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NATURAL HISTORY: REFLECTIONS ON ITS REPRESENTATION IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY MUSEUM

David Kleinberg - Levin *

“Nature is the first, or old, Testament, since things are still outside the center and therefore under the law. Man is the beginning of the new covenant through whom, as mediator, since he himself is connected with God, God accepts nature [. . .]. Man is thus the redeemer of nature towards whom all its archetypes strive. [But] the Word that is fulfilled in man exists in nature as a dark, prophetic (still incompletely spoken) Word. [...] [For] Man never gains control over the condition [that organizes the world], even though in evil he strives to do so. [The words that Man brings to the naming of nature have, however, only a weak redemptive potency.] Hence the veil of sadness which is spread over the whole of nature, the deep, unappeasable melancholy of all life.” Friedrich Schelling, *Treatise of Human Freedom*.¹

“The life of Man in pure language-mind was blissful. Nature, however, was mute. True, it can be clearly felt in the second chapter of Genesis how this muteness, named by Man, itself became bliss, only of lower degree. [After he has named the animals, Adam sees them leap away from him with joy.] But after the Fall, when God’s word curses the ground, the appearance of nature is deeply changed. Now begins its other muteness, which we mean the deep sadness of nature. It is a metaphysical truth that all of nature would begin to lament if it were endowed with language. [. . .] This proposition has a double meaning. It means, first: she would lament language itself. Speechlessness: that is the great sorrow of nature (and for the sake of her redemption the life and language of Man—not only, as is supposed, of the poet—are in nature). This proposition means, secondly: she would lament. Lament, however, is the most undifferentiated, impotent expression of language; [. . .] and even where there

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¹ Schelling, F. W. J. (1936), *Treatise on Human Freedom*. Chicago: Open Court, pp. 92, 79. Translation modified.

is only a rustling of plants, in it there is always a lament. Because she is mute, nature mourns. Yet the inversion of this proposition leads even further into the essence of nature: the sadness of nature makes her mute.” Walter Benjamin, “On Language as Such and on the Language of Man”²

“History is written across the countenance of nature in the sign language of transience. [. . .] In nature, the allegorical poets [of the German Baroque] saw eternal transience, and here alone the saturnine vision of these generations recognized history.” Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*³

“Whereas in the symbol, with the glorification of death and destruction, the transfigured face of nature reveals itself fleetingly in the light of redemption, in allegory, the observer is confronted with the *facies hippocratica* of history, a petrified, primordial landscape.” Ibid.⁴

“[But ‘second nature’, the artificial world of convention taking up what ‘first’ nature has provided, is also, and in fact even more than ‘first’ nature,] a petrified, estranged complex of meaning that is no longer able to awaken inwardness; it is a charnel house of rotted interiorities.” Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*⁵

§1

I would like to offer some modest reflections on the American Museum of Natural History in New York City, founded in 1869 as an institution that shows us and tells us not only about ourselves as “rational animals” and about our relationship to the natural world, but also, through that relationship to nature, something important about our moral relationship to one another. This museum has played a significant role in my life—especially during the formative years of my child-

² Benjamin, W. (1986), “On Language as Such and on the Language of Man.” In: *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*. New York: Schocken Books, pp. 328–29.

³ Benjamin, W. (1998), *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. London: Verso, New Left Books, pp. 177, 179. The title in English is egregiously misleading, because the whole point of that work is to distinguish between tragedy and *Trauerspiel*; thus, its claim to originality consists in a refined analysis of the *Trauerspiel* as a distinct theatrical genre during the German Baroque.

⁴ Ibid., p. 166.

⁵ Lukács, G. (1978), *The Theory of the Novel*. Cambridge: MIT Press, p. 54.

hood, when I lived near enough to the Museum to visit it almost every weekend, passing many exhilarating hours in its awesome halls of exhibition. In the earliest years of my visits, what never ceased to enthrall me were the gigantic dinosaur skeletons, mounted in life-like poses, and the no less gigantic whale, floating in the air high above me. In somewhat later years, I found enjoyment in learning from the exhibitions that showed the smaller animals—fearsome animals, such as bears and snakes, strange animals, such as anteaters and armadillos, lovable animals, such as otters, chipmunks, deer, wolves and beavers, impressive animals of the skies, such as eagles and hawks—placed with a marvelous approximation to realism, as if living happily, despite their uncanny immobility, in their “natural” habitats. Still later, developing a passionate research interest in geology, paleontology, and archaeology, the preeminent sciences of natural history, I concentrated on the halls that contained dazzling displays of minerals and the petrified traces and remains of prehistoric life. And of course I became a knowledgeable collector of fossils and minerals, searching for additions wherever discoveries seemed promising. I also developed, around the same time, a serious interest in the Lepidoptera, attracted to their glorious beauty, and, for a while, I hunted and collected them, capturing some of the butterflies that frequented the family’s gardens, not slighting the furry moths that I found near the lights where they ended their fatefully brief lives. Among others in my collection, around which I invented a network of fables and allegories, I had, neatly pinned, the Monarch, the Yellow Swallowtail, the Black Swallowtail, the Common Buckeye, the Brown Fritillary, and the ephemeral and exquisitely beautiful Luna Moth, once a spectral presence haunting the moonlit nights of summer, but now hovering near extinction in the New England States. But I ceased to collect these magnificent creatures when I could no longer bear watching their agonizing deaths and realized that they had lost as corpses the mesmerizing, spectral beauty I saw in their energetic lives, dancing and fluttering in the currents of summer air.⁶

⁶ See my discussion of the implications of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of language for the question of our responsibility to care for nature, in: Kleinberg-Levin, D. (2008), *Before the Voice of Reason: Echoes of Responsibility in Merleau-Ponty’s Ecology and Levinas’s Ethics*. Albany: State University of New York Press. Also see my four chapters on Hölderlin, Marx, Benja-

Returning to the Museum after a half century away from its proximity, I was profoundly shocked by the momentous changes that had taken place there: really startling changes, not only in regard to what had been selected for “permanent” exhibition and what was no longer to be seen, but also in regard to the “character” of the exhibitions, the ways in which all our contemporary political and cultural sensitivities had been ever so carefully and cautiously—and, I suspect, with some anxiety—taken into account. So as I began to contemplate these changes, I realized that they reflected a half-century of changes in the very concept of natural history, changes culminating in the way in which we of today conceptualize and relate to natural history, hence also how we understand ourselves as a distinct species of life and as a species in relation to the rest of the natural world. Although my first reaction was, not surprisingly, nostalgia—a wistful sense that something precious had been abandoned to oblivion,—as the enlightened voice of reason began to make itself heard, I gradually welcomed the changes. But at the same time, I believe that those among us who remember the old Museum with its painstakingly ordered exhibits of “rational” taxonomy have a responsibility to rescue its history from the oblivion that is an all too common fate these days.

Ernst Haeckel’s book, *Kunstformen der Natur* (1900), with its marvelous coloured illustrations, still evokes for me an enchanted realm of nature: that book exemplifies an historically significant way of experiencing nature that we should not exclude and forget in our embrace of the new techniques and forms of knowledge which a “more enlightened” science can deliver. We still need to know—to experience—that enchantment. The natural history museum is one of those singularly favoured places where enchantment and disenchantment could in principle exist in a lively dialectic of reciprocal enrichment.

So what I would like, accordingly, to reflect on in this essay are some of the differences that constitute this conceptual shift—a shift signifi-

min and Heidegger in: Kleinberg-Levin, D. (2005), *Gestures of Ethical Life: Reading Hölderlin’s Question of Measure After Heidegger*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005; and see my two chapter discussions of Descartes and Heidegger in: Kleinberg-Levin, D. (1999), *The Philosopher’s Gaze: Modernity in the Shadows of Enlightenment*. University of California Press; revised paperback edition: (2003), Duquesne University Press.

cant enough, I should suggest, to warrant being called a “paradigm shift”.

§2

The most striking change, I would say, is in the representation of human life as a matter of natural history in its relation to the realm of nature. For the truth is that, despite all the stuffed animals, fossils, minerals, and skeletons, despite all the exhibitions of animal and plant life, in the final analysis, the Museum exists as an historical monument to a seemingly persistent, forever unsettled problematic, a forever controversial answer to the forever renewed anthropological question that defines the modern world: “What is Man?” And, consequently, also, the question “What is Man in relation to nature?” or, in other words: “What is Man as a being that inhabits, and belongs to, the realm of animal nature?”⁷ Thus, I think we must recognize that, insofar as it is conscious of its mission, the Museum is an institution that registers our anthropological self-understanding at a specific historico-cultural moment. In fact, what it presents reveals far more about us than it does about the minerals, plants and bestiary that clamour for our attention and entertain, if not also inspire, our young children. My childhood consciousness of this anthropological intention was however obscured by my fascination with a realm of nature supposed to be separate and apart, not autonomous like the realm in which I and the other recognizably human beings dwelled. But who are we? What kind of natural being are we? And how should we inherit and bequeath the realm of nature in which we live and on which we depend?

In the second of Kant’s three critiques, the *Critique of Practical Reason*, the philosopher poses three questions he wants to address: “What can I know?” “What ought I to do?” and “What would it be reasonable for me to hope for?” In his *Logic*, however, he asks a fourth question: “What is Man?” If, though, ones reads his *Anthropology* with that ques-

⁷ See Edmund Husserl’s exploratory reflections on nature, animality, human nature, and the human embodiment, in: Husserl, E. (1952), *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie* (ed. Marly Biemel). Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, Book II.

tion in mind, one will be disappointed to find what today must be recognized as culturally bound, culturally prejudiced reflections failing his own moral test of universalizability, failing the great eighteenth century project of Enlightenment. But, as Aristotle's definition of the human as a rational animal, or an animal endowed with the gift of language, implicitly reveals, the enigmatic intersection of human nature and nature has always been the subject, since time immemorial, of heated controversy. Besides scholarly debates about geological dates, classificatory systems, taxonomies, origins, genealogies, and evolutionary patterns, New York's Museum of Natural History, like the natural history museums of Western Europe, has been at the very centre of politically charged debates over the definitions and representations of races and ethnicities, along with debates over the theory of evolution and its representation of our relationship to the species to which we have given the name "animals".

In the New York Museum I visited recently, once again living near it—indeed now virtually in its shadow, I find that the scientific evidence for the story of evolution is more meticulously, more intricately, more compellingly documented than it was in the past, whilst also being explained and exhibited with much more caution and delicacy, and much more attention to the counter-arguments. The theory of evolution is still confronting us with questions for which we have no satisfying answers. We still do not know how planetary life could have arisen from the chance conjunction of nature's elements, inanimate matter. And whereas, in my childhood, the Museum was not sufficiently careful to avoid giving the impression that the indigenous tribes scattered around the globe could be thought of as in some ways primitive or savage, unable or unwilling to rise above the condition of animal nature, the Museum of the present not only avoids this blindness, this morally offensive arrogance, but makes a great effort to present these peoples in a way that encourages, beyond mere sympathy, genuine admiration for their skills and intelligence, and no small measure of understanding in regard to their ways of life. Above all, the Museum of the present is much more careful in its representations of the different "races" and "ethnicities", exposing the untruths concealed within old myths and prejudices, calling attention to the numerous difficulties that research encounters trying to define in strictly genetic and evolutionary terms the very concept of race,

documenting scenes from the history of wars, crusades, and massacres motivated by racial and ethnic hatreds, and representing the brutal realities of the trade in slaves without diminishing any of the terror. Thus, even when visitors are confronted with the undeniable “otherness” of other races, ethnicities, tribes and cultures, what they have been given to see in the museum is their irrefutable sharing and participation in a universal humanity. A new stage in the dialectic of Enlightenment seems to have been thereby attained.

My argument for a paradigm shift will be, here, essentially anecdotal, although, as will become apparent, I have drawn extensively on Michel Foucault’s thought, in particular, his historical analysis in *The Order of Things* (1966), and have benefited more than I can acknowledge here from Friedrich Schelling’s *Treatise on Human Freedom* (1809),⁸ Walter Benjamin’s Schellingian account of natural history in *Origin of the German Mourning Play* (1928),⁹ Theodor Adorno’s essay on “Natural History” (1932),¹⁰ the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947) that Adorno worked on with Max Horkheimer,¹¹ and the writings of Martin Heidegger, especially his 1929–1930 seminar, published under the title, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*,¹² in which, among other things, he struggled with the question of animality, a question that, inseparable as it is from the peculiarly obscure question of human nature, he found it necessary to leave in many ways unresolved. But perhaps the intractable character of the problem, its resistance to resolution, stems from Heidegger’s metaphysical assumption, which he will never seriously challenge, that, between human beings and the [other] animals, there is an absolute abyss of difference. Every time Heidegger’s thinking drew him inexorably near the topic of our embodiment, the philosopher

⁸ Schelling, F. W. J. (1936), *Treatise on Human Freedom*. Chicago: Open Court.

⁹ Benjamin, W. (1998), *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. London: Verso, New Left Books.

¹⁰ Adorno, T. W. (1984), “The Idea of Natural History,” *Telos* (Summer 1984), nr. 60, pp. 97–124. Also see his discussions of natural history in the 1944 Adorno, T.W. (2002), *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Stanford University Press; a work written in collaboration with Max Horkheimer, and his 1966 work, Adorno, T.W. (1973), *Negative Dialectics*. New York: Continuum.

¹¹ Adorno, T.W. and Horkheimer, M. (2002), *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

¹² Heidegger, M. (1995), *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, and Solitude*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

deferred the questions, unwilling to give them the rigorous thought they demand. Whilst taking Aristotle's ontological definition of the human being—mankind understood as the “rational animal”—as his starting point and arguing forcefully against biological reductionism and the racism it can be treacherously used to legitimate, Heidegger was never able to illuminate the nature of human embodiment. And this meant that he was never able to approach a compelling ontological representation of the being of “Dasein” as human nature.

This ontological difference between human being and animal being—the difference that Heidegger and many of his predecessors turned into a metaphysical difference—is called into question in Franz Kafka's short story, “A Report to an Academy,” in which a creature living like human beings reports to an assembly of scholars and scientists about his former life as an ape. Captured in the wild forests of Africa, he was brought back to the “civilized world” as an object for research. Longing to escape the cage into which, for most of his time, he was kept locked, he found entertainment and distraction undertaking his own research, carefully observing and studying the comportment, the manners and gestures, of the human species, represented, of course, by his captors. Gradually, he succeeded in imitating, or aping them so cleverly that he was released from his cage and mingled with this strange, other species. But the more he took part in the life of human beings, the more he questioned the “freedom” he once imagined to await him outside that terrible cage. Did he merely exchange one cage for another? Kafka leaves us to brood on this question. What is culture, he wonders, if not a sophisticated form of aping—the transmission and inheritance of repetitive cultural patterns, embodied in gestures, bearing, and speech?

Years later, Vladimir Nabokov, asked about the inspiration for one of his novels, related this story, perhaps with Kafka's story in mind. His account, supposedly drawn from memory, was subsequently determined to be one more of his impish masks, a fictional subterfuge:

As far as I can recall, the initial shiver of inspiration was somehow prompted by a newspaper story about an ape in the Jardin des Plantes, who, after

months of coaxing by a scientist, produced the first drawing ever charcoaled by an animal: this sketch showed the bars of the poor creature's cage.¹³

What are we, we human beings? What is our nature? What is our place in nature? What should that place be? What wisdom, in regard to these questions, can a museum of natural history impart? As Kant argues in his third Critique, there are limits to what we can learn about nature by way of "determinate reflection". This mode of cognition was deemed appropriate for the acquisition of empirical knowledge about the world; but Kant appreciated that it could not adjust to recognize the aesthetic and ethical dimensions of our experience of the world. In particular, it failed to take account of our experience of purposiveness in nature and in ethical life. *A fortiori*, it could not illuminate adequately and appropriately the intricate dialectic, the intertwining, of nature and human beings that is represented by the concept of "natural history".

§3

For many years, it has been accepted as fact that myth was not only a precursor of science, but itself an archaic type of science: myths form, after all, coherent systems for describing, explaining, predicting, and understanding the natural world. However, whereas modern thought arrogantly assumed that it had left the mythic completely behind, as nothing more than a fascinating relic of our benighted past, Adorno argued, I think compellingly, that myth and science are, and have always been, inextricably intertwined, and that, accordingly, even our latest scientific knowledge, abundantly confirmed though it may be, retains traces and vestiges of mythic configurations. These mythic residues are representatives, he claims, of the prejudices, the unexamined, unchallenged ideological formations, secretly operating in our culture.

In this context, according to Adorno, a certain dialectic is at work: the dialectic, namely, between nature and history. In defining the concept of natural history in his 1932 essay, Adorno makes it clear that what concerns him is something distinctly philosophical: it is not a question

¹³ Nabokov, V. (1991), *The Annotated Lolita*. (Edited with preface, introduction and notes by Alfred Appell, Jr.). New York: Vintage, p. 311.

of the history of nature as an object of natural science; nor is it a question of the history of nature as an object of myth. Although he does not dispute the validity of these approaches to natural history, his concept is intended to recognize the dialectical intertwining of nature and history and, in keeping with this understanding, to set in motion an appropriate project for critical thought—critical social theory—to pursue. Specifically, the dialectical character of the concept is supposed to indicate the possibility that the diremption in which nature and history confront one another in seemingly irreconcilable conflict might be overcome or transcended. But how? We cannot avoid the catastrophic eventualities due to climate changes without fundamental changes in the way we live our lives: not only how we live in and with nature, but how we are to live with one another in order to protect and preserve the natural environment on which we will always depend.

Now, what I want to argue in this light is that the museum of natural history—I mean any such museum, not only the one in New York City—is an institution that, existing in the conceptual space formed by this dialectic, must somehow come to terms with, must somehow negotiate, the question of its legitimacy as an authoritative mediation of this constantly evolving, constantly shifting dialectic, not only showing history as taking place within nature, but also showing nature as historical, hence as a normatively constituted narrative—think of the Book of Nature metaphor here—always subject to conflicts of interpretation and rational debate. And perhaps, in this way, the museum of natural history could even contribute to overcoming or transcending the history of the metaphysical abyss separating the sympathies of human beings from the suffering of the animals that live without the gift of language.

For Georg Lukács, natural history calls our positivistic conception of an absolutely autonomous objective science into question: If reality is inherently dialectical, such that the enquiring subject and its object of enquiry are inextricably intertwined, how would it ever be possible for us to know and interpret the world that the positivist conception of natural science is logically committed to assuming, namely: a thoroughly reified, essential mortified object, a world from which we, as living subjects, must necessarily find ourselves estranged? In the Introduction to their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the authors, presumably at-

tempting to address this very problematic, call for a “remembrance of nature within the subject”: “Eingedenken der Natur im Subjekt”.¹⁴ A beautiful thought! But exactly what kind of remembrance is at stake? We must not hasten to the more obvious answers. For it is surely not what is involved when I remember to carry my umbrella; nor is it what is involved when geology and biology record for future reference the facts established by their research. As Walter Benjamin argued in writing to Max Horkheimer: “history is not simply a science, but also and not least the objects of a form of cultural remembrance [*Eingedenken*].”¹⁵ Hence the historical role of myths as resources of cultural memory. Adorno’s phrase “within the subject” provokes other no less importunate questions. Thus: What is the character of this “subject”? How would this remembrance affect it? How would it be carried, borne and sustained, by the subject? How would it “live”, as it were, within the subject? And finally, we must consider this: Are the existing museums, the existing institutions for keeping natural history in our memory keeping it in the right way? What would be the “right way”—if there is one? How might a museum of natural history be rigorously guided by, and appropriately reflect, its commitment as an institution to this kind of remembrance? Could the museum somehow contribute to the reconciliation of nature and history? Could the museum in any way facilitate the redemption of nature, a “fallen” nature that has since the emergence of human life suffered from our exploitation? For the time being, all that I can suggest as an answer is that this remembrance is ultimately a question of responsibility, a question that has the potential to transform the so-called “subject” in the most profound, most radical ways: raising consciousness of our historical responsibility for nature, raising consciousness of our responsibility for the history and destiny of nature, raising consciousness of our human history as a history that, since time immemorial, has

¹⁴ Adorno, T.W. and Horkheimer, M. (2002), *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 32; Adorno, T.W. and Horkheimer, M. (1971), *Dialektik der Aufklärung*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, pp. 38–39.

¹⁵ Benjamin, W. “Erkenntnistheoretisches, Theorie des Fortschritts,” in: *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. V, N8, 1, p. 589; Benjamin, W. (1999) “On the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress,” in: *The Arcades Project*, (trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin). Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Convolute N8, 1, p. 471.

taken place not merely within nature but in reciprocally consequential interaction with it. If, as I believe, the museum of natural history is an institutional guardian of cultural memory, then its remembrance of nature must be the source of a moral obligation for our protection and preservation of nature—an obligation corresponding to our indebtedness for nature's blessings. However, the "museum conception" of natural history that determined the exhibits in the museums of natural history from their earliest times until recent years was limited by its unexamined commitment to a paradigm of scientific knowledge that neglected this stewardship, this obligation. The mission of the museum must not be merely a question of accumulating, organizing, interpreting and presenting empirical knowledge; it must also be a place where we learn how to take care of nature, a place where we learn what that means for our form of life—and indeed for our sense of ourselves as beings both natural and human. This understanding of the mission is one that has, around the middle of the twentieth century, finally taken hold, reforming the natural history museum into a place where not only the rationality of determinate empirical judgement, but also the rationality of what Kant calls "reflective judgement" is encouraged and included in the processes of learning. Beginning with empirical data, with singularities, reflective judgement is a search for a fitting universality, a unifying, coherent meaning. By encouraging this form of judgement, the museum is supporting the search: the importance of questions, and not only answers; thinking, not only knowing; and perplexity, instead of certainty. A dialectical methodology.

§4

The story about natural history that Foucault wants to tell in *The Order of Things* commences with the humanism of the Renaissance, passes through what he terms the Classical period, the age of rationalism, roughly defined as beginning in the late sixteenth century and ending in the eighteenth, and culminates in the so-called Modern age of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when rationalism and idealism are challenged and the spirit of a new empiricism and skepticism prevails. Different "epistemes", that is, configurations of epistemology and

ontology, orders of representation, are characteristic of these different historical periods. In each of these epistemes, there prevails a distinctive methodology prescribing the normative conditions for truth and knowledge, and, correspondingly, a distinctive conception of reality, the possible realm of objects about which there can be appropriate claims to knowledge. Foucault's "archaeology" excavates these fundamental determinants of the different historical periods.

In the Renaissance, natural history was an ordering of resemblances, correspondences based on visible similarities, affinities, sympathies, analogies. Natural history was a hermeneutic science, the interpretation of signs and designs. What mattered were structures, not organic functions. Sir Thomas Browne's *Religio Medici* exemplifies the episteme of this time. The "fundamental task" of natural history consisted therefore in determining the essentially constant "arrangements" and "designations". As such, it was a science that remained for the most part at the level of description: description strongly influenced by myths, legends, anecdotes, and superstitions.

What Foucault names the Classical age repudiated these influences in the name of Reason. It was an age of supposedly rational classifications, orders manifest in the very nature of things. It was an age that believed in "a homogeneous space of orderable identities and differences", identities and differences lucidly visible to the natural, but nevertheless rational eye. [OT 268] It recognized that, in the course of their history, natural species have undergone structural alterations, amendments of adaptation; but it did not yet have the concepts to think about evolutionary transformations and took the mutations they perceived to be totally preordained according to taxonomic tables the transparent classificatory ordering of which is eternally fixed and eternally true. Hence it refused to take into account both the historicity of nature—the "nature" it presented, and the historicity of its own methods of enquiry.

In the Classical age, Renaissance and Baroque descriptions of resemblances, correspondences and affinities and classifications by structure were replaced by rationally organized empirical procedures and explanatory schemes. It was now the investigation of more objectively determinable identities and differences that fascinated. However, despite its declared commitment to empiricism and its recognition that taxono-

mies are always in part conventional and that consequently the order of things in themselves cannot guarantee the connection between signifier and signified, this age remained under the spell of rationalism; and it continued to have faith in a universal science of nature grounded in eternally true rational laws precluding chance and merely probabilistic events.

The theory of evolution, together with major discoveries in many of the other natural sciences, ended the Classical age and created an epistemic and ontological revolution in science that brought about historically earthshaking repercussions the significance of which passed into a cultural life far beyond the predictive powers of the sciences. The sciences of nature gained immeasurable power and prestige in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In what Foucault terms the Modern age, a radically new episteme took over: evolutionary models made their appearance; genealogical discontinuities and instabilities were now recognized; chance and relativity were no longer outlawed; visible organic events gave way to deeper, more invisible processes; probabilities and contingencies were acknowledged, and science itself became historical and interpretive.

Foucault's story, his archaeology, ends with the Modern age, mostly represented by events in the nineteenth century. Should we therefore contemplate a Post-Modern age, beginning, say, around the late 1960's and continuing to evolve? In the context of his story, such an age would, I think, be defined by virtue of its radical recognition of difference. It would be the time of the Other. It would be the harbinger of a time when it is no longer morally permissible to make "Man" the measure, the anthropological point of reference for natural history. As we leave the episteme of the twentieth century behind us, essentialism, the assumption of universal sameness, has finally revealed its secret truth, and that truth is violence. This, I take it, is what Foucault means when, in his "Preface", he says, cryptically and coyly, that "Man" is merely a recent invention—an invention, that is, of the Modern period, and is destined soon to vanish, replaced by a new episteme, a new form:

Strangely enough, man—the study of whom is supposed by the naïve to be the oldest investigation since Socrates—is probably no more than a kind of rift in the order of things, or, in any case, a configuration whose outlines

are determined by the new position he has so recently taken up in the field of knowledge. Whence all the chimeras of the new humanisms, all the facile solutions of an “anthropology” understood as a universal reflection on man, half-empirical, half-philosophical. It is comforting, however, and a source of profound relief to think that man is only a recent invention, a figure not yet two centuries old, a new wrinkle in our knowledge, and that he will disappear again as soon as that knowledge has discovered a new form. [xxiii]

Writing in 1932 about the history of morality and religion, Henri Bergson gives unequivocal expression to the impossibility of getting, as it were, to the very “bottom” of the enigma that is “Man”, uncovering in the so-called “primitive” peoples of the earth that pure essence of humanity in which the animal nature of the human as such would appear:

Are the “primitive” peoples we observe to-day the image of that humanity? It is hardly probable, since nature is overlaid, in their case as well, by a layer of habits that the social surroundings have preserved in order to deposit them in each individual.

“But,” he goes on to say,

there is reason to believe that this layer is not so thick as in civilized man, and that it allows nature to show more clearly through it.¹⁶

He puts scare-quotes around “primitive”, but none around “nature”: he still assumes the discernability of distinct layers. By the end of the twentieth century, this assumption will no longer be made without evoking vigorous scholarly ridicule.

Contemplating, in his “Conclusion” to *The Order of Things*, the indications already apparent of a paradigm shift in the “fundamental arrangements of knowledge”, Foucault speculates that,

If the existing arrangements were to disappear as they appeared, if some event of which we at the moment can do no more than sense the possibility—without knowing either what its form will be or what it promises—were to cause them to crumble, as the ground of Classical thought did, at the end of the eighteenth century, then one can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea. [387]

¹⁶ Bergson, H. (1935, 1949), *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*. New York: Henry Holt & Company, p. 117.

However, if my recent experience in the New York Museum of Natural History can be trusted, the epistemic shift that Foucault, writing in the middle of the last century, rather grandly and extravagantly prophesizes, as if he were announcing some new conception of eschatology, has already come to pass. And this is why I find myself tempted to think that, in terms of Foucault's historiographic model, we are living—already now—in a Post-Modern world, despite so many reasons to resist that all-too-voguish terminology.

§5

Returning to the Museum after so many years absence, I was completely disoriented. I had expected—quite unreasonably, as of course I realize in retrospect—to find my way around without difficulty, taking pride in my familiarity with such an awesome institution. Gone, however, were the huge, solemn halls with their grand windows and overwhelming spaciousness, welcoming the natural light of day to fall gently on the rows of rectangular glass cases, each one carefully presenting its specimens, its objects, exactly labeled, neatly displayed, in some perfect geometric order. The halls themselves, slightly stuffy, dusty and musty, where not a breath of air stirred, subtly conveyed to the senses, almost at a subliminal level, the impression of a mausoleum or a sepulcher—in any case, a solemn and sober place, quite intimidating for a child, where one must honour the possessions and the claims of absolute knowledge. Entering these halls, where a heavy, hushed silence prevailed, felt like entering a strange temple: a temple, however, without any gods, where one will have come to worship in wonder and awe the irrefutable triumphs of science.

And on display in the glass cases, all the known entities that appear in our world. In the halls with smaller cases, moths and butterflies, meticulously mounted, delicate wings delicately spread; insects of all sizes, shapes, and colours; fossilized trilobites, primitive fish and arachnids; and dazzling formations of crystal and iridescent stones. And in the halls with the much larger display cases, either aligned in rows, with one series running the central length of the hall and two other series placed along the walls, or else occupying the walls floor to ceiling: petrified

skeletons of reptiles and mammals, simulacra of prehistoric animals and the carefully embalmed bodies of mountain lions, wolverines, foxes, and other slowly vanishing denizens of our increasingly denaturalized world, placed in artificial reproductions of their habitats.

The Museum of Natural History was intended to exhibit the history of nature, including the history of “Man” and the “nature” of “Man”. But there was nothing at all “natural” about the history it reported. The artificiality, the fundamentally interpretive or hermeneutical character of the Museum was artfully concealed—as much as possible. In the enchantment of my childhood years, though, I was not aware of this artificiality, this cultural constructedness. Nor did I grasp the significance of the fact, so obvious and so significant for me now, that everything in that Museum was either inanimate or dead. No wonder that the halls vaguely felt more than a little like funerary monuments! Every living thing there had succumbed to its ultimate fate and returned to the immobility of the inanimate, the stone-like, forever petrified. Dead nature. The grizzly bear is standing up, as if to give warnings of his wrath; but he is dead and will never move, never gesture, never chase and threaten. The red-tailed hawk spreads its glorious wings; but it will never fly, never move from its perch. Butterflies, like magical apparitions when fluttering over a garden of flowers, would now evoke nothing but death were I to see them exhibited today as they were exhibited when I was a child. The Museum of Natural History was all about death—but that is a part of the story that the museum never told—never wanted to tell, or perhaps never even thought of telling. Dead nature. Until now!

Now, all the cabinets of curiosities with their painstakingly researched displays of dead nature, were removed from sight, consigned, in a kind of second burial, to their sepulchral vaults in the basement deep underground.

Not only, though, is there nothing “natural” about the exhibitions of nature in the museum of natural history; but in the older Museum of my childhood, the history of nature was told as if that history were without its own historicity. Artifacts were of course dutifully, exactly dated, bones and fossils were dated; earth and rock samples were dated, registering the periods of geological time. And yet, the history of natural history was itself left without any acknowledgement of its role in the

production and institutionalization of the scientific knowledge that the museum presented.

To the deadness of nature, there corresponded a certain conception of knowledge—a conception that, until the consciousness-raising, consciousness-rescuing revolutions of the 1960's, retained and perpetuated some of the epistemological convictions and ontological commitments of Enlightenment rationalism, the spirit of which inaugurated the Modern period. The glass that enframed the exhibits bespoke the rationalist ideal of transparency; the lawful orderliness of the exhibits proclaimed an unquestioned faith in the laws—and indeed, the lawfulness and systematicity—of nature; the labels implied a knowledge of absolute certainty. The displays in their entirety suggested totality, completeness, even finality. In fact, despite all its specimens, all its exhibits, the Museum of my childhood was still, by Foucault's criteria, not fundamentally challenging old rationalist-idealist assumptions.

Herakleitos, the pre-Socratic philosopher from Ephesus, is supposed to have declared that nature loves to hide. This assertion is not representing nature as if it took part in a game for children of hide-and-seek; rather, it was an attempt to express his recognition of the finitude of our knowledge—and to warn, accordingly, against efforts to force nature to surrender all its treasures, all its mysteries. Science, he thought, must respect, must indeed protect and preserve, the hiddenness of nature, the withdrawing of nature into the mystery of its self-concealment. In "The Age of the World Picture" and "The Question of Technology", Martin Heidegger reiterated this warning, arguing that, in attempting to turn nature into an object of total control, total availability, total knowability, our civilization is risking a grave danger—the danger that, after Nietzsche, he called nihilism.¹⁷ In the Modern age, the natural history museum exposed nature—at least implicitly—to the vision of total visibility. And the glass cases and carefully constructed stagings of nature conveyed, even if not with intention, the impression that nature could

¹⁷ See: Heidegger, M. (1977), "The Question Concerning Technology" and "The Age of the World Picture", in: *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*. New York: Harper & Row.

always be made to stand still for us—in other words, it could always be made into what Heidegger termed an available “standing reserve”.

Since the early years of modern natural science, when the possibility of achieving a rigorously unified, systematic knowledge of nature in its totality seemed to be an eminently rational and empirical assumption, we have learned a certain degree of humility. But there are still many, today, who will defend the idea of a program of research that aspires to unify all domains of knowledge, all universes of discourse, not just the natural sciences and the human sciences, but indeed even the humanities, according to an evolutionary paradigm ultimately reducible to biochemistry, physics, and mathematics. (Consider in this regard E.O. Wilson’s argument for “consilience”.) As an ideal, the unity of the natural sciences is not necessarily something to be repudiated. But reductionism for the sake of such unity is problematic. Such unifying reductionism has, no doubt, a certain aesthetic appeal; but the understanding of life that it must sacrifice is of incalculable value, much too important to lose. In the final analysis, such a program, such an ideal, could succeed only by constructing a unity in which knowledge would become, once again, knowledge only of the dead. We need a science that serves the flourishing of animal, plant, and human life—we need, as the Jena Romantics of the early nineteenth century proclaimed, a rigorous science that is also, as it were, a form of poetry—what Friedrich Schlegel would call a “sympathetic” science.

The natural history museums of the Renaissance, the Classical age, and the Modern age were made for viewing; they were constructed for only one of the five senses. What do we *see* when we look into exhibitions framed in glass cases? Reified nature, a nature to be conquered, mastered, and possessed, totally accessible to the grasp of knowledge. In the post-1960’s, Post-Modern Museum, everything has changed. Whereas, the museum of the Modern age privileged the all-knowing, totalizing, sovereign gaze, encouraging systematic contemplation as mastery and domination, the Post-Modern promotes interactions, engagements, questions. Whereas the exhibitions in the museum of the earlier period often could give the impression that there are certainties, totalities, essentialities, and universals, the exhibitions in the museum of the present encourage more questions and more skepticism with regard to these as-

sumptions, urging attention to significant differences more than to obvious but superficial similarities, identities, and unities. Whereas the earlier museums did not sufficiently challenge absolutes, the Post-Modern is comfortable with relativisms, probabilities, even randomness and coincidence. And whereas the older museum was unhappy with fragments of knowledge, the contemporary museum is willing to admit them.

But there can be no doubt, I think, that the most obvious, and also most important difference between the older Museum and the one with which I have recently become acquainted is that, because of our extraordinary advances in technologies, the exhibits are no longer silent, petrified, and dead: at long last, they have come to life, have become sites of dialectical interaction with a living nature, where visitors can not only question, explore, and experiment, but also learn how this nature is affected by different types of interaction. The significance of this difference is that it raises the hope that the younger generations visiting the museum of today will have a deeper understanding of their place in natural history and, in consequence, a greater sense of responsibility for the future well-being of nature. Nature is a sacred bequest from one generation to the next. So too is our quest to understand it.

§6

“Natural history” is a concept that is, I suggest, peculiarly appropriate for the conceptual interpretation of our time. If, on the one side, it would remind us of the truth that what we call “nature” exists only, in fact, in relation to a world that we human beings have constructed and that the only “nature” accessible to us is a “nature” constituted in terms of our history, on the other side it would remind us that our historical being takes place within the realm of nature and that, therefore, all our institutions, in fact, the entire world that since time immemorial we have struggled to build, will, as they must, succumb to the fate of all things natural: decay, corruption, ruination—in a word, finitude. In times past, the museums of natural history evaded this truth, despite the warnings from an earlier century, represented in the Baroque “still life” paintings, where, next to the abundance of nature, the artists would place a sobering human skull. True, the Classical museums showed skel-

etons, mummification, funerary artifacts, and burial sites; but the impression they ultimately sought to convey was one of defiance: enlightenment, science, will eventually triumph over death, the final power of nature. Today we no longer evade the truth: finitude, mortality, the precariousness—despite the progress in our sciences, our technologies, our cultural enlightenment—of all natural forms of life. And yet, this wisdom is endangered by the very interactions that I have welcomed. For if the interactive technologies that today's museums provide can not only show their visitors more knowledge than they can possibly absorb, can adumbrate realms of ignorance and limitations to our knowledge, and even reveal in very immediate ways the consequences for nature of our different possible interactions with it, they can also, unfortunately, encourage, instead of humility and a recognition of our responsibility, a false and dangerous feeling of empowerment—as if, with the pressing of a button or the turning of a handle, we could manipulate a passive, compliant nature to satisfy all our desires.

To its credit, the Museum in New York, conscious, like other reconstructed museums of natural history, of this challenging dialectical aporia, is constantly endeavouring to create exhibits that can encourage a “remembrance of nature in the subject” and secure an abiding sense of our responsibility as guardians of a nature that our knowledge, despite its impressive vastness, will never completely master. Moreover, the museum of natural history must also reflect, and reflect on, the fact that the museum is itself a fragment of natural history: an institution with a responsibility to show its own role in the history of interpretations of nature and its own interventions, as an institution of research, in the historical fate of nature. In other words, what, in distinction to the Modern museum of natural history, the Post-Modern museum embodies above all is, I think, a stronger and sharper recognition of the Other—hence, the indeclinable responsibility to raise and sustain provocative questions regarding the objectives and the consequences of our interactions with nature and no less provocative questions about the variables and invariables of human nature.

This is, in the broadest sense, a matter that concerns the political vocation of the museum, because the natural history museum has become what it always already was, a point of reference, a center, around which

a community can examine not only its diverse belief-formations—its superstitions, prejudices and presuppositions, its hopes and articles of faith, especially with regard to its conception of human nature and its recognition of the Other, whether that be other human beings, other animals, the other forms of nature, or the realm of the transcendent; it can also examine its rituals and other social-cultural practices, all the amazingly diverse and complex systematicities through which creaturely life is formed into meaningful experience, a coherent design, as natural history.¹⁸

§7

The natural history museum has from the very beginning been an institution organized for research—a function that the visiting public tends to forget. Now, as the natural history museum transforms itself into a research institution of the twenty-first century, it is beginning to look into the past with a complex of new materials, new instruments, new techniques, and new concepts. Unquestionably, one of the most powerful and most promising involves the analysis of DNA samples extracted from all the dead life in its keeping.¹⁹ There is an immeasurably vast wealth of biological information kept in the skins and skeletons and other organic matter that the museums have been preserving. Within the next five years, it is anticipated that museums will be able to sequence the entire genomes contained in many of their specimens; and they will be able to contribute to our understanding of evolutionary patterns in ways that today are nothing but the fantasies of science fiction. This information can serve not only to reveal a prehistoric past; it can, and will, also benefit the future of the planet, for, among other things, it makes possible much better maintenance and stewardship of presently

¹⁸ Some of the reflections formulated in this essay are explored further in “Damals: The Melancholy Science of Memory in W. G. Sebald’s Stories,” one of the chapters in *Redeeming Words: Language, Literature, and the Promise of Happiness in a Time of Mourning*, the book project, nearing completion, on which I am currently working.

¹⁹ For an overview of the possibilities and pitfalls of extracting DNA from museum specimens, as well as a review of studies that have applied the technique, see: Wandeler, P., Hoeck, P. E. A., and Keller, L. F. (2007), “Back to the Future: Museum Specimens in Population Genetics,” in: *Trends in Ecology and Evolution*, vol. 22 (2007), pp. 634–642.

living species, especially those threatened with extinction. And beyond this, who knows what other benefits for planetary life lie hidden in the collections of dead life that the museums have preserved?

In any event, the natural history museums of today have transformed themselves: in every way, it is influencing the future and not memorializing the past that is their ultimate concern. Even the way their visitor exhibits are designed serves this end, for they manifest, as never before, a lucid awareness that the children of today, which the exhibits enchant and teach, will one day be responsible for all the life on this glorious planet.

As what we call “nature” and what we call “history”—and their dialectical intersection in the force field of “natural history”—have become, as never before, matters of cultural contestation, the museum of natural history has correspondingly undertaken to transform itself into an institution where this contestation, and the freedom of thought it requires, can flourish. The museum of natural history that fits the Post-Modern episteme will make us, its visitors, endlessly question our assumptions about the natural and challenge our inheritance of history—and, above all, it will not only make us familiar with ourselves; it will also make us into strangers to ourselves, even revealing that in ourselves which is other than the “human” we have believed in. For in the museum of natural history, nature comes to appearance in all its beauty and sublime mystery, all its wildness and monstrosity, as a ceaseless challenge that not only demands knowledge, the continuing formation and refinement of our concepts and technologies; it also makes demands on our culturally instituted self-knowledge, our ethical capacity to respond to the needs, solicitations, and claims of the natural world. Indeed, if it is true that, as Kant declared in his third critique, *The Critique of Judgment*, in our experience of the awesome beauty and sublimity of nature a symbolic connection to morality is constituted, then it is manifest that nature has always already engaged our proto-moral sensibilities long before we were capable of moral judgment and the pursuit of natural science—indeed, I believe, even before the emergence of memory. I think that, more keenly than did the museums of earlier centuries, the contemporary Post-Modern museum recognizes the significance of this moral connection, this

“bonding” for the future of the planet and the civilization that depends upon its blessings.

The future will take the measure of whom we of today are, as individuals and as societies, by judging how we lived up to the moral responsibility towards which nature’s bounty and beauty have been directing us. Natural history will thus be the record of a fateful test of our moral resolve: how we respond to nature’s condition in learning how to live in nature and with nature as its appointed guardians. Natural history will be the record that reveals who we are and what we want to become. The fate of nature and the fate of our ethical life are forever bound up in a remembrance of nature in the subject.²⁰

²⁰ An earlier version of this essay was presented in February, 2010 as the year’s Aquinas Lecture at Manhattan College, Riverdale, New York. I am grateful to Professor Seamus Carey and the College for the opportunity to try out the thoughts presented here.

OUTSIDE AND IN: HEGEL ON NATURAL HISTORY

D a v i d K o l b *

Introduction

Hegel, so the story goes, was a philosopher of spirit, an idealist, interested in logic and society. So why should we pay much attention to what he might say about nature and natural history? We are told he said that nature has no history.

In Hegel's published works long volumes of lectures are devoted to history, religion, spirit, and logic. Nature is treated more briefly in the second part of his *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*. This text is dense, abbreviated. There are added notes taken from student records of Hegel's lectures, but these are not well linked with one another. The people who prepared Hegel's lectures for publication after his death apparently didn't feel the lectures on nature needed to be assembled together, whereas they synthesized (not always well) many years' lectures on history, art, and religion.

So why even ask about natural history in Hegel? There are several reasons. First, he does suggest novel ways to think about nature. Hegel was closely associated with Schelling and other figures in German Romanticism who had creative theories of nature, and while Hegel came to reject their overall views, he was marked by the encounter. Second, Hegel was interested in the science of his day and relatively well read on its developments and controversies. From our perspective, he took the wrong side on some of those controversies, but his comments on them remain interesting and often insightful.

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It remains true nonetheless that Hegel's is preeminently a philosophy of spirit, self-consciousness and culture. Not for him the romantic exaltation of nature in itself, and not for him Schelling's attempt to use categories derived from nature to understand spirit and history. For Hegel the dependence goes the other way, for nature shows us structures and processes that echo in primitive form the more developed processes revealed in culture and history.

Studying Nature

To find out about Hegel's conceptual analysis of the natural world, we look to his *Encyclopedia* and his *Science of Logic*. To find out what it means to live in nature and to be confronted by its energy and diversity, we look to his texts on art and religion. Hegel's rhetoric about the way nature enters our lives seldom sounds like a romantic exaltation of nature, and he does not believe in an unreflective life in unity with nature. Our goal not an immediate but a resultant connection.

A natural unity of thought and intuition is that of the child and the animal, and this can at the most be called feeling, not spirituality. But man must have eaten of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and must have gone through the labour and activity of thought in order to become what he is, having [opened up and then] overcome this separation between himself and nature. (EN par. 246z)¹

We need to distance ourselves from any immediate feeling of unity and mythological identification with nature, then reintegrate ourselves with nature by studying it and finding there the lineaments of spirit.

Hegel wants us to conduct a double study.² First we derive by a self-investigation of pure thought the logical categories required for thinking

¹ References to Hegel's philosophy of nature in the second part of his *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* are here abbreviated EN, followed by the paragraph number, followed by "z" if the extract is material added from Hegel's lectures. I have occasionally modified the translations.

² For discussions of Hegel's methodology, see the essays collected in: Houlgate, S. (ed.) (1998), *Hegel and the Philosophy of Nature*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, as well as Houlgate's own discussion of the philosophy of nature, in his (2005), *An Introduction to Hegel: Freedom, Truth and History*, Oxford: Blackwell.

about any being on any level. These are valid in both nature and culture. They provide the framework Hegel is willing to call “metaphysical.”

For metaphysics is nothing else but the entire range of the universal determinations of thought, as it were the diamond net into which everything is brought and thereby first made intelligible. Every educated consciousness has its metaphysics, an instinctive way of thinking, the absolute power within us of which we become master only when we make it in turn the object of our knowledge. Philosophy in general has, as philosophy, other categories than those of the ordinary consciousness: all education (*Bildung*) reduces to the distinction of categories. All revolutions, in the sciences no less than in world history, originate solely from the fact that spirit, in order to understand and comprehend itself with a view to possessing itself, has changed its categories, comprehending itself more truly, more deeply, more intimately, and more in unity with itself. (EN par. 246z)

Hegel calls the result of the logical investigation “the absolute Idea,” which is the involuted final category that includes all the others as its moments and aspects of its self-referential unity. The content of the absolute Idea is its own self-development. The final section of the logic reflects back on the earlier sections and discerns the dialectical motions of its subsidiary concepts, especially the move from concepts describing simple immediate presence, to kinds of mediated unities, to self-differentiating unities that hold together unity and diversity.

The key to understanding nature, for Hegel, is a prior understanding of the internal distinctions and divisions within this complex conceptual unity. Often he refers to it as *das Begriff*, which is etymologically “what grasps together,” and is the standard German word for “concept.” This is translated as “Concept” (sometimes, confusingly, as “Notion”), but it not a single concept such as “cow” or “cause” but more like a whole set of categories with their complex internal connections mutually constituting one another and describing their own logical connections and transformations.

Having derived categories that describe the way different kinds of being and unity come together, we then study how nature, as revealed by contemporary science, embodies the various moments of this complex movement. Logic comes first; we do not derive our basic categories from the always incomplete empirical sciences.

One must start from the Concept; and even if, perhaps, the Concept cannot yet give an adequate account of the “abundant variety” of Nature so-called, we must nevertheless have faith in the Concept though many details are as yet unexplained. The demand that everything be explained is altogether vague; that it has not been fulfilled is no reflection on the Concept, whereas in the case of the theories of the empirical physicists the position is quite the reverse: these must explain everything, for their validity rests only on particular cases. The Concept, however, is valid in its own right; the particulars then will soon find their explanation. (EN par 353z)³

We can trace how nature approaches more closely to spirit’s unity-in-difference as we study more and more complex natural systems and organisms. Hegel works with *a priori* definitions of what it means to be a mechanism, a chemical unity, an organism. He leaves to empirical contingencies just what develops to fulfill these definitions. He distinguishes the general categorial structure from the contingent detail of nature. The logic shows the general types that must be thought, but no natural being appears as only a general type. What philosophy provides is the general scheme, so we know, for example, that an animal organism must have subsystems for mobility, perception, for gathering energy from its environment. But whether it has two legs or eight, one eye or a hundred, and what precise species of bird it is, these are contingent details. Also, how the organism came to have its particular features is an empirical question that is not of philosophical interest to Hegel. Overall his investigation is more like devising a periodic table of the elements than an evolutionary tree. When he said that nature has no history he did not mean that individual species were eternal; he meant that the logical categories for nature’s general types were derived and valid in pure thought without reference to empirical history.

Put very abstractly, for Hegel spirit aims at becoming fully self-present to and in its own complex unity and development. That development requires that each of the basic moments and aspects studied by the logic be brought forth explicitly, be posited more or less independently on its own, and then be brought back into a larger overarching unity.

³ In: Kolb (2008) I discuss the ways in which the relation of the logical categories to nature has been wrongly interpreted as the operation of a separate level of causality, when instead their power is in defining the dispositions and potentialities of things.

Spirit develops by having all its logically necessary moments and movements posited “outside” and then brought “inside” its self-awareness.

In this development, everything is interdependent, despite initial appearances of separation. Nothing stands purely on its own; everything is mediated through relations and processes with other aspects, moments, and things that in their turn are mediated. Their interrelation may be simplified and mechanical, but there is always interrelation. There are no simple units that can be fully just what they are without any connection to anything else. There is no level of fundamental, totally independent atomic entities in nature (nor in psychology, thought, or society).⁴

Nature’s levels of increasingly complex empirical interrelations might be seen as developing over time. Hegel had little interest in whether or not they did. Nature’s fertility works both in the past and present; what was important for philosophy was not tracing the details of what developed from what, but showing how the different logical moments of spirit’s processes were embodied externally in nature’s immense variety.

