiesis and art are not a distinctly human activity, but rather human knowing and being is grounded in the most rudimentary activities of nature when the the artistic impulse

modifies the *Bildungstrieb*; that is, when creaturely artistic activity perceives differences in the environment and subordinates the productivity of nature and compels it to submit to its own ends. This can be seen in nature when the simple productive activities of corals and crustaceans begin to differentiate themselves from what they create in more advanced lifeforms.

On the *Bildungstrieb*

Schelling viewed the artistic impulse as a modification of the *Bildungstrieb*. The *Bildungstrieb* was an idea popularized by Blumenbach and cited by Kant to describe organic life.¹⁶

Blumenbach was fundamental in the debates in biology surrounding epigenetics and preformationism in the late 18th century. His concept of a *Bildungstrieb*, the idea that there is a force that drives matter to organize itself, united mechanism with teleology in the embryo and all organic life. Blumenbach's epigenetic description put an end to the dominance of the theory of preformationism in embryology and biology beginning in the 17th century. With the help of Blumenbach's 1781 book *über den Bildungstrieb und das Zeugungsgeschäfte* epigenetics would become the prominent theory in biology. Blumenbach's support of epigenetics in 1781 was due to his own change of heart regarding preformationism that resulted from an incident where he was observing and pondering the regenerative force or drive in vegetal life. Blumenbach writes,

Daß in allen belebten Geschöpfen vom Menschen bis zur Made und von der Ceder zum Schimmel herab, ein besondrer, eingebohrner, Lebenslang thätiger wirksamer Trieb liegt, ihre bestimmte Gestalt anfangs anzunehmen, dann zu erhalten, und wenn sie ja zerstört worden, wo möglich wieder herzustellen. Ein Trieb (oder Tendenz oder Bestreben, wie mans nur nennen will) der sowol von

¹⁶ On Kant's citation of the *Bildungstrieb*, see Catherine Malabou, *Before Tomorrow: Epigenesis and Rationality*

den allgemeinen Eigenschaften der Körper überhaupt, als auch von den übrigen eigenthümlichen Kräften der organisirten Körper ins besondere, gänzlich verschieden ist; der eine der ersten Ursachen aller Generation, Nutrition und Reproduction zu seyn scheint, und den ich hier um aller Misdeutung zuvorzukommen, und um ihn von den andern Naturkräften zu unterscheiden, mit dem Namen des Bildungs-Triebes (*Nisus formativus*) belege. (“That in all living creatures from the human to the maggot and from the cedar down to mold, there lies a special, native, lifelong active drive to first take on and then preserve their definite form, and, if mutilated, to restore it where possible. A drive (or tendency, or striving, or however one wants to call it) that is utterly distinct from both the common properties of bodies in general, as from the other idiosyncratic forces of organized bodies in particular; which appears to be one of the first causes of all generation, nourishment, and reproduction, and in order to avoid misinterpretation and distinguish it from the other natural forces, I am designating with the name the formative drive (*Nisus formativus*).”; 12-13)

In Blumenbach’s mind, the *Bildungstrieb* was a real force fashioned after Newtonian conception of a force. Whereas Kant saw an affinity in the *Bildungstrieb* for his way of thinking the transcendental. Robert J. Richards¹⁷ claims that for this reason, Kant and Blumenbach’s shared use of the idea is really based on a misunderstanding since Kant would never endorse the overstepping the limitations of a merely regulative teleology. That is, the Kantian *Bildungstrieb* is not an empirical force as Blumenbach had conceived it, nor is it fully metaphysical. For Kant, it is safe to assume, the intentional force of the *Bildungstrieb* can only be treated *as if* it were

¹⁷ See Robert J. Richards, “Kant and Blumenbach on the *Bildungstrieb*: A Historical Misunderstanding.”

really existing in nature, but it is not constitutive of nature. The latter claim would overstep the boundaries to the supersensible. The *Bildungstrieb* exists only in the mind of the rational subject and helps to describe organic processes that are both mechanical and teleological.

The drive became important for the aesthetic theories of Schiller and Hölderlin, however, Schelling develops an entirely new perspective on the *Bildungstrieb*. In his *Zeitschrift für spekulative Physik*, Schelling published a mysterious entry under “Miszellen 8” in *Band 2 Erstes Heft* which came out on the first of January 1801 on the subject of the *Bildungstrieb*. In it he writes that “Nachdem Blumenbach den Bildungstrieb erfunden hatte, suchte man aufs neue in allen alten Schriftstellern nach, ob er in keinem derselben anzutreffen wäre” (“After Blumenbach had invented the formative drive, a new search was underway in all the old writers to see whether it was to be found in any of them.”; 323). He claims that “ein großer Gelehrter, der sich seit einigen Wochen auch mit Physik bekannt gemacht hat, endlich dahin gelangte, die erste sichere Spur davon – im *Dante del Purgatorio Canto XXV*” (“a great scholar, who for a few weeks also made himself familiar with physics, finally got there, the first sure trace of it – in *Dante del Purgatorio Canto XXV*.”; 323). For Schelling, only the poet Dante could invent a language for nature, only an artist could develop a poetic consciousness of nature that would give its activity a concrete form.

For Schelling, art is a fundamental element out of which the universe is constructed. Schelling describes the development of the ecologically interweaving lifeworlds of creatures as being spurred on by the oscillation of form and fragmentation in the rotary motions of the *Bildungstrieb* and *Kunsttrieb*. The increasingly complex marvels created by the creaturely artistic (that is, *ecstatic*) impulse is both the creating and suturing of difference produced by the formative impulse. Animals that externalize an artifice have an artistic impulse that fragments

simple formation by way of self-differentiation; for example, spiderwebs are artworks that result from the creative self-differentiation that fragments the unity of the activity of a self and the body as artifact that we find in the corals. The spiderweb fragments the unity found in creatures whose art is still dormant in their sensing body as in corals. I cite Schelling at length:

The previous observations already lead us to recognize in all cases of the artistic impulse a certain identity between the products and the producing agent. The bee produces the material of its edifice from within itself; the spider and the silkworm draw the threads of their webs from within themselves. Indeed, if we go even deeper, the artistic impulse merges completely with anorganic external deposits that remain in cohesion with the producing agent or animal. Such are the products of the polyps inhabiting coral, the shells of mollusks and oysters, indeed even the stonelike and hard coverings of some insects as well as of crabs, which therefore lack the artistic instinct, which in their case is lost completely in the production of that covering...only at higher levels of organization does nature succeed in coercing this anorganic mass back toward the inside and subjecting it to the laws of the organism. As soon as this has been attained to some degree, for example, in birds, the anorganic mass no longer appears in direct identity with the producing agent, but it emerges nonetheless not completely out of coherence with that agent. The artistic instinct expresses itself more freely in the nest building of birds; there is an apparent choice made here, and the product receives the impression of a higher inner life. (*PoA* 163-4)

While corals embody poiesis, meaning their sensing body is identical with their drive to form, as nature becomes more complex, this formative impulse is altered to produce externally organized

products; that is, the finding and sensing self differentiates itself from what it finds and creates. For more complex creatures there is a cleft between creator and product. For example, spiders and silkworms externalize material from within their bodies in such a way that they create an artifice in the spiderweb and in silk that is distinct from their body.¹⁸ Schelling evokes here the image of the exoskeleton calling these artifices, the web and silk products, a kind of external skeleton. The spider alters the formative impulse and differentiates materials from its own body in an external artifice, while also remaining in an identical relation with the web as it recognizes the web as an extension of its sensing organ. The spider does not tear itself and its activity away from its artifice entirely; spiders are object oriented, they have an intimate relation to their webs and to their environment as if to their own body. Spiders externalize material from within their bodies, and this product even in being differentiated remains in an identical relation to the producing creature. However, at more advanced stages of organization, the artistic impulse coerces this product of creative activity back inside the bodies of more complex animals that have endoskeletons. The externalized “skeleton” of the web is reintegrated into the bodies of birds and beavers as an endoskeleton.

For Schelling, nature is a mixture of passive creatureliness and creaturely creativity, and through the rupture in creation and creator and the artistry that reunites what the self dissects, unfolds more and more complex forms of life. This transformation of the fissure in the spider clears the ground, freeing the birds by coercing the web back into a unity with the body in the endoskeleton of birds. In this aesthetic ecology of animal life, Schelling considers creatures pushing each other to endeavor more and more complex artworks as the absolute self fragments

¹⁸ This tearing away of the self from pure affirmation in differentiating sensing activity from what is sensed is retraced, as will become clear, in the ideal philosophical activity of differentiating (abstracting and schematizing) concepts from sense impressions and making sensible intuition objective in the aesthetic intuition of a poetic consciousness in the *System*.

into a multiplicity of morphing lifeforms struggling to establish their independence from the unity of life. The negation of the opposition spurs on the inner life of the subject. Birds, unlike the spiders, are no longer compelled to use materials that are produced by their own bodies to create their nests. Birds are free to choose amongst found objects to construct their artifice and they enjoy a more robust inner life. According to Schelling, “Noch weiter geht diese scheinbare Freiheit in Bildung eines von dem organischen Wesen unabhängigen, obgleich zu ihm gehörigen Produkts in dem Bau des Bibers.” (“This apparent freedom in construction of a product independent of, yet belonging to, an organic being goes even further in the constructions of the beaver.”; *SW* 5:574; *PoA* 164). In this way all nature is really becoming, as a piecemeal unfolding of the absolute, in human knowing as the human being's prior self-realization process, and thus it is the aesthetic processes of nature that form the ground of all human knowing and being; for, as Schelling puts it: “Es gibt einen Idealismus der Natur, und einen Idealismus des Ichs. Jener ist mir der ursprüngliche, *dieser* der abgeleitete.” (“There is an idealism of nature and an idealism of the self. For me, the former is the original, the latter the derivative.”; “Über den Begriff der Naturphilosophie” in *Zeitschrift* 300). In the following section, we will now turn to this derivative *Idealismus des Ichs*.