Hegel was well aware of the bountiful variety of nature. He followed Aristotle in distinguishing the three broad categories of mineral, vegetable, and animal. However he was also aware that the world revealed by the microscope showed vast new ranges of living things, among which Hegel seemed most interested in plankton and other tiny creatures that show the ocean to be a natural womb from which life constantly emerges. “The fecundity of the Earth causes life to break forth everywhere and in every way” (EN par. 370z).

Hegel also read reports about types of animals that differed from those alive today. He interpreted the fossil record as showing extinct

⁴ Hegel was in every area opposed to theories that postulated a basic layer of isolated independent entities (material atoms, isolated sense data, pre-social rational individuals, self-contained concepts) with no necessary connections to one another and to larger unities. What is fundamental for Hegel is the logical structure of the processes of mediation and interaction. This led him to deny the atomic theory of chemistry as it was proposed at his time. He was mistaken, but his emphasis was correct. For even at that time the atomic theory was no longer a theory of fundamentally self-sufficient independent entities. Hegel pointed out how Newton’s theory of gravity compromised the strict independence of the atoms, and he saw that new observations of chemical and electric forces were also undermining strict atomism. He might feel vindicated today since our atoms are even less independent and self-sufficient; their particles are also waves and transform themselves into one another, while quantum nonlocal effects and decoherence indicate further entanglements that we do not yet fully understand.

species and experimental forms intermediate between the usual types. He claims these, along with present-day intermediate forms such as the platypus, reveal both nature's fertility and its inability to embody precise categorical distinctions.

Almost less even than the other spheres of nature, can the animal world exhibit within itself an independent, rational system of organization, or hold fast to the forms prescribed by the Concept, preserving them, in face of the imperfection and medley of conditions, from confusion, degeneration, and transitional forms. (EN par 370z)

The variety of nature exceeds the set of categories that Hegel argued are the *a priori* structure of nature. But far from this undermining the categories, it shows that in its externality nature is not able to embody the full complexities of the logical concept.

Outsides

Nature is the primal and ultimate "outside." The different levels and types within nature exist spread out in space, externally connected to one another. Individual natural things in their turn show sets of properties that may have no necessary connections.

The contradiction of the Idea, arising from the fact that, as nature, it is external to itself, is more precisely this: that on the one hand there is the necessity of its forms which is generated by the Concept and their rational determination in the organic totality; while on the other hand, there is their indifferent contingency and indeterminable irregularity. In the sphere of nature contingency and determination from without has its right. This contingency is at its greatest in the realm of concrete individual forms, which however, as products of nature, are concrete only in an immediate manner. The immediately concrete thing is a group of properties, external to one another and more or less indifferently related to each other. For that very reason, the simple subjectivity which exists for itself is also indifferent and abandons them to contingent and external determination. This is the impotence of nature, that it preserves the determinations of the Concept only abstractly, and leaves their detailed specification to external determination. (EN 250)

However, this externality is not the whole story. Hegel's picture of nature is a complex balance between individuals that show forth the differ-

ent aspects of spirit and interactions that link them into natural wholes. Nature's variety is not a pile of completely separate items. Gravity unites separated bodies into physical systems. Chemistry and electricity show how seemingly independent beings intimately influence one another. Different organisms form complex networks as they share space, rely on and prey upon one another. Yet these kinds of dependencies remain external and do not form a tight unity such as is found inside a single organism or in the history of self-aware individuals and cultures.⁵

At every level of nature the entire Concept is present, but not in its fully explicit and mediated unity. For instance, in the abstract consideration of matter we see both the self-division of the Concept, in the separate points of space, and its unity, in the gravity that holds space and its contents together.

To show the different levels of unity in nature, Hegel several times compares the solar system with an animal organism. In the solar system different aspects of the Concept are embodied in the different motions of the planets, moons, and comets, which exist as independent bodies externally related to one another. The unity of the system is expressed abstractly as the gravitational force that holds them together, and concretely in the existence of the sun as the center of the system.

The Sun, comets, moons, and planets appear, on the one hand, as heavenly bodies independent and different from one another; but, on the other hand, they are what they are only because of the determined place they occupy in the total system of bodies. Their specific kind of movement as well as their physical properties can be derived only from their situation in the system. This interconnection constitutes them in the unity that relates their particular existence to one another and holds them together. Yet the Concept cannot stop at this purely implicit unity of the independently existing particular bodies. For it has to make real not only its distinctions but also its self-relating unity. This unity now distinguishes itself from the mutual externality of the objective particular bodies and acquires for itself at this stage, in contrast to this mutual externality, a real, bodily, independent existence. For example, in the solar system the sun

⁵ Hegel does not follow the Stoics for whom nature as a whole is a single living organism, in which each thing keeps to its appointed role. Nature's externality means that there will be many different unities and kinds of unity, all expressing the Concept, but unable to come together into a whole in the way spirit can unify and totalize itself in politics and community, and more completely in art, religion, and philosophy.

exists as this unity of the system, over against the real differences within it. But the existence of the ideal unity in this way is itself still of a defective kind, for, on the one hand, it becomes real only as the relation together of the particular independent bodies and their bearing on one another, and, on the other hand, as one body in the system. (*Hegel's Aesthetics*, vol. I, 117–18)

Externality, unity, and interdependence can all be found in the solar system, just as in animal organisms. But in organisms the individual moments of the Concept are expressed in subsystems and organs that are more deeply interdependent and cannot exist independently on their own as do the planets.

The sun, planets, comets, the elements, plants, animals, exist separately by themselves. The sun is an individual other than the earth, connected with the planets only by gravity. It is only in life that we meet with subjectivity and the counter to externality. The heart, liver, eye are not self-subsistent individualities on their own account, and the hand, when separated from the body, putrefies. The organic body is still a whole composed of many members external to each other; but each individual member exists only in the subject, and the Concept exists as the power over these members. (EN par. 248z)

In organisms, there is no separate organ expressing unity, as does the sun in the solar system. The unifying principle of the organism is present in every piece but not itself identified with any one of them. The organism is thus a more complex expression of the logical process of unity in diversity. Yet the animal organism is not yet fully unified, for while animals have a sense of themselves as individuals, they have no conceptual self-knowledge.

What this comparison shows is how Hegel is constantly looking for how the variety of nature expresses logically defined moments of the Concept, as the externality of nature is overcome by more and more organic modes of unity. His understanding is top-down, for the principles of unity are fully expressed only in the most developed levels, whose development consists in expressing all the moments and their interrelations in their full concrete complexity.

In order to understand the lower grades, one must note the developed organism, since it is the standard or archetype for the less developed animal; for in the developed animal, every function has attained to a developed existence,

and it is therefore clear that it is only from this animal that undeveloped organisms can be understood. (EN par. 370z)

To our eyes Hegel's treatment of the variety of nature is a strange mixture of the *a priori* and the empirical. He is eager to read the latest discoveries about ocean creatures or geological features or chemical phenomena, yet on the other hand he does not attempt to derive his categories for nature from these phenomena, but rather to bring the categories already established in the logic to the phenomena. There may, of course, be a mutual cross-fertilization going on as he revises the logic, but the official method of the system is that a set of categories derived on their own is to be the lens through which we see and organize nature's incredible variety.

The infinity of forms of animal life is not to be rigidly conceived as if they conformed absolutely to a necessary principle of classification. On the contrary, therefore, it is the general determinations that must be made the rule, and natural forms compared with it. If they do not tally with it but exhibit certain correspondences, if they agree with it in one respect but not in another, then it is not the rule, the characteristic of the genus or class, which is to be altered, as if this has to conform to these existences, but conversely it is the latter which ought to conform to the rule; and insofar as this actual existence does not do so, the defect belongs to it. (EN par. 370z)⁶

Externality is nature's defining characteristic but also its weakness. Nature's unities are not inward enough to contain the full movements described in the Concept. Nor can nature keep to the strict divisions conceived in the logic.

In the impotence of nature to adhere strictly to the Concept in its realization, lies the difficulty and, in many cases, the impossibility of finding fixed distinctions for classes and orders by an empirical consideration of nature. Nature everywhere blurs the essential limits of species and genera by intermediate and defective forms, which continually furnish counter examples to every fixed distinction; this even occurs within a specific genus, that of man, for example, where monstrous births, on the one hand, must be considered as belonging to the genus, while on the other hand, they lack certain essential determinations characteristic of the genus. In order to be able to consider such forms as defec-

⁶ In the third edition of the EN this is par. 368

tive, imperfect and deformed, one must presuppose a fixed, invariable type. This type, however, cannot be furnished by experience, for it is experience that also presents these so-called monstrosities, deformities, intermediate products, etc. The fixed type rather presupposes the self-subsistence and dignity of the determination stemming from the Concept. (EN par 250)

This “impotence” of nature is also its strength, for nature’s overall role within the development of spirit is precisely to show forth externality, separation, and to provide the necessary framework and background on which spirit can erect culture and history.

Insides

Nonetheless, the transition from nature to spirit is not a Cartesian jump from a purely external nature to a purely internal soul. The unity of an animal organism is already internalized in the sensations of the animal, especially in higher animals who feel their own individuality and assert their own individual habits. Even magnetic and chemical phenomena show that natural beings have internal connections.

There is no sudden leap from the final paragraphs about nature in the *Encyclopedia* to the first paragraphs about spirit. Hegel starts his treatment of human spirit with animal feelings and environmental influences, and only gradually builds up to self-conscious thought.

On the social level, human culture develops by internalizing its earlier historical phases. Different partial moments of what will become a fully developed rational society have their time in the sun and then become subsidiary moments in more complex social formations. As opposed to nature, where the different moments are scattered about spatially and continue to exist on their own, in European history different moments succeed one another temporally. They appear as societies dominated by principles of unity and institutions based on partial aspects of the Concept: autocracy, slavery, feudalism, democracy, and so on. They eventually change due to their internal contradictions, and their principles of unity are retained as self-consciously secondary moments in new and more complex unities. So the struggle to the death that Hegel takes to be the initial form of the search for mutual recognition persists in modern society as the discipline in educational systems. Absolute

monarchical forms persist in a constitutional limited monarchy. Older forms have their one-sidedness and claims of totality cancelled as they take their places in a more adequate unity. The past is taken up anew. Spirit's ability to look back upon this history of its becoming completes its present-day self-understanding, and this presentation of itself to itself is a key to its complete development.

Nature does not perform such self-aware retrospection. In this sense, too, nature has no history. Recall that for Hegel, tribes and peoples do not "have a history" until they begin to reflect on themselves as a people and record unified narratives of their own development. A chronicle of events is not yet a history. Hegel sees primitive tribes and nomads as having developed through a sequence of events, but not as having a self-aware history.

In external nature, the more complex builds on the simpler, so more primitive kinds of natural unities do get taken up into more complex systems. But the simpler also remains independent. As we ascend the scale of nature toward the animal organism, we see simpler levels of nature incorporated, for instance when hydraulic and chemical processes are domesticated into the higher purposes of an organism. However there remain other free hydraulic and chemical processes occurring spatially scattered about on their own. Nature never comes together, neither spatially nor temporally. So although Hegel is no dualist, it is tempting to tie nature to outside and space, and culture to inside and time.

Inside Out, Nature's Time

However, Hegel's external/internal division is not as sharp as it might seem. There is spatial externality in culture, and there is a kind of external history in nature.

In his account of world history Hegel sees different cultural units remaining spatially exterior to one another. The Chinese, the Indians, the Africans are seen by Hegel as having become frozen at earlier stages of spiritual development. He never really explains why these cultures failed to progress, except by making Eurocentric judgments about the capabilities of other peoples. Nor does he explain how these scattered cultural "species" deal with one another, except to imply that the expansion of

European capitalism and colonialism may transform the older cultures as they are dragged into the worldwide market and civil society. In any case, the relations between different cultural units show a spatial externality of different moments of spirit's development scattered around the globe, similar to the mutual externality of natural phenomena.

On the other hand, nature includes its own modes of internalization and its own kind of temporality. When Hegel was writing in the 1820s, it was becoming evident that the earth had developed over a long time, with huge variations in its organic populations and geological forms. Looking at the developments in the new science of geology, Hegel asserted they showed a very long period, "and in the matter of years one can be generous" (EN par. 339z), during which the current geological face of the earth had been shaped by slow processes whose sequence can be read in the current formations.

If the strata written in rocks and hills show a temporal dimension, what about the fossils found in those rocks? Though Hegel rejected the theories of evolution current in his day, he did leave room for historical unfolding of the Concept. True, his overriding interest is in natural phenomena as examples for a table of necessary types and features. But given the empirical evidence he was willing to consider the possibility that different systems and levels of complexity may have appeared in history at different times.

Hegel knew contemporary theories of evolution. Unlike Darwin's they employed teleological descriptions of nature as moving from indefinite beginnings to highly differentiated organisms, culminating in humans. Although Hegel did not accept these theories, he admitted that it was possible that animal species emerged sequentially. His doctrine of the role of contingency in nature allows for flexibility in the handling of natural history. Hegel did not think that contemporary biology proved (or disproved) evolution. He regarded the origin of species as an empirical question that did not impact the crucial investigation of just what logical categories were necessary to comprehend nature. He said that even if organisms did evolve through a series of stages, that fact was not of philosophical interest. How things developed is a contingent matter; he was interested in what they are, and the necessary conceptual moments of the Idea.

The concept tirelessly and in a universal manner posits all particularity in existence. It is a completely empty thought to represent species as developing successively, one after another, in time. Chronological difference has no interest whatever for thought. If it is only a question of enumerating the series of living species in order to show the mind how they are divided into classes, either by starting from the poorest and simplest terms, and rising to the more developed and richer in determinations and content, or by proceeding in the reverse fashion, this operation will always have a general interest. It will be a way of arranging things as in the division of nature into three kingdoms; this is preferable to jumbling them together But it must not be imagined that such a dry series is made dynamic or philosophical, or more intelligible, or whatever you like to say, by representing the terms as producing each other. (EN par. 249z)⁷

Hegel knew that the earth had once supported quite different types of animals. His dominant interpretation of this was that nature in its impotence and inability to adhere to categorically necessary divisions had produced monsters and unsuccessful mixed forms, some of which have failed and some of which exist even now as do the platypus and marine mammals.

But there is more to be said, for nature does recapitulate itself, externally. One way is in the animal organism. But we can see that recapitulation clearly in the rocks. There we see an external internalization: geological formations are made out of older formations, and current

⁷ Theories of evolution in Hegel's day conceived of a goal-directed movement from undifferentiated to differentiated organisms. Hegel rejected this, though his logic agreed that beginnings in any sphere were relatively undifferentiated. His point against evolution was that the concepts of the fuller, more differentiated natural systems could be developed on their own in the Logic; they were not just variations of more primitive systems. The paragraph cited in the text continues: "Animal nature is the truth [the completion or richer reality summing up a process or development] of vegetable nature, vegetable of mineral; the earth is the truth of the solar system. In a system, it is the most abstract term that is the first, and the truth of each sphere is the last; but this again is only the first of a higher sphere. It is the necessity of the Idea that causes each sphere to complete itself by passing into another higher one, and the variety of forms must be considered as necessary and determinate. The land animal did not develop naturally out of the aquatic animal, nor did it fly into the air on leaving the water, nor did perhaps the bird again fall back to earth. If we want to compare the different stages of nature, it is quite proper to note that, for example, a certain animal has one ventricle and another has two; but we must not then talk of the fact as if we were dealing with parts which had been put together. Still less must the category of earlier spheres be used to explain others: for this is a formal error, as when it is said that the plant is a carbon pole and the animal a nitrogen pole" (EN par 249z).

formations show that sequence. Consider the strata revealed on a hillside. Hegel admits that it has taken eons for the geological formations to achieve that present form. He admits that their chronology can be read from the formations. And since Hegel claims that the different kinds of rocks and different geological formations express different necessary moments of the Concept, contemporary geological features sum up the necessary moments.

In the study of geology then, we must first direct our attention to the general mass of rocks and the Concept of the moments, rather than thoughtlessly enumerate the different kinds, straightway converting a small difference into a fresh genus or species. What is most important is to follow the transitions from one layer to another. Nature keeps to this order only in a general way and numerous variations occur, although the basic features of the order persist. Heim, with a truly philosophical view of the matter, has very clearly exhibited this transition, the breaking forth of one rock in another. (E 340z) ⁸

These different geological moments do not interact as do the necessary subsystems of an organism. Older formations are simply adjacent to one another, or have been deformed to lie on top of one another, or new formations been made out of fragments of the older. They incor-

⁸ Hegel's desire to see all the moments of the Concept revealed and summed up in contemporary geological formations means that he attributed more unity to those formations than we would do. Hegel also thought that whatever the empirical processes may have been, they are finished, now that they have produced an essentially complete repertory of species and geological forms. "There were events which shaped the present earth, but that becoming of the earth occurred in a kind of absolute past, something over and done with, which has now produced the repertory of rock types that reveal the moments of the Idea. Formerly, history applied to the earth, but now it has come to a halt: a life which, inwardly fermenting, had time within its own self; the earth-spirit which has not yet reached the stage of opposition—the movement and dreaming of one asleep, until it awakes and receives its consciousness in man, and so confronts itself as a stabilised formation" (EN 339z). We might connect this with the much discussed "end of history" in Hegel. Hegel does seem to think that whatever the defects of actual European societies of his day, the general principles of a fully rational and free society have now been developed. History has ended, in the sense that all the dimensions of social life have been revealed. This does not mean that events will not continue, as nations rise and fall. But the stage is fully set; no new principles are needed. Similarly, nature has revealed all its essential moments. What matters to Hegel are those moments; whether or not they developed in history is not as crucial to nature as it is to culture. So he can accept or reject evolution depending on the empirical evidence. But even if he accepted evolution he would not see the present as just one contingent stage in an ongoing process of change. See Kolb 2008 for a discussion of this point, and its connection to Hegel's curious silence about uniformitarianism in geology.

porate one another, rest upon and support one another, get folded into mountains, and show the transition from one rock type to another.

The hillside thus presents an external summation and history. The various moments and necessary kinds of rocks are scattered about in contingent ways but together the contemporary landscape reveals all the essential types. The mountain is not aware of the way it is composed of fragments of previous geological formations or of the way in which the different geological strata and formations express different moments in the processes of spirit. But that unity and those processes are there, externally united and recapitulated, open to be read and already formed into a historical "text."

There is no historian for this external text but there is a sequence; nature recapitulates its own temporality in an exterior history shown by coexistence and reuse in geology and by organic unity in the plant and animal kingdoms. This is not a history as written by a self-consciousness, but it bears some analogy to the non-history of those tribes and peoples who went from one event to another without proper recollections or self-awareness.

In concluding we should note that Hegel's treatment of nature's forms and levels does not yet enter into what has become an enormous discussion from Darwin and Nietzsche onward about how natural and social forms might emerge contingently without either teleological guidance or conceptual necessity. For these thinkers, externality invades the spiritual sphere. Hegel's play of externality and internalization continues but the ways in which later natural and cultural formations incorporate and reuse earlier forms resembles more the loose unities of external geological accumulations than the tight conceptual unities that Hegel sought.

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MASS EXTINCTION: SCHELLING AND NATURAL HISTORY

J a s o n W i r t h *

But this circulation goes in all directions at once, in all the directions of all the space-times opened by presence to presence: all things, all beings, all entities, everything past and future, alive, dead, inanimate, stones, plants, nails, gods—and “humans,” that is, those who expose sharing and circulation as such by saying “we,” by saying we to themselves in all possible senses of that expression, and by saying we for the totality of all being.

—Jean-Luc Nancy¹

One great ruin—In Schelling’s dialogue *Clara* (c. 1810), the doctor advises Clara that if one wants to witness ruins, one does not need to travel to the deserts of Persia or India because “the whole earth is one great ruin, where animals live as ghosts and humans as spirits and where many hidden powers and treasures are locked away, as if by an invisible strength or by a magician’s spell.”² Scientists now identify at least twenty mass extinction events, five of which are considered so cataclysmic that they are referred to collectively as the “Big Five” and during which time the conditions for life were cataclysmically altered. Although it is still a matter of some debate, the acceleration of global temperatures due to the increasingly industrial character of human life, the widespread destruction of non-human habitats, the alarming rate of rain forest devastation, and the general degradation of the earth and its resources, is precipitating a sixth. Indeed, the very character of life, given its ruinous history, leaves the earth scarred with fossilized vestiges of former ages of the world, a natural history of the wreckage of past life.

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¹ Nancy, J.-L. (2000), *Being Singular Plural*. (translated by Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O’Byrne). California: Stanford University Press, p. 3. Henceforth BSP.

² Schelling, F.W.J. (2002), *Clara*. (translated by Fiona Steinkamp). New York: State University of New York Press, p. 33.

Although Schelling could not have been aware of this current reading of the exuberantly profligate fossil record, nature's luxurious infidelity to its guests was not lost on him. As he mused in *The Ages of the World*: "If we take into consideration the many terrible things in nature and the spiritual world and the great many other things that a benevolent hand seems to cover up from us, then we could not doubt that the Godhead sits enthroned over a world of terrors. And God, in accordance with what is concealed in and by God, could be called the awful and the terrible, not in a derivative fashion, but in their original sense" (I/8, 268).³ There is something awful and terrible concealed within nature, and it haunts us through its remnants. Or to articulate it more precisely: what is haunting about the immense ruin of nature is not only that its remnants indicate what once was but is no longer, nor is it enough to say, as does the skeleton at the base of Masaccio's Trinitarian crucifixion (c. 1427) in Santa Maria Novella in Florence: "I once was what you are now and what I am you shall be."⁴ It is certainly true that the presence of the shell of past life speaks both to the past and to the past's capacity to speak to the future. Both of these moments, however, more fundamentally indicate something awful coming to presence concealed in each and every coming to presence, something awful in which all nature partakes as the paradoxical solitude of its coming to presence.

What all of nature shares, this awful and terrible concealment, is not a common and discernible essence or metaphysical property. Rather, it shares the paradox of coming to presence: each and every coming to presence, what each being shares in its own way, is therefore a solitary coming to presence. Each being is exposed as singular, or, as

³ Except where noted, all translations of Schelling are my own responsibility. Citations follow the standard pagination, which follows the original edition established after Schelling's death by his son, Karl. It lists the division, followed by the volume, followed by the page number. Hence, (I/I, 1) would read, division one, volume one, page one. It is preserved in Manfred Schröter's critical reorganization of this material. Schelling, F.W.J. (1856–1861) *Schellings Sämtliche Werke*. Stuttgart-Augsburg: J. G. Cotta; Schelling, F.W.J. (1927), *Schellings Werke: Nach der Originalausgabe in neuer Anordnung* (ed. Manfred Schröter). Munich: C. H. Beck. My translations of *Die Weltalter* originally appeared in: Schelling, F.W.J. (2000) *The Ages of the World*. (translated by Jason Wirth) New York: State University of New York Press. For citations of this work I also use the standard pagination and not the translation pagination, although the prior is embedded in the latter.

⁴ Io fui già quel che voi siete e quel ch'io sono voi anco sarete.

Schelling adapts Leibniz's *Monadology*, as a monad, as a "unity" or an "idea." "What we have here designated as unities is the same as what others have understood by *idea* or *monad*, although the true meanings of these concepts have long since been lost" (I/2, 64). The monad is the very figure of shared solitude, sharing the awful secret of the absolute as *natura naturans*, yet each in its unique fashion, each singularly. The monad is a particular that is not the instantiation of a higher generality, but rather each monad "is a particular that is as such absolute" (I/2, 64). The community that is nature, a terrible belonging together, is the strange *one* expressing itself as the irreducibly singular proliferation of the *many*, much in the way that Jean-Luc Nancy claims that the "world has no other origin than this singular multiplicity of origins" (BSP, 9).

This is not merely to mark the awful and terrible secret as a limit, as a threshold beyond which thinking dare not pass. As Nancy further reflects, "its negativity is neither that of an abyss, nor of the forbidden, nor of the veiled or the concealed, nor of the secret, nor that of the un-presentable" (BSP, 12). Merely to designate it as such is to designate it exclusively as the "capitalized Other" which marks it as "the exalted and overexalted mode of the propriety of what is proper," relegated to the "*punctum aeternum* outside the world" (BSP, 13). This is precisely what is denied in marking the terrible secret as *the terrible secret of nature*. It is everywhere and therefore everywhere different, the immense dynamic differentiation of the community of solitude that is nature. The "world of terrors" does not therefore merely mark abstractly a limit to thinking. It is the awful secret that expresses itself ceaselessly in and as the play of nature.

The plurality of the origin is not only the shared solitude of birth, but also the shared solitude of ruin. My essay takes as its prompt the phenomenon of mass extinction events, especially the seeming likelihood of the "sixth," but it does so in order to engage in a sustained reflection on Schelling's conception of *natural history*. As such, I will argue that for Schelling all history is ultimately natural history, all nature is radically historical, hence subverting the common bifurcation of history into human (or cultural) history and natural (or non-human) history.

The ascendancy of the Anthropocene Age⁵ is inadequately indicated as the triumph of culture over nature. In order to subvert this duality, I will consider carefully the difficult and prescient character of my two key terms: “nature” and “history.” For Schelling, the two terms are ultimately inseparable (that is, they belong together as a unity of antipodes). Already established in the early works of his *Naturphilosophie*, and dramatically developed in the 1809 *Freedom* essay and various drafts of *Die Weltalter*, nature is not a grand object, subsisting through time, and leaving behind it the residue of its past. Such a conception belongs to modern philosophy’s nature-cide by denigrating nature, reducing it to an object that can to some extent be pried open by scientific inquiry. Hence, nature stands *before* us as a vast conglomeration of objects and the laws that govern the manners of relation to each other. In contrast, as Merleau-Ponty later observed, Schelling “places us not in front of, but rather in the middle of the absolute.”⁶ Schelling’s retrieval of the question of nature is simultaneously the retrieval of the temporality of nature, including its cataclysmic dimensions, but also its transformative dimension for human thinking.

⁵ This is the now famous term coined by Paul Josef Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer in 2000 to describe the ascendant role of human manufacture in the prevalent geological character of the earth. The climate scientist William F. Ruddiman’s (2007) very provocative recent work, *Plows, Plagues, and Petroleum: How Humans Took Control of Climate* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press), makes a case that the Anthropocene is not coterminous, as Crutzen and others have argued, with the Industrial Revolution but rather the interaction between human population numbers (their rise and fall, including the effect of pandemics on overall population numbers), cultural practices (starting with things like deforestation for agriculture, which increases when population numbers increase), and the climate. The implication of his argument is startling: there is not an independent, pure, healthy, ideal climate that would exist independent of industrialization (for the latter merely shifts the direction of the effect of the Anthropocene Age, namely, towards the widespread heating of the planet), but rather that whether the earth is heating (post 18th Century) or cooling (the enigmatic Little Ice Age that began in the mid-14th Century), the climate of the Anthropocene is inseparable from the widespread presence of human culture. That is nothing less than to say: already at a meteorological level it no longer makes sense to divorce “natural climate” from “human cultural activity.” The two are rather parts of a more complex whole emerging out of the interplay of these two sets of trajectories. We are not *in* the climate as if it were our mere surroundings (environment). In some very real sense it makes more sense to say that we *are* (of and towards) the climate. It is a feedback loop in which the *anthropos* is the leading indicator species.

⁶ Merleau-Ponty, M. (2003), *Nature: Course Notes from the Collège de France*. (ed. Dominique Séglaard, translated by Robert Vallier). Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, p. 47.

After a preliminary and orienting reflection on the destructive element of time, I will turn to Schelling not by broadly canvassing the vast territory of his thinking, but rather by concentrating on a small number of texts. Although I will maintain an eye toward the explosive works of Schelling's transitional period, including the celebrated 1809 *Freedom* essay and the third draft of *The Ages of the World* (1815), I will also look into two early writings: "Is a Philosophy of History Possible?" (1798) as well as the beginning of the introduction to *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* (1797, revised edition, 1803).

It is in the latter that Schelling makes the remarkable claim that "Philosophy is nothing but a natural accounting of our spirit [*eine Naturlehre unseres Geistes*]" and that, as such, philosophy now "becomes genetic, that is, it allows the whole necessary succession of representations to, so to speak, emerge and pass before our eyes" (I/2, 39). In moving from the being of our representations to their becoming, to the dynamism of their coming to presence, we become present to the coming to presence of nature itself. That is to say, the organic, non-mechanistic temporality of nature's coming to presence, that is, nature naturing (*natura naturans*), comes to the fore. This in part yields a mode of access to the vast, paradoxically discontinuous yet progressive history of nature. As Schelling articulates it in *The Ages of the World*: "Therefore that force of the beginning posited in the expressible and exterior is the primordial seed of visible nature, out of which nature was unfolded in the succession of ages. Nature is an abyss of the past. This is what is oldest in nature, the deepest of what remains if everything accidental and everything that has become is removed" (I/8, 244).

Amid the current, heartbreaking and agonizing explosion of ruin, an event that, while staggering, is hardly unprecedented, accreting the already enormous record of wreckage, I turn to what is "oldest in nature." At the conclusion of the *Freedom* essay, Schelling designates nature as an "older revelation than any scriptural one," claiming that now is not the time "to reawaken old conflicts" but rather to "seek that which lies beyond and above all conflicts" (I/7, 416). Now is not the time to reawaken the "sectarian spirit" (I/7, 335), to pose one position against another, but rather to allow to come to presence, to let reveal itself, that which haunts every possible position. It is time for the most ancient

revelation, what is oldest in nature, to come forth. That the sixth biotic crisis is not unprecedented does not make it any less of a crisis. What does what is oldest in nature enable us to see regarding what is currently the anguish of our earth?

Sifting through ruins—If one were to drive to a museum of natural history, one could become aware of two ways in which nature is coming to presence. Parking the car, one could enter the museum and, if it is at all comprehensive, one can find preliminary indications of the ruinous discontinuity of nature in the remnants of earlier ages of the world. Nowhere is it more dramatically evident than when contemplating the fossilized remains of the great reptiles. Their size and power are haunting relics from a scarcely imaginable age, ghosts that speak not only of themselves, but of a lost world, a vastly different ecology of life. Although such things remain issues of scientific debate, the decline of the dinosaurs and the rise of the mammals are generally attributed to the fifth great biotic crisis, occurring some 65 million years ago, perhaps as the result of a collision with a meteor or a dramatic increase in volcanic activity. In either scenario, the ecology was drastically altered and the rate of speciation of macroscopic life was overwhelmed by its rate of extinction.

It is the macroscopic grandeur of the Cretaceous-Tertiary extinction event, with the disturbing and compelling specters of the rapacious Tyrannosaurus rex, the enormous Brontosaurus, and myriad other sublime creatures, that make the paleontology divisions of natural history museums the most gripping of haunted houses. The imagination reels all the more when it considers that the magnitude of this loss was greatly exceeded by the third great biotic crisis, which concluded the Permian age. This was the so-called “Great Dying,” which preceded the fall of the great reptiles by some 180 million years. If one then ponders the spectral record of the species that have died since the last great biotic crisis, the “fearful symmetry” of creatures like the saber tooth tiger or the woolly mammoth, or if one considers the plight of the beleaguered Florida panther or the Himalayan snow leopard, their endangered grasps on life symbolic of the immense pressure on so many different creatures, known and unknown, one then grasps the awful truth of what Bataille meant when he claimed that death “constantly leaves the necessary room

for the coming of the newborn, and we are wrong to curse *the one without whom we would not exist*.⁷ Death makes space for the progression of life, the awful secret of what is oldest in nature, haunting nature, progressing anew as *natura naturans*.

When one then, unsettled, leaves the museum of natural history, that repository “where animals live as ghosts and humans as spirits and where many hidden powers and treasures are locked away,” and gets back into one’s car, and navigates back into a great sea of automobiles, one could reflect that the car’s capacity for movement basically depends on fossil fuels. It profits from the very wreckage that had just been haunting one. Not only that, it partakes in a vast network of human industrial life that is exercising immense, even cataclysmic, pressure on biotic communities. Although the debates continue, there is a growing consensus among biologists that we are in the midst of the sixth great extinction event, with predictions running as high as the net loss of half of all macroscopic species by the end of the century. However, one’s automobile is not analogous to a comet or a volcano and catastrophic climate change cannot be attributed to an accident. We “are” the automobile and the wreckage of the earth is a symptom of our acquisitive wrath. *We are the natural disaster*.

Richard Leakey and Roger Lewin have bemoaned that we “suck our sustenance from the rest of nature in a way never before seen in the world, reducing its bounty as ours grows.”⁸ Not only is the rise of the human the diminishment of the earth, but the more we diminish the earth, for example, by clear-cutting rainforests for arable land, the more we increase our numbers, which means the more we need to diminish the earth, and so it continues in a deadly progression of self-destructive self assertion. “Dominant as no other species has been in the history of life on Earth, *Homo sapiens* is in the throes of causing a major biological crisis, a mass extinction, the sixth such event to have occurred in the past half billion years.”⁹

⁷ Bataille, G. (1991), *The Accursed Share*, volume I. (translated by Robert Hurley). New York: Zone Books, p. 34.

⁸ Leakey, R. and Lewin, R. (1995), *The Sixth Extinction: Patterns of Life and the Future of Humankind*. New York: Doubleday, 233.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

Is this self, exorbitantly sucking our “sustenance from the rest of nature,” that is, the self as the occasion of explosive ruin, clearly distinct from the self which gazes at the extravagant expenditure of life that haunts biotic relics? One might be tempted to say that in the first instance one finds oneself *against* nature and in the second instance awestruck, gazing *at* nature. Yet to stare *at* nature, as if it were simply *before* one, is to be no less opposed to nature than to be straightforwardly *against* it. In both instances one finds oneself *in* nature, that is to say, surrounded by nature, amid nature, as if nature were an environment. Nature appears as one’s environs when one measures one’s relationship to nature as an object distinct from oneself as a subject. Even when one is *in* nature, one is more fundamentally opposed to it, cut off from it, allowing one to gaze *at* it or act ruinously *against* it.

It is in this spirit of separation, of the Fall from the Garden of nature, so to speak, that the human gazes even at its own animality as something strange, distant, perhaps lost, and therefore looks at its community with non-human animals as somehow beneath the dignity of Aristotle’s “animal having *logos*.” The human knows itself as the *arche* of thinking only as the consequence of having risen *out of* or *above* nature. Such extrication or elevation, however, is not a clean escape, but a fundamental denial or obscuration of oneself, a turning away from oneself in order to elevate oneself above oneself. The vestigial self, left behind in the self’s movement toward self-presence, toward the pretence of autonomy, is not yet separated from nature. The “self” that one abandons in order to become distinctively and autonomously a self was not a self-standing self, extricating itself from nature in the act of cognizing itself. It was therefore a “self” at the depths not only of itself, but also of nature, something like what the Zen tradition has called the “original face”: “Before your parents were born, what was your original face?” This question, still studied in Rinzai kōan practice (*dokusan*, 独参), seeks to initiate the deconstruction of a self that has come to know itself as a self wholly in possession of itself.

The self-possessed subject, the self imminent to itself, has taken flight from the great life of nature. In the *Freedom* essay, this life on the periphery will be characterized, from the perspective of nature, as a sickness, and from the perspective of the human, as radical evil, the original sin

of human self-consciousness. This is the paradox of *Selbstbewußtsein* in post-Kantian thought: as soon as the self takes possession of itself, that is, as soon as it identifies with a phenomenal representation (*Vorstellung*) of itself, it loses itself. In direct contrast to the Cartesian position, the subjective self cannot take possession of itself as an object. Self-presentation leaves a trail of relics, without ever revealing what is being presented. How then does one think this ghostly subject haunting the relics of oneself? In some strange sense one can designate it as the ground of oneself, but then again, that is also to make this ground objective, to hypostasize it, even in calling it a thing in itself or some object = x. It is not a thing, neither of the noumenal nor the phenomenal sort.

In *The System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800), Schelling argues that the pure self, the self haunting the subject position, “is an act that lies outside of all time” and hence the question “is the I a thing in itself or an appearance [*Erscheinung*]?” is “intrinsically absurd” because “it is not a thing in any way, neither a thing in itself nor an appearance” (I/3, 375). It is literally *unbedingt*, that which has not and cannot become a thing within each thing. Translating *das Unbedingte* as “absolute” always risks hypostasizing *das Unbedingte* or rendering it vague, a night when all cows are black.¹⁰ Schelling was clear about this in his earliest writings. In *On the I as Principle of Philosophy, or Concerning das Unbedingte in Human Knowing* (1795), published when Schelling was twenty years old, he considered this an “exquisite” German word that “contains the entire treasure of philosophical truth.” “*Bedingen* [to condition] names the operation in which something becomes a *Ding* [thing], *bedingt* [conditioned], that which is *made* into a thing, which at the same time illuminates that *nothing through itself* can be posited *as a thing*. An *unbedingtes Ding* is a contradiction. *Unbedingt* is that which in no way can be made into a thing, that in no way can become a thing” (I/1, 66). *Das Unbedingte* comes to presence as things, but without revealing itself as anything. Hence in the 1800 *System*, we can see that from the perspective of the objective, seen among things, this is philosophy resuscitated

¹⁰ Hence, Iain Hamilton Grant (2006), in his *Philosophies of Nature after Schelling* (London and New York: Continuum), renders *unbedingt* literally as “unthined.” Despite its lexical exuberance, this is a watershed study of Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie* in the English-speaking world. Henceforth PON.

as genetic, as “eternal becoming” and from the perspective of the subjective, it “appears [*erscheint*],” itself a rather spectral verb, as “infinite producing” (I/3, 376), the free play of nature.

The pure self, the original face before your parents were born, is a non-subject haunting the subject (because the subject is in itself absolutely nothing). It “is” an *Ungrund*, to use Schelling’s deployment of Böhme’s phrase (I/7, 407), spectrally present, that is, present in its absence, within *Grund*. How does one face this all-consuming fire within oneself, and within all things, when it emerges, as did Krishna to the despondent Arjuna in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, as Vishnu, the mystery of mysteries, the royal secret, and finally as great Time, *mahā kāla*, the world destroyer? In the *Freedom* essay, Schelling will argue that *Angst* before the great matter of life, before what is oldest in nature, drives us from the center (I/7, 382). And as Schelling argued in *The Ages of the World*: “Most people turn away from what is concealed within themselves just as they turn away from the depths of the great life and shy away from the glance into the abysses of that past which are still within one just as much as the present” (I/8, 207–208).

The face of modern philosophy came to presence in abdicating its original face. In a sense one might hazard to say that its very existence was its original sin (the self falling from nature in its flight toward itself). Schelling was a close yet worried reader of modern philosophy and a defender of a radicalized Spinoza, one might even say, using the designation carefully, a post-modern Spinoza in the sense of a Spinoza that has been extricated from the limitations of what was thinkable within modern philosophy’s estimation of its grounding possibilities.¹¹ Schelling’s Spinoza, unleashing the spectral force of *natura naturans*, with its implicit post-Enlightenment reconfiguration of the philosophy of science, certainly invited ridicule from the prevailing theological orthodoxy, but it also put him at odds with the enlightened scientific standpoint, with its commitment to an autonomous subject (one is

¹¹ For a discussion of Schelling’s relationship to Spinoza, see my (2003) *The Conspiracy of Life: Meditations on Schelling and His Time*. New York: State University of New York Press, chapters two and three.

tempted even to say, the liberal capitalist subject) as both researcher of nature and moral agent.

In the *Freedom* essay, Schelling provocatively characterized all of modern philosophy as the impossibility of the question of nature even emerging as a serious question. “The entirety of modern European philosophy has, since its inception (in Descartes) the shared deficiency that nature is not present to it and that it lacks nature’s living ground” (I/7, 356–357). In resuscitating Spinoza, Schelling breathes life into his thinking, endeavoring to divorce the ground of nature in Spinoza’s thinking from any dogmatism. It is the very freedom at the heart of things that, as *unbedingt*, is what is oldest in nature, always older than its ceaseless coming to presence. It is a life beyond the life and death of things. It expresses itself¹² pluralistically as the shared or “natural” monadic solitude of the life and death of those things. Not only does this deconstruct a Newtonian mechanistic universe, that is, a universe of sheer necessity, adhering to *a priori* laws of nature, but it also deconstructs the autonomous moral subject, adhering to the laws of freedom or to the divine command of a transcendent creator God. “The moralist desires to see nature not living, but dead, so that he may be able to tread upon it with his feet” (I/7, 17).

Time and nature—Long before he became president, Thomas Jefferson knew of the remarkable mastodon fossils from what was called the Big Bone Lick (formerly in Virginia, now in Kentucky).¹³ Yet when he sent Lewis and Clark on their famous trip to the Pacific Northwest, he wanted them to find living mastodons. “Such is the economy of nature that no instance can be produced, of her having permitted any one race of her animals to become extinct; of her having formed any link in her great work so weak as to be broken.”¹⁴ The laws of nature, whether or

¹² On the problem of expressionism in Schelling, see my (2004), “Animalization: Schelling and the Problem of Expressivity,” in: *Schelling Now: Contemporary Readings of Schelling*. (ed. Jason M. Wirth). Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, p. 84–98.

¹³ Jefferson bequeathed the fossilized jawbone of a mastodon to the University of Virginia.

¹⁴ Both the anecdote about Lewis and Clark and the Jefferson quotation are from Elizabeth Kolbert’s (2009) essay, “The Sixth Extinction?” *The New Yorker*, May 25, 2009, p. 53. Henceforth SE. In her eloquent and eye-opening essay, Kolbert also speaks with the Harvard paleontologist Andrew Knoll who reflects on the nature of the sixth extinction event: When the asteroid collided with the Yucatan Peninsula, “it was one terrible afternoon . . . But it was a short-term

not God is the legislator, form a closed and recursive system. All surprises, all happenstance, are manifestations of our ignorance and lack of mastery of the fundamental rules governing the movement of nature. Catastrophic ruin suggests that God does not know what He is doing, or at least that the rules of nature are not ironclad. It has been the Western disposition to err on the side of an omniscient and omnibenevolent God or to have an equally optimistic faith in reductionist materialism.

Georges Cuvier, the French naturalist, did not buy any of this and in 1812 concluded that the fossil record not only indicated that some species were “lost,” but that the rate of loss was not exclusively a matter of what is now called background extinction (it is the way of species to become *espèces perdues*). He discovered evidence of cataclysmic loss, like the floods that drove Noah to his Ark.¹⁵ Even Darwin, who unsettled the traditional account, according to which divine final causality was incompatible with an account of speciation that included, even to a limited extent, the play of chance, opposed the idea that chance was capable of such profligacy.¹⁶

Nonetheless, the remnants of sublime squandering, as well as the role of chance mutation in species survival, cast doubt on the unbroken recursivity (“mechanism”) of nature. As Grant observed, “the reassuring certainty of a mechanical eternity is removed by the fossil remains

event, and then things started getting better. Today, it’s not as if you have a stress and the stress is relieved and recovery starts. It gets bad and then it keeps being bad, because the stress doesn’t go away. Because the stress is us” (63).

¹⁵ See SE, p. 53–54.

¹⁶ SE, p. 54. Deleuze and Guattari argue in “10,000 B.C.: The Geology of Morals” that Cuvier and this kind of approach nonetheless is too tied to forms, not the unfolding of the earth: “There are irreducible axes, types, branches. There are resemblances between organs and analogies between forms, nothing more.” Deleuze, J. and Guattari, F. (1987) *A Thousand Plateaus* (translated by Brian Massumi). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, p. 46. For a more complicated account of Cuvier, see Grant, PON, p. 124–125. It is also, however, clear that Cuvier had a poor understanding of Schelling and *Naturphilosophie*, dismissing it as illogical. See: Outram, D. (1984), *Georges Cuvier: Vocation, Science, and Authority in Post-Revolutionary France*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, p. 135–138. Cuvier concluded that Schelling’s tendency to regard nature as a “living organism” was experimentally unverifiable and that such metaphysics could only discredit the natural sciences (136). In this sense, Cuvier’s allergic reaction to *Naturphilosophie* was nothing unusual, but rather ultimately emblematic of modern science’s inclusion within modern philosophy in general and that, as such, “natural” science was oblivious to the *natural*.

of vanished creatures" (53). Is this not freedom in its permutation as contingency?

Schelling's efforts to think through the problem of the relationship between freedom and nature, of course, had first to move through the Kantian critical project. In the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, the very appearance of nature excludes the possibility that freedom operates in any way in nature. Rather, the laws of nature manifest the forms of intuition that gather the manifold into experience. We are the legislators of nature. "The intellect [*Verstand*] is itself the legislation [*Gesetzgebung*] of nature, that is, without the intellect there simply would not be any nature, that is, the synthetic unity of the manifold according to rules."¹⁷

The impossibility of an experience of freedom, of freedom in nature, governs the famous third antinomy, the antinomy of pure reason in its third conflict of transcendental ideas. The antithesis holds, given the very conditions for the possibility of experience, that "there is no freedom but rather everything in the world happens merely according to the laws of nature." If this were the last word, of course, there could be no ethical autonomy and no capacity to obey the moral law. Hence the thesis holds that "causality according to the laws of nature is not the only cause from which the appearances of the world could be collectively derived."¹⁸ The antinomy clearly disallows recourse to an experience of freedom. Nature, in order to appear to reason at all, follows the rules legislated by the intellect. Everything appears as it must appear, in accordance with the rules that gather the manifold into appearance. Freedom, the *sine qua non* for practical philosophy, does not and cannot appear in nature. Instead, it commands from the noumenal kingdom of ends, from beyond the rule of nature. This, of course, is Kant's famous bifurcation: human life simultaneously dwelling under the laws of nature and the deontological citizenship in the autonomous kingdom of ends.

With this account, it makes little sense to speak of natural history as anything other than the chronology of rule-bound happenings. There can be no real sense of history in the sense of what happened. What

¹⁷ Kant, I. (1976), *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (A edition 1781, B edition 1787). Hamburg: Felix Meiner, p. 186. The citation appears in the A edition, p. 126–27.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 462 (A 444/B 472 – A 445/B 473).

happened did not happen by happenstance. It had to happen. But the fossil record!

The possibility of anything like a living natural history (rather than the mechanical natural chronology) opens up in the third *Kritik*, which Schelling regarded as “Kant’s deepest work, which, if he could have begun with it in the way that he finished with it, would have probably given his whole philosophy another direction.”¹⁹ Its project is nothing less than to try to reflect from the space that opens in the “incalculable chasm [*die unübersehbare Kluft*]” between nature and freedom, the laws of appearance and the non-appearance of freedom. In aesthetic judgment (that is, in the exercise of taste), one reflects on the pleasure that one senses operating at the ground of and at odds with the laws of nature, its “reference to the *free lawfulness* of the imagination [*die freie Gesetzmäßigkeit der Einbildungskraft*].”²⁰ For example, Kant objects to William Marsden’s claim in his *History of Sumatra* that when, amid the overwhelming prodigality of “free beauties” in the Sumatran forests, he discovered the beauty of a nice and tidy pepper patch, he had found real beauty, as opposed to the chaos of the jungle. For Kant, what made Marsden judge the pepper patch as beautiful was that it was unexpected, a surprise in the jungle. If he were to gaze exclusively at the pepper patch, he would soon grow bored, as the free play of nature that unexpectedly came to presence became the rule that pepper patches are the only beautiful things in the Sumatran jungle. Soon Marsden’s attention would turn to the “luxuriance of prodigal nature, which is not subjected to the coercions of any artificial rules” (KU, §22, 86). When one finds oneself taking pleasure in the aqueous undulations of a waterfall, or the dancing flames of a campfire, or the quietly dynamic flow of a babbling brook, does one not delight in one’s incapacity to comprehend the principle at play in their intuition (KU, §22, 85–86)? It is the unbidden pleasure taken in the free play of nature’s rule.

It is as if nature presented itself in the element of water, capable of taking any form, but having no form of its own. In the water-con-

¹⁹ Schelling, F.W.J. (1994), *On the History of Modern Philosophy* (1827) (translated by Andrew Bowie). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 173. Henceforth HMP.

²⁰ Kant, I. (1990), *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (1790). Hamburg: Felix Meiner, §22, p. 82.

sciousness of aesthetic judgment, one does not seek to explain nature, but rather one becomes aware of the wonder of nature, of the miracle of its coming to presence. In the sublime, of course, this dynamic is intensified as the immeasurability [*Unangemessenheit*] and boundlessness [*Unbegrenztheit*] of this freedom, which “makes the mind tremble,” filling one with a feeling of astonishment, respect, the shudder of the holy, and a quickening of life. One could say that the possibility of a living natural history, itself only possible with the shattering of the paradigm that dictates that nature’s temporality, is recursive, like a clock, begins to suggest itself in the dawning of the sense of a whole that holds together the antipodes of nature and freedom. For Kant, however, this whole does not come entirely to the fore. Freedom is but the feeling of the moral law within, projected upon the starry heavens above. He does not yet know Alyosha Karamazov’s more difficult joy: “The silence of the earth seemed to merge with the silence of the heavens, the mystery of the earth touched the mystery of the stars. . . . Alyosha stood gazing and suddenly, as if he had been cut down, threw himself to the earth. He did not know why he was embracing it, he did not try to understand why he longed so irresistibly to kiss it, to kiss all of it, but he was kissing it, weeping, sobbing, and watering it with his tears, and he vowed ecstatically to love it, to love it unto ages of ages.”²¹ For this to happen, Kant needed to remember his original face and therefore that the pleasure and shudders of nature are not found within ourselves but within the original face that always already shares and touches the original face of nature.