The Waking Life of Self-Consciousness

For Schelling, our poetic consciousness can never fully grasp the object of intuition as a result of a limitation on the self's intuiting activity. Being before this conceptual limit is an *unvordenkliches Seyn*. However, Schelling does give an account of the self's activity before this limitation occurs. This as yet undifferentiated self is an unconscious productivity that is enclosed

in itself in the *surreal* creativity of an intellectual intuition.¹⁹ Meaning that the first acts of the intellect are a kind of autoaffection where what is created and what creates are the same. This *surreal* pre-being of the intellect evades our waking consciousness like a dream or death. As the young Schelling put it in the 1795 essay “Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism”:

We awaken from the intellectual intuition as from the state of death. We awaken through reflection, that is, through a forced return to ourselves. But no return is thinkable without resistance, no reflection without an object. We designate as alive an activity intent upon objects alone and as dead an activity losing itself in itself. Man ought to be neither lifeless nor merely alive. His activity is necessarily intent upon objects, but with equal necessity it returns into itself. The latter distinguishes him from the merely living (animal) being, the former from the lifeless. (185)

¹⁹ Intellectual intuition was introduced by Kant in the third *Critique* as a foil for human understanding in order to highlight the need for concepts and sensible intuition: Kant writes, “But we can also conceive of an understanding that, unlike ours, is not discursive but intuitive, and hence proceeds from the *synthetically universal* (the intuition of a whole as a whole) to the particular, i.e., from the whole to the parts. Hence such an understanding as well as its presentation of the whole has no *contingency* in the combination of the parts in order to make a determinate form of the whole possible” (§77). For Kant, the excess of reason must become limited by our finite and discursive understanding for human use, which, “restricts the validity of those ideas of reason to just the subject, yet in a universal way, i.e., as a validity for all subjects of our species” (§76). For Kant, the condition of possibility for human knowledge is that it is given conceptual form by the understanding which prescribes categorial determinations to the objects provided by sensory intuition; meaning that without discursive concepts and sensible intuition we could not have any cognition of objects or a determinate reality whatsoever. Rather, cognition of an object would simultaneously entail the creation of that object in itself. Our human understanding is constructed out of a discourse between the “understanding to provide concepts, and sensible intuition to provide objects corresponding to these” (§76). Intellectual intuition, by contrast, is fully resident in actuality and never goes outside of itself; however, such an intellect is without the ability to distinguish reality from itself; unable to distinguish the free activity of discovery and possibility from the necessary constraints of the way the world really is, intellectual intuition is without the ability to cognize objects as external to the mind. Kant writes, “if our understanding were intuitive rather than discursive, i.e., conceptual it would have no objects except actual ones. For we would then be without concepts (and these deal with the mere possibility of an object) and also be without sensible intuitions (which do give us something actual), yet without allowing us to cognize it as an object” (§76). By contrast, in the first *Critique*, Kant describes human intellection as transcendental apperception where the consciousness of a self always precedes all sense impressions and provides them with the unity of form in a representation. All impressions must be related to a conscious self that senses and determines the form of the impression.

As a human consciousness we are roused from this deep slumber by the strangeness of a sensation, by the perceptible quality of something Other. And in this waking life, we always remain in a state of *ekstasis*, in sensible intuition or autoheteroaffection.

Human philosophical consciousness becomes wrapped up in schematizing these muddled sense impressions, dissecting intuitions into abstract concepts and presenting them in their temporal and spatial dimensions. Concept, space and time, are not separate in the original intuition;²⁰ they only come apart in philosophical consciousness when judgment separates the original unity of concept and intuition by disentangling its pure activity of intuiting from the intuition. Intelligence and the objects of nature become opposed only when the self which has its ground in a free activity of presenting comes on the scene and separates itself from intuitions, setting a limit to its finding activity, whereby what the self finds “loose themselves from the mind” in the act of judging. The self externalizes the intuition as an object so that it can be viewed as something distinct. Otherwise, according to Schelling, remaining in its undifferentiated creativity, the intellectual intuition (that *surreal* intellect *which is itself not a being*) actively creating and perceiving itself immediately would perceive everything internally undifferentiated as a part of its own self. As if in a kind of sleep, lost in a dream world, without the act of judgment separating concepts from intuitions, the self is a pure activity that has no external object or reality for consciousness (*System* 135). The differences of the real come to be for us only through this judgment that breaks up the presenting activity from what is presented and sets limits on the finding activity of the self.

²⁰ “Now in the original intuition neither concept, nor space, nor time arises for us alone and separately, but rather all are given at once. Just as our object the self conjoins these three determinations unconsciously, and of itself, to the object, so likewise have we fared in the deduction of productive intuition. Through transcendental abstraction, which consists, in fact, in the annulment of that third thing which binds intuition, only the intuitionless concept and the conceptless intuition could remain to us as constituents thereof” (*System* 147-148).

Initially, however, the sensing self becomes object-oriented. This subjective point of view of the intellect cuts the objects of its intuition off from their own aesthetic activities. The self is a mere presenting activity; nature is reduced to that which is presented. From this perspective of a naive consciousness, nature, as much as the self, is completely determined by the opposition. In §1 of the *System*, Schelling describes this difficulty, writing:

The intrinsic notion of everything merely *objective* in our knowledge, we may speak of as *nature*. The notion of everything *subjective* is called, on the contrary, the *self*, or the *intelligence*. The two concepts are mutually opposed. The intelligence is initially conceived of as the purely presentative, nature purely as what can be presented; the one as the conscious, the other as the nonconscious. But now in every *knowing* a reciprocal concurrence of the two (the conscious and the intrinsically nonconscious) is necessary; the problem is to explain this concurrence. (5)

In the *System*, Schelling turns to self-consciousness for its capacity to conceive of intelligence and nonconscious nature together and to bring forth the point characterized by “die Übereinstimmung der Vorstellungen mit ihren Gegenständen” (“the coincidence of presentations with their objects.”; §1). It is only with the development of a self-consciousness that the self is able to tear itself away from its orientation towards objects and to turn inward and loose itself from this opposition to nature where its freedom depends on holding nature captive; as part of this process of becoming self-conscious, the being of nature is also freed from the conception of nature as a product, as merely work-to-be-made. In his *System*, Schelling describes the overcoming of this perspective of nature in “aesthetic intuition” which presents its activity concretely, suturing the break in nature between poiesis and consciousness. Intellectual intuition,

the pure sensing activity of an unconscious I, is broken up in the consciousness of sensible intuition. This subjective perspective is made concrete and reunited with nature in self-consciousness. The *System* describes this fragmentation of self becoming concrete in aesthetic intuition in three epochs in the development of self-consciousness.

In Schelling's *System*, there are three *Epochen* which will ultimately describe the development of self-consciousness; initially the dreamlike sensing activity experiences an original incision when it is limited in an individual consciousness. In this first act of self-differentiation, the sensible qualities that are intuited are taken by the naive consciousness to be given in independent impressions. Previously, the sensing subject's only character was that, as the pure activity of presenting, it could not take on quality or a predicate; for, as Schelling writes, "Ist das Ich kein Ding, keine Sache, so kann man auch nach keinem prädicat des Ichs fragen, es hat keines, als eben dieses, dass es kein Ding ist. Der Charakter des Ichs liegt eben darinn, dass es kein anderes Prädicat hat, als das des Selbstbewusstseyns." ("If the self is not a thing or affair, it is likewise in vain to enquire about any predicate thereof, for it has none, save only this, that it is not a thing. The character of the self consists in this very fact, that it has no other predicate than that of self-consciousness."); *System* 48; 26). To not have a predicate is to not really *be* anything and this self is a mere finding activity; this subject is negated in the act of being brought into connection with what is found in a predicate. Hence qualitative being only arises as a breach in the self. That is, the sensation that something is, requires the self suspending itself as a pure identity. The self is initially a pure finding activity, and so this alien something opposed to the self in what it finds can only arise as the cessation of the finding activity. Therefore, being is always a negation of finding activity; what is found is the suspension of finding. The ideal and real only arise in this contrast as the disequilibrium of finding activity and what is passively

found. But to the extent that the self is only sensing its own suspended activity, the self has yet to break out of autoaffection.

For Schelling, it is with the concept and language more generally that, as Žižek puts it, “the in-itself split itself from itself” and “clear[s] the space in which it can appear (to itself)” (14). In the first epoch of the becoming of self-consciousness, there is no separation between concept and intuition, no separation between the activity of the self and the outcome. The end of this stage, Schelling calls the productive intuition of an object, where the object has no existence as an object outside of the self in external space that appears as distinct to a consciousness of it. What is initially united with intuiting activity in producing becomes intuited as such when the self tears itself away from the product in reflection. The first step of reflection is abstraction whereby the creative activity is able to tear itself away from its products as philosophical consciousness. It is only with the separation of the concept from the object that objects “loose themselves from the mind” (*System* 136) and take their place in space outside of the self. Previously, in productive intuition, the external object and intuiting activity are lost in each other as if in a dream. The absolute intelligence remains in a deep sleep, unaware of itself as such since it consists of everything in the “universe at large.” This unconscious ground of the poetic universe is offset by the self tearing itself away from its product in a determinate intelligence that presents what it intuits as distinct and external to the self. This presentation of intuitions as such, no longer entwined with intuiting activity, but differentiated as that which is intuited by the intuiting self; this shift involves then creating presentations of sense impressions and objective nature as particular objects as such: for example, presenting the pure intuitions of time and space as particular intuitable forms. As Schelling writes, “Time is merely inner sense becoming an object to itself, and space is outer sense becoming an object thereto” (106). Here the intuitions of

time and space come before consciousness no longer as intuitions, “sondern nur als Angeschaute im Bewußtsein vor.”²¹ Because, unlike the absolute intelligence, the determinate intelligence cannot grasp everything at once, or intuitions as intuitions, it must present the real at every moment as existence in a succession, as “history” or a finite spatial organization; consciousness must reduce the infinite everything in order to present it as such in a finite form; the self must mold the fragmentary multiplicity of existents into a narrative form that reflects the original unity, a unified form in which it can recognize itself.

In the first epoch of the development of self-consciousness, we saw that the self moves from “Original Sensation” to “Productive Intuition.” Plunged into the original limitation on the pure sensing activity, the naive consciousness of the self posits sense impressions as distinct objects. Initially, subjective philosophical consciousness attributes the constitution of said objects to the independent activity of a thing-in-itself. In the first epoch, a self-limitation is imposed on intellectual intuition that forms a boundary between self and thing-in-self. In the second epoch, the self moves from this stage to the standpoint of reflection. Now, it is recognized that sensible objects perceived in their externality as fundamentally opposed to the self are merely a result of the state of “the upset equilibrium of the two activities” (*System 56*) of das Findende and das Gefundene or Angeschautes and Anschauendes. The object, transcendently regarded, is determined by a hierarchical opposition to the sensing self. The self, that entity with conscious sensations, distinguishes itself as such in opposition to its unconscious object in nature, and this boundary is determined “as contingent in either respect, for the thing no less than for the self” (*System 100*). However, going forward, overcoming the illusion of things-in-themselves, the

²¹ “As an immediate result, therefore, of the bounding of the ideal activity in production, inner sense becomes an object to the self through time in its independence from space, and outer sense an object through space in its independence from time; both, therefore, enter consciousness, not as intuitions, of which the self cannot become conscious, but merely as items intuited” (*System 132*).

intuiting intelligence takes itself as its own object in becoming self-conscious and starts acting with a moral freedom to realize its own self-determination. In the final epoch of Schelling's *System*, consciousness finds itself in an external form, as the contradiction of a pure subject recognizing itself as its own object, *das Selbstobjektwerden*. Self-consciousness is not a mere coming to an end of the pure activity of the self at the limit of the empirical self but an intrinsic opposition and contradiction. Self-consciousness is the negation of the absolute illimitable presenting activity, where *das Findende*, the finding self, and *das Gefundene*, what it finds, become indistinguishable and the self is negated and taken up in the presentation.²²

Self-consciousness can only begin with an immediate self-determining act, “an act whereby the intelligence determines itself” (*System* 155), or what Schelling calls absolute abstraction; whereby, the intelligence breaks itself off from its object orientedness. At the end of the three epochs in the development of self-consciousness the entire process is reflected on again from the perspective of the absolute will. Self-determining is then a willing, and every willing is a determination of the self. It is at this stage of the absolute act of the will that we move to practical philosophy and will be the concern of the next chapter. For now it will suffice to say that in transcendental willing, the intelligence recognizes itself as intuiting in a different way than in producing, where the intuitant is always directed toward something external.

Self-consciousness cannot be explained from the standpoint of reflection where the intelligence

²² “Was im Gefundenen ist, ist für das Findende, aber auch nur insofern es das Findende ist, etwas Fremdartiges. Deutlicher. Das Ich als unendliche Tendenz zur Selbstanschauung findet in sich als dem Angeschauten, oder was dasselbe ist (weil Angeschautes und Anschauendes in diesem Akt nicht unterschieden werden) in sich etwas ihm Fremdartiges. Aber was ist denn das Gefundene (oder Empfundene) bei diesem Finden? Das Empfundene ist doch wieder nur das Ich selbst. Alles Empfundene ist ein unmittelbar Gegenwärtiges, schlechthin Unvermitteltes, dies liegt schon im Begriff des Empfindens. Das Ich findet allerdings etwas Entgegengesetztes, dieses Entgegengesetzte aber doch nur in sich selbst. Aber im Ich ist nichts als Tätigkeit; dem Ich kann also nichts entgegengesetzt sein als die Negation der Tätigkeit. Das Ich findet etwas Entgegengesetztes in sich, heißt also: es findet in sich aufgehobene Tätigkeit. – Wenn wir empfinden, empfinden wir nie das Objekt; keine Empfindung gibt uns einen Begriff von einem Objekt, sie ist das schlechthin Entgegengesetzte des Begriff (der Handlung), also Negation von Tätigkeit” (*System* 74).

is merely carried along by an incessant flow of images. In willing the self as such, rather, the self becomes an object to itself as a whole; that is, the self becomes aware of its own capacity for self-determination and the ability to act freely not merely in the ideal activity of sensing nature, but moving in its moral freedom to act and determine itself (*System* 156-157).

Beginning with original sensation, the limit on the self is a “self-giving” that can never be resolved, but, in Schelling’s words, “it is this one original limitation within which the self constantly remains, from which it never emerges, and which merely develops, in individual presentations, in one way or another” (*System* 59). The self is originally sensing activity that becomes limited with the differentiation of what it senses as its object; this limit will ultimately be overcome in self-consciousness when the self takes itself as its own object and the artwork that reunites consciousness with nature in sensuous forms of aesthetic intuition. However, in taking itself as its own object, the self-determination of aesthetic intuition, no longer determining nature as its captive other, recognizes itself in nothing other than the unconscious I of nature. In Merleau-Ponty’s words: “In order to find itself in this mirroring reflective of intellectual intuition, the I must be already preliminarily recognized in this primordial identity, the result of the organization of a primordial and unconscious I. There must be in the things a preparation of what will then be an explicit sense, a liberation of the captive sense in the natural thing” (42). That is, in the natural history that ordinary perception leaves in its wake of abstracting and schematizing, there lurks in the natural things a repressed self. The development of the self-certainty of philosophical consciousness creates a hierarchical opposition between the self and a metaphysically impoverished nature. This hierarchy is deconstructed and transformed by the aesthetic intuition of nature. The intellect is brought closer to natural phenomena, but art also creates the possibility for the explicit liberation of the captive sense in nature.

Transforming Nature in Heidegger

In his lecture courses from the 1930's, (and here I will refer to the lecture course on *Schelling's Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom* given in the summer of 1936 and the lecture course of 1929/30 *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*), Heidegger provides a helpful inquiry into how a shift in our relationship to being might free the captive sense in nature and help us take on an ecological concern for the Earth that Schelling will develop in his aesthetic view of nature; Heidegger writes, regarding the world in general, "we can grasp as the opening of totality, always in a definite direction and thus limited" (*Schelling's Treatise* 18). There are in fact several senses in which we can interpret the world here that open up onto each other. The world as totality, the opening of the world shared by all beings; we arrive on the scene with intelligences that precede us and we encounter them as, in Schelling's words, those "many indestructible mirrors of the objective world" (*System* 174). In this sense, the world is considered an infinite conglomerate of limited worldviews. All finite beings have a limited perspective of this world; their world in this sense is only a slice of the other world; the other world, in the sense of totality, one of Kant's three ideas, is the objective world that we all share. Beings all have different ways of being in the world amongst the many plurality of limited worlds and perspectives. My finite perspective of the world, my limited perspective as well as the perspectives of other finite beings are all particular ways of "holding open of the world." Heidegger admits, "animal and plant, too, have their world view," but he hesitates, and hedges his language, "...better expressed, are a world view" (*Schelling's Treatise* 18). According to Heidegger, our human way of being in the world is to *have* a world; whereas, the animal and

plant way of being in the world is to *be* a world; their manner of being is rather one of total immersion in the world because plants and animals are incapable of self-consciousness, incapable of apprehending intuitions as such. In Heidegger's terms, plants and animals do not hear the world-forming call of *Dasein* to itself.

Animals are absorbed in the environment and cannot apprehend other beings or themselves as such. In spite of our fascination with the ability of plants and animals to find their way in the world, their unfailing ability to orient themselves, Heidegger interprets their encounter with the coordinates in the world, such as their relationship to the self and other beings, as impoverished: they cannot apprehend their coordinates *as such*, they cannot open "space *as space*," Heidegger says in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*. A bee, for example, cannot open space and fly "through it as its spatial flight path" (*Fundamental Concepts* 243). They are held captive by their coordinates: Bees orient their flight path by depending on the angle of the sun. They cannot apprehend the coordinate, the sun, as such. Bees are "*simply given over to the sun and to the period of its flight without being able to grasp either of these as such*" (*Fundamental Concepts* 247). These homing creatures cannot apprehend the coordinates in their environments as something, they are rather held captive by "having every apprehending of something as something withheld from it" (*Fundamental Concepts* 247). The animal in this sense is "taken." According to Heidegger, this means the animal is a captive of the drive to forage and "does not possess the possibility of attending either to the being that it itself is or to beings other than itself" (*Fundamental Concepts* 248). Without the possibility of *having* being, a self, a world, the animal cannot concern itself with losing being, cannot "die" properly or have a metaphysical concern for the end of the world. The animal is a captive and "Because the captivation belongs to the essence of the animal, the animal cannot die in the sense in which dying is ascribed to human

beings but can only come to an end” (*Fundamental Concepts* 267). Animals cannot die, they merely “come to an end” and they do not properly have a world.

For Heidegger, it is rather *Dasein* that has a true beginning and end, that can properly face death; it is rather *Dasein* that is world-forming and hence can anticipate the ultimate possibility of the end of the world. However, the call of *Dasein* to itself is also a challenge to transform “our ordinary conceptions of beings.” In her book, *The Heidegger Change*, Catherine Malabou has shown that readers of Heidegger preoccupied with ontological difference have overlooked the thread of transformation in Heidegger. For Heidegger, it is attunement that opens the world to us, it is attunement that forms the “thin partition” between difference and Being; and, as Malabou points out, attunement “is not a being, but a manner or way” (251) and further, this path is characterized through and through by transformation: “*Stimmung* is always changing,” and “mood is, by definition, eminently variable” (Malabou 251). The shift from a focus on beings and difference, the “ontological excess” of *Dasein*, toward original change, presents a transformed Heidegger in which we do not *have* “being” but we are always on a detour of the detour to Being, down a disconcerting path, turning toward the strangeness of what is other, interpreting and translating the aesthetic contradictions of alterity, bringing into focus of what is other:

Metamorphosed metaphysics is thus no longer the act of thought that consists in turning away from beings toward another conception of them (toward being understood as beingness) but the very detour of this detour, the turning around toward the other of every being, toward being in its astonishing strangeness (*Befremdlichkeit*). By grace of this metamorphosis, metaphysics becomes what it

is: overcoming, a movement of turning toward *something else* and *other*.

(Malabou 257-258)

The concern of *Dasein* for what is other is also a transformative concern for the end of the environment and the extinction of beings. As caretakers of death, we are responsible to concern ourselves with the existential threats that face our ecologically interconnected world. Heidegger writes that “our understanding must first twist free from our ordinary conceptions of beings and properly transform itself into the Da-sein in us” (*Fundamental Concepts* 296). For Heidegger, shifting away from the perspective of our ordinary conceptions, it is attunement that opens the world to us, that forms the partition of ontological difference. As a partition it is open to flux; attunement is not a thing or a “being,” attunement does not *have* being; the partition of attunement is a conduit of transforming our ordinary conceptions of beings and twisting free from the conceptual determinations of the understanding. *Dasein* is a transformation in our relationship to being that unconditions the determinate conceptions of being as much as the self.