For Schelling, operating in the unity of the “incalculable chasm” articulated by Kant, natural history speaks from nature as the progression of freedom and necessity. As Grant articulates it: “Natural history, then, does not consist solely in empirical accounts of the development of organizations on the earth’s surface, nor in any synchronic cataloguing of these. Its philosophical foundations make it a science that attempts to straddle the gulf between history, as the product of freedom, and nature, as the product of necessity” (18). In a small essay from 1798, “Is a Phi-

²¹ Dostoevsky, F. (2002), *The Brothers Karamazov* (translated by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky). New York: FSG, p. 362.

losophy of History Possible?”, Schelling defines history according to its etymology as “knowledge of what happened” (I/I, 466). Hence, “what is *a priori* calculable, what happens according to necessary laws, is not an object of history; and vice versa, what is an object of history must not be calculated *a priori*” (I/7, 467). History in relationship to nature, then, is the play or chance occurrence of freedom in nature, not in the sense that nature becomes a chaotic free-for-all and collapses into mere “unruliness [*Gesetzlosigkeit*],” but rather that it is not merely subject to rules. There is also variance and deviation [*Abweichung*] (I/I, 469), instances where the rule did not hold. In this sense, “history overall only exists where an ideal and where infinitely-manifold deviations from the ideal take place in individuals, which nonetheless remain congruent with the ideal as a whole” (I/7, 469). In other words, progression assumes deviation from the ideal and, as such, is the expression of the course of a free activity that cannot be determined *a priori*. “What is not progressive is not an object of history” (I/I, 470).

Schelling, perhaps not to his credit, did not regard animals as having history “because each particular individual consummately expressed the concept of its species” and there was therefore no “overstepping of its boundaries” and no “further construction on the foundation of earlier” individuals (I/I, 471). An individual bear acts in accordance with how bears as such generally behave. Of course, animals do not need to act freely because they are not subject to the original sin of self-consciousness. Since an animal is not tempted to remain faithful to its *imago*, it does not experience its freedom in overstepping its *imago*. What is freedom from the perspective of *natura naturans* is tacit necessity from the experience of animals because they are not self-consciously free. That being said, the non-human animal community is full of surprises, and it is wise not to speak too confidently about them. Nonetheless, Schelling’s sensitivity to the general problem, beyond the complex and vexing problem with non-human animals, remains acute: “where there is mechanism, there is no history, and vice versa, where there is history, there is no mechanism” (I/I, 471).

Even if one granted that animals do not have a history, that is to say, a history that belongs to animals as animals, *it does not follow that nature does not have a history of animals*. There is not a history of animals,

but there is a natural history of animals, just as there is a natural history of everything, from subatomic particles to black holes. Just as deviation from oneself is the possibility of humans having history, that is, of acting freely, nature's progressivity is its capacity not to be held hostage to its manifold appearances, to deviate from itself ever anew. As Schelling articulated it in his introduction to *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, written around the same time as the small piece on history, "Nature should be visible spirit, spirit should be invisible nature" (I/2, 56).

The very idea of *Naturphilosophie* is not to define nature as a philosophical object, but rather to recover nature as "the *infinite* subject, i.e. the subject which can *never* stop being a subject, can never be lost in the object, become mere object, as it does for Spinoza" (HMP, 114). As such, its translation as "the philosophy of nature" is potentially misleading. *Naturphilosophie* in Schelling's sense is more like doing philosophy in accordance with nature (not as an elective activity originating at the whim and command of the *res cogitans*). It is not therefore a kind of philosophy, or a topic within philosophy, but rather a gateway into the originating experience of philosophizing.

In his startling and exceptionally lucid thought experiment at the beginning of his introduction to *Ideas*, we see Schelling orchestrating the "originating [*Entstehen*]" of this subject "before the eyes of the reader" (I/2, 11). This origination and "coming to the fore" happens in simply reflecting on the nature of philosophy itself. Is philosophy any particular philosophy? If philosophy is not a philosophy, what is philosophy which includes the remnants of all philosophies heretofore, but which is exhausted by none of them? Philosophy, one could say, is the free, historical act of philosophizing, not any particular philosophy. Or: the subject of philosophy is reducible to no philosophical objects. Hence, Schelling claimed in the first (1797) version of this introduction that "the idea of philosophy is merely the result of philosophy itself, but a universally valid philosophy is an inglorious pipedream [*ein ruhmloses Hirngespinnst*]" (I/2, 11). One might say that the very desire to make a philosophy out of philosophy is itself undignified illness, recoiling in anxiety from the freedom of philosophizing.

This origination of the subject also comes to the fore when one extends the subject of philosophy to nature. It begins with reflecting on

being able to ask simple questions like: What is nature? How is nature possible? If nature were merely mechanistic, one could not ask this question. Reflection by its very nature is what David Wood has called “the step back, the promulgation of negative capability” which resists “unthinking identifications.”²² In reflection we divorce ourselves from nature, separating ourselves from an absorption in nature. We ask if what we see of nature and what we already think of nature is sufficient to appreciate nature. As if one were in Plato’s cave, reflection, the eruption of the radically interrogative mode, “strives to wrench oneself away from the shackles of nature and her provisions” (I/2, 12).

However, one does not tear oneself away from nature as an end in itself. One rejects the grip of nature as a means to grasp nature itself more fully. Mere reflection, that is, reflection for the sake of reflection, is accordingly, and in anticipation of the *Freedom* essay, *eine Geisteskrankheit des Menschen* (I/2, 13). A *Geisteskrankheit* is a psychopathology or mental disease, literally, a sickness of the spirit. One pulls away from the center of nature and its stubborn hold and retreats to the periphery of reflection. If, however, one remains on the periphery, separated, alone in the delusion of one’s ipseity, this is the experience of sickness and radical evil. In the language of the introduction, when reflection reaches “dominion over the whole person,” it “kills” her “spiritual life at its root” (I/2, 13). Reflection has no positive value in itself. It has “negative value,” enabling the divorce from nature that is the original experience of philosophy, but it should endeavor to reunite with that which it first knows only as necessity. Reflection is “merely a necessary evil [*ein notwendiges Übel*]” that, left to itself, attaches to the root, aggressing against the very root of nature that prompted the original divorce from the chains of nature. Philosophy, born of the abdication of nature, is the art of the return to nature. In such a return, the self of nature, so to speak, comes to fore as the eternal beginning of nature. Just as the root of philosophy is exhausted in no exercise of philosophy, the root of nature is exhausted by none of its expressions. The history of nature is the unfolding legacy of what is always already gone in all that originates and comes to pres-

²² Wood, D. (2005), *The Step Back: Ethics and Politics after Deconstruction*. New York: State University of New York Press, p. 7.

ence. Since it expresses everything in its coming to presence, as well as the mortality of all presence, its origination and points of access are as multiple as things themselves.

In the temporality of nature, what is oldest in nature, whose remnants are its history, but which in itself remains always still to come, promises fatality as the truth of natality. The “eternal beginning [*ewiger Anfang*]” begins ever anew because of the generativity of finitude. Bereft of the radical interruption that is both finitude and the incessant natality of the future, nature is populated by angels, perfect beings, wholly obedient to their forms. Angels do not partake in history; Klee’s and Benjamin’s angel of history is the murderous face of history that falsely and ruinously imagines that it has become immanent to itself, as it does in Hegel. Already in 1798 history essay Schelling dismissed angels as “the most boring beings of all” (I/1, 473) and almost thirty years later said of Hegel’s God that “He is the God who only ever does what He has always done, and who therefore cannot create anything new” (HMP, 160). One might say, then, that Hegel’s great Angel is not merely boring, but rather *the wrath of the boring*.

The time of nature is its abyssal past returning as the *Unvordenklichkeit* (unprethinkability) of the future. As such, the past is not therefore the record of the continuous history of some grand object= x . It is rather the evidence of the at times catastrophic record of discontinuity, and the history of the ruptures of time that persist, for example, in the intersection of different ages. In *The Ages of the World*, Schelling offered the example of comets, those mysterious emissaries from another age:

We still now see those enigmatic members of the planetary whole, comets, in this state of fiery electrical dissolution. Comets are, as I expressed myself earlier but would now like to say, celestial bodies in becoming and which are still unreconciled. They are, so to speak, living witnesses of that primordial time, since nothing prevents the earlier time from migrating through later time via particular phenomena. Or, conversely, nothing prevents a later time from having emerged earlier in some parts of the universe than in others. In all ages, human feeling has only regarded comets with a shudder as, so to speak, harbingers of the recurrence of a past age, of universal destruction, of the dissolution of things again into chaos. Evidently, the individual center of gravity (the separate life) in a comet is not reconciled with the universal center of gravity.

This is demonstrated by the directions and positions of their paths that deviate from those of the settled planets. (I/8, 329–330)

Nature is bizarre—Comets are strange, as strange as the mastodons that Jefferson hoped that Lewis and Clark would find in their travels. That they did not find mastodons was no less strange than that they did find grizzly bears. Nancy, in his beautiful way, reflected that “‘Nature’ is also ‘strange [*bizarre*],’ and we exist there; we exist *in* it in the mode of a constantly renewed singularity” (BSP, 9). The term *bizarre* is of uncertain origin, perhaps originating from the Basque word for beard, perhaps in so doing recording the strangeness of the appearance of bearded Spanish warriors. In addition to the element of wonder and surprise, it also speaks to the dignity and grandeur of that surprise. This “‘strangeness’ refers to the fact that each singularity is another access to the world” (BSP, 14).

The sudden reemergence of the dignity of nature’s strangeness reunites (without dissolving singularity into identification) thinking with the nature that it had forsaken. In the famous 1797 *System* fragment, written by Hegel, Hölderlin, and Schelling, the dignity of nature’s strangeness, something that Hegel would in an important respect later renounce, was designated the practice of *natural religion*, and Schelling, even in the late Berlin lectures on mythology and revelation, never loses sight of it.

What Schelling calls for in this origination of the strangeness of nature, in the cultivation of natural religion, is a *practice of the wild*. I take this term, of course, from Gary Snyder. In the final chapter, called “Grace”, of his duly celebrated *Practice of the Wild*, he explains that at his house they say a Buddhist grace, which begins, “We venerate the Three Treasures [teachers, the wild, and friends].”²³ The three treasures are universally acknowledged by all negotiators of the Buddha Dharma to be the Buddha, which Snyder, using his own *upaya* or skillful means, renders as “teachers,” the Sangha, the community of practitioners, whom Snyder renders as “friends,” and finally, and most strikingly, the Dharma, which Snyder renders as “the wild.”

²³ Snyder, G. (1990), *The Practice of the Wild*. California: North Point Press, p.185. Henceforth PW.

In what manner can the Dharma, the very matter that is transmitted from Buddha Dharma to Buddhist negotiator, be translated as *the wild*? It all depends on how one hears the word “wild.” Typically “wild” and “feral” (*ferus*) are “largely defined in our dictionaries by what—from a human standpoint—it is not. It cannot be seen by this approach for what it *is*” (PW, 9). Hence, a wild animal is an animal that has not been trained to live in our house (undomesticated) and has not been successfully subjected to our rule (unruly).

But what happens if we “turn it the other way”? What is the wild *to the wild*? Animals become “free agents, each with its own endowments, living within natural systems” (PW, 9). As Snyder begins to explore this turn, he indicates the ways in which the wild “comes very close to being how the Chinese define the term *Dao*, the *way* of Great Nature: eluding analysis, beyond categories, self-organizing, self-informing, playful, surprising, impermanent, insubstantial, independent, complete, orderly, unmediated . . .” (PW, 10). And the *Dao*, as we know from the rich interpenetration of Mahāyāna and Daoist traditions in East Asia, is “not far from the Buddhist term Dharma with its original senses of forming and firming” (PW, 10). The early Daoists spoke of *Dao* as “the great mother” and Schelling emphasized that the etymology of *natura* is that which has been born, and that *natura* thereby speaks of prodigal natality.

What are we to make of ourselves as the occasion of the sixth great extinction? This question is inseparable from the management of our cities, the cultivation of our bodies, the way that we read books—everything depends on the recuperation of the wildness that we share with all of being, the wildness (beyond the ruinous dichotomy of wild and civilized) that is our abdicated being together with and as nature.

THREE KINDS OF RUIN: HEIDEGGER, BENJAMIN, SEBALD

Max Pensky*

(1) Stein und Zeit¹

There is a strange moment in the great French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs' unfinished, posthumously published work, *The Collective Memory*. The topic is, as ever, the social nature of memory or the sociological description of memory processes as irreducibly group-based. Social groups generate memory-processes as part of their internal solidarity and as the external expression of their shared identity, and Halbwachs, not unreasonably, suspected that for this reason all social groups maintained not just a temporal but a spatial memory-process, or better, a suite of memory routines that ramify through space and time, between individuals and groups, and further, between groups and material objects.

Halbwachs believed that a group's extension in physical space – where and how the group situated itself, in a non-supervenient manner from its various individual members – played a constitutive role in how its individual members would re-member. This extension is not simply a matter of physically occupying a given space or series of spaces but of transforming and creating space through organized activity: building. And this process, Halbwachs suggested, was dialectical: just as the endurance of the social group, its internal cohesion and external identity, was dependent on the stability of the groups' spatiality, so too the physical space itself was in a real sense dependent on the enduring memories of the group that occupies it.

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¹ I borrow this play on words from Assmann, J. (1995), *Stein und Zeit: Mensch und Gesellschaft im alten Ägypten*. München: W. Fink Verlag.

This suggestive hypothesis led Halbwachs to suspect that urban groups may actually enact or be, rather than merely inhabit, the built urban environment. In other words, buildings are not expressions, symbols, or repositories of collective memory, but the latter's physical process. The "stones of the city," as Halbwachs writes, are therefore not allegories for the stability of an urban population's shared identity. In large measure, they simply are that identity.

This implies that buildings, as cases for memory, don't merely preserve collective memory for the series of organisms that are encased in them. Rather, the buildings are those memories, and for this reason their durability and stability through time both holds the urban collective together, literally, and at the same time place that collective in a peculiar concentration of time, a social time where the endurance of stone over time, and through time, is both nature and history at once.

Buildings enact a dialectic of natural history, a discourse that I here borrow from the suggestive and compact essay on "The Idea of Natural History" that Theodor W. Adorno published in 1932. There Adorno suggested that the idea of natural history is best understood as a dialectical way of seeing, a construction of concepts which like a chemical elective affinity become volatile in one another's presence and can, under suitable theoretical conditions, reverse polarity, such that nature, developed to the point of its most extreme significance, appears as the saturation of time – that is, as fully timely, hence historical being – where humanity as a historical phenomenon in turn appears under the sign of the historical repetition of catastrophe, and therefore as mythically recursive and static, that is, as nature.²

Nature, for the appearance of timelessness, or resistance to the encroachment of historical time, is always in a real sense illusion only; history, for the built landscape stands opposed to the materiality of nature and yet at the same time is nothing other than that same nature. In its stone buildings, the urban collective can experience a genuinely dialectical relationship to their own temporality, since, as Halbwachs writes, it

² See: Adorno, T.W. (1984), "The Idea of Natural History," (translated by Robert Hullot-Kentor). *Telos*, no. 60, (summer 1984), pp. 111–124. For a discussion see: Pensky, M. (2004), "Natural History: The Life and Afterlife of a Concept in Adorno," *Critical Horizons* vol. 5, no.1 (2004), pp. 227–238.

has no impression of change so long as streets and buildings remain the same. Few social formations are at once more stable and better guaranteed permanence... The nation may be prone to the most violent upheavals. The citizen goes out, reads the news, and mingles with groups discussing what has happened. The young must hurriedly defend the frontier. The government levies heavy taxes that must be paid... But all these troubles take place in a familiar setting that appears totally unaffected. Might it not be the contrast between the impassive stones and such disturbances, which convinces people that, after all, nothing has been lost, for walls and homes remain standing?³

Walls and homes did not remain standing. Halbwachs himself did not experience the mass destruction of many of the cities of Europe during the Second World War: arrested by Vichy officials after protesting the arrest and internment of his elderly Jewish mother- and father-in-law, he was himself deported to Buchenwald where he died shortly before the war's end. But his insight about the relationship between buildings, subjects, and collective memory is important for framing a range of questions concerning the ruin, rather than the stability, of buildings.

How does the ruined building come to articulate a distinctive mode of a dialectic relating nature and history – a natural history in which both terms depend upon, exacerbate, and ultimately interpenetrate one another? Is there a mode of memory that is appropriate to the ruined building, released by or mobilized by the experience of former sites of human dwelling that have been evacuated, that stand now as forms of experience? How does one think about the natural history of the ruin?

These questions can draw on a long and well-established tradition in which the ruined building stands for, bears, a burden of signification for the observer who reconstructs it, so to speak, as a site for something other than dwelling or shelter. In this sense one could say that the history of the ruin as a meaning-bearing location is the history of social and cultural modernity. In an admirably concise recent history, for instance, Brian Dillon traces the consistency in the history of attitudes toward ruined classical sites, which as early as the first origins of cultural modernity in the late 14th century were already being reconstructed as hieroglyphs, open signifiers whose age, partially destroyed state, and

³ Halbwachs, M. (1980), *The Collective Memory*. New York: Harper & Row, p. 131.

jagged and gapped history of transmission qualified them as shelters or cases for a wide range of indirect normative claims.⁴

A “secret language of gesture, line and ornament” could justify the dialectically subtle self-understanding and self-assertion of a newly confident age precisely by comparing itself (unfavorably) to the pomp and massive majesty of classical architecture, with the crucial proviso that the age that inhabited the latter is vanished. As the ruin symbolizes the transience and temporality of building and living, it both threatens and offers significance as a meditational object-lesson on the relation between social life and physical life. The ruin, to put it probably too preciously, is rune: a cipher or mark whose very enigmatic character qualifies it both for occult significance and as a sign of the constant threat of an insignificant social world threatened at all moments with the omnipresence of guaranteed oblivion.

It was a short step from this renaissance fixation on the ruin as visible mark of a dialectic of meaning and meaninglessness to the baroque allegorical construction of the ruin as the physical embodiment of human vanity and the godforsakenness of earthly life. In both theater and the graphic arts, the moral-religious catechism of human vanity is set against the background of the ruins of pompous classical culture. Architectural stone, marble and granite, and the repertoire of decorative styles that embellish stone, disclose their true significance only once they are weathered, cracked, partial. And subsequent transformations of the semiotics of the architectural ruin kept, *mutatis mutandis*, this core function: the physical ruin is cleared, so to speak, by the intention of the subjective observer, the destroyed or unbuilt building is re-built, reconstructed, as a blank screen on which the various normative ambitions of the observer can be projected.

While the status of the ruin as an allegorical site for moral catechism is most evident in the baroque preoccupation with human vanity and pride and its attendant relapse back into the godforsaken or abandoned scene of unredeemed nature, even the Enlightenment continued, in a secularized manner, the allegorization of ruin. The ruin’s plasticity could allegorize both natural or man-made disasters and the omnipres-

⁴ Dillon, B. (2005), “Fragments from a History of Ruin,” *Cabinet*, vol. 20 (Winter 2005).

ent threat of the evacuation of meaning from the landscape of human existence that such disasters threaten. Sublime violence, again either human and historical (war, pestilence, famine) or natural (earthquake, volcano) are processes of creative destruction that offer ruins as sites of ambivalence, whose collective memory requires ongoing philosophical interpretation.

Hence a dialectic of natural history constructs the image of the ruin as the “chronotope” in Bakhtin’s sense, a spatio-temporal singularity which serves as a generative point for narrative construction and for the narrative work of collective memory. If, for instance, the narrative of guaranteed historical progress through the gradual historical victory of human technological control is vitiated through the repetition of disaster – a common enough trope in the Enlightenment *philosophes*, just as much as in their splenetic critic, Voltaire – then the image of the ruined city (Lisbon, Pompeii, Smyrna) destroyed by some sublime spasm of overwhelming violence, continues under changed terms to serve as the familiar catechism of human vanity and the return of nature to take revenge for the injuries done to it. But at the same time the ruin can also, without contradiction, operate as the mnemonic device that reminds Enlightenment culture of the proximity of natural disaster or human folly, reminding it of the autonomous and contingent nature of its technical and moral progress, or serving as a concrete visual cue of the difference between European rationality, with its internal resources for control and stabilization of social antagonisms, and the calamities of vanished empires and their smashed cities, which had no such *ratio* to save them.⁵

In what follows I would like to trace three intertwined discourses that emerge when this narrative of ruin as cipher of moral catechism, or the ruin as manipulable allegory of natural history, is further transformed by the anticipation, and then the memory, of the disastrous “urbicide” of the European city in World War II.⁶ In the first, Hei-

⁵ For a fuller discussion see: Pensky, M. (2010), “Contributions to a Theory of Storms: Historical Knowing and Historical Progress in Kant and Benjamin,” *The Philosophical Forum*, vol. XLI, nos. 1 and 2 (Spring/Summer 2010), pp. 149–174.

⁶ I borrow this term from Mendieta, E. (2007), “The Literature of Urbicide: Friedrich, Nossack, Sebald, and Vonnegut,” *Theory & Event*, Vol. 10, no. 2 (2007).

degger's essay "Building Dwelling Thinking" evokes a world without ruin and, for Heidegger, without a specific kind of (urban) memory: Heidegger's postwar project, the re-pastoralization of Germany's shattered cities, seeks an exit from the dialectic of natural history by enveloping both poles of this dialectic within a space of thinking that is, in effect, "unruinable." In Benjamin's notes and sketches for the Arcades Project, the ruin as the concrete image that emerges at the site of nature and history at their moment of maximum dialectical interpenetration is allowed or encouraged to present itself once the subjective intentionality of the magisterial subject, the sovereign observer, is erased so far as possible from the site of ruin: this complex and frankly somewhat unhinged experimental methodology, so close ultimately to the intoxicating operations of surrealism, attempts to wrest the power of the image of the ruin from the experience of the big city – Paris, paradigmatically – even where or perhaps especially where no ruin is to be found. Finally, the prose works of the German writer W.S. Sebald present a version of the natural history of the ruin which, despite Sebald's extraordinary prose, in fact seeks to recuperate a discourse of the ruin as site of moral catechism that dates back well before the experiences, and concrete remainders of experiences, he describes.

(2) Totenbaum

When she returned to Germany in 1950, Hannah Arendt witnessed a peculiar behavior amongst the German citizens, coping with their shattered cities a half decade after the war's end. Picking their way through these peculiar urban areas where ruins and inhabited buildings coexisted together with a great number of constructions that were an odd combination of both, the inhabitants, Arendt noticed, had taken to sending one another postcards of "churches and market squares, public buildings and bridges that no longer existed,"⁷ as though the cards and their images of an intact city could rectify or supplant the reality of the landscape that they had to occupy. For Arendt, what was even more noteworthy

⁷ Safransky, R. (1998), *Martin Heidegger: Between Good and Evil* (translated by Ewald Osers). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, p. 362.

than this practice was the specific constellation of affects that seemed to accompany it: “The reality of destruction that surrounds every German,” she later wrote of her visit, “is resolved in a brooding, though not very deeply rooted self-pity, which, however, vanishes rapidly when in some wide thoroughfares ugly little flat buildings, originating in some main street in America, are erected.”⁸

Even sixty years later the ubiquitous *Fussgaengerzonen* lined so often with “ugly little flat buildings” are a common enough sight in most German downtowns, and Arendt understandably sees the proliferating architecture of the new American dominium as another kind of loss, another infliction of a technological solution to a human catastrophe. On the other hand, though, her scorn at the satisfied reactions of Germans to the rapid Americanization of their destroyed cities itself feeds from the kind of discourse of resentment and victimhood she also despises.

Her trip in 1950 had been to visit Martin Heidegger. The city of Freiburg (where Benjamin and Sebald both trained as university students) had been attacked by more than 300 Lancaster heavy bombers on the night of November 27, 1944, and had much of its old city center damaged in the attack. Arendt certainly would have seen downtown rubble piles there, as she passed through on her way to Heidegger’s hut at Todtnauberg. And whatever else might have transpired at that encounter, we can speculate that the two might have had occasion to talk about houses.

Heidegger’s essay on “Bauen Wohnen Denken” was not published until 1954, but Heidegger notes there that the essay had first been given as a lecture on August 5 1951, for a Darmstadt colloquium on “Man and Space.”⁹ Perhaps not surprisingly, Heidegger’s lecture offers a philosophical example of the sort of erasure of memory of destruction that Sebald would condemn in postwar German literature. There appears to be no special urgency in the text to register the fact of physical destruction or its aftermath, which is simply absent; instead Heidegger notes as a social fact requiring no further explanation the “current housing shortage,”

⁸ Arendt, H. “Besuch in Deutschland,” in: *Zur Zeit, Politische Essays*, 46. Quoted in: Safran-sky, R. (1998), p. 364.

⁹ Heidegger, H. (1971), “Building Dwelling Thinking,” in: *Poetry, Language, Thought* (translated by Albert Hofstadter). New York: Harper & Row.

the technically adept response to which has generated housing but not dwelling. It is this humdrum set of social needs that Heidegger addresses with his own more high-blown worries about the inhuman and alienating aspect of the cheap and Americanized housing architecture that West Germany, at least, was providing to address the shortage.

“On all sides we hear talk about the housing shortage, and with good reason. Nor is there just talk: there is action too. We try to fill the need by providing houses, by promoting the building of houses, planning the whole architectural enterprise. However hard and bitter, however hampering and threatening the lack of houses remains, the *real plight of dwelling* does not lie merely in a lack of houses. The real plight of dwelling is indeed older also than the increase of the earth’s population and the condition of the industrial workers. The real dwelling plight lies in this, that mortals ever search anew for the nature of dwelling, that they *must ever learn to dwell*.” [142]

Such new construction, Heidegger noted, certainly provided much-needed shelter. But they were also houses impossible to dwell in: “today’s houses may even be well-planned, easy to keep, attractively cheap, open to air, light, and sun, but – do the houses in themselves hold any guarantee that *dwelling* occurs in them?” [145–6]

It’s not entirely clear from “Building Dwelling Thinking” why postwar residential urban architecture was undwellable for Heidegger, though it seems plausible to suppose that much of the problem is simply the location in an urban center, rather than any specific features of design and construction. But it’s also true that the very newness and sameness, the detachment from the historicity of a population in its landscape, made the *Neubau* inhabitable but undwellable, the latter implying for Heidegger a specifically pastoral-agrarian mode of existence where the mode and means of residential construction exhibits manifest connections to the nurturing and cultivating work of a primary economy.

Building cultivates the intertwinement of human being with its manifold surroundings. Hence there is an implied antinomy, for Heidegger, between building and construction – building is less about imposing human technical prowess through the medium of stone, wood or fabricated material than it is the continual preserving, nurturing subsistence within a landscape that has always been there. Building in this sense may imply a desistence from the will to construction. Building is dwelling;

and dwelling is ‘the manner in which mortals are on the earth.’ “Building as dwelling,” Heidegger concludes, “unfolds into the building that cultivates growing things and the building that erects buildings.” [148]

This antinomy between building and constructing certainly implies a peculiar relationship to the phenomenon of the ruin. In one sense, certainly, “Building Dwelling Thinking” reacts to the urban ruin less by forgetting it than by enforcing a kind of mental hygiene where the ruin cannot be registered at all, though life in Freiburg in 1950 would certainly have made this mental hygiene difficult to practice.

Structural stone was of course out of the question for new construction. As an economic fact stone building would be reserved for the reconstruction of historically significant cathedrals, churches and other public buildings, in cases where structural stones could be recovered and reassembled. In other cases the massive use of brick masonry for housing in German cities provided a kind of basic pattern of reconstructive labor for decades to come: the picking, sorting, and stacking of the millions of bricks left behind once the fires ignited by dropped incendiary ordnance had superheated mortar and caused the ubiquitous multistory masonry apartment blocks to collapse. (In *The Rings of Saturn*, W.G. Sebald ascribes this particular childhood memory, the postwar city landscape as an endless plain of stack after stack of recovered and sorted brick, to Michael Hamburger, but it must have been extraordinarily widespread for urban childhoods in both Germanies in the 1950s.¹⁰)

How can the erection of *Neubau* satisfy this duality of building, such that it is both cultivation and construction in a single act? Heidegger offers no hints on this subject, but implicit in his pastoralism is the principle that *there must be no ruins*. One simple way to achieve this organic building principle is to avoid urban building entirely; another compatible principle would be to eschew all manufactured building materials and construct principally from trees, that is, from wood. (Heidegger’s example of a rural stone bridge that “gathers” the banks of the stream through the pastoral meadow is interesting here just because one cannot of course dwell in (or under) it.) And in fact Heidegger’s pastoral ideal of the form of human habitation that satisfies all his positive criteria for

¹⁰ Sebald, W.G., *The Rings of Saturn*, p. 177.

dwelling in “Building Dwelling Thinking” is the Schwabian farmhouse, roughly 200 years old in Heidegger’s own description, with wooden timbers as the principle structural element, and plasterwork, stone, masonry and metal present if at all as (limited) design elements necessary for reinforcement or insulation or, one imagines, in a very limited sense, as ornament. “Here,” Heidegger writes, “the self-sufficiency of the power to let earth and heaven, divinities and mortals enter *in simple oneness* into things, ordered the house.”

It placed the farm on the wind-sheltered mountain slope looking south, among the meadows close to the spring. It gave the wide overhanging shingle roof whose proper slope bears up under the burden of snow, and which, reaching deep down, shields the chambers against the storms of the long winter nights. It did not forget the altar corner behind the communal table; it made room in its chamber for the hallowed places of childbed and the ‘tree of the dead’ – for that that is what is called a coffin there: the *Totenbaum* – and in this way it designed for the different generations under one roof the character of their journey through time.” [160]

This is, one imagines, a house that cannot, will not be ruined or, in a sense, ever destroyed, since in its very essence it is no longer perceptible as an artificial object or imposition of technical expertise inserted into a landscape. Each cozy farmhouse, like a nodule growing in and through its geological setting, is a site where – to use the terms of our subject-matter – natural history has performed yet another of its inversions, extruding a building that is neither exactly built in a conventional sense nor precisely “natural” in the way that, say, the geological features of its landscape are: the farmhouse combines – or ‘gathers’ — the polarity of nature and history into one focal point.

This natural history of the farmhouse threatens at every moment to lapse into sentimentality and kitsch, as Heidegger himself understands. It is not and cannot be the answer to the social problem, the shortage of decent, affordable housing, but stands as a continuing rebuke to the framing of the question of the house as a technological question, since building more does not correlate to dwelling better. And perhaps it’s Heidegger’s very willed blindness to the tidy rubble piles, the sorted stacks of blasted brick, or the empty facades of Freiburg’s old downtown

that permits him this older and broader view of the indifference point of a history of building and the traces of a fugitive call to live differently.

But that *Totenbaum* still bothers.

One takes Heidegger's point, of course, that wooden houses in which one dwells, in which one invites the unity of the Fourfold, of mortals and divinities, earth and sky, is also a site for the unification of organic life and the social enactment of death, a holism under one roof that expresses the full range of integrative dimensions of pastoral existence that urban life, so susceptible to ruin, cannot make possible. It is nevertheless unnerving to envision Heideggers' un-ruinable farmhouse containing within itself its own *Totenbaum*, indeed being itself just such a *Totenbaum*, an organic growth, a wooden capsule, consisting of an indefinite series of *Totenbaueme*, like nested dolls or a series of nested cases or etuis enclosing or encapsulating the indefinite, indeed indifferentiated lives of the inhabitants, who surrender their individuality in this fantasy of pastoral fulfillment as readily, and as completely, as any Odyssean sailor threatened at every cove with the overwhelming mythical power of unmastered nature.

The strangeness of the word itself needs to be registered, certainly, as well, since Heidegger is careful to make its regionalism a point of pride. "Tree of the dead" is what a coffin is known as, in these parts. This is peculiar. Certainly an archaeologist of early central and northern European prehistory would be familiar with the relatively rare and brief but scientifically interesting practice of tree burial, in which the trunk of a large tree, usually an oak, was carefully hollowed to fashion a neat capsule for the burial of a chieftain, princess, or other high-ranking corpse. Decorative burial objects tend to be found in the rare cases (pun intended) where tree burials are discovered more or less intact; moreover, the tannins of the oak can have a powerful preservative effect on the body, especially on the skin, which is gradually stained to a striking, glossy obsidian black.

Why this bronze-age burial practice should have been etymologically preserved in the Swabian dialect, where elsewhere the word, like

the practice, was long since lost, is yet another natural-historical nodule growing, benignly one supposes, in or on the farmhouse floor.¹¹

But why Heidegger's entire essay seems to me at least to come to revolve precisely around this focal point, this single word *Totenbaum*, is less a matter of etymological contingency and has to do with the heart of the matter of natural history. Words are natural history, certainly, in that moment where their otherwise contingent genealogies disclose a glimpse into a mode of human memory that otherwise remains occluded. Heidegger's essay teases the words *Bauen*, *Wohnen*, *Denken* to generate a glimpse of an alternative history of the natural stuff of buildings from out of the heart of a ruined present.

I choose instead to tease at his unwitting candidate for the "way of seeing" or way of remembering that is natural history: *Totenbaum*, whose cracks offer a glimpse of a human history older by far than all three of these newcomer words. The will to encapsulate and to make of the world one's own *etui*, the capacity to see the tree as at once the source of life and the material for the ebbing and denial of life: isn't there in this glimpse also a faint memory of that first tree of life, from which the divinities, lice-infested and hooting with alarm and lust, Heidegger's own African ancestors, first descended, and from where they began their long, long walk, each band no doubt believing itself autochthonous but nevertheless proceeding at a stately fifty kilometers per generation both East and West, until they had covered the distance from Turkana to Pelau, Olduvai to Tierra del Fuego, leaving in their wake nothing at all, except perhaps the midden cairns of empty shells of whelks, mussels and clams in their thousands, marker piles of calciferous etuis stationed with such inadvertent precision that archaeologists can predict with confidence where the next one will be found on the archaic route along vanished coastlines.

¹¹ On this dialectical fact I thank Dennis J. Schmidt for his incomparable expertise: see: Kluge (2002), *Etymologisches Woerterbuch des deutschen Spraches*. Berlin: Gruyter, p. 625: "Neben ihm [Sarg] haelt sich im suedwesten Totenbaum als heimisches Volkswort, daneben Totenruhe."

(4) La Vie dans l'Etui

In a way far more manifest than Heidegger, Walter Benjamin certainly devoted a good deal of his later thought to the question of buildings and their quiddity – of empty and abandoned buildings, of buildings as capsules and mausoleums, time machines, and unwitting or involuntary vessels for a host of human remembering, dreaming, hoping and fearing.

Walter Benjamin's *Passagenwerk* is of course a primary site for reflections of this kind. Like Halbwachs, Benjamin did not live to see the industrial demolition of entire urban centers through aerial bombardment, though one can speculate that the experience of air war against a civilian population in Spain was sufficient grounds for the inference that the coming war would entail such large-scale destruction; one moving entry in Benjamin's Parisian notes is a citation from a 1938 work by the French philosopher Pierre-Maxime Schuhl, who wrote of the use of air attacks in the Spanish Civil War in his 1938 topical work, *Machinisme et philosophie*. "The bombers remind us of what Leonardo da Vinci expected of man in flight: that he was to ascend to the skies 'in order to seek snow on the mountaintops and bring it back to the city to spread on the sweltering streets in summer.'"¹²

Mining the collective memory for visions of a Paris that evoke both the uncanny reminder of the archaic in its architecture as well as the presentiment of destruction is a central theme of the Arcades Project, a core part of the revelation of the dominion of myth in urban design and building practices. Visions of Paris abandoned, depopulated, *menschenleer*, run through the notes for the *Passagenwerk* like a kind of reverse Ariadne's thread, describing another form of ruination that forms the counterpoint to that of threatened, impending devastation. Unruined, Paris appears as unlikely, even as an impossible object – how could such a mass of delicate stone and glass have failed to be weathered to nothing or blown to bits?

This very glimpse of the unruined city provokes the same train of reflections as the brooding contemplation of ruin itself: the city, encod-

¹² Benjamin, W. (1999), *The Arcades Project* (translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, p. 486.

ing human history, lapses into a vision of nature instead, its close streets turning to a maze of warrens, capillary passages with no rational taxonomy, medieval and renaissance buildings, with their crusts of stone embellishment, appear as fossils of impossible antediluvian beasts, the city in its very built complexity loses the look of the human altogether and begins to appear hive-like, an excrescence of cells, housing for a writhing mass of creatures.

For Benjamin some cities, most notably Naples, have preserved this abjectly fascinating tension in which the experience of the big city is indistinguishable from the glimpse of human beings in their stone cases reverting back to animal life.¹³ In Naples [the ‘new city’] archaisms are literally the architectural basis for a specific mode of deeply physical existence – the fusion of archaic and capitalist modes forces its citizens into a range of creative, parasitic and parodic adaptations to proximity and scarcity, a sort of continuous virtuoso improvisation that he surely could have observed in virtually any post-colonial world city as well. Above all the remarkable publicity of material existence struck Benjamin, that quintessential child of the hermetically sealed bourgeois *interieur*, as fascinating, both compelling and repelling.

The porosity of physical life – here I am thinking of Julia Kristeva’s observations of the closeness of abjection and love – is the threat of the loss of individuation through the disclosure of the permeability of the membrane separating self and other, self and not-self. In Naples Benjamin observes that this porosity is not a metaphor. It is also a feature of urban architecture where the inadequacy of regular maintenance over a long period of time results in a honeycomb of cells, each with unplanned and uncontrollable openings and passages to one another, that simultaneously make each cell in at least potential communication with all others, and also opens all cells to the exterior that their interconnectedness first creates, to the street as public sphere, as ongoing political theater.

This is not the labyrinth demystified by the destruction of urban blocks and the creation of broad avenues, as Benjamin meticulously records the Hausmannization of Paris. Instead, Naples – dirty, danger-

¹³ See Benjamin, W. (2004) “Naples,” in: *Selected Writings Volume 1, 1913–1926*, (ed. by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, pp. 414–421.

ous, diseased, poor, and in a kind of stasis of ongoing ruination – stays precisely the same, evokes the specter of natural timelessness, precisely by remaining poised precisely at the tipping point of irrecoverable social and physical dysfunction. It is physically composed neither of interior nor of exterior, but entirely – thrillingly, revoltingly – of the spaces between. (In this sense Naples becomes one polar extremity of the architecture of urban social life; the other pole, Moscow, is therefore exactly the anti-labyrinth, where the violent imposition of willed history on the old city yields up the huge public square, devoid of life, like the reclamation of the human habitation by a kind of political taiga, a public sphere with nothing in it.)

When it comes to Benjamin's true urban fascination, however, the distance separating Paris from all other cities becomes apparent. Unlike Naples, certainly, is Paris's remarkable, indeed staggering wealth, and the sheer span of centuries in which regional and national wealth has concentrated in one tightly delimited physical space. This has concentrated spirit and stone as well, a very great deal of both, and explains in part why it is that Paris can appear at once so profoundly fragile and indestructible.

Unlike planned capitals like Washington D.C. and Berlin, whose rectilinear grids and rational architecture emanated from a specific set of convictions regarding urban life, urban services and amenities, and urban politics, Paris was an ancient city that had received wave after wave of new initiatives for social policy and social control. The result, Benjamin perceives, is a remarkable and remarkably tense synthesis of rational agency, of historical self-confidence, and at the same time a suppressed but constantly perceptible substrate of mythic nature whose incessant breaches through the membrane that separates nature and history result in the kinds of disturbances, of unlikely objects, both political and material, that the Arcades Project took as its primary object of study.

The processes of architectural transformation, the ruins of Paris, are both fantastic and expressions of the historical domination of nature, which has been exiled to a determinate number of strictly delimited quarters and precincts, most of them vertically rather than horizontally mapped. The Paris of the triumph of human reason sits snugly like a cap upon a massive and pressurized reservoir of exiled, disciplined, and

deeply unruly nature, which, if it could, would erupt and geyser through every porous opening in every Parisian street and boulevard it could. Below the streets lie literally miles of passages, tunnels, crypts, catacombs, dripping caverns, cul-de-sacs filled with ossuaries and secret burials.

Natural history appears as the image of the city poised at a delicate equilibrium point, balancing forces that could at any moment blow it to smithereens. Benjamin of course draws here on the longer Enlightenment discourse that sees the looming threat of urban destruction by uncontrollable natural processes as indistinguishable from, indeed merging with, the uncontrollable force of the urban mob. And just as the Enlightenment *philosophes* had settled on a small number of paradigmatic cases to illustrate this dialectic – Pompeii, Lisbon – so Benjamin describes the fantastic and largely hidden pressures that form Paris's lapidary buildings as a kind of *Indifferenzpunkt* between nature and history: seismic, volcanic, uncontrollable, deeply angry, beyond argument. As Benjamin puts it,

“Paris is a counterpart in the social order to what Vesuvius is in the geographic order: a menacing, hazardous massif, an ever-active hotbed of revolution. But just as the slopes of Vesuvius, thanks to the layers of lava that cover them, have been transformed into paradisaical orchards, so the lava of revolution provides uniquely fertile ground for the blossoming of art, festivity, fashion.”¹⁴

The arcades trace their way across the unstable surface of this three-dimensional seismic field. At the moment in which they are poised to vanish as victims of the next wave of architectural reform, the arcades appear simultaneously as history and nature. As history, certainly, since the arcades are expressions of the rational, progressive will to take control of an oppressive built urban environment, cutting through buttes of medieval buildings to open new routes through the urban labyrinth; lined with fashionable shops, and covered from inclement weather by large glass panes, they are a new technology of the conscious provision of urban porosity, a kind of controlled destruction.

But they are nature too, since the latest and most up-to-date urban architectural and commercial design discloses the emergence of the ar-

¹⁴ *The Arcades Project*, p. 83.

chaic, as various unplanned consequences of its design, or the relation of the design to larger social and economic forces, reverse to form the grounds for the design's obsolescence. In the case of the arcades, the earliest use of cast iron and glass as structural elements created new urban spaces at mid-century, commercial venues that quickly became intensely popular gathering places for the display of new industrial commodities, new fashion and couture, and the self-presentation of new social classes. (At one point Benjamin records the brief craze during the 1840s for pet tortoises, on a lead of velvet ribbon, whose – very stately – walks in the arcades allowed their owners a slow-motion display of their own fashionable dress.)

But the same use of new design and construction methods and materials inadvertently creates something else: a space which, with its flickering gas lighting, dim filtered sunlight seeping in desultorily from the thick glass panes suspended above, its murmuring crowds of over-stimulated pedestrian shoppers strolling its lengths, uncannily replicates something archaic, even aquatic, poised at the brink of reversion to a pre-human form of conscious life. The arcades replicate a very primal *etui*, in other words, both womb and cave. They both promise and threaten the mythical loss of self that lies at the heart of all urban memory, and therefore both entice and terrify. Their destruction during the second half of the 19th century, even in Benjamin's own observations, comes as something of a relief, even if the ruler-straight boulevards and wide-open, over-large squares of Baron Haussmann betray the core of violence in the rational dream of urban planning.

The Parisian arcades make visible the image of Paris as ruined even in its uncanny survival. They are perhaps the ultimate and richest example of the *etui*, the human case, and in this sense Benjamin's fascination with *etuis* of all kinds, and in particular with the imprint of the vanished inhabitant of the *etui* that survives in ghostly imprint on its plush inner lining, becomes less peculiar, and more moving. Empty cases are the true ruins.

(4) Kartenspiel

W.G. Sebald seems to have taken the sentiment that Halbwachs expressed very much to heart: if the stones of the city in their enduring forms provide containers or cases for the collective memory of groups, then the ruins of these containers – buildings that have had the living contents expelled from them, or which have been blown to smithereens by high-explosive ordnance and incendiary sticks, dropped with industrial efficiency from miles above in the atmosphere – do not simply accomplish the opposite of social memory. Ruins do not correspond to the withdrawal of memory but to its utter transformation. Much of Sebald's prose, written in notable haste and urgency in the space of a decade, attempts to mobilize the tools of minute observation, microlology, to register the varieties of alchemical transformations of memory that can be produced by smashed stone. In this effort, he places himself – whether consciously or not, I cannot tell – at the precise dialectical tension point between Heidegger's effort to erase the very possibility of ruin from the material practice of building, and Benjamin's attempt to develop a form of seeing that is exquisitely sensitive to the ruin everywhere, even in (especially in) urban milieux that have survived the process of physical destruction.

Let me begin with a passage from a short address that Sebald delivered very shortly before his death, a childhood memory that, like many others, may be playful and misleading, but provides for us a beginning point. Speaking at the opening ceremony of the Stuttgart *Literaturhaus*, Sebald recounts how, as a child growing up in the late 1940s and 1950s in the remote and deeply rural Allgau region, he had no firsthand knowledge of the destruction of Germany's cities. The provincial village of his childhood seemed, in a Halbwachsian manner, eternal. But the village was reachable by post, and as Heidegger was writing "Bauen Wohnen Denken," the fractured and largely silent Sebald family acquired a swapping card game called Cities Quartet.

"Have you got Oldenburg, we asked, have you got Wuppertal, have you got Worms? I learned to read from these names, which I had never heard before. I remember that it was a very long time before I could imagine anything about these cities, so different did they sound from the local place-names of

Kranzegg, Jungholz, and Unterjoch, except the places shown on the cards in the game: the giant Roland, the Porta Nigra, Cologne Cathedral, the Crane Gate in Danzig, the fine houses around a large square in Breslau.”¹⁵

Card images of a Germany both physically intact and politically undivided: the game, Sebald claims, “marked not only the beginning of my career as a reader but the start of my passion for geography, which emerged soon after I began at school: a delight in topography that became increasingly compulsive as my life went on and to which I have devoted endless hours bending over atlases and brochures of every kind.”

If Arendt’s fragmentary reminiscence is to be trusted, then Sebald’s inauguration into literacy by cards of intact cities was part of a far larger, more general reaction, even as the kind of legibility – such a central term for Benjamin too, of course – he derived from this early exposure differed in method and morals so profoundly from the displaced population of Germany’s ruined cities, mailing one another their postcards of the city that had once stood on the very spot. But natural history, among other things, is a viewpoint that disdains the stability of the distinction between memory and forgetting. If the postwar worthies that both Arendt and later Sebald castigate for their self-administered general anesthesia paper over the reality of their ruined cities with postcards real and metaphysical, then Sebald, too, develops a kind of lifelong reading that will also depend on them.

In fact reading the series of works that comprise the remarkable productive flowering of Sebald’s hurried decade of writing – *Vertigo*, *The Emigrants*, *The Rings of Saturn*, *Austerlitz* – it’s impossible to avoid the sense that those Cities Quartet cards never left his famous knapsack; that he ‘learned to read’ in a more powerful, pervasive, and involved sense than the familiar boundaries of what counts as *Prosa*.

Open any of these books, of course, and you will find ruined buildings: abandoned towns being reclaimed inexorably by the sea; forgotten grand country estates which have not so much withstood or defeated time and age but have been forgotten by time entirely, preserving material remnants of lost historical epochs to no clear purpose; dreary for-

¹⁵ Sebald, W.G. (2005), “An Attempt at Restitution,” in: *Campo Santo* (translated by Anthea Bell). New York: Random House, p.198.

tifications saturated with the memory of human malice and pain; depopulated and pointless clumps and clots of houses. All these structures are both drained of human life and filled to bursting with melancholy significance. Each of them *means* – and in this way Sebald both observes the process in which nature takes its slow revenge against humans’ will to impose lasting significance on their landscape, while simultaneously undoing this very observation, reversing it, in the very act of deriving meaning from abject and abandoned encasements by seeing them as, by transforming them as, ciphers for a specific form of moral catechism.

The utopian cards of intact cities guide the way as surely as any Borgesian map would, directing Sebald’s rambles with an unerring magnetic north: walk until you find that structure which, its life and purpose having ebbed and withdrawn, now conforms to a predetermined suite of cognitive and affective correspondences which permit the imposition of the legible signs of a larger story of the futility of human efforts to live decently with one another, to please ourselves without becoming monsters.

Many of the abandoned structures that seem to draw Sebald so powerfully, and whose stages of decay are so carefully, even lovingly catalogued, are clearly only capable of generating the melancholic effects that Sebald himself brings to his planned encounter with them. This allegoresis of the evacuated and crumbling building, in its repetition, can in many of Sebald’s works evoke the suspicion of a kind of penny-in-the-slot. Where Heidegger consciously effaces the ruin through the evocation of an alternative historicity, and where Benjamin is fascinated by the uncontrollable productivity of the ruin in its proximity to creaturely nature, Sebald’s emotional repertoire – see ruin, become ruminative and sad – evinces a rote simplicity that is often disguised by the pellucid elegance of his prose.