Schelling’s turning away from the self defined in its hierarchical opposition to nature is a “metamorphosed metaphysics”; and for Schelling, the artwork not only upends the conceptual determination of being, but maintains a perpetual turning towards its strange otherness in a poetic consciousness of nature. In the final moments of the *System*, Schelling writes:

Art is paramount to the philosopher, precisely because it opens to him, as it were, the holy of holies, where burns in eternal and original unity, as if in a single flame, that which in nature and history is rent asunder, and in life and action, no less than in thought, must forever fly apart. The view of nature, which the philosopher frames artificially, is for art the original and natural one. What we speak of as nature is a poem lying pent in a mysterious and wonderful script. Yet

the riddle could reveal itself, were we to recognize in it the odyssey of the spirit, which, marvelously deluded, seeks itself, and in seeking flies from itself; for through the world of sense there glimmers, as if through words the meaning, as if through dissolving mists the land of fantasy, of which we are in search. Each splendid painting owes, as it were, its genesis to a removal of the invisible barrier dividing the real from the ideal world, and is no more than the gateway, through which come forth completely the shapes and scenes of that world of fantasy which gleams but imperfectly through the real. Nature, to the artist, is nothing more than it is to the philosopher, being simply the ideal world appearing under permanent restrictions, or merely the imperfect reflection of a world existing, not outside him, but within (*System* 231-2)

In our search for nature, we are confounded; our intellectual activity removes the aesthetic activities from the natural world, imposing our own artificial frame in its stead; we are left with a passive nature that leads science on the endless search for knowledge that can only end in mystery. And yet, in reuniting spirit with nature, the painting forms a “gateway,” removing “the invisible barrier” and transforms being understood as a mastery of sensuousness into the anarchic becoming of an aesthetic ecology. The aesthetic intuition does not *have* “being” and it refuses to predicate the life of the subject on holding nature captive.

Symbolic Language

In Schelling’s view, “language in general=the artistic impulse in human beings” (*PoA* 102); and yet, language is also a product of nature. For Schelling, language cannot be thought apart from

the ecology of interweaving aesthetic activities that animate the dynamic universe. This view of language goes against the perspective that the natural world is reducible to human representation understood as an invented inner system of signs. Rather, Schelling considers the aesthetic activities of nature as constitutive of all acts of signification. Gabriel Tropic describes this relationship between nature and signs in this way:

Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* seeks nothing less than a grammar of all differential systems—a play of agonistic forces that individuates, disrupts, reorganizes, and multiplies the forms of the world of appearances—permeating the entire field of consciousness and phenomenality, opening a window onto the way in which attractive-repulsive movements give rise to the order and disorder of signs, things, and the minds that move through them and with them. (152)

Schelling's philosophy of language is a significant departure from enlightenment theories that defined human language in its freedom as the severing of nature. Weighing in on the eighteenth-century debate regarding the origin of language, for example, Schelling argues against the idea that language is the product of human freedom: "Both assertions—that it arises as an invention of human beings, through freedom, and by divine instruction—are false" (*PoA* 102). Eighteenth-century theories regarding the origin of language had approached language from a one-sided perspective and in this way, "thought it possible to understand language from the perspective of psychologically isolated human nature, whereas it is to be understood only from within the whole of the universe" (*PoA* 102). For Schelling, language is a recapitulation of processes already embedded in the natural environment.

Schelling's philosophy of language is a radical reversal of enlightenment thought that defined human reason in its independence from nature. The idea that language is an invention of human freedom stems from the German philosopher of language, Johann Gottfried Herder; in his "Essay on the Origin of Language," Herder argues that with the invention of language, humanity stepped outside of its immediate sensuous sphere. For Herder, language clears a space where we step outside of ourselves and reflect; with language, we take control not only of *our* environment, but we also develop a consciousness of that which exceeds us with intentionality and a degree of clarity. With the invention of language we strike out beyond the predetermined boundaries of our surroundings. It is the essence of what it is to be human to create and discover the universe of others through this figuration. With human language, we create a *Merkmal*, an *innerliches Merkwort*, by which we unite ourselves and others through the mediation of a third thing. The only faculty that we have is the freedom to create these relationships in language to an otherness that exceeds our sensuous nature, an otherness that would otherwise remain imperceptible to us. For Herder, all human perception is predicated on the aesthetic faculty to create linguistic figures that represent our experience. In this sense, language is figurative and ecological; language gives us the creative power to take control of our worlds and conceive of the relationships between the multiplicity of interweaving systems of the ecological world.

However, human language on this account becomes predicated on a freedom defined in opposition to the captivity of nature; nature is held captive to its sensuous sphere and predetermined instinctive relationships to the environment (a sensuous nature that the inventor of rational language must repress):

Every animal has its sphere to which it belongs from birth, into which it is born, in which it stays throughout its life, and in which it dies; and it is a remarkable

fact that the keener the senses of the animals and the more wonderful their artifacts, the narrower is their sphere; the more uniform is their artifact... The bee in its hive builds with a wisdom that Egeria could not teach her Numa; but away from these cells and away from its predetermined activity in these cells, the bee is nothing. The spider weaves with the skill of Minerva, but all its skill is woven into this narrow spider space. That is its world. How marvelous is this insect, and how narrow the sphere of its activity. (Herder 152-3)

Herder defines the human, by contrast, only through the capacity for transforming and adapting to the diversity of the sensuous environment by inventing figures. This dynamic view of the human being's aesthetic relationship to nature is clearly a crucial contribution to Schelling's theory of language; however, in Schelling's view, language defined in its total opposition to sensuous nature deprives it of any necessity. In §73 of the *Philosophy of Art*, Schelling puts it in this way:

Viewed from the one side, language is the direct expression of something *ideal*—knowledge, thought, feeling, will, and so on—in something *real*, and is to that extent itself a work of art. Yet viewed from the other side it is just as definitely a work of nature, since it is the one necessary form of art that cannot be conceived as being invented or generated by art. Hence, it is a natural work of art, just as more or less everything produced by nature is. (99)

Schelling's philosophy of language takes its shape most fully in his theory of the symbol; the symbol displays this contradiction of language, that it is a creative invention and simultaneously

part of the larger ecological and sensuous environment. For Schelling's new theory of the symbol, language presents this contradiction as the creative discourse of being and meaning.

The Schellingian symbol (theorized during the identity period in the *Philosophy of Art*) constructs meaning discursively out of the inner contradiction with itself. Daniel Whistler has recently brought out this discursive aspect of Schelling's theory of the symbol. Whistler notes a distrust of discourse in Kant and Goethe inherited from the more general distrust of language in enlightenment thought under the influence of British empiricism. In fact, it was Kant's theory of the symbol that turned it against its traditionally discursive character in logic and brought it into contact with intuitions that are connected with perception. Empiricists sought to forgo the deceptive nature of the sign in order to achieve direct access to unmediated sense-perception. For aesthetic rationalists, like Baumgarten and Wolff, beauty was located in the *cognition* of perceptible qualities in the object. That is, beauty arose from a discursive and rational relationship between subject and object. Kant was sensitive to empiricist attack on rationalism and hence there is no symbolic cognition for Kant. Kant transformed symbols "into a perceptual *Darstellung*—completely opposed to any discursiveness" (Whistler 45). Whistler disassociates Schelling's theory of the symbol from other *Goethezeit* models with the simple distinction that Schelling holds fast to the absolute identity of meaning and being. According to Whistler, the result of this utter identity is that Schelling rejects Kant's turn to a model of the symbol based in perception, in favor of a discursive symbol. For Schelling, meaning is generated by particular manifestations; it is not something already out there independent of any particular presentation. For Schelling there is no "partial tautology" where meaning and being coincide but meaning still exceeds being. For Schelling, Whistler writes, "The universal is produced out of the particular, rather than pre-existing it; the movement of the symbol is no longer a fall inward, but a

productive development outwards” (18). In the Schellingian symbol, the manifestation is not an inferior, derivative form of its universal meaning, but a “symbolic activity,” productive of meaning. This model of symbolic activity avoids pointing beyond the horizon to some other world, or Kant’s abstract perspectival space of reason, rather it generates the infinite within it. Whistler argues that there are multiple ways in which the coincidence of meaning and being are modeled in the *Goethezeit* rejecting the typical characterization of a monolithic “romantic symbol.” It is Schelling’s symbol that holds fast to the utter identity of meaning and being. This is the particular innovation of Schelling’s theory of the symbol. Others who promoted the symbol slip into a partial identity of meaning and being, where meaning exceeds being, or a universal meaning descends into finitude for revelation. For other philosophers of the symbol in the *Goethezeit*, Whistler argues, “being is meaning without thereby impacting on meaning’s transcendence” (25), ultimately giving priority to the universal of which the particular becomes a mere copy.

It wasn’t the romantics, but the models of the symbol developed by Kant and Goethe, that shifted toward a symbolic based in non-linguistic perception and away from the discursive and interpretative aspects of symbols. According to Whistler, this led towards the “natural” perceptual and paradoxically non-linguistic notion of symbolic language associated with romanticism and critiqued by deconstruction. According to Whistler, in contrast to the romantic symbol, Schelling’s symbol “manages to be discursive” and “Schelling’s symbol is non-perceptual, whilst remaining tautegorical” (43). Whistler writes, the Schellingian symbol must be distinguished from the monolithic symbol of the *Goethezeit*:

‘The romantic symbol’ is understood along the lines of a natural object—that is, the signified inheres in the signifier in much the self-evident way that, for

example, green inheres in grass: one need only perceive the latter to know the former. Schelling, however, understands symbolic language in a very different manner: it does not display its meaning like a natural object, but produces it or constructs it, like a Euclidean problem. (43)

However, in replacing nature with symbolic language, Whistler truncates the contradictions of art and nature that constitute the very conditions of signification that the symbol aims to reveal. Schelling's symbol presents the aesthetic contradiction of the materiality of the sign together with its signification out of itself, within an ecology of others.

In the symbolic presentation of plants, for example, the contradiction of a latent meaning embedded in the sensuous form is interpreted as stemming from the natural entity itself. It is the aesthetic activity in which the plant itself is involved, in existing for its own sake and sensing and perceiving differences, that the plant reveals its symbolic significance.

Even in natural beings, for example, in plants, we cannot fail to recognize the allegory; it anticipates, as it were, moral beauty. Yet it would offer no charm for fantasy and no satisfaction for intuition if it existed only for the sake of this meaning and not first of all for its own sake. The delight comes precisely when we simultaneously recognize the significant or meaningful element contained within this unintentional, unaffected, and outwardly purposeless existence. Any suspicion that this meaning is intentional would suspend the object itself for us, since that object should be absolute according to its own nature and should not exist for the sake of any purpose external to it. (*PoA* 49)

The meaning of symbolic language cannot be the mere invention of psychologically isolated human reason; rather, the symbol must allow its meaning to be dimly visible in itself and in the

entire ecological web in which it moves, consisting of interrelated natural forms actively engaged in constant change and differential acts of signification. The tendency of the concept to externalize meaning cancels this being; and, conversely, the meaning is destroyed if the being is not actual. Schelling says,

meaning here is simultaneously being itself, passed over into the object itself and one with it. As soon as we allow these beings to *mean* or *signify* something they themselves are no longer *anything*. Their reality is one with their ideality (§29); that is, their *idea*, their concept is also destroyed to the extent that they are not conceived as actual. Their ultimate charm resides precisely in the fact that they, by simply *being* as they are without any reference to anything else—absolute within themselves— simultaneously always allow the meaning itself to be dimly visible. I emphasize that we are not satisfied with mere *meaningless being*, such as that given by a mere image. Just as little are we satisfied with mere meaning. Rather, whatever is to be the object of absolute artistic representation should be as concrete and self-identical as the image, and yet as universal and significant as the concept. Hence, the German language renders the word *symbol* excellently with the term *Sinnbild*. (*PoA* 49)

Symbolic art and nature are correlated here as art becomes a matter of interpreting the poetics of nature in an aesthetic ecotranslation. In tracing the movements of the aesthetic ecology whereby phenomena themselves become discursive and make their appearances, we treat nature symbolically. The otherness of the sensuous environment only becomes perceptible as such through the discursive dissonances of interactions, the fragmentary self-differentiation, stemming from the aesthetic sensing activities in nature. We present nature symbolically and objectively

only in relation to this ecological universe: For Schelling, “Each language is a universe if taken by itself” (*PoA* 101) and in this way language reveals the real aesthetic activity of nature in an ecology of *Sinnbilder*: “Within the inner structure language itself all individual elements are determined by the whole. There is not one form or one individual unit of speech that does not require the whole” (*PoA* 101). In the self-differentiating movements of nature, fragmenting phenomena are made sensuous and perceptible; that is, life is aestheticized and this active ontology is revealed in the symbolic work of art without effacing these contradictory relationships. There is an irrational and impenetrable kernel of difference in the plant that art must forever contend with and it is this aesthetic activity that generates the plant’s symbolic meaning.

Chapter 3: History as Tragic Drama

In Schelling's *System of Transcendental Idealism*, the development of self-consciousness unfolds in stages moving from sensation to reflection and finally on to praxis. At the stage of praxis we enter into the world of intersubjectivity, freedom encountering freedom, because the moral order that dictates ethical action puts limits on freedom by prohibiting action that infringes on the rights of others. And, for Schelling, the contours of this action can only be given a real form in historical art. In this chapter, I explore three distinct portrayals of action in Schelling's aesthetics: the epic, Attic tragedy, and modern literary fiction. For Schelling, in the initial stirrings of spirit, the epic is timeless: "In its *essential nature*, action is atemporal, for all time is merely the difference between possibility and actuality, and all manifested action is only the dismantling of that identity in which everything is simultaneous. The epic must be an image of this timelessness" (*PoA* 213). Here, an essential contradiction arises in that activity as such is atemporal and yet any aesthetic portrayal, "manifested action," must occur in time. In poesy, in the epic, a sequence of events is placed entirely into the aesthetic object so that it may remain untouched by external motion. Poesy reduces the infinite action in the historical narrative of the epic. In the portrayal of the sequence of events in epic poesy, Schelling describes time being placed entirely into the object in following way:

Poesy itself as such must appear to be outside time, untouched by time, and thus must place all time, all successive elements, purely into the object, thereby maintaining itself in a serene condition and floating above it immobile and unmoved by the sequential flow. Hence, in the *essential nature* of all action, in whose place poesy itself steps, there is no time. Time is only in the objects *as such*, and every idea, by emerging as an object from within its own essential nature, thus steps into time. Hence, the epic itself must be the calming element, the object in contrast to the moving element. (*PoA* 213)

The epic is the poetic making of action into a temporal and sensuous form where the action steps into time as the aesthetic object. The serenity of this epic construction of action, however, erupts in ferocious battle between action and fate in the dramas of Attic and modern tragedy dismantling the unity of activity and objectivity in the epic. As we will see, the two forms of tragedy manifest a historically particular conception of ancient and modern time.

For Schelling, “the ancients are the planets of the world of art” where everything is “eternal, enduring, imperishable” (*PoA* 73); in the solar system of art, the figures of antiquity are the immovable planets, “plastic, symbolic figures,” (*PoA* 74) in which the collective is simultaneously the individual. By contrast, the modern world negates the collective in favor of the individual; the modern world is one of “degeneration or collapse” like a “system of comets” (*PoA* 73) where “change and transformation are the reigning law” (*PoA* 73). Which is to say that ancient and modern art have different “connections to conditions of the universe,” but ultimately are two faces of the same cosmos. In the following we will consider the way ancients and moderns construe their relations to the universe in different ways specifically in Schelling’s examples of the “plastic, symbolic figures” of Prometheus and Faust. Prometheus' rebellion

against the gods as a symbol of ancient morality and tragic fate, and Goethe's *Faust*, a character whose "unsatisfied thirst to view and enjoy as subject the inner essence of things" (*PoA* 277) presents the modern subject's condition of *Entzweiung*. As tragic figures, however, both Prometheus and Faust experience a fall from the tranquil calm of the epic into mortal time driven by conflict, discontent, and a striving to return to the serene state of simultaneity (*PoA* 74).

Tragic History

In Schelling's view, history taken as a whole discloses the absolute; and yet because history is never complete, the absolute is never finally revealed in history. The freedom to act morally and to participate in history is a partial revelation of the absolute that can only be interpreted from finite aesthetic presentations that form a "continuous demonstration." As Schelling puts it,

History as a whole is a progressive, gradually self-disclosing revelation of the absolute. Hence one can never point out in history the particular places where the mark of providence, or God Himself, is as it were visible. For God never exists, if the existent is that which presents itself in the objective world; if He existed thus, then we should not; but He continually reveals Himself. Man, through his history, provides a continuous demonstration of God's presence, a demonstration, however, which only the whole of history can render complete. (*System* 211)

History is the gradual unfolding of the absolute in a never ending process. The absolute cannot be presented apart from this aesthetic and developmental historical character. It is for this reason that the non-philosophical wisdom imparted by dramatic literature, artworks, and poetry, are

essential to historical and ethical life for Schelling; going back to the dramas of antiquity, a major aspect of ethical life was its creative poetic dimension and its public character; in Schelling's words, "tragedy lives in the atmosphere of public morality, so the comedy lives in the air of public freedom" (*PoA* 278). It was precisely the loss of this connection between ethical life and art that in large part motivated Schelling's aesthetics as he viewed the separation of praxis and poetics detrimental to both spheres. The public morality which came about in the drama of history as the freedom to act lived in the atmosphere of drama in antiquity. In the christian world, the only symbolic act was private worship and the aesthetic dimension of ethical life was displaced by the ideal, inward, universal ethics of the church. Schelling's lamentation in the *Philosophy of Art* of the "extremely diminished and reduced form" of the worship service foreshadows the spreading nihilism that Nietzsche would diagnose by the end of the century.

With the onset of modernity, the public life of morality and freedom that lived in tragic and comic drama of antiquity turned inward; as the external aesthetic world became completely divorced from the moral world, it was replaced by a nihilistic conception of art. The moral life of the subject became limited to the inward drama of the church worship service, and in modern drama, the collective morality of antiquity is negated by the uniqueness of character in the modern subject and their individual guilt. Schelling laments this development in the final lines of his *Philosophy of Art*:

Music, song, dance, as well as all the various types of drama, live only in public life, and form an alliance in such life. Wherever public life disappears, instead of that real, external drama in which, in all its forms, an entire people participates as a political or moral totality, only an *inward*, ideal drama can unite the people. This ideal drama is the worship service, the only kind of *truly* public action that has

remained for the contemporary age, and even so only in an extremely diminished and reduced form. (280)

For Schelling, the freedom of the modern subject is not a triumph of reason over the primitive conception of fate in antiquity. Modern and ancient tragedy simply portray action in different configurations. Falling from the serene timelessness of the epic, ancient and modern time are not so much progressive developments of history, but merely “different faces” (*PoA* 19) of the absolute spirit conceived in dramatic art. That is, for Schelling, history manifests itself in the work of art; and in developing his philosophy of history, Schelling looks to the models of tragedy and epic style in antiquity: “Wer sich zum historischen Künstler bilden will, halte sich einzig an die großen Muster der Alten, welche nach dem Zerfall des allgemeinen und öffentlichen Lebens, nie wieder erreicht werden konnten.” (“Whoever will form oneself as a historical artist should adhere solely to the great models of the ancients which could never be reached again after the disintegration of common and public life.”; *Methode* 641-2).

In Schelling’s view, history is anarchic, it cannot begin in accord with any natural law.²³ And yet, history that is completely lawless is just as meaningless: “it is self-evident that an absolutely lawless series of events is no more entitled to the name of history than an absolutely law-abiding one” (*System* 200). Rather, for Schelling, the meaning of history is the convergence of these two horizons: lawless action colliding with the constraints of their necessary consequences. History requires both free action to raise the unfolding of events above mere contingency, and the presupposition of the higher ideal of an end that gives historical action an eschatological order: “neither absolute lawlessness, nor a series of events without aim or purpose, deserve the name of history, and that its true nature is constituted only by freedom and

²³ This lawlessness of history led Schelling in 1797 to argue that a philosophy of history was impossible.

lawfulness in conjunction, or by the gradual realization, on the part of a whole species of beings, of an ideal that they have never wholly lost” (*System* 200). The departure of free action from arbitrariness and contingency is only given meaning in being subordinated to the purposiveness of a telos of history that is greater than any one-sided character or isolated event. The revelation of the purpose of history is never complete and always remains tentative; that there is a purposiveness is predetermined, but what that purpose is always remains to be seen as the plot depends on the characters of history to act it out.