As Simon Ward has observed, many ruin-stories in Sebald’s prose evoke the familiar specter of a depopulated world, not just a world in which physical objects radiate unintended and undesired meanings once their human contents have ebbed.¹⁶ The *constructed* nature of the ruin

¹⁶ Ward, S. (2004), “Ruins and Poetics in the Works of W.G. Sebald”, in: Long, J.J. and Whitehead, A. (eds.), *W.G. Sebald – A Critical Companion*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

– its status as the outcome of a specific epistemic process with a series of discrete steps – involves not only the recording of the physical status of a built object, but also its careful preparation: the ruin is invariably abandoned and empty, object-like, which rules out in advance the porosity of the relation between observed structure and observing narrator, assuring the stability and predictability of the cognitive and affective valences that the narrator attaches to the weathered stone or shattered façade. This fixity of meaning is the true legibility, the true *Ruinenwert*, of Sebald's gloomy insights, which revert back to the familiar precincts of a longer historical discourse of the mirror-like and open signification structure of the ruin as an empty vessel to contain and reflect the intentions of the self-reflecting subject.

The descriptions of cities like Jerusalem in *The Emigrants*, or the soon-to-be-abandoned seaside villages of East Anglia such as Dunwich, Lowestoft and Orfordness in *The Rings of Saturn*, describe a process of natural history in which the city slowly succumbs to entropic processes that draw life and meaning from the dead stone, leaving empty husks in the way of the pilgrim that serve as hieroglyphs, ciphers prepared to take on the projection of subjective meaning. This is the return, in pastoral terms, of the 'antinomy of the allegorical' that Benjamin had already described in the *Origin of the German Play of Mourning*, where the very meaninglessness of godforsaken nature is rescued, resignified in its very lack of significance by the subjective intention of the allegorist, who can take no satisfaction in this legibility of ruin, since it only discloses what he knew he would find there.

But in a way profoundly unlike Benjamin's urban flanerier, which was an aesthetic of willed self-loss, Sebald's wandering narrators are trying, with a desperation so horrible they are no longer able even to name or speak it, to go home. Each creased card of intact cities offers a model of legibility that the world's landscape can never live up to, and which offer no rest and no stopping place; these narrators are driven by something entirely distinct from the cartographic obsession Sebald describes as a young child, a memory that is surely on some level intentionally untrustworthy.

This specific appropriation – or interruption, as I believe – of the dialectic of natural history is most vivid if we think of some of the more

extended treatments of ruin in Sebald's masterpiece, *Austerlitz*, where Sebald encounters his model ruin: the fortress-concentration camp-memorial site of Breendonk, where the story effectively both begins and ends.

Breendonk is a building of extravagant, in fact of virtually sublime ugliness, a kind of comprehensive hideousness that the narrator (presumably Sebald) describes in lavish detail. Its ugliness is transcendent: Breendonk is a physically repulsive object whose appearance – one might say pathetically – mirrors the concentration of a century of human cruelty and suffering that saturate its walls, which take on the uncanny aspect of some long-repressed collective nightmare. These walls, to the narrator, seem to transmogrify into an ur-ancient, impossible survivor of the pre-human era, “a low concrete mass, rounded at all its outer edges and giving the gruesome impression of something hunched and misshapen: the broad back of a monster, I thought, risen from this Flemish soil like a whale from the deep.”¹⁷

For the cartographo-maniacal narrator, the sheer planlessness of Breendonk, its confused mass of half-finished or over-built walls, bastions, and ramparts, blurs the boundary between nature and history: once again, the building as ruin evokes the specter of an unstable and hence abject consignment of human history to natural disaster:

“I found myself unable to connect [Breendonk] with anything shaped by human civilization, or even with the silent relics of our prehistory and early history. And the longer I looked at it, the more often it forced me, I felt, to lower my eyes, the less comprehensible it seemed to become. Covered in places by open ulcers with the raw crushed stone erupting from them, encrusted by guano-like droppings and calciferous streaks, the fort was a monolithic, monstrous incarnation of ugliness and blind violence.” [21]

Studying its confusing architectural plan later, the narrator is even more struck by the building's resemblance to a horrible living or formerly living thing, with weeping malevolent eyes and attenuated limbs, gazing back at him evilly from the printed plan, which appeared to him as “the anatomical blueprint of some alien and crab-like creature.” [23]

¹⁷ Sebald, W.G. (2001), *Austerlitz* (translated by Anthea Bell). New York: Random House, p. 20.

Breendonk fortress, as Sebald's narrator notes, was reopened in 1947 as a national memorial and museum of the Belgian resistance; it has been left unchanged as far as feasible from its wartime condition, including the implements used by the wartime inmates – the narrator is particularly struck by the fleet of crudely made, disturbingly large wooden wheelbarrows, with which the prisoners were obliged to move uncounted thousands of tons of earth and rock. Glancing through the rest of the exhibits, the narrator contemplates the mess hall of the SS guards: "I could well imagine the sight of these good fathers and dutiful sons from Vilsbiburg and Fuhlsbuettel, from the Black Forest and the Bavarian Alps, sitting here when they came off duty to play cards or write letters to their loved ones at home. After all, I had lived among them until my twentieth year." [23]

Passages like this one would require far more unpacking than I can offer here. A few remarks will be enough: what Sebald encounters at Breendonk is certainly a ruin that conforms in every particular to a mode of experience in which the distrusted utopia of intact existence – the cards, again – serves to predetermine that, and how, the landscape of human history, in its decrepitude, will present itself in a kind of pre-established harmony with the subjective intention to endow it with meaning in the form of a moral catechism. What Breendonk as ruin signifies is in other words itself the subject of a not especially disguised triumph of intention, in which the force-field of natural history is defused, and ruin itself is, in a deeply curious but unmistakable way, rehabilitated, just as Breendonk is transformed from what it was to what it was not precisely by doing as little to it as possible in its changed status as memorial site.

The historical narrative that forms the genealogical core of Breendonk's abject ugliness cannot be explained solely in terms of its history as a prison, since it was designed as a part of a chain of fortifications to protect the Belgian frontier, requiring the use of building materials and design – poured concrete, heaped earth – that all but guaranteed its close resemblance to an enormous natural growth, an architectural tumor. This form of military architecture, like the larger comprehensive vision of defensive strategy of which it was one part, had been rendered strategically obsolete and technically useless even before the fortress had

been completed shortly after the turn of the 20th century, serving only to concentrate and immobilize large numbers of men and quantities of military materiel and supplies precisely where open terrain and rail travel had already put a strategic and tactical premium on maximum mobility. It is as though the fortress, useless from its inception, had been decreed from its birth to be used for the wrong purpose – as a prison and torture chamber for Belgian resistors to the German occupying forces, as well as for remnants of Belgium's Jewish community.

Eric Santner notes the continuity between this story – the fortress builders trapped by their own fortification – and that of Dunwich on the East Anglian coast, where the extensive fortifications the inhabitants of the town erected to protect it from the encroaching sea ended up generating the very inundation that their imposition of technological power was meant to ward off. Santner calls this the “essential paradox of natural history” in Sebald's work: nature, implacably and with a divine and righteous violence, takes its revenge on the vanity of humanity's enfaming, its technological hubris.¹⁸

Well, yes and perhaps also no. What Santner sees as an essential paradox is also a prime candidate for the specific mechanism whereby Sebald artificially – that is, by the legerdemain of authorial, subjective intention on the otherwise mute materiel – interrupts a dialectic of natural history in which both elements, as Adorno had put it, developed to their point of maximum dialectical tension, reverse polarity and go over into their other.

But Breendonk is not a dialectical image where nature and history are developed to their indifference point. It is a visual, indeed an overpoweringly over-determined and unmissable moral allegory for human *vanitas*, and it is only by prematurely arresting the movement of paradox that Sebald's narrator forbids himself the melancholy reflection that would, in what I'd be tempted to call the natural order of things, follow: the hideousness of the museum as museum, the vanity of making museums at all, that is, the futility of memory, its fugitive, traitorous,

¹⁸ Santner, E.L. (2006), *On Creaturely Life: Rilke, Benjamin, Sebald*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 108.

exhausting refusal to stay on message, to conform its ceaseless productivity to a consistent acceptable moral conclusion.

But this next step – one Benjamin seems to have taken with terrifying ease, like breathing or walking down a street, is one that Sebald, with his own cargo of historical grief and his own powerful albeit occluded epistemology, cannot, or will not, take. I blame those cards.

HEIDEGGER AND THE APORIA OF HISTORY

F r a n ç o i s R a f f o u l *

Introduction

It is striking to note that when the question of history first emerged in Heidegger's path of thinking, namely in the 1915 essay, "The Concept of Time in Historical Science,"¹ it was in contrast with and in opposition to the motif of nature and natural sciences; as if history in its proper being could only be accessed from such a break with nature, an "other" of history that nonetheless will continue to haunt Heidegger's conceptualization of history. Nature will figure as history's aporia, and will be visible including and perhaps especially when Heidegger attempts to subordinate nature to (historical) time: it is in order to overcome this aporia that Heidegger attempts to ontologize history away from the natural, the biological, the ontical. In Heidegger's attempts to think what is most proper to historical time and to reappropriate the ontological senses of history, one can still read this original aporia and its persistent effects, through the transformed oppositions of the mobility of life (*Bewegtheit*) versus natural movement (*Bewegung*), the break with the theoretical and the grasping of historicity as Life's self-reflexion, historicized facticity versus natural factuality, the *Geschichte/Historie* distinction, authentic temporality versus inauthentic or natural time, time of the psyche versus natural time. This original tension, if not contradiction, constitutes both the origin of the thinking of the historical in Heidegger's work and its very aporia: History remains in a relation to nature as to a non or

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¹ Heidegger, M. (2007), "The Concept of Time in the Science of History," (translated by Thomas Sheehan), in: *Becoming Heidegger* (ed. Kiesel, T. and Sheehan, T.). Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, pp.60–72. Essays from this volume will hereafter be cited as BH, followed by page number. I wish to thank Gregory Schufreider for his help in the writing of this essay. My thanks go as well to Andrew Johnson for his telling comments on a draft of the essay.

pre-historical ground that both threatens it and makes it possible. I will attempt to follow this aporia, from its first articulation in the 1915 lecture through Heidegger's overcoming of the epistemological horizon of the question, and the eventual subordination of nature under historical time in *Being and Time*. I will make forays in later texts from the thirties with the introduction of the notion of earth – that some commentators have claimed points to an archaic pre- or non-historical “nature” or “essence” – and question the reversal that one notes in Heidegger's thinking with respect to the relation between nature and history: far from being subjected to historical time, nature as “earth” will be said to be the “ground” of history. Ultimately this raises the question, if not of the historicity or nonhistoricity of the human, of the aporia of history itself as an inappropriable event, as we will see this original aporia reinscribed in the seizing of history as eventfulness, and its happening from a withdrawal. It will ultimately appear that we are no longer facing an opposition or an aporia, but the secret origin of historical time as such, always originating from an opaque ground, a withdrawal and a mystery, designated in the thirties by Heidegger as *earth*. History would be here “primal history,” emerging “from nature as *earth*, which is deeper and more mysterious than the nature discovered by science.”² This is why the opposition between nature and history ultimately proves inadequate, still too representational and epistemic: The opposition between nature and history was but the ontic characterization of the ontological being of history as arising out of a secret ground.

I. The Access to Historical Time: The Break with Nature

In the formal trial lecture which he delivered in Freiburg on July 27, 1915, “The Concept of Time in the Science of History” (“*Der Zeitbegriff in der Geschichtswissenschaft*”), Heidegger leaves behind the logical questions that had occupied him in earlier works (whether in *The Doctrine of Judgment in Psychologism* or in his 1916 habilitation thesis, *The Theory of Categories and Signification in Duns Scotus*) to focus on the motif of

² Polt, R. (2010), “Being and Time,” in: *Martin Heidegger. Key Concepts*. Durham, UK: Acumen, p.76.

the historical, first grasped in a concrete, pre-phenomenological manner. For the concept of time in historical science rests upon a lived, phenomenological and concrete experience, which Heidegger begins to explore in an otherwise epistemological essay. This is why it is to correct to state that even though these reflections take place within an epistemological horizon, they nonetheless already anticipate the ontological inquiries of the twenties regarding the being of time and history.³ In fact, in his opening remarks, Heidegger from the outset draws the limits of an epistemological approach, as he explains that the “emphasis on epistemological problems is born out of a legitimate and lively awareness of the need and value of critique, but it does not permit philosophy’s questions about ultimate issues and goals to achieve their intrinsic significance” (BH, 61). Thus it is legitimate to note that if Heidegger does share with Dilthey the view that there is a radical difference between the methods of the natural and human sciences, yet “over and above the purely epistemological problem, some ontological considerations already appear about what constitutes ‘true’ time, which is not physical time, and which is characterized by diversity and heterogeneity.”⁴

Heidegger begins by defining the object of his inquiry, namely, the determination of the concept of historical time: “we shall single out and clarify a specific individual category (or basic logical element): the concept of time.” More specifically, “What we need to articulate is this determination of the concept of ‘time in general’ as the concept of ‘historical time’” (BH, 62). Significantly, Heidegger proposes to access the meaning of historical time in contrast with the concept of time in natural sciences: “The peculiar structure of the concept of time in the science of history will no doubt stand out more clearly if we contrast it

³ In fact, one could claim that this early essay anticipates several key aspects of *Being and Time* (where it is mentioned by Heidegger), and significantly echoed in the contrast between original versus natural time. See John van Buren’s clarification in his Editor’s Introduction to (2002) *Supplements*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, p. 5. Also, in his editor’s Introduction to *Becoming Heidegger*, Theodore Kisiel stresses appropriately that this essay represents “the proto-development of the distinction between the originaive time of the unique self and the derivative time of science and the clock”. *Becoming Heidegger*, Editor’s Introduction, p. xviii. I will return to the question of original time versus natural and clock time later in this essay.

⁴ Dastur, F. (1998), *Heidegger and the Question of Time* (translated by François Raffoul and David Pettigrew). Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press International, p.2.

with a very different articulation of the structure of time. To do so, we shall briefly characterize the concept of time in natural sciences – specifically physics” (BH, 63). One finds there the first characterization of the time of historical sciences, which is defined in distinction with the time of natural sciences.⁵ At issue is to approach the concept of time in a way that is irreducible to a “purely logical or chronological apprehension” (Jollivet 2009: 26). Historical time is not reducible to the logical, but points to life itself in its specific eventfulness. As we indicated, this represents both the origin of a reflection that will always seek to think the specific and proper being of historical time, and a constitutive internal limit through which historical time is each time confronted by an aporetic situation: the relation to and distinction with nature. At every stage of Heidegger’s reflections on historical time, one will encounter this aporia, necessitating the analyses to always more distinguish proper ontological history from inadequate, ontic or inauthentic representations. In this first essay, Heidegger thus finds access to the problematic of history through a break with nature, that is, in the context of epistemological questions and disciplines, with natural sciences. More precisely, Heidegger attempts to determine the specific nature of the concept of time which intervenes in historical science, in contrast with the concept of time one finds in natural sciences. While time in the natural sciences is constituted as a homogenous, spatialized universal flow, allowing for measurement of motion (“the relation of motion and time has to do with *measuring* motion by means of time”, he explains, BH, 65), and therefore reduced to being “a mere parameter,”⁶ historical time is characterized by a *qualitative heterogeneity*, engaging a lived meaning.

In natural sciences, as Heidegger states, “*the function of time is to make measurement possible*” (BH, 66), and time “is a necessary moment in the *definition* of motion.” Indeed, as Heidegger expresses it “concisely put”, the “object of physics is law-governed motion” (BH, 65). In such an approach, time becomes a homogeneous flow, reduced to a “homo-

⁵ Servanne Jollivet stresses the irreducibility of historical time from the paradigm of nature: “Purely qualitative, this usage [from historical science] excludes the simple transposition of the method proper to natural sciences.” Jollivet, S. (2009) *Heidegger, Sens et Histoire*. Paris: PUF, p. 27.

⁶ Dastur, F., *Heidegger and the Question of Time*, p. 2.

geneous ordering of points, a scale, and a parameter” (BH, 66). Time becomes the measure of motion. Further, time in this context is reduced to simply function as the “condition of possibility for mathematically determining the object of physics (i.e., motion)” (BH, 66). This in fact is harmonious with the traditional metaphysical account of time, which is always understood in terms of the measurement of motion, within the general context of a philosophy of nature (hence Bergson’s critique of spatialized time). Heidegger makes the point in the Kassel lectures: “Time, says Aristotle, is what is counted in motion with respect to the before and after. This definition has remained essentially unchanged into modern times. Kant, too, determines time by starting from an apprehension of nature” (BH, 270).

In contrast to this “natural” time, time in history engages *events*, Heidegger also specifying that the object of the science of history “is human beings” (BH, 68). Indeed, Heidegger uses the word *Ereignis* in the 1915 essay to name such historical event (BH, 71). He makes the claim that time-reckoning systems in calendars always begin with a historically significant event (he gives the examples of the founding of the city of Rome, the birth of Christ, the Hegira), that is, with a “historically significant event [*Ereignis*]” (BH, 72).⁷ The starting-point of time-reckoning is a qualitative event. Heidegger then differentiates historical time from the time of physics by such reference to the event: “Consequently, the concept of time in the science of history has none of the homogeneity characterizing the concept of time in the natural sciences. That is also why historical time cannot be expressed mathematically by way of a series, for there is no law determining how the time-periods succeed one another” (BH, 71). Heidegger thus severs historical time from a quantitative approach, and approaches it in terms of a qualitative eventfulness. “*Time-periods [Zeiten] in history are distinguished qualitatively*” (BH, 71). Certainly, Heidegger concedes, the historian works with a concept of time as a certain “ordering of points,” that is, he or she works with historical dates, with “quantities” such as the number 1515 for the battle of

⁷ Compare with that passage from the 1934 summer semester course: “History [*Geschichte*] is an event [*Ereignis*], insofar as it happens” [*geschieht*]. Heidegger, M. (2009), *Logic as The Question Concerning the Essence of Language*. Albany, NY: SUNY, p. 74. Hereafter cited as GA 38, followed by the page number of the translation.

Marignan. Yet, such a number is not treated as a *quantity* (that is, as an element within the numerical series from 1 to infinity, or as a number per se), and the historian is not interested in dates as dates, but considers them only insofar as they refer to meaningful events.⁸ A date thus has “meaning and value within the science of history only as regards its historically significant content” (BH, 71).

Such content is given by the event, which Heidegger also thematizes as the presence of life in history, as when he explains that the “qualitative factor of the historical concept of time is nothing but the congealing – the crystallization – of an objectification of life within history” (BH, 71). A decisive passage, as Heidegger clearly states that the concept of historical time needs to be grounded in the phenomenological event of life itself, and that the concept itself is grounded in a phenomenological pre-theoretical domain. Therefore, the question “when” has two different meanings in history and in physics. When asking about the “when” of a historical event (*Ereignis*), “I am asking not about its quantity but about its place in a *qualitative historical* context” (BH, 71). What is specific to the concept of time in history is that it designates *an event*: “Thus the concept ‘the famine in Fulda in the year 750’ indicates a very specific individual event [*Ereignis*] and accordingly is a historical concept” (BH, 67). This is why historical dates are only “convenient tokens for counting,” but in themselves have no meaning. What gives them meaning is a *qualitative* determination. This also implies that history as a science, as historiography, rests upon and presupposes historical reality itself (which still demands to be elaborated and clarified ontologically), making necessary Heidegger’s distinction between *Historie* and *Geschichte*.

II. The Break with the Theoretical: The *Historie*/*Geschichte* Distinction

This original determining distinction between history and nature will be radicalized in the following years in Heidegger’s ontologizing of

⁸ We leave aside here the whole discussion in section 79 of the so-called “datability” (*Datierbarkeit*) that Dasein deploys in its concerned existence in the world (and the time-reckoning that is the ground for such dating), and which is the existential basis for historical dating. See SZ, p. 407.

the problematic of history. For the epistemological horizon proves inadequate to the appropriate raising of the question of historical time. Indeed, as early as 1919, in an early Freiburg lecture course, Heidegger explained that “the theoretical itself and as such refers back to something pre-theoretical,” so that, on the way to an originary phenomenology of the facticity of life, later renamed *Dasein*, “the primacy of the theoretical must be broken.”⁹ Such pre-theoretical basis is approached by Heidegger as life, and more precisely factual life, so as to avoid any psychologism, a life that will be characterized as “ultimate fact.” What is indeed most striking is how in that period Heidegger identifies life as *the* fundamental Fact, the central concern of his thought, the very matter of phenomenology. Phenomenology, for Heidegger at that time, is a phenomenology of life itself. In *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle*, Heidegger states from the outset: “‘Factual life’: ‘life’ expresses a basic phenomenological category; it signifies a basic phenomenon.”¹⁰ Far from reducing it to an ontic, regional domain, subordinated to a prior, more originary, ontological level, Heidegger on the contrary approaches life as the fundamental fact — indeed as “something ultimate” (PIA, p.62) — to which all thought must return as to its ground. He also places himself explicitly within the tradition of life-philosophy in its various forms, which is the foreshadowing of a genuine phenomenology of what he terms “factual life”. He recognizes, for instance, that some of his analyses “came forth already in modern life-philosophy”, a philosophical movement which he praises in these terms: “I understand [life-philosophy] to be no mere fashionable philosophy but, for its time, an actual attempt to come to philosophy rather than babble idly over academic frivolities” (PIA, p.61).

Heidegger thus seeks to establish that life in its givenness is not a theoretical object, does not take a theoretical distance with itself, but rather interprets itself in a radically immanent manner.¹¹ Such life is “lived life”

⁹ Heidegger, M. (2002), *Toward the Definition of Philosophy* (GA 56/57: translated by Ted Sadler. London: Continuum), p.50.

¹⁰ Heidegger, M. (2001), *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, p. 61. Hereafter cited as PIA, followed by pagination of the translation.

¹¹ On this point, see my (2008), “The Facticity of Life and the Need for Philosophy,” in: *Re-thinking Facticity*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, in particular pp. 73–77.

(*Toward the Definition of Philosophy*, 40), not in the sense of a psychical process, not as *Erlebnis*, but indeed and already as *Er-eignis*, appropriative event. “The experiences are appropriative events in so far as they live out of one’s ownness, and life only lives in this way” [*Die Erlebnisse sind Er-eignisse, insofern sie aus dem Eigenen leben und Leben nur so lebt*] (*Toward the Definition of Philosophy*, p. 64, tr. slightly modified). And since life understood as *Ereignis* constitutes the essence of the historical as such,¹² one can see how the opposition between quantitative time and qualitative historical time from the 1915 lecture finds itself rethought in terms of an originary hermeneutics of factual life: historical time now designates life’s proper motion (*Bewegtheit*) – distinguished from the *Bewegung* or natural movement of natural entities – in its restlessness and self-unfolding, which Heidegger also calls a relation of effectuation or enactment (*Vollzug*).¹³ He calls this movement “historicity” (*Geschichlichkeit*), borrowing the term from Count York via Dilthey. In fact, one needs to approach life essentially as a motion, a specific movement. Heidegger writes: “In our rough characterization of life, we have often spoken of actualization, nexus of actualization. Elsewhere, people

¹² We thus read in this 1919 course that life “is itself *historical* in an absolute sense”. *Toward the Definition of Philosophy*, p. 18. One notes here the clear break with Husserl and a certain anhistoricity of Husserlian phenomenology, which Heidegger explicitly denounces in the 1923 summer semester course, Heidegger, M. (1999), *Ontology. The Hermeneutics of Facticity*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, p. 59. Referring to “the absence of history in phenomenology,” Heidegger pokes fun of its presuppositions: “one naively believes that the subject matter will, no matter what the position of looking at it, be obtained in *plain and simple evidence*.” However, phenomenology must become a historical method, and “for this it is necessary to disclose the history of the covering up of the subject matter,” Heidegger adds, anticipating on the *Destruktion* as method of ontology which will be thematized in *Being and Time* and *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*.

¹³ On the historicity of life as enactment, see Martin Heidegger’s (1998) “Comments on Karl Jaspers’s Psychology of Worldviews,” in: *Pathmarks*, (ed. William McNeill). NY: Cambridge University Press, p. 28. As Eric Nelson notes, “Heidegger first discussed history in terms of the priority of event (*Ereignis*) and enactment (*Vollzug*), which are used in his early lecture courses in opposition to the traditional concepts of subject and object, and in terms of the difference between “lived history” (*Geschichte*) and historical science (*Historie*) in the situation of crisis and engagement with *Lebens-* and *Existenzphilosophie* after the First World War.” “History, Event, and Alterity in Heidegger and Levinas,” in: *Between Levinas and Heidegger* (ed. Eric Sean Nelson and John Drabinski), under contract with SUNY Press. The emphasis is placed on “historical life” in its motility and facticity as opposed to the science of history, which presupposes it while ignoring it.

speak of process, stream, the flowing character of life. This latter way of speaking is motivated by and follows a fundamental aspect in which we encounter life, and we take it as a directive toward the ensemble of the basic structures of life as *movement*, motility” (PIA, 85). Also: “The movedness [*Bewegtheit*] of factual life can be provisionally interpreted and described as *unrest*. The ‘how’ of this unrest, in its fullness as a phenomenon, determines facticity” (PIA, 70).

Implicit in these distinctions is a critique of the reliance on the metaphysical and epistemological primacy of natural sciences, as well as the beginning of an ontological derivation of nature as such. Heidegger takes issue with the positioning of objectivity – and nature – as the standard model for being. He articulates such a critique in the following way: “It is not the case that objects are first present as bare realities, as objects in some sort of natural state, and that they then in the course of our experience receive the garb of a value-character, so they do not have to run around naked. This is the case neither in the direction of the experience of the surrounding world nor in the direction of the approach and the sequence of interpretation, as if the constitution of nature could, even to the smallest extent, supply the foundation for higher types of objects. *On the contrary, the objectivity, ‘nature,’ first arises out of the basic sense of the Being of objects of the lived, experienced, encountered world*” (PIA, 69, my emphasis). Objectivity, nature, are here derived from a more primordial sense of being, namely, life in its facticity.

For Heidegger, this break with the theoretical, with the epistemological, in a new approach that he referred to in the 1919 course as a “primordial science” (*Urwissenschaft*)¹⁴, appears clearly in the opening pages of the 1925 summer semester course, *History of the Concept of Time*, the sub-title of which reads: “Prolegomena to the Phenomenology of History (*Geschichte*) and Nature (*Natur*)”. Heidegger begins by noting the epistemological horizon of the very distinction between nature and history, through their respective empirical disciplines, natural sciences and human sciences. However, he immediately raises a doubt with respect to the self-sufficiency or legitimacy of this scientific approach: for on the one hand, “history and nature would be accessible only insofar as

¹⁴ Heidegger, M. *Toward the Definition of Philosophy*, in particular pp. 17–26.

they are objects thematized in these sciences,” which would not give us “the actual area of subject matter out of which the thematic of the sciences is first carved;”¹⁵ and on the other hand, due to this situation in which history as a science misses the “authentic reality of history,” one may stress that “it might well be that something essential necessarily remains closed” to the scientific way of disclosure. Second, Heidegger attempts to refute the opposition between nature and history, treating it as a strictly scientific division (“the separation comes first from these sciences”), one which would not be validated phenomenologically (“the separation of the two domains may well indicate that an original and undivided context of subject matter remains hidden,” HCT, 2). Instead of remaining with the “fact” of these scientific divisions, it is a matter of leaping ahead “into the primary field of subject matter of a potential science and first make available the basic structure of the possible object of the science” (HCT, 2, slightly modified). This does not mean, Heidegger clarifies, a phenomenology of each of these disciplines, nor a phenomenology of their respective areas, domains of being or subject-matter: “Here it is not a matter of a phenomenology of the sciences of history and nature, or even of a phenomenology of history and nature as objects of these sciences” (HCT, 2). In other words, the scope is neither a phenomenology of science, nor an investigation as a regional ontology.

It is a matter instead “of a phenomenological disclosure of the original kind of being and constitution of both” (HCT, 2). How can this be achieved? Heidegger answers: “by disclosing the constitution of the being of that field”. This would constitute the “original science” of which Heidegger spoke in the 1919 course (here referred to as “a productive logic,” HCT, 2), because it investigates a domain prior to its scientific thematization. And what is that primary field prior to the domains of nature and history? Original Dasein. Indeed, sciences must receive “the possibility of their being”, Heidegger tells us, “from their meaning in human Dasein”. And original Dasein means: original historicity and temporality. This is why the next section is titled, “Prolegomena to a

¹⁵ Heidegger, M. (1985), *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena* (GA 20; translated by Theodore Kisiel). Bloomington, In: Indiana University Press, p.1. Hereafter cited as HCT, followed by page number.

phenomenology of history and nature *under the guidance of the history of the concept of time*" (my emphasis), as both nature and history can be said to stand under the horizon of time. The task is to reveal the horizon within which history and nature can be set against, and find the "actual constituents which underlie history and nature" (HCT, 6). Thus, what Heidegger seeks to achieve is a grasp of nature and history before scientific thematization ("We wish to exhibit history and nature so that we may regard them before scientific elaboration", HCT, 5). This requires an overcoming of the theoretical or epistemological.

This overcoming of the theoretical or epistemological – as well as the exhibiting of the ontological basis of historical time – is achieved through Heidegger's problematizing of the distinction between the terms *Historie* and *Geschichte*, a distinction which he had not made in the 1915 essay, and which we find for the first time addressed by him thematically in the 1925 Kassel lectures,¹⁶ although already in the 1920–1921 winter semester course on the *Phenomenology of Religious Life*, we read: "We mean the historical in the way we encounter it in life; not in the science of history".¹⁷ The problem lies in the fact that the question of history is usually approached from historical science (*Historie*), a discipline which for Heidegger *does not master its own subject matter*, historical reality itself (*Geschichte*). In *The History of the Concept of Time*, for instance, Heidegger reminds the reader that "the historiographical sciences are currently troubled by the question of historical reality itself," a situation presumably made worse by the fact that "historiographical sciences generally dispensed with any philosophical reflection"! (HCT, 14). One could add here that *Historie* is an investigation of ontic "facts" while *Ge-*

¹⁶ Heidegger, M. "Wilhelm Dilthey's Research and the Current Struggle for a Historical Worldview", in: *Becoming Heidegger*, pp. 238–274. It is interesting to note here that indeed Heidegger had used the terms – in particular the adjectives *geschichtlich* and *historisch* – interchangeably in earlier courses and lectures, for instance in the 1919/1921 "Comments on Karl Jaspers's *Psychology of Worldviews*" (translated by John van Buren) in: *Pathmarks*, pp. 1–38; see note 2, p. 365 for clarifications]. Heidegger wrote of "life as History (*Geschichte*)" (GA 58, p. 81), but also of "*historisches Leben*" or of life as being historical (*historisch*) in GA 56/57, p.21, tr. p. 18. I owe this last observation to Sophie-Jan Arrien, in: (2001), "Vie et Histoire (Heidegger 1919–1923)," in: *Philosophie*. Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, n. 69, p.57, note 20.

¹⁷ Heidegger, M. (2004), *The Phenomenology of Religious Life* (translated by Matthias Frischt and Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei). Bloomington, In: Indiana University Press, p. 23.

schichte designates the *being* of history. *Historie* presupposes *Geschichte*, while missing it.¹⁸

One knows how in §74 of *Being and Time* Heidegger makes the distinction between *Geschichte* and *Historie*, history as eventfulness of Dasein's being and history as the science of objectively present objects (*Objekts-geschichte*). History as *Geschichte* designates the absolutely originary history (*ursprüngliche Geschichte schlechthin*) whereas History as *Historie* designates the objectification of *Geschichte*. Thus, "whereas *Geschichte* refers to history articulated from the horizon of the question of the meaning of being, which is rearticulated as the history of the event and truth of being, *Historie* refers to the models of history found in the ordinary understanding of history as presence and re-presentation, and which continue to inform historiography and the philosophy of history."¹⁹ Further, as Nelson stresses, the ordinary understanding of *Historie* "presuppose the 'vulgar concept of time' analyzed in *Being and Time* as underlying everyday and philosophical understandings of time — whether linear or cyclical. These understandings block access to the history of being, obscuring rather than clarifying the history that we ourselves are" (op.cit., ibid.)

We find in this distinction the opening of an access to ontological time, to a historical time "which we ourselves are," an expression used frequently by Heidegger, and also echoed in the famous question from the 1924 lecture, "The Concept of Time": "Am I time?," "am I my time?" (*Supplements*, 213). At issue in this distinction is the radicalizing of historical time, from an external object of inquiry (*Historie*, from the Greek *historein*, to enquire), to history as an event (*Geschichte*, from the verb *geschehen*, to happen), indeed as "the happening that we ourselves are" (BH, 271). This happening is to be distinguished from a *natural* happening, or *Vorgang* (from *vorgehen*, as in the processes or *vorgänge* of nature). It is striking in this respect that in a later critique of histori-

¹⁸ In *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger returned to this question and reasserted that "the science of history does not at all determine, as science, the originary relation to history; instead, it always already presupposes such a relation." Heidegger, M. (2000), *Introduction to Metaphysics* (translated by Gregory Fried and Richard Polt). New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, p. 46.

¹⁹ Nelson, E. "History, Event, and Alterity in Heidegger and Levinas," op.cit.

cal science, Heidegger makes the point that such a discipline takes as its model natural sciences and its objectifications.²⁰

This expression, the history “that we ourselves are” (or “We ourselves are history”), “we are history” (*Wir sind Geschichte*) is borrowed from Count Yorck, and is to be found used as a leitmotiv in the Kassel lectures, which engage Dilthey’s philosophy of history as they pursue a phenomenological inquiry into the senses of life and the “being of the human being.” Heidegger in these Kassel lectures begins by lamenting the fact that in post-Kantian philosophy, the question of the sense of historical being “died out,” due to the predominance of the mathematical natural sciences, and the reduction of philosophy to epistemology. The question concerning the being of history became all the more pressing, and Heidegger credits Dilthey for having revived such an inquiry, although Dilthey was not able to sufficiently distinguish his approach from the epistemological, and as a consequence could not raise the question of the being of history phenomenologically. As Heidegger puts it: “It is a matter of elaborating the being of the historical, i.e., historicity and not the historical, being and not beings, reality and not the real. It is therefore not a question of empirical research in history. Even a universal history still would not deal with historicity. Dilthey made his way to the reality that is properly historical and has the sense of *being* historical, namely, human Dasein. Dilthey succeeded in bringing this reality to givenness, defining it as living, free, and historical. But he did not raise the question of historicity *itself*, the question of the sense of being, the question of the being of beings. It is only with the development of phenomenology that we are in a position to raise this question overtly” (BH, 255). A few pages later, Heidegger emphasizes that “Dilthey never raised the question of the reality of life itself,” never “had an answer to the question of what it means *to be* historical” (BH, 258).

In order to gain access to the *being* of the historical, it became necessary to break with the theoretical or epistemological perspectives, and

²⁰ Heidegger, M. (2002) “The Age of the World Picture,” in: *Off the Beaten Track* (ed. and translated by Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes). NY: Cambridge University Press, p. 62. Let us recall here the distinction made by Heidegger in the 1934 course among three types of change: One speaks of “flow” [*Ablauf*] for the earth, of “process” [*Vorgang*] for life, and of “happening” [*Geschehen*] for human beings. GA 38, tr., p. 75.

distinguish more fully between historical science and history as such. This is what Heidegger attempts in the following way. He first recalls the phenomenological scope of his analyses, clarifying that the “fundamental attitude of phenomenological research is defined by a principle which at first seems self-evident: to the matters themselves” (BH, 256). The issue is to reveal the *phenomenon* of history. This is all the more necessary since the ontological structure of historicity is concealed by history as a science.²¹ In terms of the question of history, it becomes a matter “of bringing historical reality itself to givenness so that the sense of its being can be read off from it” (BH, 256). This phenomenological task is only misleadingly self-evident, for the matters themselves are covered over by the unphenomenological representations concerning historical time, the epistemological perspective and the reductive outlook on natural time. “By way of preparation,” Heidegger then proceeds to distinguish *Historie* from *Geschichte*, noting that those terms, although from an entirely different origin, can “yet both get used interchangeably”. History as *Geschichte* designates “a happening that we ourselves are,” whereas historical science, from its etymological source, is an “ascertaining and reporting [of] what has happened,” and means “a knowledge of a happening” (BH, 271). The being of the historical is thus the happening that we ourselves are (“History happens to me; I am this happening”²²), while historical science is the thematic investigation of such happening. To this extent, it is not simply a matter of distinguishing those two terms, but of showing how one is grounded in the other, *Historie* as we saw presupposing *Geschichte*.²³ This ontological foundation is further developed in *Being and Time*, where Heidegger proposes to reveal “the ontological genesis of historiography as a science in terms of the histo-

²¹ As Jean Greisch explains, “what is thus forgotten or concealed (*passé sous silence*) is the *phenomenon* of historicity which is such that, before the invention of a historical science, which only came to be at the end of the 18th century and beginning of the 19th century, human existence was already constituted in a ‘historical’ manner in its ontological structure”. Greisch, J. (1994), *Ontologie et Temporalité*. Paris: PUF, p. 357, translation mine.

²² We find a similar expression in *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*, p.124, where we read: “History hits us (*Die Geschichte trifft uns*), and we are history itself”

²³ As Peter Warnke explains in his essay, “The History of Being,” “history, or more precisely ‘historiology’ (*Historie*) as a domain of research, operates within a pre-given sense of being, a determination of *what it is that it investigates*”. In: *Heidegger. Key Concepts*, p. 162.

ricity of Da-sein.”²⁴ This will involve, as we will see, a subordination of nature to historical time.

III. The Subordination of Nature to Historical Time

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger notes once again the ambiguity of the term “history,” which designates both “‘historical reality’ as well as the possibility of a science of it” (SZ, 378). However, Heidegger’s focus is neither the science of history nor even history as an object of such science. Instead, Heidegger is interested in thinking “this being itself which has not necessarily been objectified,” namely, the historical itself. Heidegger explains in paragraph 72 that the problem of history cannot be raised from historical science or historiography, because in such an approach, history is taken as an *object* of science. The basic phenomenon of history is “prior to the possibility of making something thematic by historiography and underlies it,” so that the question of the relation between the two becomes the following: “How history [*Geschichte*] can become a possible *object* for historiography [*Historie*], can be gathered only from the kind of being of what is historical [*Geschichtlichen*], from historicity and its rootedness in temporality” (SZ, 375). Heidegger makes this point in three different ways in this section 72: first, by defining historiography as an existentiell possibility of Dasein (“from the kind of being of this being that exists historically, there arises the existentiell possibility of an explicit disclosure and grasp of history”), which betrays that it presupposes an existential basis that needs to be fleshed out. Second, by characterizing historical science as the “thematizing” (proper to any science) of a pre-given domain, as *Historie* is “primarily constituted by thematizing” (SZ, 392). Third, by characterizing this discussion in terms of ontological foundation (“the existential interpretation of historiography as a science aims solely at a demonstration of its ontological provenance from the historicity of Da-sein”, SZ, 376).

²⁴ Heidegger, M. (1953), *Sein und Zeit*. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, p. 392. Hereafter cited as SZ following the German pagination; all citations of the work are from Heidegger, M. (1996), *Being and Time* (translated by Joan Stambaugh). Albany: SUNY Press.

This ontological foundation is of course the task of paragraph 76 of *Being and Time*, which is concerned with showing the “existential origin of Historiography from the Historicity of Dasein” and proposes to “inquire into the ontological possibility of the origin of the sciences [and here of historical science] from the constitution of being of Dasein” (SZ, 392), an existential derivation already posited in paragraph 3 of *Being and Time*. The presuppositions of the historicity of Dasein by historiography are several: one can for instance note from the outset that the very possibility of disclosing the past through historiography presupposes that “the ‘past’ has always already been disclosed in general” (SZ, 393). Although this may seem obvious, Heidegger stresses that the fact that “something like this [the fact that the past must be open to a return to it] and how it is possible is by no means obvious” (SZ, 392). Things such as “antiquities” can become historiographical objects only because they are already in themselves historical. As Heidegger explains, the historical character of antiquities is “grounded in the ‘past’ of Dasein to whose world that past belongs” (SZ, 380). This means that the historiographical disclosure (Heidegger uses the term *Erschliessung*) of history “is in itself rooted in the historicity of Dasein in accordance with its ontological structure, whether it is factically carried out or not” (SZ, 392). This is why historiography should not be given a positivist interpretation, as its objects are not “the facts” in their positivity, but rather the having-been of historical Dasein.

This is why, one notes in passing, history does not designate “the past” (*Vergangenheit*) in the sense of what has gone by, the bygone, *das Vergangene*, but rather the world of Dasein has having-been, *das Gewesene*, which ultimately for Heidegger is yet to come, and thus futural. “We see that beenness [*Gewesenheit*], insofar as it reaches over us and comes toward [*zukommt*] us, has future [*Zukunft*]” (GA 38, tr. 98). For Heidegger, history as happening “is determined from the future,”²⁵ or as he would also state in the “Letter on Humanism”: the “history of being is never past, but stands ever before” (BW, 194). Indeed, if the possible itself is the very meaning of Dasein’s existence, should not one see “behind” those alleged facts the presence of the possible itself? “Does

²⁵ Heidegger, M., *Introduction to Metaphysics*, p.47.

historiography thus have *what is possible* as its theme? Does not its whole ‘meaning’ lie in ‘facts,’ in what has factually been?” (SZ, 394). In this sense, as Heidegger would state in that 1934 course, “we mean by ‘history’ not the past, but the future”: “To enter into history means, therefore, not simply that something that is bygone, merely because it is bygone, is classed with the past. Yes, it is, generally speaking, questionable whether the entering into history always means to be sent to the past, as it were... we mean by ‘history’ not the past, but the future” (GA 38, tr. 71). Decades later, in the Zollikon seminars, Heidegger would return to this question, maintaining the distinction between an ontic past and an ontological “having been,” and claiming that the confrontation with such having-been – no mere “retaining” — engages the future: “The present confronts what has been in relation to what is coming [*das Künftige*]”.²⁶ For Dasein to be “factually” does not point to “facts” but to a world-history. This is why remains, monuments, records, are all possible material for historical research and “can become *historiographical* material only because they have a *world-historical* character” (SZ, 394); that is to say that the acquisition, sifting and securing of material “does not first bring about a return to the ‘past,’ but rather already presupposes historical being toward the Da-sein that has-been-there” (SZ, 394). *The object of historical science is not “the facts”, but historical Dasein.*²⁷ This in turn presupposes the historicity of the historian’s existence, as one can also note further that a thematization of the past (historiography) presupposes the historicity of Dasein. This does not indicate a subjectivism in Heidegger’s analysis, but rather the fact that historiography is a possibility of existence: as Heidegger puts it, the central theme of historiography “is always a possibility of existence that has-been-there,” and thus rests upon the historicity of Dasein’s existence.²⁸ In short, the fundamental concepts of historiographical sciences – the epistemological problematic

²⁶ Heidegger, M. (2001), *The Zollikon Seminars*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, p. 220

²⁷ This is why, as Heidegger states, “what is philosophically primary is neither a theory of the concept-formation of historiology nor the theory of historiological knowledge, nor yet the theory of history as the Object of historiology; what is primary is rather the Interpretation of authentically historical entities as regards their historicity”. SZ, 10.

²⁸ Heidegger at that point refers to Nietzsche’s essay on the “advantages and disadvantages of historiography for life,” and the three senses of historiography that Nietzsche retains – the mon-

of the social sciences – ultimately “are concepts of existence” (SZ, 397). As we see, the epistemological problematic of historiography (*Historie*) rests upon and presupposes the ontological constitution of history (*Geschichte*). The question of the relation between history and nature is thus displaced from the epistemological horizon of the 1915 essay, to the ontological level.

Most significantly for our concern, this ontological foundation of *Historie* in *Geschichte* has radical consequences for an understanding of the relation between history and nature as it leads to a grounding of nature in historical time. Indeed, as Heidegger explicitly states, “even nature is historical” (SZ, 388). Not historical in the sense of “natural history,” for, as he would say in the 1934 course, it is senseless and vacuous to speak of natural history. Nature, Heidegger insists, *has no history*, and “only the human being has history” (GA 38, tr. 67). Nonetheless, nature is in a certain sense historical when it appears as within the world, as an intraworldly object: “nature is historical as a countryside, as areas that have been inhabited or exploited, as battlefields and cultic sites.” (SZ, 388–389)²⁹. The ontological foundation of historical science in historicity thus also implies the subordination of nature to history, via the reference to the world, or, to be more precise, the so-called “secondarily historical,” “World History” or the “world-historical” (*das Weltgeschichtliche*). As Heidegger explains, Dasein is the “primarily historical,” and the “secondarily historical” is “what is encountered within the world, not only useful things at hand in the broadest sense, but also *nature* in the surrounding world as the ‘historical ground’” (SZ, 381). Nature gives itself against the background of the world, which itself is unfolding temporally. “With the factual disclosedness [*Erschlossenheit*] of Dasein’s world, nature has been uncovered [*entdeckt*] for Dasein” (SZ, 412). Whereas Dasein is “disclosed,” nature is “uncovered,” marking here the ontological distinction between the two.

umental, the antiquarian, and the critical – to the historicity of Da-sein (“*The threefold character of historiography is prefigured in the historicity of Da-sein.*” SZ, 396).

²⁹ One also finds in (1997), *Phenomenological Interpretation of Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, p. 14, the same characterization of nature as an intraworldly being.

Dasein's concern, which is always thrown, surrendered to night and day (for Heidegger nature thus also designates thrownness, and in fact will be described a few years later, as earth, as that in which historical Dasein is already thrown, *schon geworfen*³⁰), is connected to the environment it is involved with, such as "the rising of the sun" (SZ, 412). What is significant in this description is that nature, i.e., the sun, gives itself in terms of and on the basis of concerned time: "Then, when the sun rises, it is *time for* so and so" (SZ, 412). Now, the time of concern, or the counting of time, is what Aristotle understood time to be, the counting of *natural* movement: the counting of time becomes "the counting of the now in relation to the now that is no longer and the now that is not yet. Time is thus that which is numbered in movement encountered in the horizon of the earlier and later, which is precisely the Aristotelian definition of time in Book IV of *The Physics*" (Françoise Dastur, HCT, 49).

What is significant here is that this conception of time as number of movement takes place within "the natural understanding of Being as *Vorhandenheit*" (HCT, 49). There is thus a profound affinity between the time of concern and the sphere of the natural. This is why it should not come as a surprise if Heidegger then defines "nature" as a kind of ready-to-hand, that is, an intra-worldly entity that is encountered within a world that has been disclosed under the horizon of temporality. "Concern makes use of the 'handiness' of the sun, which sheds forth light and warmth" (SZ, 412, modified). The sun is used in terms of the time-reckoning of Dasein: "The sun dates the time interpreted in concern" (SZ, 412, modified), such "natural clock" constituting the origin, Heidegger tells us, of "artificial clocks" as such (as these artificial clocks must be "adjusted" to the natural clock). The natural concept of time is hence a derivative mode of temporality, a mode of Dasein's concern with entities within-the-world. Natural time is derivative, vulgar time. Time as measured refers to Dasein's time-reckoning, also a function of concern. "The disclosedness of natural clock belongs to the Dasein which exists as thrown and falling" (SZ, 415). This reduction of natural time is

³⁰ Heidegger, M. (1993), "The Origin of the Work of Art," in: *Basic Writings*, rev. and exp. Edition (ed. David Farrell Krell). San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, p. 200.

further emphasized in the text, for not only does Heidegger refer it to public fallen time, but he then also assigns it to so-called “primitive Dasein,” as opposed to so-called “advanced Dasein”! “Comparison shows that for the ‘advanced’ Dasein the day and the presence of sunlight no longer have such a special function as they have for the ‘primitive’ Dasein *on which our analysis of natural time-reckoning has been based*” (SZ, 415, emphasis mine). Natural time is in any case fallen temporality, and represents the leveling down of original temporality (*Nivellierung der ursprunglichen Zeit*). One knows how, in section 82, Heidegger is careful to note that time has traditionally been interpreted, from Aristotle to Hegel, within a philosophy of nature, which denotes the inauthentic approach to the concept of time, how “since Aristotle, time has been defined as physical time, the time of the objective world.”³¹ Time is approached from within an ontology of the present-at-hand, to which nature belongs. As such, it is subject to a phenomenological destruction.

Nature thus gives itself within the world (the secondarily historical), and is thus grounded on Dasein’s historicity, i.e., the primarily historical! Therein lies the reduction of nature, which in fact could lead, in Heidegger’s most extreme formulations, to an expulsion or rejection of nature outside of the realm of history and historical Dasein. For instance, in *On the Essence of Truth*, Heidegger states: “Only the ek-sistent human being is historical. ‘Nature’ has no history.”³² One finds a similar claim in the 1934 summer semester course, where Heidegger states that “nature is without history” (GA 38, tr. p.113). Certainly, nature can be in-time, as we saw, but it is not historical, it is outside history. As Heidegger states, one never speaks of a past or futural nature! (GA 38, tr. p. 85). Heidegger insists at length on this point, reiterating that, “In nature there is neither historicity nor unhistoricity, but it is without history [*geschichtlos*], not dependent on the happening [*Geschehen*]. Nature is without history because it is atemporal [*Zeitlos*]” (GA 38, tr.113). Certainly, he concedes, “natural processes are measurable and ascertainable by time. Nature, insofar as it is measurable by time, is in a certain manner in time”. But one needs to distinguish between “being-in-time” [*in-der-Zeit-Sein*] and

³¹ Dastur, F., *Heidegger and the Question of Time*, p. 7.

³² Heidegger, M., “On the Essence of Truth,” in: *Pathmarks* (translated by John Sallis), p. 146.