In his *Vorlesungen über die Methode des akademischen Studiums*, given in the summer of 1802 in Jena, Schelling claims that it is only art that is able to give a real form to this super-empirical telos in a way that approximates his tragic conception of history. We must demonstrate historical action aesthetically, Schelling says, “aber nicht durch Philosophie, da diese die Wirklichkeit vielmehr aufhebt und ganz ideal ist.” (“but not through philosophy, since this rather negates reality and is entirely ideal.”; 639). It is only art, and neither philosophy nor religion, that can present historical action in a way that mediates the given reality within the ideal:

Dieses ist nirgends als in der Kunst möglich, welche das Wirkliche ganz bestehen läßt, wie die Bühne reale Begebenheiten oder Geschichten, aber in einer Vollendung und Einheit darstellt, wodurch sie Ausdruck der höchsten Ideen werden. Die Kunst also ist es, wodurch die Historie, indem sie Wissenschaft des Wirklichen als solchen ist, zugleich über dasselbe auf das höhere Gebiet des Idealen erhoben wird, auf dem die Wissenschaft steht; und der dritte und absolute Standpunkt der Historie ist demnach der der historischen Kunst. (This is nowhere possible except in art, which allows the real to exist in its entirety, as the stage of

real events or stories, but presented in completion and unity whereby they become the expression of the highest ideas. It is art, therefore, by means of which history, being the science of the real as such, is simultaneously raised above it to the higher realm of the ideal on which science stands; and the third and absolute standpoint of history is therefore that of historical art; *Method* 640)

In the *System* that appeared two years prior to these lectures, Schelling also compares history to a dramatic fiction where a presupposed authorial voice of the poet is fragmented into a cast of relatively autonomous characters. The unity of the poet's intention, Schelling claims, is only revealed through the fragmentary relationships between the poem's characters: the purpose of history is similarly interpreted intersubjectively as the meeting of multiple horizons of the cast of characters. The creator can only be seen through the plot of the historical drama that consists in all the actions and conflicts between one-sided characters taken together as leading to some eschaton. That is, history is free will manifest in the interpretation of collective action that is greater than the freedom of any one thespian. If all the characters played their part in total freedom and with no regard for other characters or the higher purpose of the conclusion, then there would be no plot whatsoever and it would be impossible to interpret the intention of the poet.

If we think of history as a play in which everyone involved performs his part quite freely and as he pleases, a rational development of this muddled drama is conceivable only if there be a single spirit who speaks in everyone, and if the playwright, whose mere fragments (*disjecta membra poetae*) are the individual actors, has already so harmonized beforehand the objective outcome of the whole

with the free play of every participant, that something rational must indeed emerge at the end of it. (*System* 210)

The rational aesthetic development of the plot can only come about if we contemplate and interpret the actions of the fragmentary characters at the end of the drama as being interrelated by considering the higher purpose of a poet. A dialog between the creativity of the poet and the interpretation of the action on the part of the reader emerges here revealing an aesthetic dimension to praxis.

The poet is hidden from view, and nevertheless, the poet's intention is revealed if we are sensitive to interpreting actions that contribute to the coherence of the open ended dramatic plot; that is, if we cultivate *phronēsis* by way of *poiēsis*. Which is to say that moral praxis is an aesthetic attunement involved in interpreting the constantly changing contexts of action; as Socrates points out in Plato's *Cratylus*, when he defines *phronēsis* as "the understanding of motion and flow. Or it might be interpreted as taking delight in motion. In either case, it has to do with motion" (411e). That is, *phronēsis* is a wise contemplation of a changing and transforming ground of action and involves the interpretation of poetics, that making and bringing into being that which admits of being otherwise in art.

In Schelling's conception of history as dramatic fiction, it is important that the univocity of the author does not exist entirely independent of the drama; and at the same time, the poet is never fully realized in the many fragmentary pieces of the one-sided characters. The voice of the poet, just as the eschaton of history, remains subject to the characters' actions and is always open to new interpretations:

if the playwright were to exist independently of his drama, we should be merely the actors who speak the lines he has written. If he does not exist independently of us, but reveals and discloses himself successively only, through the very play of our own freedom, so that without this freedom even he himself would not be, then we are collaborators of the whole and have ourselves invented the particular roles we play. (*System* 210)

The drama of history is not predetermined by an *a priori* authorial voice of reason as regards the actions of the characters but only by the assumption that all the one-sided characters will be interpreted as acting in accordance with the rational plan of the poet at some future point; actions are read through the lens of this tentative future of the end as being interrelated and guided by the interpretation of the poet's purpose.

The necessary rational unity provided by the author is acted out "through each single intelligence" and therefore only apparent in the plot revealed by the entire cast of characters that must actually act out the play. If the absolute were fully expressed in existence, nothing could be otherwise than it is. The freedom to act in history is in the perpetually deferred fulfillment of a higher purpose reflected in the neverending plot. This means that the eschaton of history is necessarily an interpretation of the events taken together, and hence always merely provisional and relies on the continually unfolding process of introducing new action, as well as collecting and interpreting the fragmentary and conflicting pieces. The rational purpose, however, involves the interpretation of a general good that supersedes the particular intentions of any one character. The contemplative interpretation of the tragic plot of history develops in the audience an aesthetic sensitivity to a concealed necessity that is greater than our individual freedom, a wise prudence in the face of this hidden necessity and the motion and flow of the changing ground of

freedom. The most appropriate work of art to portray the sublimity of the absolute poet in history is tragedy because it is in tragedy that the life of the subject and its intentions are most clearly disrupted revealing this unconscious poetic ground.

Kant and the Sublime Warrior

Transitioning from *Naturphilosophie* to the world of practical freedom, all necessity in human history is dissolved; in overcoming nature, history is isolated from any lawfulness and moral freedom leads to despair and paradoxically an inability to act.²⁴ For Schelling, however, a tragic conception of history cultivates the necessity of action in connection with a higher ideal. Tragedy is closely linked with morality because tragedy portrays action;²⁵ and in Schelling's tragic conception of history, the poet opens us to the sources of the sublime moral world: "für den Historiker [ist] die Tragödie die wahre Quelle großer Ideen und der erhabenen Denkungsart, zu welcher er gebildet sein muß." ("for the historian, tragedy is the true source of great ideas and the sublime way of thinking for which they must be trained."); *Methoden* 642). For Schelling, history is a kind of tragic social ontology; however, different from Kant and Schiller, as we will see, the sublime feeling in Schelling's tragic conception of history does not depend on the subject becoming aware of a moral freedom that is independent of nature; rather, Schelling's sublime involves opening the historical individual to a connection with the conditions of the universe.

²⁴ See Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy* pp. 126-7

²⁵ As Schiller puts it, "tragedy is the imitation of a succession of *events*, of an action" and "it is the imitation of an action; and this idea of imitation already distinguishes tragedy from the other kinds of poetry, which only narrate or describe" (356). In several essays written in the 1790's, Schiller imported the concept of the sublime and Kant's ethics into his dramatic theory.

For Kant, the sublime is an aesthetic experience that is linked with moral vocation. In the aesthetic experience of the “Dynamically Sublime,” one confronts the overwhelming might of nature, and as finite beings we are confronted with the fact that we are no match for the existential threat posed by the power of nature. And yet, it is at this moment that reason kicks in activating the sublime feeling, assuring us that we are moral beings beyond the threat of nature. In clinging to this supersensible rational principle, the subject affirms its superiority and independence from nature. The object of nature in the sublime is revealed to be the mere reflection of the inadequacy of nature to our moral constitution. It was for this reason that Schiller, in his aesthetics, theorized that tragedy is sublime; for Schiller, tragedy gives us this experience of supersensible moral freedom and brings about the awareness that we have the power to act freely and independent of nature. For both Kant and Schiller, reason is beyond and superior to nature; the sublime is cut off from nature in the name of expanding the subject: Kant writes, “the object serves for the presentation of a sublimity that can be found in the mind; for what is properly sublime cannot be contained in any sensible form, but concerns only ideas of reason, which, though no presentation adequate to them is possible, are provoked and called to mind precisely by this inadequacy, which does allow of sensible presentation” (third *Critique* §23). Kant’s example here is “the wide ocean, enraged by storms”²⁶ which cannot be called the sublime itself, rather we are “put in the mood for a feeling which is itself sublime, in that the mind is incited to abandon sensibility and to occupy itself with ideas that contain a higher purposiveness” (third *Critique* §23). Here nature does indeed have a role as the impression that

²⁶ Other examples: “Bold, overhanging, as it were threatening cliffs, thunder clouds towering up into the heavens, bringing with them flashes of lightning and crashes of thunder, volcanoes with their all-destroying violence, hurricanes with the devastation they leave behind, the boundless ocean set into a rage, a lofty waterfall on a mighty river, etc.” (third *Critique* 144) and “The **astonishment** bordering on terror, the horror and the awesome shudder, which grip the spectator in viewing mountain ranges towering to the heavens, deep ravines and the raging torrents in them, deeply shadowed wastelands inducing melancholy reflection, etc.” (third *Critique* 152).

connects us with the feeling of the overwhelming beyond of nature, but this sublime feeling is ultimately about quelling nature, and “elevating the strength of our soul” above it.

The subject affirmed as a moral being that surpasses the measure of the senses must truncate nature from its rational constitution. Nature is merely the name for a sensation that enriches this conquest of reason. As David Pan puts it, “The feeling of the sublime depends on the soul’s sense of superiority over nature, and the result of this feeling is a self-aggrandizement of the individual” (98). This self-aggrandizement of the individual becomes complicated, however, when Kant turns to the example that involves the goals of a collective in the dynamically sublime experience of warfare. In Kant’s discussion of war, he claims that warfare carried out with a certain decorum is sublime: the warrior confronts their physical powerlessness in battle without succumbing to fear. However, in this example, Pan argues that the mind does not simply assert its superiority over the limitations of a merely finite existence in the name of the hero’s personal identity. Here the individual makes a sacrifice for the particular goals of a collective. Kant associates war with the breaking up of the administered world and a revitalization of thinking of an entire people:

(war) makes the way of thinking of a people that carries it on in this way all the more sublime in proportion to the number of dangers in the face of which it courageously stood its ground. A prolonged peace, on the other hand, tends to make prevalent a mere(ly) commercial spirit, and along with it base selfishness, cowardice, and softness, and to debase the way of thinking of that people. (third *Critique* 122)

The sacrifice of the warrior in facing existential dangers breathes new life into the commercial spirit of a people. In what Pan calls “the heroic sublime,” it becomes apparent that in the case of

a self-sacrifice made by the warrior for the particular goals of the collective, the sublime becomes more than the vanity project of the subject:

In the warrior, there is not just an affirmation of the insignificance of materiality but a linked affirmation of a particular goal that goes beyond the value of the individual. This version of the sublime does not end with an affirmation of the autonomy of the individual as purpose in itself but with a subordination of the individual's purpose to an overall purpose that is both superindividual and particular in orientation. (Pan 98)

In Pan's heroic sublime, sacrifice grounds morality in an aesthetics of action that brings value to the goals of a collective rather than the individual and at the same time "undermines the possibility of a universal ethic" (Pan 101). Similarly, for Schelling, Kant's sublime conceived of as the triumph over nature leads to despair and a conception of moral freedom that paradoxically quells any higher necessity that could provide the impetus for the courage required to act. The real, however, revenges itself in Schelling's tragic conception of the sublime as the monstrous fate to which the tragic hero is necessarily bound.

In a departure from the sublime defined by Kant and Schiller in its independence from nature, for Schelling, the negation of nature by the tragic sublime only exposes the moral subject to a higher necessity of collective action that includes nature. For Schelling, in conquering nature, the freedom of the moral subject leads to incoherence and despair, reducing the creativity of life to a commercial spirit, the quiet traffic of intrahuman administrative procedures that war was supposed to invigorate:

Auch Kants Plan einer Geschichte im weltbürgerlichen Sinn beabsichtigt eine bloße Verstandesgesetzmäßigkeit im ganzen derselben, die nur höher, nämlich in

der allgemeinen Notwendigkeit der Natur, gesucht wird, durch welche aus dem Krieg der Friede, zuletzt sogar der ewige und aus vielen andern Verirrungen endlich die echte Rechtsverfassung entstehen soll. Allein dieser Plan der Natur ist selbst nur der empirische Widerschein der wahren Notwendigkeit, so wie die Absicht einer danach geordneten Geschichte nicht sowohl eine weltbürgerliche als eine bürgerliche heißen müßte, den Fortgang nämlich der Menschheit zum ruhigen Verkehr, Gewerbe und Handelsbetrieb unter sich, und dieses sonach überhaupt als die höchsten Früchte des Menschenlebens und seiner Anstrengungen darzustellen. (Kant's plan for a history in the cosmopolitan sense aims for a mere lawfulness of the understanding in much the same way, sought only higher, namely in the general necessity of nature, through which peace emerges from war, ultimately even perpetually, and finally, out of many other aberrations, the authentic legal constitution ought to emerge. However, this plan of nature is itself only the empirical reflection of true necessity, just as the intention of a history ordered according to it need not mean so much a cosmopolitan as a bourgeois one, namely to present the progress of mankind as a quiet traffic, trade and commerce among themselves, and this as the highest fruits of human life and its striving; *Methode* 639)

For Schelling, unlike Schiller, tragedy is not involved in the self-aggrandizement of the moral subject becoming aware of a freedom that is independent of nature; rather, tragedy reveals the individual as fundamentally entwined with the universe, exposing a necessity that is higher than ourselves in *Vorsehung*.

Schelling defines the tragic as “an actual and objective conflict between freedom in the subject on the one hand, and necessity on the other, a conflict that does not end such that one or the other succumbs, but rather such that both are manifested in perfect indifference as simultaneously victorious and vanquished” (*PoA* 251). To generate a genuinely tragic conflict and in order for there to be an expression of freedom, there must be a struggle against fate; and for this to be a genuine conflict, fate must be absolute, giving the expression of freedom an impossible obstacle. Tragedy reveals the fundamental entwinement of the human and the otherness of the natural world, and throws this strangeness of nature into relief. Tragedy rises above arbitrariness and mere contingency by introducing action, but tragedy does not provide the moral clarity and self-certainty in the way that the development of philosophical consciousness does. In Paul Ricoeur’s words, “the hero-victims of the drama do not benefit from the ‘certainty of self’ that is the horizon of the educational process in which consciousness is engaged” (248).²⁷ In introducing action the characters diverge from the merely contingent course of nature with clear intentions. However, in tragedy there are always more forces at play than the clear intentions that move the tragic hero to decide and to act. In tragedy there is an undecidable conflict between the one-sidedness of the characters. Characters moved by primordial and imperceptible mythical powers give rise to conflicts when, Schelling writes, these characters become “despots”; driven by “storms of passions” that “blindly rage against each other,” and the characters lose all reason. The tragic hero does not enjoy the expansion of personal identity and the clarity of self-awareness; rather, the hero becomes conscious of their fundamental entwinement with the unconscious element in their acting and the astonishing strangeness of being.

²⁷ And nevertheless, as Ricoeur points out, the tragic effect results in “conviction.”

Ancient and Modern Tragic History

In Schelling's development of consciousness and the idealism of the self out of nature, we get glimpses of a natural history. In the *Naturphilosophie*, the absolute never becomes one with nature, but rather is expressed piecemeal through an ecology of creative aesthetic projects of creatures that unfold in stages and therefore historically. For Schelling, history is made with every creative act and history cannot be determined *a priori*: "nothing whatever can be an object of history which proceeds according to a determinate mechanism, or whose theory is *a priori*" (*System* 200). History arises through spontaneous events, the result of free actions that create surprise beginnings and cannot be foretold. To the extent that creatures are the creative agents of change, nature has a rudimentary element of historicity to it. Nature in its creativity is involved in morphological processes that unfold in stages; nature is a teleological and creative expression of the absolute.

History begins with surprise divergences and the severing of lawful progression from the very beginning in nature. In Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*, the creaturely impulse to change and create transforms the environment into an ecology of creature artisans and this aesthetic activity is historical. Schelling writes in the *System*, and repeats in his lectures on *Methode*, that there are three periods of history: "die der Natur, des Schicksals und der Vorsehung" (620). In its first movements, freedom is as yet indistinguishable from nature. We see this portrayal of freedom as necessity in the oldest myths and the epic style of antiquity where gods and humans live and act in the same world. The manifestations of action in Attic and modern tragedy are different than the situation in the epic where action is portrayed "within the identity of absoluteness" (*PoA*

212); that is, necessity and freedom are identical in epic style and they have yet to erupt into the conflict that will animate tragedy: “The first determination of the epic should thus be formulated as follows: *it portrays action in the identity of freedom and necessity, without opposition between the infinite and the finite, without conflict, and, for that reason, without fate...The husk yet encompassing the two in the bud is not yet broken; nowhere is there any rebellion against fate*” (*PoA* 212). It is also for this reason that there is no moral order in the epic. For, Schelling claims, the need for a moral order is only the plight of finite beings that emerge after the fall from this state of nature. Gods do not require ethical concepts; they exist as such and absolutely. According to Schelling, “Morality, like sickness and death, only plagues mortals, and within mortals it can express itself in relationship to the gods only as rebellion against them” (*PoA* 55). It is only as finite beings that we require practical wisdom and it is the need for interpretation of our confused fragmentary experience that leads to conflicts in action.

Freedom as a distinct property of a moral human subject emerges only with the fall from the serene state of nature in epic style. This fall from the absolute universe of the gods is portrayed in Attic tragedy as the separation of freedom and necessity. This separation is presented as the rebellion against the gods in the tragic figure of Prometheus who, for Schelling, comes to represent the archetype of morality. For it is Prometheus who leads humanity out of nature. In Aeschylus’ *Prometheus Bound*, Prometheus describes the opening of this gap in nature in the following lines:

But listen to the miseries of mortals,
childish until I made them intelligent
and capable of thought. I tell you this
not to cast any blame on human beings,

but to show the kind intent in what I gave.
At first, they saw but seeing was no use;
they heard but didn't hear. Like shapes in dreams,
they passed long lives in purposeless confusion.
They knew no homes of sun-warmed brick or wood
but lived like swarming ants in lightless caves
beneath the ground. They had no way of telling
when winter would arrive, or flowery spring,
or summer with its fruits; in everything
they acted without thought, till I explained
the risings and the settings of the stars,
so hard to read. And I did more for them.
I invented number, cleverest of devices,
and writing, hard at work to help recall
all things to memory, the Muses' mother. (457-475)

Leading the descent of humanity into tragic antiquity, Prometheus represents the fall from the epic world where action was portrayed by the absolute identity of necessity and freedom.

Prometheus' rebellion against the gods generates a new corresponding necessity in tragic fate.

The separation of freedom and necessity creates a new conception of action where the tragic figure is forced to submit to fate. Prometheus is also linked with the act of interpretation; for example, Prometheus' transgression involves teaching mortals augury:

They withered without medicines, until
I showed them compounds that would soothe and heal.
With these they can fend off all sicknesses.

I set out many systems of divination.
I was the first to interpret from their dreams
what would be waking truth; I read for them
words hard to decipher, overheard by chance,
signs met by the road. I carefully distinguished
the flights of taloned birds: which ones are lucky,
and which are inauspicious; what they feed on,
their hatreds, their affections, whom they roost with;
the smoothness of the entrails, and the color
the bile should have if it's to please the gods;
the mottled surface of the well-formed liver.
I burnt the thighbone wrapped in fat, I burnt the spine,
and so led mortals to this unmapped art,
clearing the sight for fire's once clouded signs. (494-510)

In Attic tragedy, the protagonist does not succumb to the superior power of fate, nor does the protagonist overcome fate. Rather, the protagonist expresses free will by voluntarily submitting to fate: as Schelling puts it, "This is the most sublime idea and the greatest victory of freedom: voluntarily to bear the punishment for an unavoidable transgression in order to manifest his freedom precisely in the loss of that very same freedom, and to perish amid a declaration of free will" (*PoA* 254). The tragic effect of Attic tragedy lies in this tragic aporia, the undecidable struggle between necessity and freedom. The unresolved tension taken to the bitter end, results in a symbolic triumph of the will, "the insurmountable power of fate which earlier appeared in absolute dimensions, now appears merely relatively great, for it is overcome by the will and becomes the symbol of the absolutely great, namely, of the attitude and disposition of sublimity."