“being-temporal” [*Zeitlich-Sein*], “which befits only the human being” (GA 38, tr., p. 113). Nature is within-timely, the human being – and, as we saw, only the human being – is Temporal.³³

IV. The Earth as Ground of History

And yet, this early reduction of nature, subordinated to history, if not rejected in the nonhistorical, will lead to a paradoxical reversal of Heidegger’s hierarchy between nature and history, as nature will be said a few years after *Being and Time*, as earth, to be the ground [*Grund*] of the world, and thus of history if it is the case that “entrance into world by beings is primal history pure and simple”.³⁴ In “The Origin of the Work of Art,” Heidegger would speak of the earth as the ground and native soil (*heimatliche Grund*) of the world and of historical Dasein, “that on which and in which man bases his dwelling. We call this *ground* the *earth*” (BW, 168, my emphasis). The work of art reveals that the world rests upon the earth, which itself “emerges as native ground” (BW, 168). In this way, “upon the earth and in it, historical man grounds his dwelling in the world” (BW, 172). This paradoxical reversal might be the indication of a concealed aporia, the very aporia structuring Heidegger’s thought of history as contrasted and opposed to the natural. It is as if all these repeated attempts by Heidegger to subordinate nature to history might ultimately be aimed at overcoming or suppressing the aporia of an irreducible nature that could not be derived from historical time. Such an aporia would also threaten the ontological hierarchies that Heidegger sets up in *Being and Time*. At this point, as one commentator remarked, “one might try to resist Heidegger’s subordination of natural, linear time to the Temporality of Dasein”.³⁵ In fact, we note such resistance in Heidegger’s texts themselves.

³³ Certainly, Heidegger concedes, “the occurrences on the earth, in plants or animals are certainly *flows* and *processes* in the framework of time, but stones, animals, plants are themselves not temporal in the original sense as we ourselves”. GA 38, tr. 110. Only the human being is historical, and the natural occurrences within the human being (“the changing of the gastric juices, of the blood circulation, the graying of the hair”, GA 38, tr. 72) do not constitute history.

³⁴ Heidegger, M. (1984), *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic* (translated by M. Heim). Bloomington, In: Indiana University Press, p. 209.

³⁵ Polt, R., “Being and Time,” in *Martin Heidegger. Key Concepts*, p. 74.

Apart from those enigmatic passages in *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* where Heidegger states that “intraworldliness does not belong to nature’s being,” a being “which on its own part already always is,” and which “is, even if we do not uncover it, without our encountering it within our world,”³⁶ the difficulty of deriving nature from history already appeared in the discussion in *Being and Time* of the relation between original temporality and within-time-ness, history and historiography (and time-reckoning). As we saw, Heidegger claimed that Dasein exists historically before historiography, that what is world-historical is always already there “in the occurrence of existing being-in-the-world even “*without being grasped historiographically*” (SZ, 389). However, what would it mean for this discussion if historical science was not simply an existentiell possibility but a constitutive feature of the phenomenon of history, if historiography was not simply derived from the ontological basis of history? Heidegger himself asks that question, when clarifying in the 1934 summer semester course the relation between “lore of history” (*Geschichtskunde*) and *Geschichte*: “*History* [Geschichte] is an event [Ereignis], insofar as it *happens* [geschieht] A happening [Geschehen] is *historiographical*, insofar as it stands in some *lore*, is *explored* [erkundet] and manifested [bekundet]. Is that which is historiographical only a supplement to the historical? Or is history only where there is historiography, so that the statement ‘No history without historiography’ comes about?” (GA 38, tr. 74). Heidegger is constrained to admit that long before the invention of historical science, Dasein, as a historical being, was using calendars and clocks that measure time and provide a structure to social time. While insisting on the ontological priority of historicity over historiography, insisting as well that world-time is derived from Dasein’s temporality, and that the time of concern, clock-time, is based on such original historicity (Dasein’s temporality is said to pre-exist all instruments that may measure it), Heidegger also has to concede that the intra-temporality of the time of concern – and thus natural time – is “equiprimordial” with historicity: “But since time as within-time-ness also ‘stems’ from the temporality of Da-sein, historic-

³⁶ Heidegger, M. (1982), *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (translated by Albert Hofstadter). Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, p. 169.

ity and within-time-ness turn out to be equiprimordial" (SZ, 377).³⁷ Now, nature is clearly at the center of this problem, since for Heidegger nature is included within-time-ness: "In the same way, the processes of nature, whether living or lifeless, are encountered 'in time'" (SZ, 377). Heidegger's attempt to posit an ontological derivation of nature from history aporetically runs into the claim of an equiprimordiality between the two!

It becomes impossible to maintain – and this is indeed the very aporia that this essay is concerned with – the ontological hierarchy between history and nature, and to secure the foundation of nature, as intra-worldly, in history. This aporia, which threatens Heidegger's very ontological analysis, including the paramount distinction between original and vulgar time, ontological and ontic time, opens this unavoidable question: if original temporality cannot unfold without the intra-worldly, natural time, what prevents us from radicalizing this proposition (and our understanding of the natural) and assert that in this case it may be nature that turns out to be that from which the historical itself emerges? Thus radicalized, would nature not represent an "archi-ontical" origin of historical time, an original sense of nature that Heidegger would name, a few years later, earth? Further, doesn't the dimension of thrownness, itself rethought from the truth of being itself, raise anew the question of the origin of history, if it is the case, as we saw above, that the earth is described in "The Origin of the Work of Art" as that from which historical Dasein is thrown?

The question remains of how to conceive of such natural being, how to conceive of this non-derivation of nature from history: does it point to a metaphysical ground outside of the disclosedness of Dasein? Does it point to a non-historical ground of human existence, as Michel Haar argues in his two volumes on the earth and the human?³⁸ In these two

³⁷ This is why, as he concedes in the 1934 course, "assuming that lore [*Kunde*] belongs to the inner constitution of the historical happening, then we must make clear *from the happening*, to what extent something like lore can belong to this kind of being [*Seins*]. GA 38, tr. p. 81.

³⁸ Haar, M. (1993), *The Song of the Earth* (translated by Reginald Lilly). Bloomington, In: Indiana University Press. Hereafter cited as SE, followed by page number. Haar, M. (1993), *Heidegger and the Essence of Man* (translated by William McNeill). Albany, NY: SUNY Press. Hereafter cited as HEM, followed by page number.

books, Michel Haar seeks to claim that there is a non-historicity or even extra-historicity of humans as earthy beings. He is constrained at first to recognize that for Heidegger the human being is essentially historical and that "Heidegger maintains that man is entirely and exclusively historical" (HEM, 176).³⁹ However, this is to immediately challenge this view, by suggesting that beneath history there remains a "preexisting situation," leaving the trace of "prehistorical man" (HEM, 177). In fact, Michel Haar understands such element as a non-historical permanence, as "every transformation requires something that persists" (HEM, 177). For instance, he argues, although each epoch has its own fundamental mood, "the fact of finding oneself disposed and experiencing corporeal being-in-the-world according to constantly changing moods *belongs to every human being in every epoch*" (HEM, 181, my emphasis). Haar also appeals to a "transhistoricity" of Western man, as we are capable today of accessing the Greek epoch of astonishment or wonder. It should be noted that Haar supports his argument by appealing to the "nonhistoricity" of *Ereignis* (SE, p.3). However the term used by Heidegger in the passage cited by Haar is *ungeschichtlich*, a term that is not synonymous with atemporal or outside history altogether, but is a mode of historicity, as Heidegger explained in *Logic as the Question on the Essence of Language* (GA 38, tr. 113).

Haar believes that this extrahistorical or permanent element is represented in Heidegger's thought by the notion of earth. For, as he puts it, "Generally speaking, the nonhistorical is always linked to the Earth" (HEM, 179). Earth, he continues, constitutes "the limit of history" (ibid). Dwelling, in particular, "instantiates an essential mode of the nonhistorical" for in it "something immemorial persists: the shelter" (HEM, 178). Sheltering establishes an intimacy around a hearth, a notion that once again is said to point towards the nonhistorical: "Is it not the immemorial character of the hearth that founds dwelling?" (HEM, 178). Dwelling around the hearth would constitute Heidegger's reference to the non-historical: "To the degree that Heidegger writes that

³⁹ Indeed, Heidegger wrote in his "Letter on Humanism" that the "thinking that thinks into the truth of being is, as thinking, historical" (BW, 238), and also: "the history of being is being itself"! Heidegger, M. (1973), *The End of Philosophy* (translated by J. Stambaugh). New York: Harper & Row, p. 82.

'being is the hearth', he himself acknowledges the nonhistorical aspect of being" (ibid), or the archaic. This interpretation is pursued in *The Song of the Earth*, where Haar claims that being is not reducible to its history, and that history conceals a reserve and an opacity "which can never be exhibited" (SE, 2), which never sees the light of day. Without constituting a substantial metaphysical ground, the earth, according to Haar, "possesses... its own essence which, in relation to being, can be thought at least negatively as the dimension that in itself rebels against phenomenality, namely as the pre-historical or nonhistorical dimension" (SE, 100, my emphasis). Arguing against the ontological derivation of nature in *Being and Time*, Haar insists that "the essence and genuine origin of this nature cannot, by definition, be situated 'in the world'" (SE, 10) and he even go so far as referring nature to the tradition of the thing in itself! "Just as the Kantian phenomenon leaves the residue of the thing in itself, the phenomenological transparency of the world leaves a residue: the *being* of nature" (SE, 10).

We are nonetheless allowed to ask: Is there such a permanent non or extra-historical substrate in Heidegger's thought, a "deep nonhistoricality of Dasein" which Haar does not hesitate to describe as the "quasi-eternity of embodied being-in-the-world"? (HEM, 181). It is very doubtful. Heidegger himself explains that nature, although atemporal and outside history, nonetheless can in a certain sense "enter into history." How? In the sense that nature, for instance, as a landscape, "is site and abode of an historical process" (GA 38, tr, p. 113). The earth, Heidegger explains, can neither enter into history, nor step out of it, because the earth "has nothing to do with history." (GA 38, tr. 71). And yet, "the southern Balkan peninsula entered into history more than two thousand years ago. A mountain chain, a river can become [a] site for world-historical decisive battles. We speak of 'historical soil,' [we] say that an entire region is, as it were, laden with history" (GA 38, tr. 72). The earth is the soil [*Der Erdboden*] of history, a soil which then "also enters into history" (ibid). No substantial separation between earth and history (the world is earthy, the earth is worldly), but a singular intertwining, indeed a strife (*Streit*). As Heidegger explains in "On the Essence of Truth," "Beings as

a whole reveal themselves as φύσις, ‘nature,’” and history “begins only when beings themselves are expressly drawn up into their unconcealment and conserved in it”.⁴⁰ In that sense, the earth cannot constitute a separate, substantial nonhistorical ground. This is what Heidegger shows in “The Origin of the Work of Art”. The earth represents a self-secluding element and world the open region, and yet they are essentially intertwined: the earth cannot subsist on its own without the openness of the world and the world cannot float away from earth; the world is grounded on the earth, the earth juts into the open region. Heidegger explains that “World and earth are essentially different from one another and yet are never separated. The world grounds itself on the earth, and earth juts through world” (BW, 174).⁴¹

Earth and world belong together as the co-belonging – and original strife, *Urstreit* – of clearing and concealing. That relation is one of tension and resistance. The world, resting on the earth, attempts to overcome it; the earth, as sheltering and concealment, draws the world toward it. In the creation of the world, the strife “must be set back into the earth,” and the earth itself “must be set forth and put to use as self-secluding” (BW, 189). Such strife is not destructive but constitutive of both earth and world, for in “essential strife, rather, the opponents raise each other into their self-assertion of their essential natures” (BW, 174). The world “lets the earth be earth”. In the end, history itself is rethought as the strife between earth and world, as the between of earth and world, as Heidegger makes clear in *The Contributions to Philosophy* when he describes history [*Geschichte*] as “the striving of the strife [*Bestreitung des Streites*] of earth and world.”⁴² History happens in, and as, this original strife of earth and world. The earth thus cannot constitute,

⁴⁰ Heidegger, M., “On the Essence of Truth,” in: *Pathmarks*, p. 145.

⁴¹ In the highly evocative words of David Kleinberg-Levin, “Nature is always historical, never visible as such, never encountered outside the violent constructs of our historically situated consciousness; conversely, however, the world that we have built, forging a historical existence in irreconcilable struggle against Nature’s forces of destruction, can never escape its violent conditions and mortifying alembications.” David Kleinberg-Levin, Brochure for the Exhibition of the Photographic Art of Olivier Mériel, Candace Dwan Gallery, September, 2008.

⁴² Heidegger, M. (1999), *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)* (translated by Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly). Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, p. 66.

as Michel Haar suggests, a prior, prehistorical, “quasi-eternal,” metaphysical element.

For Heidegger, after the turn, history is no longer approached as Dasein’s historicity but as the history of being itself (*Geschichte des Seins*), as the between of world and earth. History is thought from *Geschick*, the sending (*schicken*) of being in its epoquality, an *epochē* which is a withdrawal. As we saw, through a genuine *Kehre* in thinking, Heidegger claims in *The Origin of the Work of Art* that earth (now no longer understood as nature giving itself within the world but as counterpart to the world), constitutes the ground of history, as “that which bears all” (BW, 188). What was constantly referred back to history as to its ontological ground now becomes the ground of the historical. Neither historical nor unhistorical, the earth is without history in the sense of being archi-historical, pre-historical, the ground of history, the “obscure ground of our abode” (Haar, SE, 57). But what kind of ground? The non-historical ground of history, as Michel Haar suggests? Or as a ground that grounds insofar as it withdraws? Haar distinguishes four senses of “earth” in “The Origin of the Work of Art,” the fourth one being that of “ground”, or *heimatlicher Grund*. Haar notes that the choice of this term shows Heidegger’s continuity with metaphysics (the term is “the same as the metaphysical term designating the foundation and reason for being”, SE, 61), although he also notes that for Heidegger *Grund* means rootedness in the sense of a ground ‘containing a reserve, the nourishing soil’ (ibid). In fact, the “native” (*heimatlich*) ground is not tantamount to a natural basis, but points to the phenomena of home and homelessness (*Heimat*, *Heim*, *Heimlich*, *heimatlich*, *heimish*, and also *Unheimlichkeit*, *heimatlosigkeit*, *Unheimlichkeit*), and thus of a historical dwelling, thereby engaging a human and historical existence. The earth can thus be said “prehistorical” only in the sense that it is the site of history, but in no way does it constitute a metaphysical separate foundation “before” history. Haar may thus be conflating the reserve of history, its proper withdrawal, with a non-historical ground while absolutizing it. For what does Heidegger mean by the earth as ground?

The earth grounds insofar as it withdraws. The earth in “The Origin of the Work of Art” essentially *withdraws*. As Andrew Mitchell shows, in “The Origin of the Work of Art,” the earth “supports and bears pre-

cisely by withdrawing”.⁴³ The earth as a withdrawal of the ground, as a remaining-away [*Weg-bleiben*] of the ground, as *Ab-grund*, a “groundless ground.” It is the soil for historical eventfulness to happen: the earth is the ground of history insofar as it withdraws in its self-seclusion. History happens from a withdrawal, as Heidegger would claim with respect to the sendings of the epochs of being. History does not rest upon the earth as on some substrate, but occurs from the withdrawal proper to the “sendings” of *Ereignis*. The aporia of history is in the end the presence of such withdrawal as possibility and origin of historical happening. The tension between nature and history turned out to designate the strife of earth and world, as the very possibility of a history always marked by a certain opacity and withdrawal.

⁴³ Mitchell, A., “The Fourfold,” in: Martin Heidegger. Key Concepts, p. 212.

NATURE ET HISTORICITÉ

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Avant même de se demander si l'on peut légitimement parler d'une « histoire de la nature », il nous faut commencer par remarquer qu'il y a une histoire du terme « nature » lui-même. Car ce que les Grecs ont nommé *phusis* et que nous traduisons dans nos langues modernes par « nature » ne correspond nullement à ce que nous entendons sous ce terme au moins depuis Kant, qui la définit comme « l'existence des choses en tant qu'elle est déterminée par des lois », définition qui conduira dans le *Système du monde* (1796) de Laplace à la thèse d'un mécanisme et d'un déterminisme intégral ainsi formulé: « Une intelligence qui, pour un instant donné, connaîtrait toutes les forces dont la nature est animée et la situation respective des êtres qui la composent, si d'ailleurs elle était assez vaste pour soumettre ces données à l'analyse, embrasserait dans la même formule les mouvements des plus grands corps de l'univers et ceux du plus léger atome: rien ne serait incertain pour elle, et l'avenir, comme le passé, serait présent à ses yeux ». Le mot *phusis* a certes des sens multiples, qui dépendent à chaque fois du contexte dans lequel il apparaît. Mais son unité sémantique est déterminée par la racine *phu*, qui a donné le verbe *phuô*, faire naître, naître, croître, pousser, qu'on peut rapprocher, comme le fait Heidegger, de *phaos*, lumière et de *phainesthai*, apparaître.¹ La *phusis* est ainsi comprise comme ce principe de croissance et d'éclosion qui caractérise le règne végétal, comme l'indique le fait qu'en grec le mot grec *phuton*, qui signifie rejeton, enfant, a aussi le sens de « plante ». Or *phusis*, qui en grec renvoie au phénomène de croissance et d'épanouissement de la plante, a été traduit en latin par *natura*. Ce mot vient de *nasci*, naître, provenir de, et renvoie au phénomène de la génération. La *phusis* grecque signifie en général deux choses: d'une part un principe de croissance, d'autre part une certaine région de phénomènes. Elle désigne donc à la fois la région des êtres qui ne

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¹ Cf. Heidegger, M. (1958), *Introduction à la métaphysique*. Paris: PUF.

sont pas des productions humaines (relevant de la *poiësis*) et le principe par lequel ces êtres (animaux et plantes) viennent à l'être. Il y a bien, en particulier dans la Grèce des Tragiques, l'idée d'un ordre qui régit à la fois le monde humain et le monde non humain. Mais on ne trouve pas dans la pensée grecque l'idée d'une *légalité* de la nature qui *commanderait* à toutes choses et leur assignerait leur finalité, ce qu'est précisément la *lex natura* latine.² C'est en effet l'idée de loi naturelle normative qui caractérise la pensée latine. Pour les Latins, la nature surplombe toutes les régions et elle les enchaîne les unes aux autres. La *natura* latine est ainsi un principe de continuité qui exprime la finalité de l'ensemble alors que la *phusis* grecque est une force d'ordre et de justice. La *phusis* demeure chez les Grecs une loi *régionale*. Elle n'est pas la *loi des lois*, mais la force majeure, justicière, qui est certes plus forte que les lois humaines, sans cependant être hégémonique par rapport à celles-ci, de sorte qu'elle demeure constamment en conflit avec elles. Il en va tout autrement dans le monde latin: là la nature est englobante et constitue un principe de finalité.

On voit donc que de la Grèce à Rome la « nature » change de sens. Il est en effet difficile d'affirmer qu'il y a un « concept de nature » qui demeurerait identique à travers les différents termes qui le nommeraient. Il y a la *phusis*, puis la *natura*, dont les sens diffèrent, puis la nature au sens que les Modernes ont donné à ce terme depuis la Renaissance. C'est à la fois le poids ontologique que les Grecs reconnaissaient à la *phusis* et l'idée d'une normativité universelle de la nature que l'on trouve chez les Romains qui vont être occultés dans la nouvelle conception de la « nature » galiléenne et cartésienne. C'est peut-être Husserl qui, dans son dernier livre, *La Crise des sciences européennes et la phénoménologie transcendantale*, a le mieux exprimé cette mutation: Galilée, dit-il, est un génie à la fois découvrant et recouvrant: il découvre que la nature parle la « langue mathématique », et qu'elle s'ouvre ainsi comme un champ infini de recherches, mais il la recouvre en même temps en tant que

² Cf. Cicéron, *Lois*, III, I: «Rien n'est aussi conforme au droit et à l'ordre de la nature — par où j'entends la loi et rien d'autre — que ce pouvoir de commandement (*imperium*) sans lequel aucune famille, aucune cité, aucune nation, non plus que le genre humain, la nature et le monde, ne pourrait subsister.»

réalité autonome et champ d'être.³ Mais c'est en réalité Descartes qui formule les principes de la science nouvelle et c'est chez lui que l'entreprise moderne de « dévitalisation » de la nature est la plus patente, car il a détruit l'ancienne physique, qui se fondait sur les données des sens, pour lui substituer une physique des idées claires, une physique mathématique qui présente de l'Univers une image strictement mécanique.

C'est en effet à partir de cette période que vont surgir les grandes oppositions caractéristiques de la pensée moderne entre nature et liberté et nature et histoire. Cette dernière opposition apparaît à partir du moment où l'histoire se voit comprise comme la dimension de la réalisation de l'esprit humain, à partir donc du moment où, avec Herder, l'idée d'une « histoire universelle » de l'humanité⁴ fait son apparition. C'est avec Kant que, de manière décisive, est énoncée l'idée que la raison, apanage de l'être humain, suppose l'histoire, car elle agit par essais et erreurs. Du fait que les dispositions naturelles de l'être humain ne peuvent s'accomplir qu'au niveau de l'espèce et non, comme chez l'animal, à celui de l'individu, l'histoire du progrès humain se déroule nécessairement par étapes et requiert pour son développement un temps interminable, ce qui implique que l'homme doit se penser par rapport à une perfectibilité possiblement infinie.⁵ L'opposition que Kant établit ainsi entre la nature, règne de la nécessité, et l'histoire, règne de liberté, va se voir radicaliser chez Hegel, qui voit dans la nature « le règne de la mort », c'est-à-dire une pure extériorité, un pur nature et non pas une puissance en devenir, une nature naturante, par opposition à l'esprit, seul capable d'avoir une histoire. Sa conception de la nature est donc proche de celle de Descartes. La nature est pour lui en dehors du temps, comme il le dit explicitement dans le dernier chapitre de la *Phénoménologie de l'esprit*.⁶

C'est avec cette grande opposition entre l'homme et la nature que va rompre Bergson au début du XXe siècle avec un livre qui fait date,

³ Husserl, E., *La crise des sciences européennes et la phénoménologie transcendantale*. Paris: Gallimard, (§ 7).

⁴ Herder, J.-G. (1784-1791), *Idées pour une philosophie de l'histoire de l'humanité*.

⁵ Kant, E. (1784), *Idée d'une histoire universelle d'un point de vue cosmopolitique*.

⁶ Hegel, G.W.F. (1807), *Phénoménologie de l'esprit*.

L'évolution créatrice (1907) dans lequel il développe l'idée d'une histoire de la nature. On est ainsi en présence pour la première fois d'une philosophie qui prend acte des théories de l'évolution qui se sont développées au cours du XIXe siècle. Bergson est en effet essentiellement en dialogue dans ce livre avec le darwinisme⁷ et le néo-lamarckisme,⁸ mais sa référence essentielle est Herbert Spencer (1820–1903), empiriste anglais, fondateur du darwinisme social et représentant de la théorie de l'évolution à l'époque où écrit Bergson, la dernière version de *Système de philosophie synthétique* ayant paru en 1898.⁹ L'idée fondamentale de Bergson, c'est que la nature est vie. Il s'oppose ainsi fondamentalement au mécanisme, qui voit dans la nature un assemblage de parties. Mais il critique également le finalisme, car il remarque non seulement que la nature crée souvent des monstres et qu'elle connaît donc le ratage, mais aussi qu'on ne peut dire d'elle qu'elle poursuit une fin, car il n'y a pas d'ouvrier qui dirige l'évolution.¹⁰ C'est l'idée d'évolution qui pour Bergson peut rendre compte du dynamisme de la nature, qui n'a plus rien de substantiel, et c'est à partir de l'idée d'histoire naturelle que Bergson définit le vivant: l'organisme vivant est « une série unique d'actes constituant une véritable histoire ». ¹¹ C'est parce qu'il définit l'organisme et la vie comme un type de temporalité qu'il les met en dehors de toute comparaison avec un système physique. L'organisme n'est jamais identique à son passé, mais il n'en est pas non plus séparé, il dure: « Partout où quelque chose vit, il y a, ouvert quelque part, un registre où le temps s'inscrit ». ¹² Bergson part donc de l'idée que la vie est histoire, et qu'elle se déploie comme une gerbe qui s'ouvre: l'unité est au départ et tend ensuite à sa dissolution. Elle se défait à cause de son instabilité essen-

⁷ Ch. Darwin, *L'Origine des espèces*, 1859.

⁸ Rappelons que le néo-lamarckisme est un mouvement apparaissant vers la fin du XIXe siècle et qui remet au goût du jour la théorie exposée par J.B. de Lamarck dans sa *Philosophie zoologique* (1809) en se basant sur les nouvelles découvertes de la biologie de l'époque. Celles-ci permettent en effet de relancer le débat sur la possibilité que l'environnement puisse avoir un effet sur l'hérédité, ce qui équivaut à une certaine « hérédité des caractères acquis », concept lamarckien.

⁹ Spencer, H. (1864- 1898), *System of Synthetic Philosophy*, in ten volumes.

¹⁰ Bergson, H. (1959), *Oeuvres*. Paris: PUF, p. 685–87.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 525

¹² Ibid., p. 508.

tielle. Il y a donc des lignes d'évolution divergentes à partir d'un élan commun. Mais l'« élan vital » qui pousse la nature à se différencier en multiples espèces a un caractère fini, il s'épuise vite, de sorte que, dans la nature, l'insuccès est la règle, la nature ne parvenant jamais à une œuvre accomplie du fait qu'elle ne se donne pas de fin et qu'elle se perd dans le déploiement aveugle des moyens. Il y a pourtant une exception, un succès unique de la nature: c'est l'homme, qui diffère par nature et non seulement par degrés de l'animal. C'est lui qui constitue la réussite unique de l'élan vital: « homme seul a sauté l'obstacle ». Pourtant on ne peut pas dire que l'homme est la fin de la nature, puisque celle-ci n'a pas de plan prédéterminé. On ne peut pas davantage dire que le reste de la nature a été fait pour l'homme, puisque celui-ci est issu d'une lutte qui l'a opposé aux autres espèces: on ne peut donc accepter l'anthropocentrisme. L'homme est le résultat contingent de l'évolution de la vie, une évolution qui aurait pu être autre. L'humanité n'est pas par conséquent ce que se proposait le mouvement évolutif, elle n'est pas préformée en lui, ni même l'aboutissement de tout ce mouvement, car l'évolution a connu des lignes divergentes, et l'humanité n'est que le terme de l'une d'entre elles. C'est donc en un sens différent de la position habituelle de l'anthropocentrisme que Bergson dit ici que l'humanité est la raison d'être de l'évolution. Il se représente la vie comme une onde immense se propageant à partir d'un centre et aboutissant, du fait du caractère fini de l'élan vital, à des frontières où l'évolution trouve son terme. Mais en un seul point l'obstacle a été forcé et la vie a pu continuer sa marche, « l'impulsion est passée librement ». L'élan vital s'est vu relancé par la liberté humaine, de sorte que « l'homme continue donc indéfiniment le mouvement vital », bien que, souligne Bergson, il ne puisse réaliser tout ce que la vie porte en elle, puisqu'il n'est que le terme dernier d'une ligne parmi d'autres de l'évolution. Bergson a bien l'idée que les lignes différentes de l'évolution qui divergent à partir d'un unique centre ne sont pas absolument différentes, car « tout se compénètre », mais elles ne sont pourtant pas superposables. Cela explique que l'homme n'a conservé que peu de choses des autres lignes évolutives. Il est pourtant difficile d'expliquer que l'homme ait pu « sauter l'obstacle » et porter plus loin l'élan vital qui anime toute la nature. Bergson ne peut ici qu'alléguer un raisonnement en « comme si », analogue à celui que l'on trouve chez

Kant qui refusait lui aussi de parler de finalité de la nature, mais enjoignait pour comprendre celle-ci de la considérer « comme si » elle réalisait un plan. Bergson ici parle d'homme ou de sur-homme, reprenant ainsi la notion nietzschéenne, pour montrer qu'en lui quelque chose dépasse la nature. On ne peut donc comprendre l'apparition de l'humain au sein de la nature qu'en imaginant une volonté interne à celle-ci de se dépasser et de laisser derrière elle ses formes inachevées. C'est pourquoi Bergson nomme « déchets » ce que l'homme en se réalisant laisse derrière lui et qui n'est autre que l'ensemble du monde animal et végétal. C'est à partir de là qu'on accède à une vision plus unitaire de la nature qui nous était jusqu'ici apparue dans les discordances de sa contingence. Toute la nature devient le sol, l'humus, sur lequel se développe l'homme. On peut se demander si on ne rejoint pas ici une vision judéo-chrétienne de l'homme qui, parce qu'il est à l'image de Dieu, commande au reste de la nature. Cette vision est cependant adoucie par l'idée propre à Bergson, et qu'il trouve dans la théorie de l'évolution, des animaux comme compagnons de route de l'homme sur des lignes divergentes. Il n'en reste pas moins qu'il voit surgir avec l'homme, point le plus élevé de l'évolution, un horizon « illimité », ce qui ne veut cependant nullement dire que l'humanité soit parfaite, car elle a perdu la « perfection » de l'instinct qui est l'apanage de l'animal.

Par rapport à Bergson, qui parvient à intégrer l'histoire humaine dans le cadre d'une « histoire naturelle » sans cependant céder à l'illusion naturaliste, et tout en faisant sa place à l'exception humaine au sein de la nature, le geste heideggérien, qui consiste à rejeter d'entrée de jeu la détermination traditionnelle de l'homme comme *animal rationale*, comme vivant doté de raison, d'âme ou d'esprit, apparaît comme une restauration de l'opposition moderne entre nature et histoire. Dans le §10 de *Sein und Zeit*¹³ consacré à la « délimitation de l'analytique du *Dasein* par rapport à l'anthropologie, la psychologie et la biologie », Heidegger conseille en effet d'éviter, pour désigner l'étant que nous sommes

¹³ Heidegger, M. (1927, 1963), *Sein und Zeit*. Tübingen: Niemeyer.

nous-mêmes, *aussi bien* le terme d'esprit que celui de vie. Un peu plus loin dans le même paragraphe, Heidegger indique clairement ce qui motive l'évitement: l'être de l'homme ne peut être obtenu par la sommation des modes d'être du corps vivant (*Leib*), de l'âme et de l'esprit et c'est justement parce que le terme homme est traditionnellement le nom d'un tel composé qu'il est enjoint lui aussi de l'éviter. Mais ce qu'il s'agit par-dessus tout d'éviter, comme la fin de ce même paragraphe le montre clairement, c'est le terme de "vie" pour désigner l'être du *Dasein*. Heidegger marque ainsi la distance qui sépare l'analytique existentielle de la *Lebensphilosophie*, de cette philosophie de la vie, qui caractérise la tendance de fond de la philosophie allemande depuis le romantisme et constitue un courant de pensée auquel le jeune Heidegger, grand admirateur de la pensée de Dilthey, appartenait encore. Car il s'agit pour Heidegger de penser l'unité de l'humain, contre une tradition qui le divise en animalité et spiritualité. Toujours dans le § 10 de *Être et temps*, Heidegger affirme avec force que l'analyse du *Dasein* ne saurait relever d'une biologie générale qui comprendrait à titre de sous-parties l'anthropologie et la psychologie. Le biologisme ne peut en effet en aucun cas rendre compte de ce qui constitue *l'humanité* de l'homme, et ce qui se voit ainsi décisivement écarté, il faut tout particulièrement le souligner, c'est la possibilité même de considérer l'être humain d'un point de vue racial, ce à quoi a finalement conduit le « darwinisme social ». Il s'agit donc de produire une interprétation plus originelle de l'être de l'homme qui pense celui-ci comme un être « un », et non comme composé d'une « matière » animale et d'une « forme » spirituelle. Mais, à la différence de l'esprit, "la vie est un mode d'être propre" qui n'est pourtant "essentiellement accessible que dans le *Dasein*" sans que néanmoins celui-ci puisse jamais être compris comme étant vie *plus* quelque chose d'autre. On doit donc partir du mode d'être propre au *Dasein*, de l'existentialité elle-même, pour cerner *négativement* l'être du « seulement vivant ». Heidegger l'affirme en effet sans équivoque: "L'ontologie de la vie s'accomplit sur la voie d'une interprétation privative; elle détermine ce qui doit être pour que puisse être quelque chose qui ne serait plus que vie".¹⁴ C'est également ce qu'il répète au § 41 lorsqu'il s'agit pour lui de déterminer

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 50.

le caractère existentiel et donc apriorique du souci par rapport aux pulsions (vouloir, désir, penchant, appétit), lesquelles ne relèvent nullement d'une part d'animalité en l'homme, mais sont nécessairement enracinées quant à leur être dans le souci en tant qu'il constitue l'être entier, "essentiellement infragmentable" du *Dasein*. Celui-ci n'a donc pas *directement* accès aux pulsions proprement « vitales » car, comme le souligne à nouveau Heidegger: « La constitution ontologique fondamentale du vivre est un problème particulier qui ne peut être développé que par voie de privation réductive à partir de l'ontologie du *Dasein* ». ¹⁵

C'est sur ce problème de cette constitution ontologique de la vie que Heidegger revient dans la deuxième partie du cours qu'il consacre en 1929–30 aux *Concepts fondamentaux de la métaphysique*, dans laquelle il aborde la question de l'animalité à partir de l'examen comparatif de trois thèses directrices: « la pierre est sans monde », « l'animal est pauvre en monde », « l'homme est configurateur de monde ». ¹⁶ La pauvreté en monde de l'animal y est en effet explicitement comprise comme « privation de monde », tout le problème consistant alors, pour avoir accès à l'animalité, à « interpréter », en partant du niveau existentiel, ce qui ne se présente jamais en lui comme tel et que Heidegger caractérise comme le simplement-vivant. Par là est donc reconnu que ce qui sépare l'homme de l'animal est une différence de mode d'être et non une simple différence quantitative. On peut certes continuer à objecter que les mots de pauvreté et de privation impliquent par eux-mêmes un jugement de valeur et une hiérarchisation. Mais c'est parce que nous continuons à considérer qu'il y a entre l'homme et l'animal une distinction de degrés de perfection dans la capacité à s'ouvrir au monde. On ne peut pas plus, explique Heidegger, juger l'homme supérieur à l'animal, alors qu'il a par exemple des capacités sensorielles moins développées que certains animaux et qu'il peut tomber dans la déchéance plus bas qu'aucun animal, qu'on ne peut véritablement distinguer au sein du monde animal des animaux supérieurs et inférieurs. Il faut au contraire affirmer que « chaque animal, et chaque espèce animale sont en tant que tels aussi

¹⁵ Ibid., p.194.

¹⁶ Voir à ce propos Dastur, F. (1995), "Pour une zoologie privative", in: *Alter, Revue de Phénoménologie*, n° 3, Paris: Editions Alter, pp. 281–318.

parfaits que les autres ». ¹⁷ Il faut donc comprendre la « pauvreté » en question ici de manière non quantitative, il faut la comprendre comme une *privation*, qui n'est pas une détermination externe, mais qui renvoie au contraire au sentiment interne d'un manque. Une telle définition interne et non externe de la pauvreté n'est donc pas nécessairement le signe d'une infériorité, elle peut au contraire être une richesse, ce dont pourtant nous ne pouvons pas juger directement. C'est ce qui conduit Heidegger à affirmer la thèse selon laquelle « *l'essence de la vie n'est accessible qu'au sens d'une considération déconstructive* », ce qui ne signifie pas, prend-il soin d'ajouter, que « la vie soit par rapport au *Dasein* humain de moindre valeur ou de niveau moins élevé. Au contraire, la vie est plutôt un domaine qui possède une richesse d'ouverture que le monde humain ne connaît peut-être pas ». ¹⁸

Dans le cours de 1929/30, Heidegger se situe toujours dans la perspective qui est la sienne dans *Être et temps*, selon laquelle les ontologies régionales se voient soumises à l'ontologie fondamentale, c'est-à-dire à l'analytique existentielle du *Dasein*. Et ce n'est pas parce que Heidegger lui-même reconnaît que la thèse dont il part, à savoir « l'animal est pauvre en monde », est bien une thèse « métaphysique » ¹⁹ qu'il faut comprendre que par là il ne fait que se réclamer de la tradition philosophique explicite. Au contraire, Heidegger envisage le rapport qu'entretiennent la métaphysique et les sciences positives de manière fort peu classique, non comme un rapport de fondement, mais comme un rapport essentiellement historial ²⁰ et destinal. La recherche positive et la métaphysique ne doivent pas être séparées et on ne doit pas les faire jouer l'une contre l'autre. Leur rapport ne se laisse pas régler de manière

¹⁷ Heidegger, M. (1983), *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik, Welt–Endlichkeit–Einsamkeit*, Gesamtausgabe Band 29/30. Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann (cours du semestre d'hiver 1929–30) p. 287 (Noté par la suite GA 29/30). Voir la traduction française: Heidegger, M. (1992), *Les concepts fondamentaux de la métaphysique, Monde-finitude-solitude*. Paris: Gallimard, p. 290.

¹⁸ GA 29/30, p. 371–72; trad. p. 372.

¹⁹ GA 29/30, p. 277; trad. p. 281.

²⁰ On reprend ici la traduction de *geschichtlich* par historial et de *Geschichtlichkeit* par historicité, originellement proposée par Henri Corbin dans sa traduction en 1938 d'extraits de *Sein und Zeit* (in: Heidegger, M. (1938), *Qu'est-ce que la métaphysique?* Paris: Gallimard) car elle permet de rendre compte de la distinction faite par Heidegger entre *Geschichte* (l'histoire en tant que processus réel) et *Historie* (la science historique).

rationnelle, sérieuse, comme s'il s'agissait seulement des branches scientifique et métaphysique d'une même entreprise, au sens où la métaphysique livrerait les concepts fondamentaux et les sciences les faits, mais il y a une *unité interne de la science et de la métaphysique*. Toute science en effet est historique (*geschichtlich*), parce qu'elle est une possibilité d'existence du *Dasein* humain et non pas simplement un système d'énoncés valides et une technique autonome et c'est la raison pour laquelle il peut et doit y avoir, à cette époque pour Heidegger, une véritable communauté entre la philosophie et la science. La zoologie n'est donc pas seulement une science régionale, pas plus que la philosophie n'est une science de l'essence qui pourrait décrire l'essence de l'animalité sans avoir recours au savoir scientifique. Une lecture attentive du cours de 1929/30 montre, au contraire, que Heidegger entreprend d'illustrer et d'explicitier sa thèse de la pauvreté en monde de l'animal en interrogeant les travaux de la science biologique et zoologique de son époque, donnant ainsi un exemple fort peu commun de *lecture philosophique* de l'état scientifique d'une question. Il rappelle non seulement les travaux, que la méthode purement analytique de Darwin fera oublier, de Karl von Baer (1792–1876) sur la structure de l'organisme, et cite ceux des embryologistes Wilhelm Roux (1850–1924) dont il critique les positions mécanistes, de Hans Driesch (1867–1941) dont il critique les positions vitalistes, et de Hans Spemann (1869–1941), qui occupa la chaire de zoologie de Fribourg de 1919 à 1935, année où il obtint le prix Nobel de Médecine, dont il fait le plus vibrant éloge à cause de sa conception du caractère processuel (*Geschehenscharacter*) de l'organisme, mais aussi ceux de Jakob von Uexküll et de Frederik Buytendijk. Car ce dont il s'agit, ce n'est pas seulement d'une interprétation métaphysique de la vie, mais en même temps du statut même de la science biologique « qui se trouve devant la tâche d'esquisser de manière entièrement nouvelle ce sur quoi elle s'interroge », qui doit « se défendre contre la tyrannie de la physique et de la chimie », ²¹ et ainsi combattre sur les deux fronts opposés du mécanisme et du vitalisme. À propos de ce dernier et de la téléologie qu'il implique, la position de Heidegger est parfaitement claire: il souligne que le vitalisme n'écarte pas le mécanisme mais en est plutôt la sanction et le ren-

²¹ Ibid., p. 278; trad. p. 282.

forcement, puisqu'il présuppose qu'il y a du supra-mécanisme dans le vivant, ce qui n'est possible que sur le fondement même du mécanisme. Car le recours, dans le néo-vitalisme de Driesch, à l'abstraction de cette force mystérieuse qu'est l'entéléchie comme principe d'explication du vivant ne permet pas de prendre en considération la situation de l'organisme dont on méconnaît alors le caractère non autonome, alors qu'il faudrait au contraire intégrer à sa structure fondamentale son rapport à l'environnement. C'est en revanche dans la direction de l'élucidation des rapports que l'animal a avec son milieu et du développement de cette discipline qu'est l'écologie que vont les recherches de von Uexküll, qui s'approchent, sans pourtant y parvenir vraiment, d'une interprétation plus radicale de l'organisme animal. Il ne s'agit pas en effet d'ajouter à l'organisme animal une âme, mais bien plutôt de voir dans l'organisme quelque chose d'autre que le simple corps vivant en tant que présence simplement donnée et donc de le comprendre comme un phénomène « dynamique », c'est-à-dire essentiellement temporel, d'organisation en devenir constant.

C'est ici qu'est atteint, à ce qu'il semble, le point essentiel de l'analyse de Heidegger. Il ne suffit pas en effet, de distinguer l'organisme de l'outil et de la machine, en soulignant que tout outil est une production humaine, pour ainsi mettre en échec la conception mécaniste du vivant. Il ne suffit pas davantage de refuser de considérer l'autoproduction, l'autodirection et l'autorégénération de l'organisme comme relevant d'une inexplicable force interne pour mettre également en question la conception vitaliste du vivant. Le projet de Heidegger, ce n'est pas de comprendre la vie à partir de la nature inanimée (mécanisme) ou à partir de l'homme (vitalisme), mais à partir d'elle-même dans son contenu d'essence, ce qui ne signifie pourtant pas que l'orientation tacite par rapport à l'homme y soit absente, puisque la vie n'est accessible pour nous que par réduction privative à partir de l'expérience de l'existentialité. Pour Heidegger, la tâche critique consiste très précisément ici, en un sens voisin de ce qu'elle est pour Husserl, à montrer que l'attitude dite « naturelle » qu'est la quotidienneté nous barre en réalité l'accès à la nature aussi bien inanimée qu'animée précisément parce qu'elle est caractérisée comme l'ouverture indifférenciée à la simple présence donnée, à la *Vorhandenheit*, alors que le rapport fondamental du *Dasein*

à l'étant n'est pas celui qu'un sujet entretiendrait avec des objets perçus comme autant d'aspects différents de cette même grande chose que serait le monde, mais au contraire un être-transporté (*Versetztsein*), à chaque fois différent dans sa modalité, *dans* les « espèces » d'étant fondamentalement différentes que sont l'autre homme, l'animal, la nature animée en général et la nature inanimée. L'homme est en effet envisagé ici par Heidegger à partir de cette possibilité fondamentale qui est la sienne de pouvoir non certes se « mettre à la place » de l'étant qu'il n'est pas lui-même, mais de pouvoir du moins « l'accompagner » (*mitgehen*) de manière à faire ainsi l'expérience de ce qu'il est en lui-même. Dans le cas de la nature inanimée, on pourrait dire en effet qu'il s'agit la plupart du temps d'une « transposition » négative, mais dont la négativité n'est pas de notre fait mais de la sienne, en tant que c'est elle qui par essence ne permet pas la transposition.

La nature n'est donc pas partout la même, elle n'est pas une surface plate ou une strate inférieure sur le fondement de laquelle s'édifierait la culture humaine, mais elle est au contraire en tant que nature vivante l'empiètement réciproque des sphères (*Umränge*) spécifiques à chacun des êtres vivants. Mais cela implique par conséquent que les êtres vivants ne sont nullement engagés dans une compétition commune dont l'enjeu serait un étant indifférencié. Cela ne veut pourtant pas dire que le combat soit absent du « monde » de la vie. L'animal n'est pas enfermé en lui-même, mais c'est au contraire en traçant le cercle dont s'entoure chaque être vivant qu'il ouvre la sphère de vie qui est la sienne et qu'il lutte continûment pour son maintien. C'est là l'occasion pour Heidegger de critiquer la théorie de l'évolution, qui se fonde sur une conception trop « naturaliste » de la nature. Elle présuppose en effet que l'étant en tant que tel est « donné », c'est-à-dire accessible par principe à tous les animaux, y compris l'homme, qu'il est identique pour tous et que c'est à eux qu'il incombe par conséquent de s'y adapter. Elle suppose donc une séparation entre l'animal et son environnement spécifique, et elle considère comme une présence donnée identique aussi bien le monde naturel que les animaux. Une telle conception relève de l'attitude scientifique théorique qui fait du *Dasein* un pur spectateur impartial non impliqué dans le jeu naturel, elle relève, comme dirait Merleau-Ponty, de la « pensée de survol » et donc de l'oubli de la finitude constitutive qui

place le *Dasein* non pas au-dessus ou au-delà de l'étant mais au *milieu* de celui-ci. Si donc, lorsqu'on dépasse la conception de la nature qui est à la base de la théorie de l'évolution, l'animal apparaît, dans ses multiples formes, comme un être-sous-l'emprise de la pulsion qui est cependant capable d'engager son activité pulsionnelle dans une sphère qu'il s'est lui-même ouverte, cela ne veut pourtant pas dire que l'être-homme impliquerait par contraste une totale libération à l'égard du donné: nous sommes au contraire aussi nous-mêmes en tant que *Dasein* inclus dans la nature vivante au sein de laquelle nous sommes par essence toujours déjà transposés et dont nous demeurons, de manière tout à fait spécifique, prisonniers.

La nécessaire liaison de l'organisme à son environnement ne peut donc pas être pensée à l'aide du concept darwinien d'adaptation qui comprend ce rapport comme un rapport d'extériorité entre un animal et un monde présents-donnés (*vorhanden*), mais en un sens encore plus radical que l'écologie de von Uexküll – qui comprend pourtant bien que l'animal est en relation avec quelque chose qui ne lui est pas donné de la même manière qu'à l'homme –, comme l'entière du cercle de la dés-inhibition (*Enthemmungsring*) à partir duquel seulement l'entière du corps vivant peut devenir compréhensible, sans qu'il soit nécessaire d'avoir recours à la force mystérieuse de l'âme ou de l'entéléchie. L'organisme en effet, pas plus qu'il n'est un complexe d'outils, n'est un faisceau de pulsions, mais une *capacité* (*Fähigsein*), la capacité fondamentale de s'entourer d'un «espace» où la pulsion peut s'exercer, c'est-à-dire une organisation toujours en procès et jamais donnée, jamais «chose faite» dirait Merleau-Ponty. Et c'est cette capacité qui «a des organes» et non pas les organes qui ont telle ou telle capacité: c'est la capacité de voir qui rend d'abord possible la possession d'yeux et la capacité de dévorer qui vient avant les organes de la dévoration et de la digestion, la bouche apparaissant même avant l'intestin, comme le montre l'exemple du protozoaire, admirablement observé et décrit par von Uexküll, dont les organes «instantanés» se forment selon le même ordre par lequel ils se défont.²² Heidegger se réfère en effet ici non pas à n'importe quel exemple, mais, à côté de l'exemple classique des abeilles, longuement analysé et décrit de-

²² Ibid., p. 327; trad. p. 328.

puis l'Antiquité, à celui des animaux dits inférieurs de structure non fixe parce que, explique-t-il, ils sont du point de vue philosophique les plus appropriés pour nous procurer un aperçu de l'essence de l'organe. Il y a là, certes, une thèse ou plutôt une hypothèse sur l'animalité qui suppose qu'il y a une chose, un domaine, un type d'étant homogène, qu'on appelle animalité en général, mais non pas une « essence » intemporelle de celle-ci qui n'est, de multiples et irréductibles façons, que dans son devenir et c'est justement ce « *Wesen* » au sens verbal de l'animalité que donne à voir, mieux que tout autre, l'exemple de l'amibe dépourvue de forme et de structure et pour cette raison bien caractérisée en allemand sous le nom de *Wechseltier*, lequel signifie littéralement « animal variable ».

Les faits observés par la science zoologique ne deviennent en effet compréhensibles que si l'on abandonne cette attitude « naturelle » qu'est l'explicitation quotidienne de l'être de l'étant comme présence donnée (*Vorhandenheit*), laquelle est au fondement de l'attitude scientifique-théorique, pour déployer ce que Heidegger dans le cours de 1929–30 nomme encore « la dimension métaphysique »²³ à partir de laquelle seule peut être aperçue ce que *Sein und Zeit* nommait déjà la *Temporalität* de l'être, son caractère processuel, lequel s'exprime peut-être le plus visiblement dans ce mode d'être déterminé qu'est la vie, puisqu'elle implique naissance, croissance et anéantissement. Il y a donc une sorte d'historicité propre au vivant qui a été aperçue par les biologistes eux-mêmes. Heidegger cite ici, avant une allusion à l'importance des recherches de Spemann qui mettent l'accent sur le caractère « processuel » de l'organisation du vivant, le livre publié en 1906 sous le titre « Les organismes en tant qu'êtres historiques » par Theodor Boveri (1862–1915), l'éminent cytologiste à qui l'on doit la démonstration expérimentale de la théorie chromosomique de l'hérédité.²⁴ Cette manière de parler de l'organisme comme d'un être historique pose le difficile problème de savoir quel statut nous pouvons reconnaître à ce qui dans le règne animal est analogue à l'expérience humaine de l'historialité et de la mortalité.

Qu'en est-il alors de la « thèse » de la pauvreté en monde de l'animal ? Et pourquoi Heidegger a-t-il eu besoin de poser cette thèse *entre* les deux

²³ Ibid., p. 385; trad. p. 385.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 386 sq.; trad. p. 385.

autres thèses qui affirment l'être sans monde de la nature inanimée et l'être formateur de monde de l'homme ? L'avantage que présente le processus comparatif, c'est qu'il évite l'enfermement dans la compréhension proprement humaine du monde. Mais son défaut consiste précisément en la position de « thèses » qui présupposent déjà le sens de ce qui est à expliciter, à savoir la différence de l'animalité et de l'humanité, laquelle n'est jamais vue que dans la perspective humaine. Si cependant, après l'élucidation et le développement de la thèse médiane de la pauvreté en monde de l'animal celle où, reconnaît Heidegger, les extrêmes de l'être sans monde de la pierre et de l'être configureur de monde de l'homme s'entrelacent,²⁵ Heidegger s'oppose à lui-même une objection, c'est bien là la preuve qu'il ne lui accorde pas une validité absolue et que cette thèse conserve pour lui son caractère problématique. La longue analyse qu'il lui consacre se clôt en effet sur la phrase suivante: "La thèse « l'animal est pauvre en monde » doit donc subsister en tant que problème".²⁶ Car Heidegger reconnaît clairement les limites de l'illustration comparative: « Cette caractérisation de l'animalité par la pauvreté en monde n'est pas originaire (*genuine*), elle n'est pas tirée de l'animalité elle-même et elle ne reste pas dans les limites de l'animalité, au contraire la pauvreté en monde est un caractère défini comparativement à l'homme. Ce n'est que du point de vue de l'homme que l'animal est pauvre en monde, mais l'être animal n'est pas en soi être privé de monde ».²⁷

C'est cet entrelacement entre humanité et animalité qui constitue la question fondamentale de Merleau-Ponty, une question qu'il aborde dès son premier livre, *La structure du comportement* dans lequel il s'oppose aux conceptions régnantes à cette époque du behaviorisme qui veut comprendre le comportement humain sur le modèle du réflexe conditionné de Pavlov, le physiologiste russe auquel fut décerné en 1903 le prix Nobel. Il s'agit donc bien Merleau-Ponty, en cela proche de Bergson,

²⁵ GA 29/30, p. 294; trad. p. 296.

²⁶ Cf. p. 396; trad. p. 396.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 393; trad. p. 393.

de défendre la spécificité de l'homme et sa liberté par rapport au règne naturel. C'est ce qui est en question dans le troisième chapitre intitulé «L'ordre physique, vital, humain» dans lequel il veut montrer que chacun de ces plans ne peut être réduit aux autres et doit être compris dans sa spécificité. Le niveau vital ne peut être réduit au niveau physique qui est susceptible d'une explication mécanique. Car au niveau du vivant, il n'y a pas causalité, mais les stimuli physiques suscitent de la part de l'organisme une réponse globale, ce qui implique qu'ils jouent plutôt le rôle d'occasion que de cause. La réaction de l'organisme vivant aux stimuli est une conduite sensée. C'est la raison pour laquelle Merleau-Ponty parle à ce sujet de « dialectique », c'est-à-dire de rapport réciproque entre le milieu et le comportement vivant qui sont dans une relation de sens et presque déjà de langage, puisque cette relation a la forme de la question-réponse.²⁸ Il y a donc trois plans: le niveau physique du stimulus-réflexe, le niveau vital de la situation-réaction, et le niveau humain situation perçue-travail. Le travail humain inaugure en effet un nouvel ordre, celui des artefacts, des objets d'usage comme des objets culturels, qui interposent entre lui et le monde naturel un milieu propre qui fait émerger de nouveaux comportements. Ces nouveaux comportements sont essentiellement relatifs à ces nouveaux objets et le monde dans lequel vit l'homme en est profondément transformé. Merleau-Ponty remarque à cet égard que la perception du monde est aussi son humanisation.²⁹ On ne peut donc voir dans l'action humaine, comme le faisait encore Bergson, une autre solution que l'action vitale et instinctive à un *même* problème.

Pourtant, ce qui définit essentiellement l'homme n'est pas cette capacité de créer une seconde nature, mais une capacité de dépassement de ce qu'il a lui-même créé, comme l'avait noté de son côté Bergson. On retrouve ici l'illimité bergsonien. C'est ce qui distingue foncièrement le travail humain de l'action vitale. Celle-ci chez les animaux supérieurs peut aller jusqu'à l'utilisation d'outils. Mais l'animal ne parvient pas à l'idée propre d'instrumentalité, comme le montrent les célèbres expériences faites par Wolfgang Köhler sur les singes supérieurs. L'activité

²⁸ Merleau-Ponty, M. (1942), *La structure du comportement*. Paris: Gallimard, p. 175.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 182.

animale se perd donc dans les transformations qu'elle opère. On retrouve ici l'idée bergsonienne d'une distraction de la vie qui se perd dans l'élaboration des moyens qu'elle met en œuvre. Au contraire l'homme a la possibilité de voir une même chose sous deux aspects différents et donc de fabriquer un nouvel instrument à partir d'un autre. C'est là le sens du travail humain: faire apparaître sous l'ensemble des choses actuellement données du virtuel, du possible, qui étendent indéfiniment le temps et l'espace. Merleau-Ponty établit un parallèle entre la capacité de langage, l'acte révolutionnaire et le suicide, lesquels constituent trois exemples de comportements négateurs du milieu donné et de recherche d'un équilibre « au delà de tout milieu », c'est-à-dire au delà de tout emprisonnement dans du donné. Cela implique que pour l'homme il est essentiel de se référer au possible, de « catégorialiser », c'est-à-dire de voir dans l'actuel donné un exemple particulier d'une possibilité générale. Ici ce sont les travaux de Kurt Goldstein, le célèbre biologiste et neurologue apportant ses soins aux blessés de la première guerre mondiale, auteur de *La structure de l'organisme*, livre paru en 1934, qui ont surtout inspiré Merleau-Ponty. Il y a donc une ambiguïté de la dialectique humaine, qui ne consiste pas seulement à créer un monde d'artefacts, et à s'enfermer en lui, mais aussi à les nier et à les dépasser. Cela implique que l'espèce humaine ne continue pas strictement la tendance naturelle qui pousse les vivants à constituer un Umwelt au sein duquel ils peuvent trouver un équilibre de vie. Ce qui caractérise ce drôle d'animal qu'est l'homme, c'est peut-être la « déterritorialisation », le fait d'étendre à l'infini les limites de son monde, en particulier par l'art, note Merleau-Ponty, du fait que l'art introduit du virtuel dans le réel, qu'il troue l'espace réel pour inclure en lui la dimension du possible et qu'il institue des objets culturels dont le sens même est le dépassement du donné factuel. Au moyen de l'art, on sort donc de l'immédiat et du réel, pour accéder à cette dimension qui est celle de la vérité, c'est-à-dire de ce qui vaut pour tous et non seulement pour l'homme, de ce qui est universel, tourné vers l'un et non pas seulement tourné vers l'espèce. Merleau-Ponty se réfère alors à Max Scheler, dont le dernier livre, publié juste après sa mort, en 1929, portait le titre significatif de « La place de l'homme dans le cosmos ». Scheler oppose l'état d'extase de l'animal, qui est ainsi perdu dans ce qui constitue les structures fondamentales, les centres de force, de son

milieu, et qui ne peut nullement les réfléchir, à la capacité d'objectivation de l'homme, qui peut se donner un vis à vis, se situer frontalement à l'égard de son milieu et ainsi le penser, s'élever au dessus de lui, et en quelque sorte échapper à son conditionnement. Merleau-Ponty en conclut, de manière consonante avec Heidegger, qu'on ne peut donc plus, du fait de la spécificité de l'ordre humain, considérer l'homme comme un « animal raisonnable », au sens où l'homme est toujours plus ou moins que l'animal.³⁰

C'est près de vingt ans après la rédaction de ce premier essai,³¹ que Merleau-Ponty revient sur la question du rapport de l'homme à l'animalité dans ses cours sur le concept de nature de 1957–58 et 1959–1960. Et c'est alors à partir des travaux des mêmes chercheurs évoqués par Heidegger dans son cours de 1929–1930, à savoir von Uexküll, Driesch, et Spemann, auquel il faut ajouter ceux de Adolf Portmann et de Konrad Lorenz, que Merleau-Ponty entreprend de s'interroger à nouveau sur la difficile question de « l'étrange parenté » de l'homme avec les animaux.³² Il s'agit là d'une référence implicite à un des passages-clés de la *Lettre sur l'humanisme* de Heidegger dans lequel celui-ci affirme que « de tout étant qui est, l'être vivant est probablement pour nous le plus difficile à penser, car s'il est d'une certaine manière notre plus proche parent, il est en même temps séparé par un abîme de notre essence ek-sistante ». ³³ Il importe en effet à Merleau-Ponty de souligner que « le rapport homme-animalité n'est pas un rapport hiérarchique, mais un rapport latéral, un dépassement qui n'abolit pas la parenté ». ³⁴ C'est pour éclaircir ce rapport de parenté que Merleau-Ponty est amené dans son cours de 1959–1960 à faire « une si grande place à la théorie de l'évolution ». ³⁵ Toute une partie du cours est en effet consacrée à l'analyse critique de la « renaissance et métamorphose du darwinisme », métamorphose qui se caractérise par une plus grande liberté de description, mais aussi par une

³⁰ Ibid., p. 196.

³¹ Rappelons que *La structure du comportement*, achevé en 1939, n'a, du fait de la guerre, pu paraître qu'en 1942.

³² Merleau-Ponty, M. (1995), *La Nature, Notes, Cours du Collège de France*. Paris: Seuil, p. 339.

³³ Heidegger, M. (1964), *Lettre sur l'humanisme*. Paris: Aubier Montaigne, p. 63.

³⁴ *La Nature, Notes, Cours du Collège de France, op. cit.*, p. 335.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 340.

retombée dans l'ontologie mécaniste du fait que l'on ne donne pas de portée ontologique à ces descriptions,³⁶ ce qui explique que le jugement de Merleau-Ponty sur la « philosophie artificialiste » qu'est le darwinisme soit, comme celui de Heidegger, finalement négatif car « l'ultra-mécanisme et l'ultra-finalisme des darwiniens reposent sur le principe ontologique du tout ou rien: un organisme est absolument ce qu'il est, s'il ne l'était pas, il aurait été exclu de l'être par les conditions données ».³⁷

Il s'était agi dans le cours précédent de comprendre, à partir des travaux de von Uexküll, de Portmann et de Lorenz, comment se constitue l'Umwelt de l'animal : non pas à partir du cadre étroit de l'opposition stimulus-réponse, mais à travers l'articulation perception-comportement, ce qui implique que le réel ambiant ait un sens pour l'animal. C'est à partir de là et de l'idée d'une co-constitution entre l'animal et son milieu que l'on peut mettre en question aussi bien la réduction de leur rapport à un mécanisme d'adaptation de style darwinien que le finalisme: « Il faut comprendre la vie comme l'ouverture d'un champ d'action. L'animal est produit par la production d'un milieu, c'est-à-dire par l'apparition, dans le monde physique, d'un champ radicalement autre que le monde physique avec sa temporalité et sa spatialité spécifiques ».³⁸ C'est ici que la référence aux considérations de Portmann sur le mimétisme animal est éclairante, car elle nous permet de « nous familiariser avec l'idée selon laquelle le comportement ne doit pas se comprendre sous la notion d'utilité ou de téléologie ».³⁹ Merleau-Ponty souligne à cet égard qu'on peut comprendre l'apparence de l'animal comme un langage, car elle montre que le corps animal est en lui-même expressif: « Il faut saisir le mystère de la vie dans la façon dont les animaux se montrent les uns aux autres »,⁴⁰ De même qu'il a donc une « interanimalité » par laquelle l'animal est corporellement ouvert à ses congénères et même aux animaux des autres espèces, il y a entre l'homme et l'animal un rapport d'*Ineinander*, d'implication réciproque, qui est la condition même de la compréhension par l'homme du com-

³⁶ Ibid., p. 319.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 375.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 227.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 246.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 245.

portement animal: « Il est apparu que toute zoologie suppose de notre part une *Einführung* méthodique du comportement animal, avec participation de l'animal à notre vie perceptive et participation de notre vie perceptive à l'animalité ».⁴¹ Il est essentiel en effet de ne pas considérer la différence entre animalité et humanité comme une différence hiérarchique, car comme Merleau-Ponty l'avait déjà affirmé dans *La structure du comportement*, l'homme n'est pas animal plus raison, mais comme un « rapport latéral » « un dépassement qui n'abolit pas la parenté ».⁴² C'est ce qui explique l'intérêt que montre Merleau-Ponty pour Teilhard de Chardin, théologien, paléontologue et philosophe français, qui fut l'un des premiers à fournir une synthèse de l'histoire de l'univers dans une optique à la fois évolutionniste et spiritualiste dans *Le Phénomène humain*, un essai qui fit grand bruit à l'époque de sa parution en 1955. Car si Merleau-Ponty critique son idéalisme, il considère par contre avec sympathie l'idée selon laquelle, d'après lui, « l'homme est entré sans bruit », à savoir sans rupture dans l'évolution, car cela implique qu'il y a « métamorphose » et non « commencement à zéro ».⁴³

On comprend alors que pour Merleau-Ponty, mais de manière différente de Heidegger, s'il est nécessaire de reconnaître à l'animal une historicité spécifique, dans la mesure où on trouve déjà, au niveau de l'animal, expression, langage et symbolisme, il ne peut être question d'inclure purement et simplement l'homme dans une « histoire naturelle ». Il est en effet important, et c'est là la racine même de l'opposition de Merleau-Ponty au darwinisme et au néo-darwinisme, de « distinguer absolument évolution et filiation ».⁴⁴ Une telle conception de l'histoire comprise comme rapport d'ascendance et de descendance provient en effet de la pensée de survol que Merleau-Ponty n'a cessé tout au long de son œuvre de dénoncer au profit d'un rapport d'implication et d'entrelacement entre l'homme et la nature, laquelle ne peut jamais devenir pour lui un pur objet. Il y a certes ici une difficulté majeure, qui provient du fait, comme Heidegger l'avait déjà souligné, que l'animalité ne peut être comprise en elle-même, et que si nous parvenons à déceler

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 375.

⁴² Ibid., p. 335.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 334 et 340.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 325.

en elle quelque chose qui s'apparente à notre propre manière d'exister, cela provient, comme Merleau-Ponty le souligne à son tour, du fait que l'animalité ne peut être pensée qu'à partir de l'homme lui-même. Il n'en demeure pas moins que ce qui reste à penser, c'est ce rapport d'implication entre l'homme et l'animal, qui seul permet de donner à l'homme ce « passé natal », de le « restituer dans un tissu d'être pré-objectif »⁴⁵ auquel il appartient de manière fondamentale de par sa corporéité. C'est la raison pour laquelle, conclut Merleau-Ponty: « il ne faut pas dériver l'homme de la vie comme en soi ni concevoir l'évolution comme sans dedans et comme théorie de la descendance. Il faut dire: l'animalité et l'homme ne sont donnés qu'ensemble, à l'intérieur d'un tout de l'Etre qui aurait déjà été lisible dans le premier animal s'il y avait eu quelque'un pour le lire ».⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 340.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 338.

"EACH AUTHENTICALLY
EMBODIED STEP IS THE
WALK OF NATURAL HISTORY"

G l e n M a z i s *

I. Introduction: For Merleau-Ponty to be
Human is to be "Natural Historical"

Maurice Merleau-Ponty taught a course at the *Collège de France* during the academic year 1956–1957 entitled "The Concept of Nature" and began the course by asking the question of his students, "Can we validly study the notion of nature?"¹ Whereas Aristotle thought that the human being could not adequately describe the sense of the world without carefully observing the varieties of other living beings in the natural world and classifying them, by the time Merleau-Ponty asked this question of his students it had come to be assumed by many that the idea of nature was itself just a cultural artifact, an epiphenomenon. Merleau-Ponty addresses this suspicion he knows his students harbor by challenging their assumptions in phrasing his next question: "Isn't it [nature] something other than the product of a history, in the course of which it acquired a series of meanings by rendering it intelligible?" Whereas for Aristotle, it was obvious that there are other orders of beings, which humans must confront as having another sort of nature and as part of a more encompassing natural world, a world of which the human is a part but which the human also transcended in virtue of its specific human capacities, for the students of Merleau-Ponty's class, it seemed that the exercise of abstract reason and language traps humanity in a self-enclosure in such a way that it had become dubious whether the natural world could be encountered in its own terms. Merleau-Ponty's students would suspect

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¹ Merleau-Ponty, M. (2003), *Nature: Course Notes from the Collège de France* (translated by Robert Vallier). Evanston: Northwestern University Press, p. 3.

that either nature is mute, or the power of language and reason are so great that humans give nature whatever voice it might appear to have as a trick of human ventriloquism. This skeptical situation has deepened since Merleau-Ponty addressed his students. Even though for Aristotle, human being's rationality was unique and uniquely valuable, humanity was still a part of an encompassing whole moving towards actualization. As Merleau-Ponty points out in the beginning of his course as he discusses Aristotle's approach to nature, Aristotle's *finalist* understanding articulated qualitatively defined regions of natural phenomena such that "nature is the more or less successful realization of this qualitative destining of bodies."² This understanding establishes the encompassing of humanity within nature. In realizing their potentialities, human and nature are woven together. It is through the meaning resulting from their structure and function that varied purposes emerge within this totality. Even though this notion seems outdated, it is often the rationale of a "natural history:" to comprehend the variety of phenomena that encompass human being within this whole, and to grasp our place within its scheme—both within the history of its unfolding and in the comparisons of structure and function within it.

Merleau-Ponty at the beginning of the course distinguishes the other idea of nature that has been dominant with the tradition of philosophy from the Greeks to modern Europeans—Descartes' idea of "nature as the idea of an entirely exterior being, made of external parts, exterior to man and to itself, as a pure object."³ This idea of nature also dates back to the Greeks, Merleau-Ponty notes, but became dominant with Descartes and Newton. In this vision, nature is something alongside us or stretching out before us and easily becomes something to be exploited for humanity's purposes. The lack of meaning within nature and its loss as a voice to which to hearken is summed up by Merleau-Ponty in stating that, "Nature thus becomes a synonym of existence in itself, without orientation, without interior. It no longer has orientation. What we thought earlier as orientation is now only mechanism."⁴ If this

² Ibid., p. 7.

³ Ibid., p. 8.

⁴ Ibid., p. 10.

were to be the case, then Descartes' dualism of an immaterial thinking substance confronting an extended material world means that natural history aims at the comprehension of those determinate processes that interact in causal chains and have an ongoing impact on the material conditions of human life. This conception of nature is resonant with the "two cultures" that evolved between the sciences and the humanities, even though "natural history" usually denotes the more qualitative exploration of this material surround than the more strictly quantifiable approach of natural philosophy. Within this understanding, natural history is the study of a certain set of material entities and their interactions that lie in front and around human being, allowing them to be grasped as a system that might be manipulated and utilized for our ends. The attempted unification of nature and subjectivity as undertaken by the Romantics is also explored by Merleau-Ponty early in this course, but for him, it does not break out of the dualisms inherent in the treatment of nature within a tradition that opposes mechanism to meaning, individuals to totality, and matter to spirit, always reducing the dichotomies to the favored term of the particular argument.

Merleau-Ponty followed this initial course with two other courses about the concept of nature: the 1957–1958 course entitled "Animality, the Human Body, and the Passage to Culture" and also the course of 1959–1960 entitled "Nature and Logos: The Human Body." By the end of this third course, Merleau-Ponty had sketched out an approach to nature that does not mesh with traditional perspectives on the human relationship with the natural world, dispenses with the dichotomies that comprise the traditional articulation of this relationship, and uses another logic to recast its structure. In Merleau-Ponty's path of thought, nature becomes something unimagined by the tradition. In accomplishing this new formulation of the human relationship with nature, he fulfilled the promise he had announced at the very beginning of the first course to discover another kind of nature: "Nature is the primordial ... It is our soil [*sol*] — not what is in front of us, facing us, but rather, that which carries us."⁵ The key for Merleau-Ponty for rethinking nature is the same key he used to unlock other philosophical problems: realizing

⁵ Ibid., p. 4.

the primordially of embodying being⁶ that led him to an “ontology of the flesh of the world.” In Merleau-Ponty’s articulation, the world comes forth within the layers of perception of an embodying being, such that there is a “vertical visible world,”⁷ and the natural world is comprehended as an interpenetrating layer with the human and cultural world. Furthermore, this verticality of comprehension is also an unfolding process, in which the perceiver is perceptible and perceives in a fashion that the sense which emerges in perception seems to be also comprised by the additional sense offered *as if* perceived by the world itself of the perceiver and the world. This notion that the perceiver takes in what is beyond its own perception as a constitutive part of its own perception is Merleau-Ponty’s notion of the “reversibility” of perception. As we will explore these ideas in their relationship to natural history, we will see that humans are not capable of taking in the world about them unless the world itself is part of that process. There is only a kind of *co-perceiving* accomplished together by humans and world.

However, in contrast to the philosophical tradition that precedes him, Merleau-Ponty does not describe this interweavement, as he calls it, by postulating the subsumption of perception by an Oversoul or a notion of spirit or even transcendental consciousness that would be totalizing and transcendent to the concrete circumstances of perception. Rather, the co-perception of perceiver and natural world arises from the ongoing interplay of the contingent and necessary, not as simply opposed to one another, but rather as belonging to an ongoing dialectic. For Merleau-Ponty the “the perpetual reordering of fact and hazard by a reason non-existent before and without those circumstances,” as stated early in his project at the beginning of the *Phenomenology of Perception*, means that what is encountered within the situation becomes the very

⁶ Throughout this essay when possible, I will use the phrase “embodying being” instead of the more common term “embodiment” in order to indicate this is a process, a continual movement, and a dynamism of the becoming of embodied relations. It will indicate the sense of the body should be taken not as a description of “the body” as a noun, nor should “embodiment” be taken as the embodying of “something” as if it were a substance, but rather embodying is gerundial—in the way that Heidegger’s use of *Sein* is about the be-ing, the worlding of the world, without anything underlying as a foundation.

⁷ Merleau-Ponty, M., *Visible*, op. cit., p. 236.

means of ordering our perception to comprehend the situation.⁸ Nature in its perceived sense, as well as other dimensions of existence, is not the result of *a priori* universalizable and formal structures nor is it merely given, but rather emerges from the ongoing interweaving of the relationships in its historical unfolding such that "there is no longer any way of distinguishing a level of *a priori* truths from factual ones" (PP 221). There is no realm of intelligibility of human beings or sphere of interiority that is not equally in the world and its materially grounded sense. Yet, materiality is not mutely, obstinately confronting us, but has beckoned us to enter a dialogue of emerging sense with it through the unfolding of perception and our bodily matching of its rhythms and textures. Human being in its relationship to the natural world can not be named by any term among the traditional dichotomies. The logic of Merleau-Ponty is not the logic of "the one" of monism or "the two" of dualism, but rather is a logic of "not-one-not-two" in which human being and the natural world come forth together.

Natural history is in part a recognition that the earth has a vast history and that the natural world has rhythms and characteristics stemming from an ancient past to which humans and all living beings have had to adapt and that has molded the inanimate natural world into varied identities that are testimony to those eons of interaction. The study of natural history as revealing the essence or characteristics of various regions of the natural world always shows itself against this background of this great expanse of time. Yet, expressed and conceived in this manner, this sense of the historical dimension of natural history is a phenomenon comprised of cause and effect chains of events. It is a linear sense of time. It is also a conception of time that drives a further wedge into the dualistic disjunction between human being and the natural world. Whether we are considering the natural history of the cosmos, the galaxy, or even just our planet, the expanse of time of this linear sense of time dwarfs the comparable history of the human species. Within this asymmetry of histories, the natural world seems to be of a different temporal order and a different register of being than human being. Given the human pace of transformation of the surround in our short history, there seems

⁸ Merleau-Ponty, M., *Phenomenology*, op. cit, p. 127.

a disjunction between the natural world as being merely there, evolving, transforming, certainly, but not with the alacrity that may seem to bespeak a different order of purpose, intelligibility and value. There seem to be two temporal orders and two orders of being, as if there is human history as differentiated from natural history, that humans in their accelerated and compacted history transcend natural history. In this second history, it seems as if the being of the human is here to remake the being of the natural world as following its own destiny, one which may depart from that of the natural world. In general, the historical sense or historical being is taken to be the creation of human self-awareness, rationality and language. Humans are often thought to be those beings through whom history first comes to consciousness and articulation—a presumption that also is taken to separate the history of humanity from the vast natural history of the world that is passing by unnoticed within the darkness of that night populated by all the nonrational beings of the natural world.

In looking at Merleau-Ponty's comments about the relationship of human being and the natural world in his late 1950's lectures about nature, in his early work and in his last unfinished work, *The Visible and the Invisible*, this essay will assert that "natural history" emerges as a depth within the "lived time" of human temporality. Despite the human pretension to introducing the historical sense into the world, the deepest history surrounds us in the natural world not as just a fact of linear time to be discovered by the human sciences, but as a presence—the sense of what each being is in the natural world resounds with a "natural history" that seems at the heart of perceiving the natural world for what it is. This is the founding sense of the history of the natural world and perhaps in some ways even of any sense of the historical. It is also the founding sense of natural history as the study of the natural world insofar as we find ourselves only as echoes of this resounding at the heart of the natural world. To walk through the natural world is to experience a density below one's feet reverberating within the surround of an ancient temporality, a density of co-presences of untold and unfathomable comings and goings that still support and beckon to us. Merleau-Ponty suggests that to have a perceiving body of the kind we have as human beings is to be in some sense "natural-historical". When a sense of this

being a dimension of our being is lost, a depth of humanity's meaning here on earth is lost. Merleau-Ponty only moved towards suggesting these insights gradually, and in fragments within his work that this essay will attempt to assemble.

II. Embodying Being is Time and Time Is in the Depths of the World: *Phenomenology of Perception*

In the beginning of the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty poses many questions to be explored, most of them concerning the nature of perception, but he acknowledges that the empiricist and intellectualist distortions of perception and of embodying being have also lead to a false picture of nature and puts among his tasks that "We shall therefore have to rediscover the natural world too."⁹ In actuality, Merleau-Ponty will not get to this task until two decades later in his last years of lecture courses and writings, right before his sudden death. As he says in an often cited "working note" of July, 1959, included in *The Visible and Invisible*, the problems posed in the *Phenomenology of Perception* were insoluble using the traditional philosophical terms and concepts and had to await his finding new ones. This seems particularly true of describing the relationship between humans and the natural world. However, there are some interesting hints in the *Phenomenology of Perception* that should be noted as laying the ground for his later formulations.

In the beginning of the first chapter, in which Merleau-Ponty starts to sketch out his idea of perception and embodying being,¹⁰ he articulates how the body's role in the process of perception enacts a dispersal throughout its surround. This dispersal at first seems as if it might be merely spatial but is revealed to even be more fundamentally temporal. For Merleau-Ponty, to become concentrated upon perceiving an object is "to respond to this summons" upon my body. Our embodied being is solicited by aspects of the surround to be perceived. Furthermore, "to look at the object is to plunge oneself into it" such that "I become an-

⁹ Ibid., p. 24.

¹⁰ After his introductory chapter deconstructing several key ideas from the tradition about perception.

chored in it.”¹¹ Embodying being extends beyond its literal bounds to circulate within that which is perceived or as Merleau-Ponty will phrase this more powerfully in his last published essay, “Vision is not a certain mode of thought or presence to self; it is the means given to me for being absent from myself, for being present at the fission of Being from the inside—the fission at whose termination, and not before, I come back to myself.”¹² By contrast, within the traditional empiricist or intellectual account of perception there is a gap between the object and the distanced perceiver that either results in a mechanical response through causal intermediaries or an immaterial mental representation. Merleau-Ponty details how the body overlaps with the perceived, in the language of the early work, or is a fold of the flesh of the world back upon itself, in the terms of the later works. In the *Phenomenology of Perception*, this moment of perception is called one of “communion.”¹³ Yet, this is not the coincidence of two objects in space, for embodying being is not a specific location in space as defined by locating it in a Cartesian grid of points, but is rather throughout its surround. If “to look at an object is to inhabit it,” as Merleau-Ponty says, and if “every object is the mirror of all others,” as he also says, then in this moment of seeing, the embodying being is caught up in the mirror-play among all the objects within the surround.¹⁴ The body circulates within the surround to take up the vantage points of all the objects it perceives:

When I look at the lamp on my table, I attribute to it not only the qualities visible from where I am, but also those from which the chimney, the walls, the table can ‘see:’ the back of the lamp is nothing but the face which it ‘shows’ the chimney. I can therefore see an object in so far as objects from a system or a world, and in so far as each one treats the others round it as spectators of its hidden aspects which guarantee the permanence of those aspects by their presence.¹⁵

¹¹ Ibid., p. 67.

¹² Merleau-Ponty, M. (1964), “Eye and Mind.” in: *The Primacy of Perception* (translated by Carleton Dallery) Evanston: Northwestern University Press, p. 186.

¹³ Merleau-Ponty, M., *Phenomenology*, op. cit, p. 212.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 68.

¹⁵ Ibid.

The embodying being is dispersed throughout its surround as enacting a perceiving that comes from the vantage of the objects and aspects that envelop it, a description of perception that already implies the idea of "reversibility" that Merleau-Ponty will make more explicit in the later writings. What is important here in working our way towards the perceiver's relationship to nature is that the perceiver perceives from within the contours of its surround.

Also, in the first pages of describing embodying being, Merleau-Ponty states that "we base our memory on the world's vast Memory."¹⁶ This seems to be a usage of language that fits the last works and not the early pages of the *Phenomenology of Perception*, and indeed, Merleau-Ponty doesn't use a phrase similar to this until another working note of May, 1959, when in describing how the perceiver and perceived are a "winding" (*serpement*) around each other, he says that what has been is held within "The Memory of the World."¹⁷ What Merleau-Ponty might mean by this develops later in the *Phenomenology* when he discusses how the horizon of any particular spatial surround is always located within other possible spatial horizons. When walking through a field, for example, Merleau-Ponty states that "through my perceptual field, with its spatial horizons, I am present to my surroundings, I co-exist with all the other landscapes which stretch out beyond it"¹⁸ The perceiver co-exists with all these further fields, because they are all vantages from which to experience the world that my body inhabits as if it were perceiving from their vantage—however indeterminate this sense might be as part of my present perception. Merleau-Ponty points out, however, that "The synthesis of horizons is essentially a temporal process, which means, not that it is subject to time, nor that it is passive in relation to time, nor that it has to prevail over time, but that it merges with the very movement whereby time passes." There cannot be this spatial expanse without there being even more primordially a temporal one.

What is important to Merleau-Ponty's later ideas about nature is that he explains this merging with a motion of time as an entrance to a differ-

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 70.

¹⁷ Merleau-Ponty, M., *Visible*, op. cit., p. 194.

¹⁸ Merleau-Ponty, M., *Phenomenology*, op. cit., p. 330.

ent depth of time within the horizons of far off spaces coming together in a more global sense. All these other landscapes stretching beyond my local surround are my co-existences since “all these perspectives form a single temporal wave, one of the world’s instants.”¹⁹ A single temporal wave from within all landscapes suggests that there is a resonance or reverberation within my personal time that is of an impersonal planetary time—the time of the natural world. From within that great body of the earth, its extensive flesh within time, my own perceptual existence is but “one of the world’s instants.” Indeed, Merleau-Ponty, goes on to say that in perceiving one’s surround the spatial horizon is subtended by a temporal horizon that has a depth far beyond my personal existence: “Through my perceptual field with its temporal horizon I am present to my present, to all the preceding past and to a future. At the same time, this ubiquity is not strictly real, but is clearly only intentional” (PP 330–331). Unlike God, the perceiver does not open unto a time that is literally all times, but this impersonal time of perception is marked by indeterminate vectors that are directed towards this vast depth of time. This time is not the temporal horizon of my projects at my disposal, but rather that which resounds in enveloping me in a presence I can never fathom.

Although Merleau-Ponty will articulate how human history and culture envelop my personal time in a deeper temporality that forms a background to my personal acts, it is the natural world that provides the most primordial temporal depth to my life: “My voluntary and rational life, therefore, knows that it merges into another power which stands in the way of its completion, and gives it a permanently tentative look. Natural time is always there. The transcendence of the instants of time is both the ground of, and impediment to, the rationality of my personal history.”²⁰ Deeper than the personal perceiver is the anonymous impersonal perceiver that Merleau-Ponty documents throughout the *Phenomenology of Perception* and to which again he returns decades later in the working notes of *The Visible and the Invisible* when he says we must think of “the self of perception as ‘nobody,’ in the sense of Ulysses,

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 347.

as the anonymous one buried in the world."²¹ The way the perceiver is buried in the world is that this lack of self is a joining up with that single temporal wave or what Merleau-Ponty calls in this working note the "sinking into" a "temporal openness." This echoes his conclusion at the end of the *Phenomenology of Perception* that the perceiver is really time: "I am myself time"²² and "we are the upsurge of time."²³ As time, we are enveloped within the "one single phenomenon of lapse"²⁴ that is time.

I take my steps through the landscape and these steps echo with the whole of my personal history, since as Merleau-Ponty says "I am still that first perception" since "my first perception, along with the horizons which surrounded it, is an ever-present event"²⁵ But for this meditation, it is more important to consider those surrounding horizons. Since the core of perception is time, at the core of the perceiver there is the vast time of nature. As Merleau-Ponty phrases it, "Since natural time remains at the center of my history, I see myself surrounded by it."²⁶ The time we live within has another side, has a deeper background, and has reverberations within perceiving the natural world around me. We join up with a greater momentum and an ongoing unfolding that Aristotle was attempting to articulate as an erotic pulse that moves throughout the natural world that also bears us along with it, especially if we hearken to it. Merleau-Ponty will turn towards this erotics of the unfolding of the natural world in his last lectures, but even within the early *Phenomenology of Perception* he concludes, "Because I am borne into personal existence by a time which I do not constitute, all my perceptions stand out against a background of nature."²⁷ The other fields and the other landscapes that trail off from the spatial horizon that I am now traversing are temporal fields that resound with their deepest layer, the history of the natural world.

²¹ Merleau-Ponty, M., *Visible*, op. cit., p. 201.

²² Merleau-Ponty, M., *Phenomenology*, op. cit., p. 421.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 428.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 419.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 407.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 347.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 347.

Although in the natural attitude we may consider ourselves surrounded by objects that stand in themselves and constitute the natural world that has been comprised of a vast chain of beings in cause and effect relationships, giving rise to one another and then being swallowed up by time, the truth of our experience is that the single wave of temporality into which I am taken by perception shows up at the heart of my perception of an indeterminate and vast history, and I also have a sense of this deeper background to my existence: "I am thrown into a nature, and that nature appears not only outside me, in objects devoid of history, but it is also discernible at the centre of my subjectivity."²⁸ The objects of the natural world may be taken as devoid of history, as if they are just inert matter, but what is more the case is that they are at the core of my being as a perceiver as resonating with a sense that they carry with them this single temporal wave at whose dim beginnings I am still somehow remaining and still beginning. The separation that seems fundamental to the very idea of a "natural history" is undercut to reveal that natural history is not a dimension I confront within the world, but is rather a depth of my own being, the depth of that temporality that does not contain me as something other, but rather as that which I am.

This awareness of being within a single temporal wave that is the natural world and the history of the natural world lines perception like the backing of a fabric or is submerged within the background of the gestalt of what is present to us as perceivers, and only rarely may we have a sense of this unfathomable depth to our own presence. This background sense can become enriched with the scientific and reflective knowledge we have gained of natural history, since the process of *Fundierung* that Merleau-Ponty calls the "dialectic of form and content"²⁹ works both ways: not only may the unexpectedly immediate experience become a structure that shapes intelligibility, but an abstract or reflective idea as we live with it can become "sedimented" into the flow of our experience, such that it is lived in an affective, kinesthetic, imaginal, memorial and altogether perceptual manner in our embodying being.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 346.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 127.

In order to exemplify a moment of perception that instantiates the presence of the natural world, its ways of being and its history as the depth of the sense of my own embodying being as perceiver and as the depth of what I perceive, it is helpful to quote at some length the anthropologist and science writer, Loren Eiseley, and his experience one summer afternoon in the shallows of the Platte River. Eiseley knows a great deal about natural history, but it is not a reflective experience that he entertains on this afternoon, but rather an adventure of embodying being moving him deeply on an emotional, kinesthetic, memorial, proprioceptive, imaginal and sensual level. A man who has always been somewhat afraid of the water, Eiseley, on this lovely afternoon, let go of himself and entered the flow of the water and the flow of time:

Then I lay back in the floating position that left my face to the sky and shoved off. The sky wheeled over me. For an instant, as I bobbed on the main channel, I had the sensation of sliding down the vast tilted face of the continent. It was then that I felt the cold needles of the alpine springs at my fingertips, and the warmth of the Gulf pulling me southward. Moving with me, leaving its taste upon my mouth and spouting under me in dancing springs of sand, was the immense body of the continent itself, flowing like the river was flowing, grain by grain, mountain by mountain, down to the sea. I was streaming over ancient river beds thrust aloft where giant reptiles had once sported.

I was wearing down the face of time and trundling cloud-wreathed ranges into oblivion. I touched my margins with the delicacy of a crayfish's antennae, and felt great fishes glide about their work. I drifted by the stranded timber cut by beaver in mountain fastness; I slid over shallows that had buried the broken axles of prairie schooners and the mired bones of mammoth. I was streaming alive through the hot and working of the sun, or oozing secretively through shady thickets. I was water and the unspeakable alchemies that gestate and take shape in water, the slimy jellies that under the enormous magnification of the sun writhe and whip upward as great barbeled fish mouths, or sink industriously back into the murk out of which they arose. Turtle and fish and the pinpoint chirpings of individual frogs are all watery projections, concentrations—as man himself is a concentration—of that indescribable and liquid brew which is compounded in various proportions of salt and sun and time. It has appearances, but at its heart lies water, and as I was finally edged against a sand bar and dropped like any log, I tottered as I rose. I knew once more the body's revolt against emergence into the harsh and unsupported air,

its reluctance to break contact with that mother element which still, at this late point in time, shelters and brings into being nine tenths of everything alive.³⁰

As an extremely gifted writer and man who has spent his life sharpening his awareness of his sensibilities, Eiseley is able to articulate the felt dimension of being in ancient waters as a crayfish, of being part of the rhythm of the primeval sliding of great land masses, of being the hot fluid mixture from which life forms emerged, of being part of a school of large primitive fishes, and how even in the felt sense of the effort of our daily posture there is a reverberation of the effort of the first emergence from water into air, as well as many other eddies of the time of the long history of the planet. In the background of his own present time, there are these resounding voices, some of which he has come to know in his studies and is now able to recognize and name in coming to the level of his felt experience, but which were always already there in the depths of his embodying being as it is enmeshed in the natural landscapes around him. At the core of the perceiver, Merleau-Ponty tells us, in the depths of time that it subjectivity, lurks the rhythms and presence of the natural world, and Eiseley's experience is a testimony to its power.

III. Geological Time Is Beneath our Feet and Resounds within our Steps

In the last working note included in *The Visible and the Invisible* from March, 1961, less than two months before his sudden death, Merleau-Ponty states that he needs to articulate "Nature as the other side of man (as flesh—nowise as 'matter')." At this point in his work, Merleau-Ponty had sketched out how "the flesh of the world" is the *unfolding* of the human, animals, and all the beings of the planet in an *enfolding* in which the beings of each register have their unique identities but are interlaced with others in such a way as to be both distinct yet inseparable, the logic of "not-one-not-two," or of interconnected interdependence. The natural world lies on the other side of humanity in the sense of a Möbius strip, where there are two distinctive sides of the strip yet within their intertwining they are one unfolding being of both inside and outside.

³⁰ Eiseley, L. (1959), *The Immense Journey*. New York: Vintage Press, pp. 19–20.

This intertwining of the natural world as the other side of humanity—a depth of being that is both the primordial human dimension and laterally crosses over and through other species and beings—causes Merleau-Ponty to reconsider the temporality of natural history in relation to the human experience of temporality.

In his last years, Merleau-Ponty is seeking an architectonic understanding of how the vastness of the past of the natural world infuses time. In April, 1960, in his working note in *The Visible and Invisible*, he points to another sort of time within linear time such that “the past as ‘indestructible,’ as ‘intemporal’” becomes visible to us once we have achieved the “elimination of the common idea of time as a series of ‘Erlebnisse.’”³¹ This “common idea of time” as a series of experiences, the propulsive movement of “inner time consciousness,” had been both the common sense of Western culture of how time is straightforwardly lived and the basis of phenomenology’s sense of the flow of the unfolding of being-in-the-world, especially as laid out in Husserl’s *The Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness*. However, Merleau-Ponty applies this to time’s unfolding, embracing the sense of depth that he had been elaborating since the *Phenomenology of Perception*, when he declared that “this being simultaneously present in experiences which are nevertheless mutually exclusive, this implication of one in the other, this contraction into one perceptual act of a whole possible process, constitute the originality of depth.”³² Temporal depth in this sense that depth is comprised of the co-presence of impossibles would mean that differing times might be enjambed or contracted into one time comprised of differing dimensions, and this contraction is what gives time greater depth.

In the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty had cited Husserl’s famous analysis of time and had agreed with it. Yet, towards the end of the book, there is a passage that might point ahead to his later departure from Husserl’s analysis, especially when taking subjectivity as decentered into the natural world. When Merleau-Ponty declares that “we must understand time as the subject and the subject as time,”³³ he

³¹ Merleau-Ponty, M., *The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 243.

³² Merleau-Ponty, M., *Phenomenology of Perception*, *op. cit.* p. 264.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 422.

is planting a seed that will take him beyond the traditional notion of subjectivity and beyond Husserl's analyses of time consciousness. When Merleau-Ponty declares "I am myself time"³⁴ and likens it to a way that people have of talking about time as if it were almost a person or having a proper name or "as a single concrete being, wholly present in each of its manifestations", he is pointing towards a depth of time that transcends our consciousness of time; but he is not yet ready to abandon the Husserlian framework. It is a depth of time he will only be able to articulate with his last analyses of nature and the flesh of the world. Yet, it is interesting that Merleau-Ponty already says here of perception that it occurs within an unfolding of the world as manifest where there is no time beneath, behind or ahead of it, but rather "temporal dimensions, insofar as they perpetually` overlap and bear each other out and confine themselves to making explicit what was implicit in each, being collectively expressive of that one single explosion [*un seul éclatement*] or thrust [*ou une seule poussée*] which is subjectivity itself."³⁵ In the place of subjectivity instead is an invocation of an "explosion" from whose depths the world emerges continually. The term used here in this late passage of the *Phenomenology of Perception* in focusing on time and depth is yet another precursor. When in 1961 in "Eye and Mind," he uses the word "deflagration" in place of subjectivity in describing depth as the "dimension of dimensions," this seems like the unfolding of the germ of his earlier thought. To use this word in this last published essay to describe how the painter and what he paints both emerge from the *deflagration* lit when each person comes into the world seems resonant with the idea of the relationship of perceiver to the perceived as *one single explosion*. These phrases suggest that both "the subject" and "states of consciousness" have been volatilized. This "explosion" is the site where what had been taken as subjectivity is now articulated as another face of time. The trajectory from the end of the *Phenomenology of Perception* is moving beyond subjectivity towards a becoming- or a process-view of embodying being as the unfolding within time of the depths of the world, especially the natural world.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 421.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 422

Returning to Merleau-Ponty's working note of April, 1960, we find him calling for an exploration of existence outside the life of the ego, and also outside "interiority", in a way that "the intentional analytic cannot grasp."³⁶ In taking reversibility seriously, our relationship to the natural world is not only about the way we intend it, but is also about the way it encompasses us such that we take up its indirect or silent voice. Here Merleau-Ponty asserts we must go beyond the "whole Husserlian analysis" and description of internal time consciousness to consider a "past that adheres to the present and not to the consciousness of the present" or as being a "vertical past" that "contains itself the exigency to have been perceived, far from the consciousness of having perceived bearing that of the past ... a spatializing-temporalizing vortex (which is flesh and not a consciousness facing a noema)."³⁷ This vortex that is the flesh of the world contains that which is "hidden" or "latent", and emerges in "this philosophy of transcendence", Merleau-Ponty's final indirect ontology, no longer "compatible with 'phenomenology,'"³⁸ as Merleau-Ponty writes in these working notes. By this, he means that he must go beyond Husserl's phenomenology in focusing merely on the way in which time is the horizon of our world—the human personal, historical, and cultural world—to envision how this temporal horizon winds around the time of the natural world like the two strands of genetic material in their chiasm. It is only in this way, he says, that he can investigate a time in which there is also a "past-present simultaneity" that is not found either in the natural attitude's sense of time as succession or in the Husserlian sense of internal time consciousness, but is rather within a "dimensional present or *Welt* or Being, where the past is 'simultaneous' with the present in the narrow sense." It is the world or Being as a dimensional presence that exists as a present that is at the same time a past, a vertical depth that envelops us. A few months before, in another working note, Merleau-Ponty had described "the vertical world" as "the union of impossibles, the being in transcendence, and the topological space and the time in joints and members, in dis-

³⁶ Merleau-Ponty, M., *The Visible and the Invisible*, *op cit*, p. 243.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 244.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

junction and dis-membering.”³⁹ The vertical world is a world that is topological, offering us the expanse of varied places of our planetary surround, but in the unique sense of depth he had articulated in the *Phenomenology of Perception* as the union of impossibles; and rather than a *seamless* temporal wave, the verticality of the world is one of joinings in the midst of disjoinings. Although he doesn’t mention it in these two notes, I believe it is his thinking through a conception of natural history and our relationship to the natural world that is moving him into this new idea, this deeper sense of a time as a “time before time, to the prior life,” a time akin to that “mythical time”⁴⁰ towards which his thinking had pointed decades before.

By June, 1960, it is clear that Merleau-Ponty has been thinking about temporality in terms of the impact of the envelopment of the natural world and of history by natural history. He now speaks of a “transcendental geology” as the way to think about the “authentic temporality” that one confronts in the sense of a history of what appears inert about us in the surround that emerges with taking in our geography. In considering the space of the planet that envelops us, Merleau-Ponty notes there is a layer of our being that emerges from this contact with another sort of time that is at the depths of this enveloping space of the natural world: “For history is too immediately bound to individual praxis, to interiority, it hides too much in its thickness and its flesh for an easy return to the whole philosophy of the person. Whereas geography—or rather “the Earth as *Ur-Arché*”—brings to light “the carnal *Urhistorie*,” in fact “it is a question of grasping the *nexus*—neither ‘historical’ nor ‘geographic’ of history and transcendental geology, this very time which is space, this very space that is time.”⁴¹ The Earth brings out in our layered and dehiscent being (as one of depths, of impossibles), a dimension of history before history that cannot appear other than through the embodying historical sense of humanity, but meets it within a nexus, within an entwining, in which encrusted within the space of the natural world is itself another sort of time. The depths of the world, as echoed

³⁹ Ibid., p. 228.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 242.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 259.

in the depths of embodying being as the natural world, is not before us or about us but is enmeshed within: "The antecedent unity me-world, world and its parts, parts of my body, a unity before segregation, before multiple dimensions—and so also the unity of time."⁴² To have a human body is to have a body that perceives not only from its own vantage but with a welling up of presence from within an enveloping geological space and time of the natural world.

It is in the working note of November, 1960, labeled "Nature", that it becomes clear that Merleau-Ponty has been thinking through the intersection of the phenomenological sense of time with another sort of time of the natural world. This note begins with his citation of Lucien Herr's phrase, "Nature is at the first day," and adds for emphasis "it is there today."⁴³ Merleau-Ponty warns that this does not mean some sort of coincidence with the natural world, some sort of naturalistic mysticism, but is rather how the flesh of the world folds back on itself within the embodying being of the perceiver: we are not the natural world, our human history does not coincide with natural history and yet the time of opening up to the natural world has an inescapable depth: "It is a question of finding in the present, the flesh of the world (and not in the past) an 'ever new' and 'always the same' — A sort of time of sleep (which is Bergson's nascent duration, ever new and always the same). The sensible, Nature, transcend the past present distinction, realize from within a passage from one to the other. ... Existential eternity. The Indestructible. The Barbaric principle."⁴⁴ Although we perceive the natural world as present, this perceiving is also of a co-existing past, not trailing along in a series of retentions, but within the present as a depth or verticality that makes it be the presence of something indestructibly still at its origin—a never-ending silent explosion. Each new step may open up a new vista, so perhaps with a thud we come up against an unexpected rock or discover the sight of hawks circling above; but each of these moments is *at the same time* a vast opening of vistas existing even before there were humans to see them but instead perhaps only

⁴² Ibid., p. 261.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 267.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

an ancient reptile. And this suggests, too, that the thud on the rock is still sounding with that of mammoths upon that same rock ten thousand years ago, and that the hawks are circling in gyres that contain within their spinning the gyres of ancient flying beings who no longer soar above the earth in new flights, but whose tracings still envelop the sky, and these circling artists of the wind are still tracing arabesques. Furthermore, explaining this verticality of time by referring to the time of sleep, Merleau-Ponty invites his readers to hear a passage from the *Phenomenology of Perception* describing at length the sense of the night as “pure depth” that “enwraps me and infiltrates through all my senses, stifling my recollections and almost destroying my personal identity.”⁴⁵ The time of night and sleep has unfathomable depths, takes one into an impersonality of something indefinable, but much more encompassing and labyrinthine. The time of nature is like this, barbaric, having something untamable, wild, outside human construction and order.