(*PoA* 254). There is a balance maintained between necessity and freedom that feigns the sublime, and “that this guiltless guilty person accepts punishment voluntarily—this is the *sublimity* of tragedy; thereby alone does freedom transfigure itself into the highest identity with necessity” (*PoA* 255). Schelling makes a distinction between empirical necessity which is a mere fortuitousness, whereby unavoidable misfortune is set in motion by external factors, and absolute necessity which is the material of tragedy, where the events are triggered by the intentional action of the hero.

With the fall from nature in antiquity, in this tragic figure developing an awareness of their freedom to act independently of nature, arises necessarily the attendant miserable sufferings of fate particular to the aesthetic development of Attic tragedy. Prometheus is the symbol of the bitter sufferings of this fate that the entire species must endure, eternally tormented by the vulture sent by Jupiter to perpetually gnaw at his liver. Schelling describes Prometheus’ fate in the following lines:

Prometheus is the archetype of morality that ancient mythology offers to us. He is the universal symbol of that particular relationship morality occupies within mythology. Because freedom expresses itself in him as independence from the gods, he is chained to the rock and eternally tormented by the vulture sent by Jupiter, a vulture that perpetually gnaws at his growing liver. As such he represents the whole human race and suffers in his own person the torments of the entire species. Hence, here the infinite does indeed make an appearance, but in that appearance immediately bound again, held back, and subjected to limitation. The same is the case in ancient tragedy, where the highest morality lies in the

recognition of the boundaries and limitations to which human beings are subject.
(*PoA* 55)

The adventure of this character is particular to the historical aesthetic life of antiquity. The freedom of the human being to act independently of nature comes to life precisely on the dramatic stage in Prometheus, as do the necessary consequences of action emerge as a higher necessity requiring the audience to consider this tragic fate and reorient their conception of ethical action. Moral praxis is the particular plight of our existential situation as mortal human beings. It is precisely the recognition of our fundamental limitations that opens the gap between action and fate; in this way tragedy constitutes a guide for praxis, and, for Schelling, Prometheus is the archetype of this particular aesthetic construction of morality.

This fate is overcome in modern tragedy where the sublimity of tragedy involves the “Sublimity of *disposition* or of *character*” and the modern subject of literary fiction becomes bound up with a higher necessity in *Vorsehung*. The modern subject no longer struggles against blind necessity; rather, the modern character encounters grace and divine providence that transform the opposition between action and fate reflected in the character and inner disposition of the subject; rather than a struggle against the blind necessity of an external nature, in modern tragedy, it is not necessary that action proceeds from the protagonist in conflict with an unavoidable fate. For example, in Goethe’s *Faust*, where, according to Schelling,

Fate does not just apply to action. Over against the knowledge of the individual as individual stands the essential nature of the universe and of nature as an unconquerable necessity. The subject as subject cannot enjoy the infinite as infinite, yet it is a necessary inclination of that subject. Here is thus an eternal contradiction. Let us call this a more ideal potency of fate, one that with respect to

the subject stands in no less a position of opposition and conflict than in action.
(*PoA* 276-7)

In modern literary fiction, which incorporates elements of tragedy, the conflict between the individual and the essential nature of the universe are entwined in “a more ideal potency of fate” that manifests itself in the subject as an intrinsic character or even guilt. The tragic figure of modernity therefore has a higher degree of moral culpability tied to their individual character.

The modern subject is not a progression or superior dramatic form. Modern tragedy is simply a different configuration of action and necessity. The modern moral subject frees itself from the tragic fate of antiquity, only to confront a new construction of necessity in providence; as Schelling explains,

Eternal necessity reveals itself during the time of identity with it as nature. This was the case with the Greeks. After the fall from nature it reveals itself in bitter and violent blows as fate. One can escape fate only in one way: by throwing oneself into the arms of providence. This was the general world feeling in that particular period of the deepest transformation when fate played its final tricks on all that was beautiful and splendid in antiquity. The old gods lost their power, the oracles and celebrations fell silent, and a bottomless abyss full of a wild admixture of all the elements of the past world appeared to open itself up before mankind. Above this dark abyss the only sign of peace and of a balance of forces seemed to be the cross. (*PoA* 61)

Schelling proposes that a new transformed kind of necessity is required to confront the modern character in their entwinement with the universe and move the moral subject to act. In overcoming the blind necessity of nature, moral freedom is no longer bound to fate in the

Christian world. But that does not mean that necessity and lawfulness cease to exist for ethical action. What emerges for moral freedom in the modern world, Schelling claims, is the necessity of Providence:

a necessity is demanded *for* history itself which still persists and asserts itself even against moral freedom, which, therefore, cannot be *blind* necessity (above which freedom certainly is elevated), which rather only mediates freedom with necessity because it does not itself (like human freedom) come into conflict with necessity, and remains not just relatively but *absolutely* free in relation to necessity, which always remains *Providence*. (*Modern Philosophy* 127)

For Schelling, the confrontation of freedom with the higher necessity of providence makes modern history a tragic artwork; the poet does not impose *Vorsehung* onto the real events of history but rather allows them to appear “vom Gesichtspunkt der Wirklichkeit aus.” (“from the point of view of reality.”²⁸)

In modern fiction the action does not proceed from the murky intention of a hero, but rather more freely and with greater responsibility that follows from the tragic figure’s inner disposition or character that comes into conflict with the universe. As a result of the modern condition, Faust, for example, is plagued by dissatisfaction, longing and *Entzweiung*. In Goethe’s *Faust*, this conflict seeks to resolve itself in one of two ways. According to Schelling, the first

²⁸ “Wir haben die Historie auf die gleiche Stufe mit der Kunst gesetzt. Aber, was diese darstellt, ist immer eine Identität der Notwendigkeit und Freiheit, und diese Erscheinung, vornehmlich in der Tragödie, ist der eigentliche Gegenstand unserer Bewunderung. Diese selbe Identität aber ist zugleich der Standpunkt der Philosophie und selbst der Religion für die Geschichte, da diese in der Vorsehung nichts anderes als die Weisheit erkennt, welche in dem Plane der Welt die Freiheit der Menschen mit der allgemeinen Notwendigkeit und umgekehrt diese mit jener vereinigt. Nun soll aber die Historie wahrhaft weder auf dem philosophischen noch auf dem religiösen Standpunkt stehen. Sie wird demnach auch jene Identität der Freiheit und Notwendig—in dem Sinne darstellen müssen, wie sie vom Gesichtspunkt der Wirklichkeit aus erscheint, den sie auf keine Weise verlassen soll. Von diesem aus ist sie aber nur als unbegriffene und ganz objektive Identität erkennbar, als Schicksal. Die Meinung ist nicht, daß der Geschichtschreiber das Schicksal im Munde führe, sondern daß es durch die Objektivität seiner Darstellung von selbst und ohne sein Zutun erscheine” (*Methode* 640-1).

attempt to pacify Faust's *Entzweiung* is: "the unsatisfied thirst to view and enjoy as subject the inner essence of things...to still this insatiable desire outside the goals and parameters of reason, through the excesses of spirit" (*PoA* 277). The alternative approach to Faust's striving "to alleviate the unsatisfied yearning of the spirit," that Goethe presents us with is Faust plunging himself into "the world itself, and to bear both its woes and joys" (*PoA* 277). However, Faust struggles in vain to enjoy the infinite; as a finite being he is set in a necessary conflict with it, and "the wild life into which Faust throws himself becomes an inferno for him according to necessary consequences" (*PoA* 277) as he travels "through the highest sphere of the tragic" (*PoA* 277).

The ethical life of the subject and history cannot be separated from the aesthetic development of drama. And it is in tragic historical drama that the sublime entwinement is most clearly brought forth; in art, "one thinks one is seeing the creator" (*Modern Philosophy* 128), and because it is in tragedy that the plan of the poet is most muddled from perspective of the characters who act it out. It is in tragedy, Schelling continues,

in the highest work, Poetry united with art—in the highest work of Poetic art (*Dichtkunst*), tragedy, there appears, in the storms of passions which blindly rage against each other, where for the actors themselves the voice of reason goes silent, and despotism and lawlessness, entangling each other ever more deeply, finally transform themselves into a hideous necessity. (*Modern Philosophy* 128)

It is in bringing the real empirical events into a connection with a higher purpose that the poet produces the tragic effect in the necessity of fate and *Vorsehung* that moves the moral subject to act with prudence and to contemplate the strange transforming necessity that emerges in the course of history. The wisdom imparted by history reaches us when the poet presents history,

according to Schelling, as an *erstaunungswürdiges Drama* that restores a sense of awe for the strange unknown: “In solcher Darstellung kann die Geschichte die Wirkung des größten und erstaunungswürdigsten Dramas nicht verfehlen, das nur in einem unendlichen Geiste gedichtet sein kann.” (“In such a presentation, history cannot fail to produce the effect of the greatest and most astonishing dramas that can only be composed in an infinite spirit.”; *Methode* 640). The plot of tragedy, the conscious and unconscious forces that drive the hero-victims submerged in the most violent contradictions, reveals a higher purposiveness. The undecidability of tragedy leaves the audience not with self-certainty that might predetermine a universal course of action, but rather a humility, an agility in being confronted with a disruption in expectations about the consequences of one’s action. In tragedy, “in the midst of all these movements there appears the spirit of the Poet as the quiet light which alone still shines, as the subject which alone is not submerged, itself unmoving in the most violent movement, as wise Providence which can yet lead the greatest contradictions finally to a satisfactory conclusion” (*Modern Philosophy* 128-9). This existential condition of tragedy instills in us an awe for the incredible unconscious forces and the potential for unforeseen consequences of action, as well as the higher purposiveness that will be interpreted at the end when all of our actions are taken together. Schelling’s aesthetic ecological ethics promote the power of tragic drama and literary fiction to foster in us the conviction to act in accord with a necessity that is higher than ourselves and with concern for the consequences of our actions on future unknown Others.

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