With each step upon this planet, there is not only a depth of space and of literal ground vital to our sense of grounding, but also as sense of the depth of time, such that differing times resonate within each other, are present in each other, not in a linear successive sense, but in another sort of reverberation or as Merleau-Ponty phrases this sense in the next paragraph:

“In what sense the visible landscape under my eyes is not exterior to, and bound synthetically to ... other moments of time and the past, but really has *behind itself* in simultaneity, inside itself and not it and they side by side ‘in’ time.”⁴⁶ The landscape of natural history is the same landscape of our everyday existence. It is not a separate object of inquiry and not a discovery of an “additional” dimension of our world. It is the presence of each landscape “behind itself in simultaneity”—the landscape within the landscape—the natural history at the depths of history.

Andy Goldsworthy, a masterful “earth artist”, endeavors to express this dimension of time in his artworks. Some of his pieces are made from sculpting ice into elaborate delicate biomorphic shapes, sewing leaves together in intricate patterns and then floating them down a stream in

⁴⁵ Merleau-Ponty, M., *Phenomenology of Perception*, *op. cit.* p. 283.

⁴⁶ Merleau-Ponty, M., *The Visible and the Invisible*, *op cit*, p. 267.

a graceful back and forth motion, making etched undulating pathways in the clay of a valley that snakes across its floor, or by making floating spherical objects of interlocking stones to be carried out and swirled apart by the tides. His artistic works are made of the materials taken from that environment and they return to their component parts with the participation of natural forces that are also part of the specific environment. Many of his pieces are meant to express and bring people's attention to the fact that "time and change are connected to place,"⁴⁷ as he states at the opening of his book, *Time*, in which he chronicles and displays photographs of many of his works. He states that in working with the natural world for a twenty five year period, "the more I worked, the more aware I became of the powerful sense of time embedded in a place."⁴⁸ One work in particular expresses pointedly Merleau-Ponty's description of place as being a layered perception of geological time that is felt but not explicitly perceived until we celebrate the vertical time we take for granted. At Scaur Glen in Dumfriesshire, Scotland, there is a spot in the river near where Goldsworthy lives that contains pockets of red rock submerged within the rock face along the banks of the river. Goldsworthy realized that this red rock was a striking perduring presence of an ancient time in the river's life that had now become submerged within the overall experience of the river. Goldsworthy excavated some of the rock, ground it into a powder, and mixed it with water in order to make several bright red pools among the rock crevice pools towards the upper range of the water's depth, and waited for the river to rise.⁴⁹ When it did, suddenly the deep past of the river that was always there to be seen and experienced but had become part of deep background of the sense of the river was splashed on its surface flow in bright red bursts to highlight the startling co-presence of the ancient strata of the river's history now carried on the surface of its newest water flow. The ancient time was always present in a still, red, submerged depth, but now it is brought to the literal surface to the perceiver's attention to celebrate a depth of time we often pass by unnoticed—the way

⁴⁷ Goldsworthy, A., (2000), *Time*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc, p. 7.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 25, 49–51. Also, Goldsworthy displays this piece and discusses it in his film "Rivers and Tides."

in which natural history reverberates throughout the natural world. This is the function of the discipline of natural history in Merleau-Ponty's perspective: to reveal our vertical being within the world and our vertical grasp of this being, and not to just display objects located at a distance from us in time or space that would spark our curiosity as other.

IV. Interanimality and the Life of the Planet as Natural History

Even though the varied schema that have been used by natural history beginning with Aristotle's classifications to comprehend the world of living beings have in one sense always placed human beings within the whole as part of an encompassing web of life, at the same time, starting with Aristotle, natural history has always placed human beings outside this web as uniquely different in the superiority of in human being's special capacities. Whether it be linguistic capacities, the capacity for abstract reasoning, for symbolism, upright posture with opposable thumbs, relationship to mortality, a sense of history and cultural institutions, humans have been seen to transcend their place among other animals as above them and not of the same order of being. Merleau-Ponty denies this long evaluative tradition, stating in his lectures on nature that "the relation of the human and animality is not a hierarchical relation, but lateral, an overcoming that does not abolish kinship."⁵⁰ Rather than human being ranking above the animal, their relationship is lateral, on a shared level, despite whatever other capacities humans developed beyond the basic shared being together, being like kin, within the natural world. This difference in Merleau-Ponty's evaluation of the status of human beings in relation to animality also stems from his notion of the nature of embodying being as the key to understanding human being. He is also led by this analysis to reassess the capacities of animals as co-perceivers.

Merleau-Ponty's next sentence elaborates that even the most distinctive dimension of human being has its roots in the lateral level of shared being of human and animal: "Even mind is incredibly penetrated by its corporeal structure: eye and mind. It is starting from the visible that we

⁵⁰ Merleau-Ponty, M., *Nature*, op. cit., p. 268.

can understand the invisible." The corporeal structure of human being is the ground of mind that emerges as an elaboration upon the world as already revealed and understood in a sensory and motoric grasp. This basic hodological sense of space is the lived understanding of the meaning of the surround that overlaps with animals. Even in his 1954–5 lectures on the nature of institution, Merleau-Ponty had already started to rethink the human and animal relationship, given that the interwoven nature of embodiment and perception "reflected a certain animalization of the human" and that the "animal is a certain variant of the human."⁵¹ In the course of his three years of lectures on nature at the end of the decade, however, the intimate tie of the human with the animal further emerges as a major theme: "We must say: Animality and human being are only given together with a whole of Being."⁵² Human being and animal being are not separable in our shared relation to the world surround in which each is enmeshed and enters through perceptual being.

Seeing humanity as Merleau-Ponty does, as an embodying being making sense of its world through a layered perceptual comprehension that is sensual, visceral, affective, kinesthetic, proprioceptive, as well as memorial, imaginative and rationally reflective, we are led to see that the areas of overlap, taking in the world with the animal, are large: "Animal life refers to what is sensible for us and to our carnal life; sensible, that is not our human kind of the present or timeless mind. In the order of *Einfühlung*, of the 'vertical' where our corporeity is given to us, there is precisely an opening to a visible."⁵³ In our sensible life, the world opens as a carnal engagement with what is around us and means something to us, just as it does for animals, and this opening does not occur through the human mind. This opening of the world's sense carnally can be imagined, for example, as the discovery alike for humans or animals that the shade is a place of rest from the hot, glaring sun; that the icy, flowing stream is a source of refreshment from the weariness and thirst experienced after a long trek through the forest; and that the oncoming night is a time to lie down and enter the world of sleep

⁵¹ (2003), *L'institution dans l'histoire personnelle et publique: notes de cours au Collège de France*. Paris, Belin, p. 54.

⁵² Merleau-Ponty, M., *Nature*, op. cit., p. 271.

⁵³ Ibid.

to become renewed for the next day. In the tradition of philosophy as in the tradition of natural history, this shared carnal life of the human and the animal is not grasped, since they assume that intellection is the ground and active ordering principle of sense-making. With rational discrimination taken as foundational, instead of being an ordering that only functions within the world already revealed and apprehended by perception (as Merleau-Ponty demonstrated throughout his work), reason is overvalued. It is taken for granted that the human being's comprehension of the surround by reason or mind transforms our relationship to the natural world to another level that is assessed as different in kind from other creatures. Merleau-Ponty denies this assessment: "An organ of the mobile senses (the eye, the hand) is already language because it is an interrogation (movement) and a response (perception as *Erführung*) of a project, speaking and understanding. It is a tacit language."⁵⁴ In the earlier lectures about institution and in the later lectures about nature, Merleau-Ponty had already contended that the motor meanings communicated among animals have significances that verged on the symbolic and constituted a kind of "pre-culture:" "The architecture of symbols that the animal brings from its side thus defines within Nature a species of pre-culture."⁵⁵ Merleau-Ponty's point here is that the same perceptual-motoric round of projects found in the surround of both humans and animals is a kind of tacit language, and our linguistic abilities are an elaboration of this "wild" meaning, grounded in this shared carnal sense of the world.

For Merleau-Ponty, not only is there a motoric and perceptual level of meaning that is more pregnant with possibilities than the tradition had allowed, but language itself relies upon the gestural and the perceptual as the underside of its own sense, such that the tacit language of animality and the more explicit language ability of the human are sides of each other: "The difference is only relative between a perceptual silence and a language that always carries a thread of silence."⁵⁶ Merleau-Ponty states that to see this anchorage of the human mental

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 211.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 176.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

capacity in the shared animality of perceptual life is not only vital to understanding our relationship with the natural world, but also is essential to understanding what human beings are: "What we call mind is again a re-equilibration, a decentralization that is not absolute ... The invisible, mind, is not another positivity: it is the inverse, the other side of the visible. We must retrieve this brute and savage mind beneath all the cultural material that is given ... There is a Logos of the natural es-thetic world, on which the Logos of language relies."⁵⁷ That mind is an emergent quality of the way in which embodying being gears into its surround through perception and action anchors humanity in the midst of the natural world and animality in a way that traditional philosophy has never envisioned; nor did European cultural and intellectual history. Merleau-Ponty does not deny human difference, but he relocates it: "We study the human body in order to see it emerge as different from the animal, not by the addition of reason, but rather in short, in the *Ineinander* with the animal ... by escape and not by superposition."⁵⁸ Merleau-Ponty agrees with the tradition that humans do create a distinctive level of meaning, but for him, such meaning emerges from within this shared matrix of sense within the natural world, this echo among beings open to the same world and this overlapping of sense from which the human can perpetually for a moment move outside, but to which they must return, remaining within a shared dwelling.

This sense of the meaningfulness of the carnal relationship to the natural world also means for Merleau-Ponty that seeing human apprehension of the world as an isolated phenomenon is a misjudgment. Our human "seeing," our "hearing," our human sense of the threat of the predator lurking, our human sense of the inhospitable nature of the wind whipping sub-zero day outside is not purely "our" doing. Once we understand that animals apprehend the surround with affective, intelligible, and even imaginative dimensions in their own distinctive ways and take "the animal body defined by the Umwelt"⁵⁹ as analogous to human embodying being that first understands its world in the embody-

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 212.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 214.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 221.

ing hodological space of its own being-in-the-world, the emergence of sense moves in lateral circulation among surrounds within the natural world. Of course, despite analogous relationships that are inscribed through its projects in dialogue with the world, the animal surround differs from the human way of having a world in that the human surround includes the “sedimentation” of reflective intellection’s structures within this more carnal relationship. As open to the same world, even though carving out sense in ways that are similar and different, the sense emerges not only in the body’s being caught up in the “mirror play” among objects within the surround discussed at the beginning of this essay, but also from within the echoes of how other animals perceive the world: “As for esthesiology, it emerges from life without absolute break. As esthesiology emerges from the relationship to an *Umwelt*, human desire emerges from animal desire. Already in the animal, in the ceremony of love, desire is not mechanical functioning, but an opening to an *Umwelt* of fellow creatures.”⁶⁰ The human embodying being finds itself at the depths of the world, partly from the vantage and sense given indirectly to us by inanimate, but also as a shared being with other animals. Merleau-Ponty says that “our ‘strange kinship’ with the animals ... teaches pertaining to the human body” that this embodiment is “our *Ineinander* with Sensible Being and with other corporeities.” In other words, the human body senses *as if* sensing through the trees and sky above it, but also *as if* in some sense its own body is extended through the senses of the other animal bodies enmeshed with it on the planet.

Human embodied being cannot even be thought outside this relationship to animality. As Merleau-Ponty says: “life teaches us not only the union of our soul and our body, but also the lateral union of animality and humanity.”⁶¹ This means that within our deepest humanity, we are animals, we are creatures enmeshed in our being with a planetary home from which we distance ourselves. Although, humans are traditionally recognized as within the natural world and within the family of animals in terms of finding objective characteristics that had vital connections in the cause and effect unfolding of the planet’s history, and,

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 225.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 271.

therefore, having certain parallels in basic life functions, humans have been regarded in the European philosophical and cultural tradition as having an interiority and a spirit of mental substance that sets humanity apart from the material and creaturely world. If Merleau-Ponty is correct, then what we are studying by studying natural history is our own extended being—our being at its greatest depths—our own being that is not really ours in some sense, but eludes us like the animal in the brush. Yet, in another sense, the animals in our world, these seemingly distant beings, spatially or temporally, are in fact at the very heart of our embodying being and are most closely what we are. Natural history is the unraveling of the sense of our own embodying being. The history of natural history is the present of each step we take on this planet in the sense of the ringing forth about us from the depths of what things around us mean, how we are directed, and even how our bodies miraculously take in all the sense they do, in a reverberation sounded by time's unceasing folding back on itself, as if natural history were a lyre whose strings could move spontaneously, sounding their own voice, without intermediary.

ON SOIL AND SOUL: THE PHILOSOPHICAL QUESTION OF THE GARDEN

Dennis J. Schmidt*

In what follows I want to suggest that, although the garden is generally quite absent from philosophical discussions, the idea of the garden is nonetheless philosophically significant. There are three sets of reasons for this significance and that argue for a closer look at the nature of the garden. First, the garden is a quite distinctive site; it cannot be thought simply as a place of nature – the presence of human intention defeats that attempt – but neither can it be thought simply as the product of human intention – the vitality and unruliness of nature defeats that attempt. In other words, the notion of the garden escapes the categories – of nature and of art – that have long structured the discussion of the human relation to the natural world. Second, as such a distinctive site where the human and natural worlds intersect in a manner not able to be defined by either the human or nature alone, the garden opens up a space that helps us think the relation of the human being to the natural world in a rather novel manner. Third, the garden is a place of cultivation, not just of the earth but of the self as well. One does well to recognize that the ancient sense of the garden as a place of education – a rather unique kind of education in light of the unique relation between nature and the human in the garden—needs our attention today. In other words, the absence of the garden from philosophical reflection is an oversight that needs to be addressed. The question of the garden is a far-reaching one that touches upon basic questions of how we are in the world.

Locating the garden, getting a grip on its elements and on the ways in which we might approach it, is no easy matter. The word “garden,” like the word “paradise” to which it is related, derives from words that

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refer to a “walled enclosure.”¹ The word speaks of something set apart and protected from the outside. However, like the word “paradise,” this meaning of “garden” as something set apart and enclosed is more a dream, an idealization, than a name that is appropriate to the reality of the garden which is both constantly dependent upon and threatened by the “outside.” Weather and insects are not alone in reminding us that the “wall” defining a garden is thoroughly *porous*. The garden needs what is not in the garden; it can never be self-contained, but needs to be understood as part of a larger whole. So, while it is true that gardens are set apart and delimited from within – they are defined spaces – it is equally true that the starting point for any reflection upon gardens must be that they are *intersections*: of the human and the natural realms, of animal and plant, of earth and heaven. Though full of human purpose and intention, every gardener knows all too well that intention does not account for much in the life of a garden. Though a place of growth and the arrival of the new that is mostly the result of human design, the garden is equally a marker of the limits of what we can know, define, and control. In the end then, though it may be well defined and walled off, the garden needs to be approached as a place of mixtures. Gardening naturally invites hybrids; they are liminal phenomena not by virtue of their edges, but by virtue of their own character. To understand the garden, one needs to recognize that it is not, in the first instance, a walled enclosure defined by a set of geographical coordinates; rather, it is set apart by virtue of the peculiar place that it defines. It is, one might say, set apart only conceptually. Despite the meaning of its name, it can never be fully enclosed.

As such a place of interaction and mixtures, the garden is by nature a metaphorical place: that is, it is a sort of doubling of the human and the natural world, of the heavens and the earth. It is the site of connections made between what is otherwise distinct: gardens are naturally metaphorical.² It is no accident then that gardens have long been meta-

¹ The word “paradise” comes from the ancient Persian word “*pairidaēza*” which means walled-in park or garden. On this, and on the way one finds this echoed in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, see: Casey, E., (1993), *Getting Back into Place*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp. 154–155.

² See my (1999) “Stereoscopic Thinking: Aristotle on Metaphor and the Law of Resemblance,” in: *American Continental Philosophy* (ed. Brogan and Risser). Bloomington: Indiana University

phors in which we see and understand something of ourselves and of our world. Consequently, when one speaks of the garden, one needs to remember that they have a double meaning: as simultaneously real – as plots of earth – and as representations – as ways in which we work out our relation to the natural world. Gardens engage our senses – the feel of the soil, the smells that range from putrid to perfumed, the splashes of color, the sound of life abuzz, and tastes galore – they also engage our imagination and enact our understanding of the human place in the world. To speak of the garden, one needs to bear in mind its double life: it grows just as well in our imagination as in our backyard. As Michael Pollan put it: “a tree in a garden is also a trope.”

Ready made for multiple meanings, gardens figure prominently and frequently in literature (just think of Voltaire, Boccaccio, Dante, and even the oldest literary work – *The Epic Gilgamesh*) as well as in religions (from the Garden of Eden to the Zen rock gardens). But the garden is just as easily made an image of an ideal (the gardens of Elysium). There is a tendency for things to grow in the garden – ideas as well as plants – and so it will always need to be defined as a place of cultivation. It is not by chance that institutions of learning have a long history of setting themselves up in gardens. From Plato’s Academy in Athens and Epicurus’ Garden School in the ancient world to the British “college garden” and the American campus in the present, places of learning, reflection, and conversation have long gravitated to the garden.³ Gardens, both real and imagined, cultivate common grounds for communities.

In light of all of these possibilities of the garden, the difficulty in defining the garden, in getting some purchase upon its specific character, is easy to understand. Much more could be said about the various distinctions and meanings of the garden, it is a rich site, but the point that is as yet only tacitly present, but that I want to highlight, is that the garden is intimately bound to the human even while it remains a place in the natural world. The garden is what it is because nature remains itself while the garden is defined by virtue of the trace of the human that is

Press, pp. 66–94.

³ See: Harrison, R.P. (2008), *Gardens: An Essay on the Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. This book is very much at the heart of what I will argue in this essay.

always present: “*vestigium hominis video*.”⁴ That is why we learn something about the nature of human being from reflections upon the garden. This deep kinship between human beings and gardens is expressed as well by the Latin word for human, *homo*, which is closely related to the word for soil, “*humus*”⁵ (likewise, the name “Adam,” the original biblical human being who emerged in the Garden of Eden, is a form of the word “earth” [“*adama*”]). In other words, the link between the soil and the soul, between the earth and the human, is very much at stake when one speaks of gardens. As a plot of land, the garden may be modest, but as an idea it can seem so sweeping that one eventually comes to see the legitimacy of the claim that “life is a subset of gardening.”⁶

The importance of the garden, its rather unique and doubled place within the world, can be seen by even a superficial glance. And yet, despite this obvious significance of the garden as an idea, philosophical reflection upon gardens remains remarkably rare.⁷ This absence of any serious consideration of gardens is however indicative of a more generalized problem with philosophy today, namely, that we are not able to take up the question of nature outside of the orbit defined by science and technology. In the age of technology, our being in nature has shown itself to be profoundly destructive, our relation to nature is overwhelmingly a matter of aggression. Heidegger, rightly I believe, char-

⁴ On this remark by Vitruvius in *De Architectura*, see: Kant, I. (2001), *Kritik der Urteilskraft*. Hamburg: Meiner Verlag, Ak., 370.

⁵ Heidegger discusses this in the fable of “Cura” in *Sein und Zeit*, see: § 42. There Heidegger emphasizes not only the relation of the human being to the earth, but also the significance of care for the maintenance of that relation.

⁶ Klinkenborg, V., “Introduction,” in: *The Gardener’s Year*, by Karel Čapek. New York: The Modern Library, p. xii. Čapek, for whom technology was a central concern (he also coined the word “robot” in his 1921 play *R.U.R.*), wrote his book as the story of a year (1938) in the life of a garden which he tells as the story of his obsession with the soil and his relation to the various possibilities of soil.

⁷ So, for instance, see: Cooper, D.E. (2006), *A Philosophy of Gardens*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, which opens with the remark that “The volume of philosophical writings about gardens in recent years is modest – so modest that their authors typically begin, as I am now doing, by remarking on the relative neglect of the garden by modern philosophy” (p. 1). The most significant exception to this tendency is found in Romanticism. On this see especially Schiller’s “Über den Gartenkalender auf das Jahr 1795.” Schlegel and Novalis are also important in this regard. Likewise, see: Hirschfeld, C. C. L. (1779–1785) *Theorie der Gartenkunst*, 5 Bd., Leipzig. I will discuss this exception and its significance in what follows.

acterizes this relation as a matter of a “Herausfordern” [an “insistence” or “demand”].⁸ On the other hand, the garden models a different sort of relation to nature, one that is much more collaborative and one in which there is clearly the need for a sort of reciprocity in that relation – one needs to adapt and adjust oneself to the garden as much as one needs to design and define it. In the garden, we find a different sort of ethic,⁹ a different way in which we can understand our place in nature: one tends nature, one does not attempt to tame it, one cultivates rather than challenges. One might say that one learns an ethics of care. To say, as does Voltaire, that “Il faut cultiver notre jardin” is not to propose some sort of retreat from the world or a withdrawal from responsibility. Quite the contrary, it is to point to the need to change oneself. Voltaire’s comment needs to be heard as centered on the meaning of the cultivation required in the garden.¹⁰

In the following, my intention is twofold: to provide what I believe is a productive context for opening up the garden in its philosophical significance, and to provide some indications of what might develop out of a serious philosophical consideration of the garden.

In the ancient world the garden was – when it was taken up as a matter for thinking at all – typically regarded as having some relation to “the good life.” One sees this, for instance, in Pliny for whom a life spent in the garden was a “good and genuine life.”¹¹ Similarly, the “pleasure garden” (that is, the garden that is made without practical intent such as growing food or medicinal herbs) of the Medieval world was often conceived as a copy of the Garden of Eden and its cultivation was re-

⁸ Heidegger, M. (1962), *Die Technik und die Kehre*. Tübingen: Neske Verlag, p. 14.

⁹ Here, I am taking the word “ethic” in the sense one finds in Homer where “*ethos*” is the name for an abode or dwelling place of an animal; that is, it is the name for a place where one properly belongs and is at home.

¹⁰ Here the German word, “*Bildung*,” which needs to be translated as “formation,” “cultivation,” and “education,” captures the sense of cultivation that is at work in the garden.

¹¹ Quoted in Cooper, op.cit. p. 10.

garded as a way of reenacting something of divine creation.¹² Indeed, until modern times discussions of gardens tended to regard them as matters of spiritual practice and the formation of character. In line with this, religion, more than philosophy, concerned itself with the nature of the garden.

This changes with Kant. In his *Critique of Judgment*, Kant exposes the limits of the capacity of determinate reflection – in the forms of science and mechanism – to give an account of nature that is able to understand the place of human being in nature.¹³ More precisely, guided by the concern to understand the relation of freedom and nature, Kant demonstrates how conceptual reason is unable to grasp this relation of nature and human being in its fullest extent. At the same time that he marks the limits of the concept, Kant argues that aesthetic judgment provides an opening for thinking this relation. The aesthetic opens up the question of nature in such a way that the place of purposes in nature can become intelligible. Once this happens, once nature comes to be recognized as a realm of purposes and not simply of mechanisms that are calculable, the ethical significance – the place of purpose and meaning – of how we are to understand the relation of nature and human being can be addressed. Kant is clear that aesthetic experience is not fully sufficient to this end, but, he argues, it is the proper beginning to this question.¹⁴ The third Critique made many new beginnings, but among the still underappreciated of these is that it opens up the question of the relation of human being and nature in a way that is not found elsewhere; it opens up this question from out of a concern with aesthetic experience, but equally as a question of ethical life. With this new beginning, the question of

¹² Glacken, C.J. (1967), *Traces on the Rhodian Shore*. Berkley: University of California Press, pp. 347–348.

¹³ Here, of course, the project of establishing the limits of *cognition* that is laid out in the *Critique of Pure Reason* has a different intention. There the problem of the limits of our knowledge of nature is not specifically centered on the problem of *judgment* and *practice*. While the 3rd Antinomy does point to this problem, the problematic of the first Critique does not extend to its full treatment. The third Critique on the other hand opens with precisely this problem that judgment faces in light of the limits of our knowledge. This is a problem of reflection, not of cognition.

¹⁴ See my (2000), “On the Significance of Nature for the Question of Ethics,” in: *Research in Phenomenology*, Vol. XXI (2000), pp. 62–77; and (2005), *Lyrical and Ethical Subjects*. Albany: SUNY Press, pp. 7–18.

the relation of art and nature wins a new found significance that frees it from the realm of science and that recognizes that in this relation we face a profoundly ethical matter.

This is not the place to begin taking up the great insights of Kant's third Critique, but what does need to be noted for my concern with the question of the garden is that by virtue of his opening of the question of nature through aesthetic experience, and by virtue of his insistence upon the importance of thinking through the relation of art and nature, Kant makes a concern with the idea of the garden inevitable. And yet, though Kant's turn to the garden signals a sort of revolution, Kant himself only discusses the garden briefly and, when he does so, he subordinates the garden to the problematic of painting. In other words, the garden, though recognized as a philosophical topic, still remains only a pendant of some other concern.¹⁵

One consequence of this way of calling attention to the problematic of aesthetics is that, by and large, the garden is treated as a work of art¹⁶ (and then it is further located as an instance of a more basic art form so that the question of the garden is removed at the same time that it appears). This means that, in Hegel's words, "In the garden, as in the building, *the human being is the main issue*."¹⁷ The notion that the garden is an intersection, a mediate realm that is defined as *between* the human and natural realms, is lost. To be sure, the work of art is defined by Kant as an intersection of art and nature; however, in the case of art, human freedom and purpose, spirit, are ultimately the determining features. In other words, in the work of art – even as a composite of the human and nature – it is the presence of the human that is the dominant feature. Awareness that the garden is not defined solely – or even basically – by human purpose or art and that it challenges the efficacy of such purposes, falls away. What is lost is what is essential to understanding the nature of the garden, namely, that gardens are "built, or perhaps we should

¹⁵ Kant, op. cit., § 51 (Ak 323). Hegel too will treat the garden as a pendant an art form, but in his case it is a pendant of architecture. See: Hegel, G.W.F. (1970), *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, Bd. I. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, p. 321.

¹⁶ See, for instance, Miller, M. (1993), *The Garden as an Art*. Albany: SUNY Press, and Ross, S. (1998), *What Gardens Mean*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

¹⁷ Hegel, op. cit., p. 321 [emphasis added].

say contrived, places and yet are largely if not entirely composed of natural things. Even if I am not yet in wilderness, in a garden I am in the presence of things that live and grow, often on their own schedule.”¹⁸ In short, the garden does not let itself be sufficiently domesticated to be thought of as a work of art, that is, as a product of human freedom and intention. No garden is ever able to be “finished” or “completed,” rather one must struggle to “keep up with it” – it will always overgrow human intention. It will always live on its own schedule. So, to take up the garden as a work of art fails to recognize that element of the garden that cannot be understood as art, but that must be understood as the unruly element that resists human art. The inappropriateness of taking up the garden as a form of painting is not the only problem with Kant’s comments about the garden. Even if it does not let itself be thought as a form of nature, neither does it let itself be thought as a form of art.

But it is not only the case that we take up the garden inappropriately when we treat it as a work of art. We do the same when we regard it through the optic of aesthetic experience. Our relation to the garden can never qualify for the basic condition of aesthetic experience as Kant lays it out: we can never fully be “disinterested” in the garden. We can never take up a distance from it. We walk through the garden, smell it, taste and eat it, touch it. For many of the same reasons that food can never be properly regarded as an art work, so too the garden breaks down a distance that might be necessary for a purely contemplative relation to the work.¹⁹ So, while Kant speaks of the garden and thus breaks the philosophical silence about gardens, his way of doing this, that is his way of opening up the idea of the garden as an aesthetic phenomenon and as a work of art, never fully opens up the real questions posed by the peculiar intersection that is the garden. The garden simply does not fit the categories that guide Kant. Consequently, the garden, though

¹⁸ Casey, op. cit., p. 154. One Japanese word for garden, “*teien*,” recognizes that the garden is a hybrid of nature and human intention: it is composed of two words which mean “wildness” and “control.” See: Keane, M. (1996), *Japanese Landscape Design*. Boston: Tuttle, p. 14–15.

¹⁹ This does not imply that food cannot be philosophically interesting, just that, like the garden, the approach to the philosophical question of food should not be defined within the horizon of aesthetics. On this, see: Hamilton, R. and Todolí, V. (eds.) (2008), *Food for Thought, Thought for Food*. New York: Actar.

dignified as a question, is fenced in and severely limited. Its challenge to us never fully emerges.

The one exception to this failure to fully appreciate the significance of the garden is Romanticism, especially the German Romanticism that followed immediately in Kant's wake and took the claims of the *Critique of Judgment* as its starting point. Here the notion of the garden gets taken up in a much more extensive manner than the limited contexts articulated by Kant and Hegel. The garden is so elemental a notion in Romanticism that "in one of its aspects ... Romanticism may not inaccurately be described as a conviction that the world is an *englischer Garten* on a grand scale."²⁰ In Romanticism, the world is thought in terms of the garden. While the garden is still thought through the optic of an aesthetics, the aesthetics in this case is one that is altered to account for the peculiar character of the garden; it is not the case, as one finds in Kant and Hegel, that the garden is simply pulled into an aesthetic framework that is designed according to what Dewey called "the museum conception of art"²¹ so that gardens are treated as subsets of painting or of architecture. It is rather the natural and unruly aspect of the garden, not its regularity and conformity to human intention, that is what attracts Romantic thinkers to the idea of the garden. In Romanticism, the effort to think the meaning of the garden is not guided by the signature of the human, but by that which resists being captured by that signature.

However, even insofar as German Romanticism has a living legacy – one finds elements of it in Benjamin, Nietzsche, and Heidegger for instance – that legacy has dropped the notion of the garden as a central concern. One does find references to gardens in Nietzsche²² and one could quite legitimately link Heidegger's notion of *bauen* [building] to the problematic of the garden.²³ Nonetheless, as a central notion and

²⁰ Lovejoy, A.O. (2009), *The Great Chain of Being*. New York: Transaction Publishers, p. 16. See also: Immerwahr, R. (1960), "The First Romantic Aesthetics," *Modern Language Quarterly* Vol. 23 (1960), No. 1, pp. 3–26. One sees the expanded role of the garden even in the titles of works such as Novalis' *Blüthenstaub* [Pollen].

²¹ Dewey, J. (2005), *Art as Experience*. New York: Perigee Trade, p. 6.

²² See, for instance, the many references in *Also Sprach Zarathustra* and *Fröhliche Wissenschaft*.

²³ Heidegger, M., (1978), *Vorträge und Aufsätze*. Pfullingen: Neske Verlag, pp. 139–156.

as a notion that opens the question of the human relation to nature, the garden has fallen away from philosophy once again, or, if it has any place at all, it has by and large been relegated to the realm of aesthetics.²⁴ This, as I have already suggested, is a great loss since the idea presented by the garden offers promising avenues for addressing the urgent question of the relation of the human to nature in the technological age. In the following section my intention is to give some indications of where this promise leads.

Two assumptions guide the remarks that follow. First, that the garden is a liminal place – a hybrid, an intersection – and, consequently, that it is not well served by any approach that treats the garden as a work of art, that is, as a fundamentally human production. A key feature of the garden is that some aspect of it always exists independently of human intention and purpose; our efforts to give some manner of form to the garden will never come under our control. Second, that the garden needs attention and care; indeed, it is these human elements that set the garden apart from wilderness and render it an intersection of the human and the natural worlds. Even if the garden cannot properly be treated as a human production, neither can it be regarded solely as the place of nature. It is fair to say that “nature abhors a garden”²⁵ and without our care and attention, without the human contribution, nature would overrun the garden. Care and attention are constant elements of the garden – they are the elements that balance the peculiar mixture of nature and the human that one finds in the garden. It is precisely these elements that I believe most merit discussion when speaking of the idea of the garden since care not only cultivates the garden, rather care itself is cultivated by being set in the garden. Pressing this point, one eventually

²⁴ There are exceptions to this neglect. Among the most interesting of these is Borchardt, R. (1968), *Der Leidenschaftliche Gärtner*. Stuttgart: Klett Verlag, who writes that his intention is “zwischen dem menschlichen Garten und dem menschlichen Geiste eine Verbindung zu schaffen” (p. 267). But these exceptions tend to be marginal figures in the philosophical tradition.

²⁵ Pollan, M., (1991), *Second Nature: A Gardener's Education*. New York, Grove Press, p. 37.

come to understand that the promise of the garden is a promise of cultivation, a cultivation of a form of care that defines the human relation to nature at its best. What one comes to understand is that “gardens *do not*, as one hears so often, bring order to nature; rather, they give order to our relation to nature.”²⁶

In focusing upon the meaning of cultivation one sees how this promise of the garden works: one learns that “cultivation of soil and cultivation of spirit are connatural, and not merely analogical, activities. What holds true for the soil – that you must give it more than you take away – also holds true for nations, institutions, marriage, friendship, education, in short for human culture as a whole, which comes into being and maintains itself in time only as long as its cultivators overgive of themselves.”²⁷ It is this connaturality of the soil and the soul – once remembered in creation myths that were placed in gardens, in language that bound these notions (*homo/humus*; Adam/*adama*), or in allegories such as the Fable of Cura that Heidegger recounts – that needs to be addressed philosophically. From this starting point, it makes no real difference what kind of garden is in question. Whether it be a pleasure garden, a garden of flowers, medicinal herbs, for food, or Versailles, the significance of the garden will always emerge out of this linking notion of cultivation that binds the soil and the soul. From this starting point then, one sees that the garden – that common ground between the human and natural worlds – instructs the gardener about being responsible and caring for what one cannot define, control, or fully understand. One sees that one learns even more: one learns patience and the limits of the human will, one learns how to be responsive to the earth and the sky, one learns attentiveness.

The garden is thus the place of a peculiar education.²⁸ Foucault makes a distinction between the philosophical tradition that is derived

²⁶ Ibid., p. 48.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 33.

²⁸ This is why it is right to suggest that “genuine teaching ... is more like planting than ... inscribing,” Ibid., p. 62. The rather commonplace characterization of teaching as sowing seeds is thus quite appropriate; thus, the soul is not just like the soil, it is a sort of soil with its own nature and requirements for cultivation. On this, see Plato’s *Phaedrus*, 276c, especially the remarks about the Gardens of Adonis. See also: Detienne, M., (1972), *Les Jardins d’Adonis*. Paris: Gallimard.

from the imperative to “know oneself” [*gnothi seauton*] and that derived from the notion of the “care for the self” [*epimeleia heautou*].²⁹ It is this care for the self, which permeates the approach of “The Garden School” of Epicurus and that describes the character of the education one receives in the garden: “[Epicurus’ garden] was a form of education in the ways of nature: its cycles of growth and decay, its general equanimity, its balanced interplay of earth, water, air, and sunlight... Here... the cosmos manifested its greater harmonies; here the human soul rediscovered its essential connection to matter... Yet the most important pedagogical lesson... was that life – in all its forms – is intrinsically mortal and that the human soul shares the fate of whatever grows and perishes on and in the earth.”³⁰ The first lesson of this education is thus that the self is always in a relation to a world that exceeds its own reach and comprehension. The care of the self can only take place by attending to this larger world; it can never succeed if it understands itself as walled off from the world that is outside its own boundaries. This is the first lesson one learns from Epicurus’ Garden School.

One can formulate a number of principles that emerge from reflections upon the character of the garden and the nature of gardening. Michael Pollan does this and arrives at ten theses regarding “the kinds of answers the garden is apt to give....[to] questions having to do with man *in* nature.”³¹ Pollan’s list of “answers the garden is apt to give” is a fine starting point for pressing forward with the philosophical consideration of the garden. So are the texts we have from Epicurus’ “Garden School.” No doubt other traditions and texts will offer other promising

²⁹ See, for instance, Foucault, M., (2005), *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* (translated by G. Burchell). New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p .8.

³⁰ Harrison, op. cit., p. 74.

³¹ Pollan, op. cit., p. 190. His ten theses are found on pages 190–196. One might summarize these theses as follows: 1). “an ethic based on the garden would give local answers,” 2). the gardener “accepts his own and nature’s contingency,” 3). “a garden ethic is anthropocentric,” 4). the gardener’s “conception of his self-interest is broad and enlightened,” 5). the gardener “tends not to be romantic about nature,” 6). the gardener “feels it is legitimate to quarrel with nature,” 7). the gardener “doesn’t take it for granted that man’s impact on nature will always be negative,” 8). the gardener “firmly believes it is possible to make distinctions between kinds and degrees of human intervention in nature,” 9). the gardener “commonly borrows his methods, if not his goals, from nature herself,” 10). “if nature is one necessary source of instruction for a garden, culture is the other.”

starts as well. The philosophical tradition has been impoverished with respect to serious considerations upon the character of the garden, but that does not mean that it is completely without resources to address that character so long as the habits we have developed of misplacing the garden, of not recognizing its quite distinctive character do not obstruct such considerations.

But, before moving forward to make such a start, I believe that it is important to flag a fundamental difficulty, a real impediment, to any such beginning. It is the same difficulty that renders problematic every effort to address questions regarding nature and the human relation to nature: the difficulty namely of asking such questions in the age of technology. One might like to believe that the question of technology could simply be bracketed, its framework sufficiently set aside, so that one could speak directly of gardens and of the education one receives in them. Such, however, is not the case. In the age of technology with its imperatives of control and calculation, and its emphasis upon production and producibility, the extraordinarily different requirements and character of the garden are difficult to see – if not completely obscured. That is why it is fair to say that “we live in a gardenless age, despite the fact that there are plenty of gardens in our midst.”³² Such a comment is directed not at plots of land, but at the human capacity to grasp the meaning of the garden in the present historical juncture. This incapacity is more tenacious than it might appear at first blush.

It is thus not by chance, by simple oversight, that gardens do not seem to merit serious philosophical attention today. Even the attempt to consider gardens from the perspective of aesthetics which has been the chief form of such attention over the past two hundred years, though a step in the right direction, remains tethered to a notion of production that mistakes the character of the garden and that domesticates the idea of the garden. At bottom, the gardener is not dedicated to any form of production – be it of food or of beauty – nor is the gardener guided by the goal of consumption or even pleasure. Even when the garden is planted out of need for food, the gardener needs to be rooted in an attitude of care and attentiveness; the gardener is one who cultivates and

³² Harrison, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

tends. In the age guided by the aims of consumption and production, such cultivation and care are difficult to preserve, one could even argue that they are foreclosed. By turning the world into what Heidegger has described as a “standing stockpile of resources” [*Bestand*]³³ destined for our consumption, we have lost sight of the truth that “human happiness is a cultivated rather than a consumer good, that it is a question of fulfillment more than of gratification....[and that] neither consumption nor productivity fulfills. Only caretaking does.”³⁴

Technology is a way of extracting or making something that is not simply given in nature. It is – or at least we tend to believe that it is – a way of bending the natural world to human needs. As such, it readily falls into an antagonistic relation to nature. The garden, on the other hand, requires a different relation between human needs and nature, one that is more collaborative than confrontational. It requires a tempering of the will. And yet, the garden is not an easy collaboration: care is certainly more difficult than consumption, but it is also much more satisfying. No matter how intimate our collaboration with nature is, the garden will always mark our separation from nature at the same time that it marks one way in which we are in nature, for the garden is also a reminder that we need something – be it order, beauty, or food – that nature does not supply quite as well without our help. The garden, even if not defined by the human, remains apart from nature by virtue of human care. It is, in the end, an intersection, a between, the common ground of the human and natural worlds. To think with reference to the garden is to think from out of this between.

One can argue, rightly I believe, that ethical matters – ethical problems and the source of good ethical judgment alike – begin at the limits of the human.³⁵ Ethical matters begin where cognition and knowledge end, where one cannot determinatively decide a question and where

³³ Heidegger, op. cit., p. 26

³⁴ Ibid., p. 166.

³⁵ See my (2008), “Hermeneutics and Original Ethics,” in: *The Difficulties of Ethical Life* (ed. Sullivan and Schmidt). New York: Fordham University Press, pp. 35–47; 214–216, and (2004)

one can no longer calculate or control; as such, ethical life always takes root and grows in a liminal situation. One such situation is the garden where one finds the encounter of the human and nature as well as the liminal situation, the between, that delimits that encounter. I said at the outset that the garden is by nature a metaphorical place – a between in which there is sort of a double truth presented – but one also needs to understand that the garden is by nature a place of a sort of ethical education. Literature has long recognized and played with the metaphorical character of the garden. Likewise, religion has long played with another meaning of the garden as the place where life takes root. Philosophy, on the other hand, has tended to neglect the way in which gardens are the place of a sort of ethical education and yet, this cultivation that takes place in the garden, this care of the self required by it, might well be the greatest significance of the garden for us since it is in this way that we are changed by working in the garden. One is right to say that “garden-ing is...a plunge into the depths of natural history, an immersion in the element where life first heroically established itself on earth. To garden is to understand the efforts by which life forced a foothold for itself in a hostile and resistant clay.”³⁶ What is ultimately at stake in the question of the garden is nothing less than our relation to the earth and to a world that we neither define nor control.

Voltaire wrote that “we must cultivate our garden.” This means that we must practice the care for the earth required of the gardener, we must learn to cultivate that which exists independently of our will, we must learn to draw closer to the sources of life and to understand how death belongs to those sources as well. Gardens require much effort, endure seasons, are fragile and can fail – and for all that, for precisely those reasons, gardens help us to grow and be better. They educate us about ourselves.

“Über Sprache und Freiheit aus Hermeneutischer Sichtpunkt,” in: *Heidegger Jahrbuch*. Frankfurt: Klostermann Verlag, pp. 59–73.

³⁶ Harrison, op. cit., p. 32.

THE ENTOMOLOGICAL
DIFFERENCE:
ON THE INTUITIONS
OF HYMENOPTERA

Ted Toadvine*

Insects have long fascinated philosophers, whose pages are peppered with metaphors and examples drawn from the diminutive lives of flies and beetles, locusts and moths. The figure of the insect continues to exert a chthonic influence on conceptions of ontology and subjectivity, offering, from Darwin to Kafka, Lacan to E. O. Wilson, a complex and often morbid analogue of human sensibility and society. Within this philosophical *Kunstammer*, a special place has always been reserved for the social *Hymenoptera*—ants, bees, and wasps—who serve as potent emblems of the human capacity for intersubjectivity and ontological disclosure. Our fascination with social insects is no doubt inspired by the long human association with *Apis mellifca*, the honeybee, in particular. Epipaleolithic paintings in the Araña Caves, near Valencia, Spain, depict gathering of honey from wild hives, and systematic apiculture has been practiced in Egypt and Greece since antiquity. Yet, beyond this cultural association, honeybees have attracted philosophical interest because of the apparent perfection of their communal life, including their complex social structure and division of labor, the mathematically ideal engineering of their hives, and their inscrutable methods of communication. Since at least the time of Plato, the hive has explicitly been imagined as a miniature monarchy, and the devotion of the bee to the hive and its queen exemplifies, in our own eyes, a kind of moral duty, privileging the good of the whole over the freedom of the individual and elevating preparation for the morrow above gratification today.¹

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¹ In *The Statesman*, Plato notes that “kings do not arise in cities in the natural course of things in the way the royal born is born in the beehive—one individual obviously outstanding in body and mind and capable of taking charge of things at once.” See Plato, *The Statesman*, in Plato

Bees have attracted so much attention from philosophers precisely because of the unmistakable ideal they offer as a contrast with our own individual morality and political arrangements, an ideal that challenges us to defend our apparent faults and to guard zealously for ourselves the definition of genuine intelligence and intersubjectivity. Our defense against this unflattering comparison has typically followed the line of reasoning that Derrida identifies concerning the human-animal relation more generally: it is the very perfection of bees that is simultaneously the evidence of their limitation, of their merely instinctive nature, while the fatal flaw of the human being, its “original sin,” opens it to genuine freedom, consciousness, language, and community.²

At stake in this appropriation of the hive as an ambivalent double of human society is less the nature of insects than the contestation of our own nature, and especially our relation with nature writ large. This tradition, already apparent in classical authors such as Aristotle and Vergil, finds its twentieth-century continuation in the writings of Maurice Maeterlinck, Henri Bergson, Jakob von Uexküll, Max Scheler, and Martin Heidegger. While Aristotle inserts the bee into a serial hierarchy of relations, all of which are incorporated into the being of the human, Vergil emphasizes the impossibility of the farmer’s perspective with that of the bees themselves. Vergil’s efforts to reconcile these perspectives frames the legacy of philosophical interpretations of the human-bee relation into the twentieth century. In Bergson’s *Creative Evolution*, for

(1961), *The Collected Dialogues of Plato* (E. Hamilton and H. Cairns, editors). New York: Random House, p. 1072 (301e). Aristotle notes that honeybees are “thrifty and disposed to lay by for their future sustenance,” and refers to the “so-called kings” of the hive. See Aristotle (1984), *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, (v. 1. J. Barnes, ed.). Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 970-71 (623b22, 623b34). The gender of the “monarch” was assumed to be masculine until the Dutch biologist Jan Swammerdam demonstrated otherwise in *Historia Insectorum Generalis* (1669). Concerning the thriftiness of bees, Aristotle’s remarks echo a fragment from Democritus: “Misers have the fate of bees: they work as if they were going to live forever” (fragment 227, in Freeman, K. (tr.) (1957), *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, p. 112.)

² Derrida develops this analysis at length in Derrida, J. (2006), *L’animal que donc je suis*. Paris: Galilée; *The Animal that Therefore I Am*, (translated by D. Wills). New York: Fordham University Press, 2008. See also Leonard Lawlor’s commentary in Lawlor, L. (2007), *This is Not Sufficient: An Essay on Animality and Human Nature in Derrida*. New York: Columbia University Press, e.g., pp. 66-70.

example, *Hymenoptera* represent the culmination of instinct, manifest in unreflective sympathy and tracing an evolutionary trajectory parallel with human intelligence. The instinct directing a wasp to paralyze without killing its victim demonstrates an intuition directed toward life, while intelligence focuses on inert matter. The “double form of consciousness,” instinct and intelligence, are therefore made necessary by the “double form of the real,” the dehiscence of being into matter and life, and philosophical intuition becomes the task of taking up the insect’s sympathy for life as a conscious human intention. Bergson’s contemporary Maurice Maeterlinck, in *The Life of the Bee*, shares the former’s views on the limits of the intellect and its common source with instinct, yet he resists the temptation to bring the “hive mind” to self-consciousness as a moment of human intuition, insisting rather on our inescapably alien remove from the intelligence of the bee. We cannot dissolve again into the ocean of life or subsume its tendencies into a becoming-bee of philosophical thinking, and consequently the ambivalent juxtaposition of our world alongside the bee’s own remains insurmountable.

Accounting for this ambivalence, the contiguity of perspectives that touch only across a distance, invites us to consider in what sense it is meaningful to attribute a “world” or “perspective” to the bee at all. Jakob von Uexküll’s rich descriptions of the bee’s *Umwelt* initially appear to confirm this attribution, yet the subjectivism and functionalism of his method requires strict agnosticism about the bee’s own experiences or inner life. Martin Heidegger, whose account of the animal’s “world-poverty” develops in dialogue with Uexküll, has famously denied that the animal relates to its environment “as such,” remaining instead “captivated” by the stimuli that disinhibit its drives, as experiments with bees putatively demonstrate. The bee has no *Umwelt*, no world, and nothing that might be called a “perspective” in the subjective sense, for Heidegger. Yet Heidegger’s account of the animal’s *resistance* to our efforts to transpose ourselves into its world, and his failure to consider the implications of symbolic communication among bees, raises doubts for us about his conclusions. A phenomenology of this resistance returns us to the Janus-faced character of our openness to the bee, to the complex valences of invitation and refusal that constitute our inter-animality. We

suggest, therefore, an apian phenomenology that gathers scientific and poetic resources for a becoming-bee and celebrates the heterogeneous multiplicity of the real, yet without nostalgia for either mutual recognition or a translation of their “unintelligible syllables” into the language of reflection.

I. Intuitions of the Hive Mind

To trace the bee’s rich tradition in Western thought, even among the ancient Greeks alone, would require at least a volume in its own right. But two moments of the classical tradition deserve particular attention here, as they frame the continued appropriation of the figure of the bee in our own time. The first is the ambivalence of our identification with the bee and the hive. Whereas Socrates can compare his own philosophical interrogations, in their dogged pursuit of truth, with the sting of a bee, Aristotle emphasizes the sharp contrast between human and animal precisely on the point of orientation toward the good, taking the bee as his example.³ As he writes in the first book of *Politics*, “it is clear why a human being is more of a political animal than a bee or any other gregarious animal. Nature makes nothing pointlessly, as we say, and no animal has speech except a human being.” While a voice is sufficient to convey pleasure or pain, speech is peculiar to human beings since “they alone have perception of what is good or bad, just or unjust, and the rest. And it is community in these that makes a household and a city-state.”⁴ The beehive, lacking the specifically human dimension of community, is therefore not a *polis*, precisely because the bee lacks genuine language and the orientation toward the good that makes language necessary. Aristotle holds to this distinction despite his own careful description of the habits of the hive in *History of Animals*, which offer much to suggest

³ Plato, *Phaedo*, in Plato, op.cit., p. 71 (91c). Derrida notes the parallel between this passage and Socrates’s self-description as a gadfly in *Apology*. See: Derrida, J. (1981), “Plato’s Pharmacy.” In *Dissemination* (translated by B. Johnson). Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 119 n. 52.

⁴ Aristotle (1998), *Politics* (translated by C. D. C. Reeve). Indianapolis: Hackett, p. 4, 1253a7–18.

collective judgment and orchestrated action.⁵ On the one hand, in denying any genuine comparison between the hive and the *polis*, Aristotle cannot avoid reinscribing this analogy; it is precisely the seductions of the analogy that call for thought. But, on the other hand, the degree to which a comparison is possible will be based, for Aristotle, on our shared animality and relative placement within the hierarchy of living things.

The second moment, rather than resolving the ambivalence in the direction of hierarchized similarity, respects the inexorable difference and juxtaposition of perspectives, as we find in the fourth book of Vergil's *Georgics*. Vergil borrows the apian analogy as a commentary on the human relationship with nature by juxtaposing the farmer's perspective on the hive with the distinct point of view of the bees themselves. The prospects for our unity with nature are figured by the tensions between these two perspectives. Each perspective culminates in a putative vision of harmony, the first centered on our shared mortality:

“Among the armies, the kings themselves, with enormous wings,
keep their large souls pulsing in very small breasts,
resolute always not to retreat until a strong victor
has forced one side or another to turn its back in flight.
This tumult of passion and these overwhelming struggles
are brought to rest, checked, by the tossing of a little dust.”⁶

The handful of dust ties the beekeeper's dissolution of the battle with the mortal interruption of human life, suggesting a parallel between our intervention in the world of the bees and the hand of fate operative within our own. With this image, as Stephanie Nelson notes, Vergil “unites all mortal nature in an exquisite balance of humor, sorrow, and acceptance,” sketching a vision of “the deepest unity of human beings and nature.”⁷ Similarly, shifting from the farmer's perspective to that of the bees, we find what Nelson describes as the “purest vision of unity

⁵ Aristotle, *History of Animals*, in Aristotle (1984), *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, op.cit., pp. 97-76 (Bk. IX, 623b5–627b22). A particularly striking example is his description of one bee giving the indication to the hive that it is time to go to sleep, p. 975 (627a25–30).

⁶ Vergil (2005), *Virgil's Georgics* (translated by J. Lombke). New York: Yale University Press, p. 63, 4.82-4.87.

⁷ Nelson, S. (1998), *God and the Land: The Metaphysics of Farming in Hesiod and Vergil*. New York: Oxford University Press, p. 147.

that the *Georgics* achieves”⁸, namely, the overcoming of death in nature’s manifestation of the divine soul:

“Having followed these signs and these habits, some say
that bees own a share of the divine soul and drink in
the ether of space; for, god invests everything—
earth and the tracts of the sea and deepest heaven;
from him, flocks, herds, men, all species of wild animals—
each one gains for itself at birth its little life;
doubtless, afterward, all return to him and, released, are
made new; death has no place but, alive, they fly up, each
to be counted as a star and ascend into heaven above.”⁹

Yet this vision of unity is rent by a resistance located in the incompatibility of the two perspectives. While the farmer recognizes himself in the bees, who are farmers after their own manner, the bees cannot recognize any benevolence in his care; from their point of view, they neither have nor have need of any keeper, so that his removal of their stores of honey is met with violent rage. As Nelson notes, “It is nature, in the person of the bees, that refuses the harmony.”¹⁰

There is, nevertheless, a moment of final reconciliation in bee-human interests, made possible precisely by the incongruity of their perspectives. Should the beekeeper, after removing the stores of honey, “fear a hard winter” and wish to “preserve their future/pitying their bruised spirits and broken condition,” he is advised to fumigate with thyme to discourage pests and remove empty cells.¹¹ Although the bees cannot appreciate this action, the loss of their stores serves to stimulate their vitality. Since their glory is in the making of honey¹², the actions of the beekeeper, in driving them onward, encourages their own self-fulfillment. The lesson is aptly summarized by Nelson:

“Vergil has found the point of view from which the bees’ sufferings are only apparent. To the bees, whose vision is inevitably limited, the farmer’s efforts seem to destroy their own. In fact, they further them. The farmer, whom the

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Vergil, op. cit., p. 67, 4.219–227.

¹⁰ Nelson, S., op.cit., p. 149.

¹¹ Vergil, op. cit., p. 68, 4.239–242.

¹² Ibid., p. 67, 4.205.

bees see as their enemy, is in fact their ally. The two are joined in a single goal. There is a vision of the whole which the beekeeper understands but which cannot be shared by the bees. So also there may be a vision of the cosmos, apparent to God, but not to us.”¹³

As we are to the bees, so the divine knowledge of nature may be to us, suggesting neither omnipotence nor justification for mastery on our part, but instead emphasizing a unity-in-difference, the shared finitude and limited perspective on the whole.

The tension between these two accounts, between unilinear series and complementary juxtaposition, echoes into the twentieth century, as we see in Bergson’s description of the relation between instinct and intuition in *Creative Evolution*. For Bergson, instinct and intellect represent the two major, divergent courses of life’s development, reaching their apogee in the *Hymenoptera* and humanity respectively. The evolutionary aim of the intellect, Bergson argues, is not speculative knowledge but practical action and fabrication, hence its orientation toward discontinuous and inert matter. Consequently, intellect in its pure form cannot think genuine duration, movement, or evolution. Confronted with the effort to think life, the intellect “does what it can, it resolves the organized into the unorganized, for it cannot, without reversing its natural direction and twisting about on itself, think true continuity, real mobility, reciprocal penetration—in a word, that creative evolution which is life.”¹⁴ Life necessarily retreats before science, as the latter takes its orientation from the intellect. Instinct, on the other hand, as an extension of the organization of vital processes, knows the unity of life from within through a kind of sympathy. This is a knowledge lived rather than represented. Bergson’s examples include the unity of the beehive, which “is really, and not metaphorically, a single organism”¹⁵, and the paralyzing stings of various wasps, which know the precise means of immobilizing without killing their insect victims.¹⁶ In its efforts to account for such

¹³ Nelson, S., op.cit., p. 150.

¹⁴ Bergson, H. (1959), “L’évolution créatrice”. In: *Oeuvres*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France; *Creative Evolution*. (translated by A. Miller). Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 1998, p. 632/162.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 636/166.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 641/172.

instinctual sympathy, science can only claim to resolve it into habituated intellectual actions or pure mechanism. But this is where the role of science ends and that of philosophy begins.¹⁷

Bergson's account of instinct and intelligence as distinct yet complementary tendencies of life may be read as a radicalization of Vergil's position over against that of Aristotle. This interpretation is encouraged by two points: first, Bergson himself contrasts his approach with the unilinear serialism of Aristotle:

"The cardinal error which, from Aristotle onwards, has vitiated most of the philosophies of nature, is to see in vegetative, instinctive and rational life, three successive degrees of the development of one and the same tendency, whereas they are three divergent directions of an activity that has split up as it grew. The difference between them is not a difference of intensity, nor, more generally, of degree, but of kind."¹⁸

As Bergson emphasizes, intellect does not develop from instinct and cannot be hierarchically ordered with respect to it, since the two orders of knowledge are entirely distinct and opposed. Nevertheless, the two are complementary thanks to their common origin as divergent tendencies of the *élan vital*, and consequently neither exists in a pure state but is always accompanied by the "vague fringe" of the other. As we will see, it is only due to the vague fringe of instinct accompanying our intellect that we can claim any access to the insect's sympathetic unity, the reflective recovery of which becomes the goal of philosophical intuition.

Bergson's account of the divergence of human and insect perspectives is anticipated in Maurice Maeterlinck's 1901 classic, *La vie des abeilles* (*The Life of Bees*), which provides a second motivation for interpreting Bergson's project as a radicalization of Vergil.¹⁹ Although *Creative Evolution* includes no reference to Maeterlinck, who would win the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1911, the similarity of their arguments suggests that Bergson was familiar with and inspired by the playwright's popular essay. Maeterlinck's literary reconstruction of the habits and life history

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 643/174.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 609/135; cf. pp. 643/174–75.

¹⁹ Maeterlinck cites Vergil's *Georgics* in Maeterlinck, M. (1905), *La vie des abeilles*. Paris: Bibliothèque Charpentier. *The Life of the Bee*, (translated by Alfred Sutro). Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 2006, pp. 6/3, 13/7, and 48/26.

of the hive tends toward anthropomorphism, but not unreflectively so. While he claims not to embellish the facts, he also repeatedly marks the limits of human comprehension, which can only reconstruct the bee's world from an alien and external perspective. Although Maeterlinck makes a case for bee intelligence, communication, and judgment throughout, rejecting explanations that reduce the hive's activities to instinctual mechanisms, our limited perspective finally cautions agnosticism, not only with regard to the intelligence of the bee, but more generally concerning any apparent purpose of nature's evolutionary path.

The life of the bee, for Maeterlinck, is guided by *l'esprit de la ruche*, the "spirit of the hive"—or, in more contemporary translation, the "hive mind"—which, while following a path distinct from our own, demonstrates the "highest degree of intellect after that of man."²⁰ Yet nature can achieve the perfection of the collective life of the hive, with its singular orientation toward posterity, only through the sacrifice of the freedom of the individual. In the "almost perfect but pitiless" society of the honeybee, "the individual is entirely merged in the republic, and the republic in its turn invariably sacrificed to the abstract and immortal city of the future."²¹ Indeed, "the god of the bees is the future."²² The single-mindedness of the hive, rather than evidence of any mechanical impulse, is precisely a kind of sympathetic knowledge of the whole, as demonstrated by the communal judgments concerning the rearing of new queens, the appropriate times to swarm, and so on. Furthermore, Maeterlinck's descriptions of the juxtaposed limits of different forms of intelligence anticipates Bergson's own account of the opposed but complementary character of instinct and intelligence. "[W]hat we call our intellect," he notes, "has the same origin and mission as what in animals we choose to term instinct," and the sharp distinction drawn between the two is ultimately arbitrary.²³ Yet each form of intelligence is limited, concealing as much as it reveals:

²⁰ Maeterlinck, M., op.cit. p. 27/15, 23/12; cf. 86/46.

²¹ Ibid., p. 22/12, cf. 83/44.

²² Ibid., p. 46/25.

²³ Ibid., p. 65/35, 103/55.

“Are we to believe that each form of intellect possesses its own strange limitation, and that the tiny flame which with so much difficulty at last burns its way through inert matter and issues forth from the brain, is still so uncertain that if it illumine one point more strongly the others are forced into blacker darkness? Here we find that the bees (or nature acting through them) have organized work in common, the love and cult of the future, in a manner more perfect than can elsewhere be discovered. Is it for this reason that they have lost sight of all the rest?”²⁴

It is possible, Maeterlinck notes, that nature restricts us from understanding or following all of its desires, which must therefore be distributed into different modes of life. Our own unconscious desires, like that fringe of instinct described by Bergson, are perhaps the clue to precisely such buried alternatives: “We too are aware of unconscious forces within us, that would appear to demand the reverse of what our intellect urges. And this intellect of ours, that, as a rule, its own boundary reached, knows not whither to go—can it be well that it should join itself to these forces, and add to them its unexpected weight?”²⁵ Even Bergson’s metaphor of the whole of life as a single wave moving through matter²⁶ is anticipated by Maeterlinck’s description of the “extraordinary fluid we call life” that, consciously or unconsciously, “animates us equally with all the rest” and “produces the very thoughts that judge it, and the feeble voice that attempts to tell its story.”²⁷ Although Maeterlinck repeatedly grapples with the question of whether this “will” of nature can be attributed a purpose, he does, in the end, suggest the solution that Bergson’s own alternative to mechanism and finalism will develop, namely, that the unity of life lies in its origin rather than its end: the progress of evolution, he writes, “has perhaps no aim beyond its initial impetus, and knows not whither it goes.”²⁸

²⁴ Ibid., p. 111/59.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 199/106.

²⁶ Bergson, H., op.cit., pp. 720/266, 723/269.

²⁷ Maeterlinck, M., op. cit., p. 209/111. See also p. 272/143: “Whoever brings careful attention to bear will scarcely deny, even though it be not evident, the presence in nature of a will that tend to raise a portion of matter to a subtler and perhaps better condition, and to penetrate its substance little by little with a mystery-laden fluid that we at first term life, then instinct, and finally intelligence; a will that, for an end we know not, organizes, strengthens, and facilitates the existence of all that is.”

²⁸ Maeterlinck, M., op. cit., p. 300/156.

The difference between Bergson and Maeterlinck can nevertheless be traced from the conclusions that they draw concerning the disclosure of the bee's perspective in its own right. For Bergson, our access to the perspective of the bee is made possible precisely by that fringe of instinct that always surrounds the bright nucleus of our intellect, to which our capacity for aesthetic perception and sympathetic identification attests. The philosophical task is to bring this fringe of instinct to reflective awareness and thereby to think life from within, that is, to effect the passage from instinct to intuition: "it is to the very inwardness of life that *intuition* leads us—by intuition I mean instinct that has become disinterested, self-conscious, capable of reflecting upon its object and of enlarging it indefinitely."²⁹ Philosophy, as intuition, is the effort to dissolve once again into the whole "ocean of life."³⁰ While the scientific entomologist knows the insect only "as he knows everything else—from the outside, and without having on his part a special or vital interest"³¹, the philosopher can discern its life from within. We may conclude, then, that the aim of philosophy is precisely a becoming-bee, a taking up of the bee's own perspective at the level of reflective self-awareness, which is a path reserved exclusively for human consciousness. While this becoming-bee involves a reciprocal enlargement of instinct and intellect, it remains unilinear with respect to bees and humans; the perspective of the bee is subsumed into human consciousness, while the limits of the bees' own perspective remain determinately circumscribed.

Maeterlinck, however, remains true to the Georgic perspective by refusing to recognize a subsumption of the bees' perspective into that of the human, and he does so by continually emphasizing our inability to exit the point of view of the outside spectator. We can do no more than "vaguely survey" the hive "from the height of another world," just as "an inhabitant of Venus or Mars" might observe us from a mountaintop.³²

²⁹ Bergson, H., op.cit., p. 645/176.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 657–58/191. Note also Maeterlinck's invocation of the ocean as a metaphor for nature at Maeterlinck, M., op. cit., p. 207–8/110.

³¹ Bergson, H., op.cit, p. 642/173.

³² Maeterlinck, M., op. cit., p. 43/23. See the similar remarks at pages 112/59, 262–63/138–39, and 301–2/157. The digression describing the author's walk with a physiologist, surveying the town from the summit of a plateau in Normandy, extends this motif of the outside spectator with the aim of distinguishing three semblances of truth, the last of which suggests a correspon-

The outside perspective of divine fate that inscribed the limits of human knowledge in *Georgics* has here become the view from a radically alien intelligence, and ultimately that of Nature itself. Not only can we never claim to have absorbed the inner meanings of the bee's world, but we also can never claim to coincide with the perspective of "the circular ocean, the tideless water, whereon our boldest and most independent thoughts will never be more than mere abject bubbles. We call it Nature today; tomorrow, perhaps, we shall give it another name, softer or more alarming."³³ While Bergson's philosopher dissolves again into the ocean of life, justifying his unique capacity to channel its emerging consciousness, Maeterlinck leaves us stranded as "waifs shipwrecked on the ocean of nature."³⁴ Here, the ocean metaphor suggests the unity of our common origin in the ultimately mysterious workings of nature, but it makes no suggestion that the impossibility of perspectives may be united as facets of a single vision. While we recognize an alien intelligence in the life of the hive, we can never coincide with it, never breach the externality of our perspective; we both are and are not of the same world. By extension, the centrality of our own perspective on the world is displaced, its limits perpetually opening it to an alien and incommensurable gaze.

The ambivalence of our relationship with the bee is thus reinforced: On the one hand, we are inexorably invited to see ourselves reflected in its apparent intelligence and social life, while, on the other, its incomparable difference forbids our entry into its world. What is the basis for this ambivalence, this refused kinship, and on what grounds can we claim even this degree of access to a non-human life?

II. *Umwelt* and Resistance

Yet perhaps we have not formulated our problem correctly in imagining that the bee has a perspective of its own, a "world," to which we

dence between our intellect and the "eternal intellect" that guides the processes of nature. But, for Maeterlinck, this final "semblance" remains speculative and ultimately beyond any certain knowledge (*Ibid.*, pp. 235-46/125-30).

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 207-8/110.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

could, in principle, gain access. Does the bee have a world of its own? Ethologist Jakob von Uexküll imagines just such a world as follows:

“We must first blow, in fancy, a soap bubble around each creature to represent its own world, filled with the perceptions which it alone knows. When we ourselves then step into one of these bubbles, the familiar meadow is transformed. Many of its colorful features disappear, others no longer belong together but appear in new relationships. A new world comes into being. Through the bubble we see the world of the burrowing worm, of the butterfly, or of the field mouse; the world as it appears to the animals themselves, not as it appears to us. This we may call the phenomenal world or the self-world [*Umwelt*] of the animal.”³⁵

Beyond this general description of the animal’s “bubble” world, Uexküll proceeds to fill out the description of the bee’s own particular perceptions, borrowing on Karl von Frisch’s research on the bee’s perception of form:

“The bee is seen in its environment, a blooming field, in which blossoming flowers alternate with buds. If we put ourselves in the bee’s place and look at the field from the point of view of its *Umwelt*, the blossoms are changed to stars or crosses according to their form, and the buds assume the unbroken shape of circles. The biological significance of this newly discovered quality in bees is evident. Only blossoming flowers have a meaning for them—buds do not.”³⁶

For Uexküll, an animal’s behavior cannot be explained mechanistically because every *Umwelt* is “subjective,” composed of signs or meanings rather than objective causal relations. The bee’s reactions can only be understood relative to the “perceptual signs” (*Merkzeichen*) and “effector signs” (*Wirkzeichen*) that are meaningful for it, since these sketch out in advance what it can perceive and what it can do. Consequently

³⁵ Uexküll, J. von (1956), *Streifzüge durch die Umwelten von Tieren und Menschen*. Hamburg: Rowohlt; “A Stroll Through the Worlds of Animals and Men”, in: *Instinctive Behavior* (translated by C. Schiller). New York: International Universities Press, 1957, p. 21/5.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 58/40. The research on which Uexküll’s description relies is summarized by Karl von Frisch in: Frisch, K. von (1950), *Bees: Their Vision, Chemical Senses, and Language*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, pp. 21–24, in lectures prepared for an American audience. This research is also reported in: Frisch, K. von (1993), *The Dance Language and Orientation of Bees* (translated by L. Chadwick). Cambridge: Harvard University Press, pp. 478–81. See also the brief remarks on bees’ perceptions of space and sense of territory in: Uexküll, J. von, *Streifzüge durch die Umwelten von Tieren und Menschen*, op.cit., pp. 36/17, 76–77/55.

the features that we assign to the “objective” world—space, time, the form and color of external objects, and so on—cannot be assumed to have the same structure or significance for the bee. Indeed, the “objective” world of the human being is simply our own soap bubble, our own phenomenal world of subjective appearances.³⁷

Understanding the structure of the bee’s world does not require that we merge these bubbles, projecting ourselves sympathetically into its interiority, nor entertain any notions of “what it’s like” to be a bee. As Uexküll admits, the biologist’s perspective is always that of the external spectator, and the events that he observes cannot be transferred outside the frame of his own subjectivity: “He is always dealing with events that take place in *his* space and in *his* time and with *his* qualities.”³⁸ Yet the identification of function-rules, as natural factors linking perceptual and effector signs, requires no projection into the psyche of the animal, nor any claims as to what the animal’s own perceptions might be like. Whereas the latter may be of interest to psychology, it is not an issue for biology, on Uexküll’s understanding.³⁹ The “subjective” world of the bee described so poetically by Uexküll turns out to be the scientist’s functional reconstruction of the bees’s world from elements of the scientist’s own fund of meanings.

It is against the backdrop of Uexküll’s descriptions of the animal’s *Umwelt* that Martin Heidegger, in his 1929–30 lecture course *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, proposes his own well-known thesis that the animal is “poor in world.”⁴⁰ Although their proposals are apparently

³⁷ See: Uexküll, J. von, *Streifzüge durch die Umwelten von Tieren und Menschen*, op.cit., pp. 30–31/13–14, 46/29, 101/80.

³⁸ Uexküll, J. von (1926), *Theoretical Biology* (translated by D. L. Mackinnon). New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, Inc., p. 136.

³⁹ As Uexküll puts this, the biologist does not “ask how butyric acid smells or tastes to the tick; we merely register the fact that butyric acid, because it is biologically meaningful to the tick, becomes a receptor cue for her.” (Uexküll, J. von *Streifzüge durch die Umwelten von Tieren und Menschen*, op. cit., p. 30/13). This position is elaborated in Uexküll, J. von, *Theoretical Biology*, op.cit., pp. 131–32, 135–36, 158–59, where he differentiates the task of biology from that of psychology in these terms.

⁴⁰ Heidegger, M. (1983), *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik: Welt–Endlichkeit–Einsamkeit*. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann; *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude* (translated by W. McNeill and N. Walker). Bloomington: Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1995, p. 284/192.

at odds, Heidegger draws several examples from Uexküll, and he shares Uexküll's rejection of mechanistic and vitalist accounts of life as well as his refusal to locate the human and animal worlds as degrees along the same scale. In fact, for his preliminary description of the world-poverty of the animal, Heidegger depicts the *Umwelt* of the bee in terms that closely echo Uexküll's own:

"The bee, for example, has its hive, its cells, the blossoms it seeks out, and the other bees of the swarm. The bee's world is limited to a specific domain and is strictly circumscribed. And this is also true of the world of the frog, the world of the chaffinch, and so on. But it is not merely the world of each particular animal that is limited in range—the extent and manner in which an animal is able to penetrate whatever is accessible is also limited. The worker bee is familiar with the blossoms it frequents, along with their color and scent, but it does not know the stamens of these blossoms *as* stamens, it knows nothing about the roots of the plant and it cannot know anything about the number of stamens or leaves, for example."⁴¹

Heidegger presents this description of the bee's world in a preliminary way and qualifies it immediately, since it may suggest that the bee's "poverty" is to be understood in terms of its limited extent or range by human standards, making poverty a matter of degree. As we know, the crux of the issue for Heidegger will turn on the bee's failure to encounter the blossoms and stamens *as such*, that is, as beings.

But even this preliminary description demonstrates a salient departure of Heidegger's approach from that pursued by Uexküll. Uexküll avoids describing the *Umwelt* of the animal as derivative from or subsumed within the *Umwelt* of the human being, which is why we cannot assume any common measure of space, time, or perceptual qualities. To this extent, Uexküll and Heidegger are in agreement that the differences between *Umwelten* are not a matter of degree. But Uexküll's functional method restricts him from drawing conclusions about the character or quality of the bee's experiences, and certainly Heidegger's claim concerning the "as such" oversteps the biological evidence. In one sense, Heidegger's willingness to carry Uexküll's description beyond its biological threshold follows from the "inner unity of science and meta-

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 285/193.

physics,” insofar as any effort to think the essential nature of life or animality requires the mutual understanding and collaboration of both modes of inquiry.⁴² Since Heidegger’s aim is to disclose the essence of the animal, he must necessarily transgress the limits that circumscribe the subject matter of biology alone.

But there is a deeper issue at stake concerning the very terms by which Uexküll has presented the animal’s world, namely, his reliance on a Kantian metaphysics of subjectivity. Uexküll professes agnosticism about the apperceptions of the bee in its own right; what things are like for the bee may be a matter for psychological speculation, but we will never be able to grant such speculations scientific status. This agnosticism, however, reinforces the very sense of a mysterious “what it’s like” that resists our grasp, remaining forever closed to our inquiries. Furthermore, Uexküll’s willingness to relativize the human position, describing our world as one soap bubble alongside the others, suggests that the “subjectivity” of the *Umwelt* is a matter of its phenomenal representation, whereas noumenal Nature remains an inaccessible *ding an sich*. According to the penultimate sentence of *A Stroll Through the Worlds of Animals and Men*, “And yet all these diverse *Umwelten* are harbored and borne by the One that remains forever barred to all *Umwelten*.”⁴³ Uexküll’s perspective lends credence to the objection, therefore, that we can never know the true experiences of the bee, and that any reconstruction will simply reduce its alterity to a variation of our own subjective phenomena. As William McNeil notes, such objections are “themselves historically conditioned by the epoch of subjectivity”:

“What is striking about such objections is that they presuppose that our perspective is at once subjective and purely human. They presuppose as unquestioned that human beings, through the subjectivity of their thinking, are undeniably at the center of the world, and that the “world,” here conceived as the sum-total of beings (objects) in their being, is merely a result and “function” of human representation. The said objections presuppose both that we

⁴² Ibid., p. 279/189.

⁴³ Uexküll, J. von, *Streifzüge durch die Umwelten von Tieren und Menschen*, op.cit., p. 101/80.

know what the human being is and that this conception of the world as our “representation” is unquestionable.”⁴⁴

In his critique of the concept of empathy and rejection of the “philosophical dogma that man is initially to be understood as subject and as consciousness,” Heidegger distances himself from this representationalist view.⁴⁵ The problem of how we understand others is ontological rather than epistemic, whether such others are human or not.

The ontological problem of our access to animals does not concern whether we have understood an animal correctly in a particular factual situation. The issue is rather in what sense, if any, we may be said to “transpose” ourselves into an animal, to go along with it, and thereby to disclose its essential nature.⁴⁶ Any effort to understand an animal in a particular situation will presuppose the possibility of such transposition, which is neither a matter of actually transferring ourselves into the animal’s point of view nor merely imagining ourselves to be in its place. As the various texts that we have considered concerning the world of the bee demonstrate, by their very entertainment of the question of the relationship between the bee’s perspective and our own, the possibility of this transposition seems at least open to us: “we tacitly assume that this possibility of self-transposition and a certain going-along-with [the animal] exists in principle, that the very idea makes sense as we say.”⁴⁷ Yet precisely insofar as transposition into the animal presents itself as a mere *possibility*, such going-along-with differentiates itself from our relation to other human beings, on Heidegger’s understanding. This is because our transposition into our fellow human beings “already and originally belongs to man’s own essence” and cannot therefore be raised as a genuine question.⁴⁸ All of our mutual understandings and misun-

⁴⁴ McNeil, W. (1999), “Life Beyond the Organism: Animal Being in Heidegger’s Freiburg Lectures, 1929–30”, in: H. Peter Steeves (ed.), *Animal Others: On Ethics, Ontology, and Animal Life*, Albany: State University of New York Press, p. 213.

⁴⁵ Heidegger, M., op.cit., p. 304–5/208, cf. pp. 298/203 and 302/206. That Heidegger reminds the reader of the Kantian basis for this misconception may be a response to Uexküll’s own explicitly Kantian inspiration. See, for example, Uexküll, J. von, *Theoretical Biology*, op.cit., pp. xiii–xvi.

⁴⁶ Heidegger, M., op.cit., p. 296–7/202.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 301/205.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

derstandings attest that our very manner of being is one of primordially going-along-with each other. What, then, of the self-evidentness with which we immediately embrace the possibility of going-along-with other living things as well?

Heidegger decisively rejects the Bergsonian answer to this question, namely, that we relate to the animal through a kind of sympathetic and instinctual attunement, as his criticisms of Max Scheler demonstrate. Scheler, in *The Nature of Sympathy*, takes up Bergson's descriptions of the instinctive knowledge of the wasp paralyzing its prey as an example of "identification," which provides the primitive basis for all givenness of "the other".⁴⁹ According to Scheler, "to be aware of any organism *as* alive, to distinguish even the simplest animate movement from an inanimate one, a minimum of undifferentiated identification is necessary."⁵⁰ The capacity for such identification, he argues, has atrophied in the modern, "civilized," adult male as a consequence of over-development of the intellect, but a complete realization of human potential requires an integration of our instinctual and intellectual dimensions, of life and spirit. Although Heidegger declares Scheler's manner of posing the question of the relation between the vital and the spiritual to be "an essential one in many respects and superior to anything yet attempted," he nevertheless considers Scheler's effort to understand the human being as an integration of these levels of being to be a "fundamental error" that "must inevitably deny him any access to metaphysics."⁵¹ While Heidegger's descriptions of the poverty of the animal's world and of the human as world-forming draw on Scheler's characterizations of life and spirit,⁵² what Heidegger rejects in Scheler is precisely the effort to integrate these ontological orders, as the notion of "identification"—or Bergsonian intuition—would do.

⁴⁹ Scheler, M. (1954), *The Nature of Sympathy* (translated by P. Heath). London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, p. 28sgg.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 31.

⁵¹ Heidegger, M., op.cit., p. 283/192; cf. 106/70.

⁵² Compare especially Scheler's contrast between the animal's *Umwelt* and the human world in his last work: Scheler, M. (1949), *Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos*. München: Nymphenburger; *The Human Place in the Cosmos* (translated by M. Frings). Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2009.

The possibility of our going-along-with the animal is not consummated in any genuine identification or sympathy, according to Heidegger, precisely because this going-along-with, while apparently invited, is nevertheless refused. This refusal or failure, *Versagen*, is the key to the animal's poverty:

"The possibility of not having, of refusing, is only present when in a certain sense a having and a potentiality for having and for granting is possible. . . . And not-having *in* being able to have is precisely *deprivation*, is *poverty*. . . . The animal displays a sphere of transposability or, more precisely, the animal itself is this sphere, one which necessarily refuses any going along with. The animal has a sphere of potential transposability and yet it does not necessarily have what we call world."⁵³

Heidegger's description is undoubtedly correct to draw attention both to the invitation to transposition with the animal and to the refusal of this transposition. Our everyday engagement with animals is characterized by precisely these two moments: on the one hand, our conviction that non-human animals present a distinct and alien perspective on the world that we should, in principle, be able to take up; and, on the other, the resistance we encounter when trying to do so. As we have seen, the descriptions of this impossibility of perspectives in the case of the bee may be traced from the *Georgics* to the present.

But the decisive question for evaluating Heidegger's account concerns whether he has described this moment of refusal adequately. Consider, first, that the refusal is not a structure of Dasein, but is rather effected *on the part of* the animal, as an essential aspect of its being. The *animal* both invites and refuses *us*. To the extent that poverty is to be understood as a not-having in being able to have, is it not *we* who remain in poverty precisely with respect to the sphere of the animal? Does not the animal refuse our access to this sphere, and thereby hold us in this deprived suspense? Secondly, if it is the case, as Heidegger will suggest farther on, that captivation is "quite different in the case of each animal species"⁵⁴, is this not just as true for the refusal as well? Are there not, in fact, many registers and variations on this melody of refusal? It is here

⁵³ Heidegger, M., op.cit., p. 308–9/210–11.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 359/247.

that Derrida's critique of the very notion of the "animal in general" offers leverage.⁵⁵ Heidegger's own decision to illustrate our invitation to transposition with the example of the household pet but the captivation of "the animal" with the bee illustrates the differential quality of refusal at work. Neither of these objections would carry weight for Heidegger, of course, because the animal's refusal merely reveals that there is nothing to be refused, that the animal lacks a world into which one may be transposed, that there is nowhere to which we may go-along together. The animal's refusal, for Heidegger, covers the shame of its poverty. But insofar as refusal *is* refusal, insofar as animals, in their disparate manners of being, resist our efforts to lay them bare, must not this refusal be given its own ontological due? What is the proper lesson to be drawn from the fact that here, as in the *Georgics*, it is the bees that refuse *us*?

For Heidegger, as is well-known, the animal's poverty is given a positive description in terms of captivation, a relating or an opening toward . . . that is nevertheless not an opening toward as such. Heidegger chooses bees, once again, as the privileged examples of captivation, both because their behavior is "more remote" than that of "higher" animals, and because "insects have an exemplary function within the problematic of biology" (although he provides no further clarification of either point).⁵⁶ Two experiments performed on bees play a key role in Heidegger's discussion. The first, drawn from Uexküll's *Theoretical Biology* (1926), concerns a bee that continues to drink honey after its abdomen has been severed.⁵⁷ The second, discussed by Emanuel Rádl⁵⁸, concerns the bee's ability to orient itself toward the hive when returning home from a long flight. Since the bee orients toward the hive according to the angle of the sun, it will fly in the wrong direction for home if it is transported to another place in a dark box. In each case, Heidegger in-

⁵⁵ See: Derrida, J. *L'animal que donc je suis*, p. 318g/408g.

⁵⁶ Heidegger, M., op.cit., p. 350/240-41. Heidegger does not explain why it is preferable to choose an example of an animal whose behavior would be less comparable to our own, nor why insects, in his view, have such an "exemplary function."

⁵⁷ Heidegger does not attribute this example to Uexküll, but it may be found at Uexküll, J. von, *Theoretical Biology*, op. cit., p. 169. Heidegger's discussion of the example closely parallel's Uexküll's own.

⁵⁸ Rádl, E. (1903), *Untersuchungen über den Phototropismus der Tiere*. Leipzig: Wilhelm Engelmann.

tends the example to demonstrate that, although the bee relates to the honey or the hive, it does not encounter anything in its surrounding *as such*, that is, as the being that it is.

According to Heidegger, the first experiment demonstrates that the bee has no relationship to the presence of the honey or to its own abdomen, since it is “taken by” its food. The bee continues to drink honey because it cannot register any “sense of satisfaction” that would inhibit its drive.⁵⁹ Heidegger’s interpretation of satiation as an “inhibition” of the bee’s drive parallels Uexküll’s own interpretation of this experiment as an example of the “subjective annihilation [*subjektive Vernichtung*]” of indications [*Merkmale*].⁶⁰ For Uexküll, the experiment is intended to distinguish between the “objective” annihilation of the indication, as in a case where the bee has consumed all of the honey, and its “subjective” annihilation in the case of satiation. The other example Uexküll offers of such subjective annihilation, the consumption of the male as prey after the ending of copulation, appears later in Heidegger’s text to illustrate the “eliminative character” of behavior.⁶¹

For Heidegger, these examples do not illustrate the annihilation of an indication, but instead the inhibition of one drive in order to be replaced by another. This concept of “drive” is found in Scheler, for whom drives underlie all sensation in humans as well as animals: “What an animal can see and hear is only what is of importance to its instincts. . . . Even in the human being the drive to see underlies factual seeing.”⁶² Whereas animals remain circumscribed by the limits of their drives, which prevents them from escaping ecstatic immersion in their environments, humans are capable of a “free inhibition” [*Hemmung*] or a “de-inhibition” [*Entthemmung*] of their drives, which is one aspect of their “world-openness”.⁶³ This world-openness is made possible by participation in spirit, which inhibits the drives in order to sublimate their power toward freely chosen aims. Scheler’s description of the world-openness of humans obviously anticipates Heidegger’s account of hu-

⁵⁹ Heidegger, M., op.cit., p. 352–3/242.

⁶⁰ Uexküll, J. von, *Theoretical Biology*, op. cit., pp. 169–70.

⁶¹ Heidegger borrows this example at Heidegger, M., op.cit., p. 363–4/250.

⁶² Scheler, M., *Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos*, op. cit., p. 22–23/14.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 41/28.

mans as “world-forming,” and their descriptions of the limitations of animals share obvious similarities. But, as we noted above, Heidegger rejects Scheler’s efforts to treat the human being as the cumulative integration of levels of being, including the drive-bound behavior of the animal. This is why, for Heidegger, the bee’s eye is determined by the bee’s specific capacity for seeing, but that this has no corollary in our own potentiality for sight. While animal behavior is founded on drives, human comportment is not.⁶⁴

Heidegger’s reliance on these examples to demonstrate the captivation of the animal in general has already received criticism from several angles. In addition to questions of evidence, the examples also raise the issue of Heidegger’s mode of access to the being of the animal. As we have noted, Uexküll’s functional approach, by restricting itself to the animal’s manifest behavior, risks reliance on a subjectivist interpretation of the animal’s world. Yet Heidegger’s alternative, to transpose oneself into the animal through a going-along-with that would reveal the animal’s genuine essence, has already been foreclosed by the animal’s resistance. While Scheler could rely on the dimension of life shared commonly with non-human animals as the basis for our identification with them, Heidegger has rejected this option. From what standpoint, therefore, does Heidegger describe the animal’s manner of being? And, to the extent that his descriptions rely on scientific experiments that presume a subjective account, how does this compromise his approach? If Heidegger is reduced to approaching the behavior of the bee from a functional standpoint, it must be possible to specify the behaviors that are indicative of captivation, or at least to identify what behaviors are absent. But it is impossible to specify in Heidegger’s account what behavior would count as evidence against captivation, despite the suggestion that his conclusions have the support of scientific experimentation.

Furthermore, Heidegger’s claim that these experiments can serve as paradigmatic of the behavior of bees is unconvincing, to say nothing of his claims that they may stand in for animal behavior in general. As

⁶⁴ Heidegger, M., *op.cit.*, pp. 336/230, 345–46/237.

David Morris⁶⁵ has noted, Heidegger approaches the bee in each case as an isolated individual, whereas we have seen that the intelligence of the bee has typically been attributed to its communal relationship with the hive, and especially its powers of communication. Yet, from the perspective that Heidegger has presented, no genuine community or communication among bees is possible, since bees can never relate to one another as such. Self-absorbed and enclosed in its encircling ring, the bee “has” its hive and fellow bees, but it cannot relate to them other than as what activates its drives. Any genuine going-along-with, ontologically and factically, is thereby reserved for Dasein. This encircling ring, as the philosophical reinterpretation of Uexküll’s *Umwelt*, also clarifies the Darwinian notion of self-preservation. The struggle for survival is actually the animal’s struggle with its encircling ring.⁶⁶ We cannot add, for Heidegger, that it “struggles alone,” which would suggest a privative of being-with ascribable only to Dasein. The solitude of the animal is beyond any possibility of factically being alone. However, this description can hardly account for the readiness with which individual worker bees, which do not reproduce, sacrifice themselves for the perpetuation of the hive. In fact, it is precisely the fact that the “struggle for survival” takes place at the level of the hive, rather than the individual, that has led evolutionary biologists to formulate a theory of “kin selection” for bees and other social insects.⁶⁷ Would some evidence, then, of bee communication and cooperation count against Heidegger’s interpretation of their captivity?

III. Transpositional Dances

Heidegger himself is already aware of such behaviors, as we know from a side remark much earlier in *Fundamental Concepts*, where Hei-

⁶⁵ Morris, D. (2005), “Animals and humans, thinking and nature”. *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 4, 49–72.

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 383/263, 377/259. Concerning “self-preservation,” see also p. 339/232.

⁶⁷ See: Hamilton, W. (1964), “The genetical evolution of social behavior I and II”. *Journal of Theoretical Biology* 7, 1–32. Mitchell (Mitchell, S. (2009), *Unsimple Truths: Science, Complexity, and Policy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 46–48), concisely summarizes the implications of this research for evolutionary theory.

degger is distinguishing between zoology and philosophy: “Our thesis is a proposition like that which states that the worker bees in the bee community communicate information about newly discovered feeding places by performing a sort of dance in the hive.”⁶⁸ (Ironically, this passage introduces a discussion of the failures of “communal cooperation” between philosophy and science in the university, a cooperation that Heidegger’s use of scientific sources in this discussion is apparently intended to exhibit.) Heidegger was aware, therefore, of Karl von Frisch’s early research on bee dances, although he elected not to discuss the implications of such behavior for his notion of captivity.

Von Frisch’s early studies from the 1920s documented the so-called “round dance” by which bees indicate that food is to be found in the near vicinity of the hive.⁶⁹ Only subsequently, in the 1940s, did he recognize the symbolic complexity of what have come to be called *Schwanzeltanzen*, “waggle dances,” by which bees communicate the direction, distance, and quality of distant food sources, thereby recruiting other foragers to join them in its collection.⁷⁰ Donald Griffin has called this dance language “the most significant example of versatile communication known in any animals other than our own species”.⁷¹ Subsequent research has confirmed and expanded our knowledge of these dances, which occur only when a commodity needed by the colony (e.g., nectar, pollen, water, or wax) is in short supply and is difficult to locate. When a forager returns from a rich source of this commodity, she seeks out an audience of other foragers, then engages in a dance consisting of walking rapidly in a straight line while moving her abdomen back and forth, then circling back (alternating between clockwise and counterclockwise circles) to the starting point to repeat this walk. As von Frisch discovered, the orientation of this walk relative to vertical conveys the relation between the angle of the sun and the direction of the source. For

⁶⁸ Heidegger, M., op. cit., p. 274/186.

⁶⁹ A summary of this research may be found in Frisch, K. von, *Bees: Their Vision, Chemical Senses, and Language*, op. cit. It was discovered much later that round dances, like the waggle dances discussed below, also include directional information. See: Griffin, D. (2001), *Animal Minds: Beyond Cognition to Consciousness*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 195.

⁷⁰ Frisch, K. von, *Bees: Their Vision, Chemical Senses, and Language*, op. cit., p. 69sgg.

⁷¹ Griffin, D., op. cit., p. 190.

example, a dance that is oriented straight up indicates that the source is directly in the direction of the sun, while 80° to the right of vertical indicates that the source is 80° to the right of the sun. The duration of the wagging run, and perhaps also its length, indicate the distance to the source, while the duration and enthusiasm of the dance communicate the desirability of the substance to be gathered.

From the perspective of symbolic communication, waggle dances are distinctive in several respects. The dances serve to communicate a complex message to other bees within the completely dark hive, where the other bees follow the dancing bee's movement by touch, scent, and perhaps also sound. Within this setting, the relation between the angle of the dance relative to vertical and the flight direction of the source has no "natural" basis; as Griffin notes, this relationship "is more truly symbolic than any other known communication by nonhuman animals. The direction of the dance stands for the directions of flight out in the open air."⁷² Second, the waggle dances demonstrate "displacement," in that they communicate about a situation that is displaced in space and time from the context of the communication, sometimes with a lag of several hours.⁷³ Third, the dances are not "fixed" in the sense of being invariably produced or closed to spontaneous symbolic innovation. As noted, the performance of a dance is dependent on conditions within the hive, such as which materials are in short supply, and on the quality of the source discovered. A forager who returns to the hive to find that the material collected is no longer in need may instead perform a "tremble dance" that interrupts other waggle dances, discouraging the pursuit of further supplies of a given resource.⁷⁴ Furthermore, von Fritsch demonstrated in early experiments that bees may spontaneously alter their symbolic system to adapt to new constraints. If the comb within the hive is laid horizontally, so that the vertical direction of dances is no longer possible, foragers are no longer able to communicate food sources to others within a dark hive. If, however, any area of the hive is open to the sky, so that the polarization of light can provide an orienta-

⁷² Ibid., p. 196.

⁷³ Ibid., pp. 196–97.

⁷⁴ See: Niah, J. (1993), "The stop signal of honey bees: Reconsidering its message." *Behavioral Ecology and Sociobiology* 33, pp. 51–56.

tion relative to the sun, dancing resumes in such a way that the straight portion of the dance points in the actual flight direction of the source.⁷⁵ This flexibility in the symbolic structure of the dance ill accords with our usual conceptions of the rigidity of instinctive behaviors.

Finally, recent research has focused on the communicative aspects of waggle dances employed when a swarm seeks a suitable location for a new hive, a phenomenon first documented by Martin Lindauer in the 1950s. When scouts return from potential hive locations, the enthusiasm of their dances takes into consideration variables such as the size, dryness, and darkness of the site, as well as its distance from the old colony. These scouts recruit other dancers to join them in communicating about the potential site, some of whom may then visit the site themselves, but many of whom will not. This demonstrates that messages can be passed along “second hand,” that is, disseminated by those who have not themselves undertaken the flight or inspected the site. Individual bees that do visit the sites described by others have been observed to revise their initial choices accordingly. This process continues for several days until a kind of “consensus” is reached, during which nearly all of the dancing bees are indicating the same potential hive location as the best option, after which the swarm travels en masse to the new location.⁷⁶

Such documentation of the complexities of symbolic communication among bees does not alone resolve the question of their “captivation” by drives or their potential for an “inner world” distinct from our own, however. Adopting an explicitly behavioral approach, Griffin argues that such studies provide evidence for conscious thought comparable to what we rely on in interactions with other humans:

“The principle basis for our inferences about subjective, conscious thoughts and feelings in humans is the communicative behavior of our companions. And here we find that certain insects also communicate simple but symbolic information about matters that are of crucial importance in their lives, and they even reach major group decisions on the basis of such communicative behavior. ... [I]t seems both logical and reasonable to apply the same procedure

⁷⁵ See: Frisch, K. von, *Bees: Their Vision, Chemical Senses, and Language*, op. cit., 86-96.

⁷⁶ See: Lindauer, M. (1971), *Communication Among Social Bees*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. Griffin (op. cit., p. 203-209), summarizes Lindauer's research and subsequent studies concerning communication during swarming.

that we use with our human companions and infer that . . . honeybees are consciously thinking and feeling something approximating the information they are communicating. Only by assuming an absolute human-animal dichotomy does it make scientific sense to reject this type of inference.”⁷⁷

Whatever we may think of Griffin’s conclusions, his argument rests on assumptions that the phenomenological tradition has consistently rejected as flawed, namely, that the existence of consciousness in others is arrived at by a process of logical reasoning rather than being phenomenologically or ontologically basic. But then we must return precisely to the ambivalence that the bee presents to us in its phenomenological disclosure, insofar as it promises us a measure of transposition while, in its own differential manner, resisting precisely the kind of going-along-with that would yield an essential insight into its nature. Such studies of bee communication can provide the guiding thread for a phenomenological investigation of this ambivalent character of the insect’s givenness.

One promising path for the development of apian phenomenology is already suggested by Heidegger himself in his consideration of our inability to transpose ourselves into a stone. As Heidegger notes, although we usually deny the possibility of such transposition, it nevertheless remains a possibility of our comportment to “animate” the stone:

“There are two fundamental ways in which this can happen: first when human Dasein is determined in its existence by *myth*, and second in the case of *art*. But it would be a fundamental mistake to try and dismiss such animation as an exception or even as a purely metaphorical procedure which does not really correspond to the facts, as something phantastical based upon the imagination, or as mere illusion. What is at issue here is not the opposition between actual reality and illusory appearance, but the distinction between quite different kinds of possible truth. But for the moment, in accordance with the subject under consideration, we shall remain within that dimension of truth

⁷⁷ Griffin, D., op. cit., p. 210. Griffin reports a similar conclusion drawn by Carl Jung, reacting to the discoveries of von Frisch: “This kind of message is no different in principle from information conveyed by a human being. In the latter case we would certainly regard such behavior as a conscious and intentional act and can hardly imagine how anyone could prove in a court of law that it had taken place unconsciously. . . . We are . . . faced with the fact that the ganglionic system apparently achieves exactly the same result as our cerebral cortex. Nor is there any proof that bees are unconscious” (Jung, C. (1973), *Synchronicity: A Causal Connecting Principle*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 94); quoted in Griffin, D., op. cit., p. 210-II.

pertaining to scientific and metaphysical knowledge, which have together long since determined the way in which we conceive of truth in our everyday reflection and judgement, in our 'natural' way of knowing."⁷⁸

The significance of this remark is that it reveals the theoretical frame surrounding Heidegger's analyses of the animal's poverty just as much as of the stone's lack of world. Since, in William McNeil's words, Heidegger's course "problematizes the foundational primacy attributed to theoretical contemplation as our originary mode of access to the world," it simultaneously recuperates alternative openings onto the truth of animal being, even if we hesitate to accept Heidegger's own characterizations of those alternative modes and their limits.⁷⁹ Consequently, a phenomenology of the ambivalent invitation of the insect, if it aims at a broader truth than that circumscribed by Western theoretical contemplation, must also consider the disclosure of the insect's mode of being through myth, art, and non-Western modes of knowing alongside the experiments and observations of Western science.

Within this broader context, the insect's resistance to our transposition is neither total, homogenous, nor static, and the many manners and degrees of going-along-with insects are themselves open to cultivation. This recognition encourages what David Wood has called "biomorphizing,"⁸⁰ which, like Scheler's notion of identification, founds our transpositional encounters on shared and embodied modes of life. Furthermore, this concrete engagement with insects already implies the possibility of a transformative relation, a "becoming bee," that, unlike Bergsonian intuition, would be operative in both directions. Deleuze and Guattari's reliance on another figure of *Hymenoptera* to illustrate their notion of dual becoming, namely, the wasp in its pollinating pseudocopulation with the orchid, is suggestive here.⁸¹ As Deleuze and Guattari note, the orchid has appropriated the wasp into its own reproductive cycle by borrowing a fragment of its "code," in some cases going so far as

⁷⁸ Heidegger, M., op. cit., p. 299–300/204.

⁷⁹ McNeil, W., op. cit., pp. 230–31.

⁸⁰ Wood, D. (2006), "On the Way to Econstruction". *Environmental Philosophy* 3, pp. 41–42.

⁸¹ See: Deleuze, G., F. Guattari (1980), *Mille Plateaux*. Paris: Minuit; *A Thousand Plateaus* (translated by Brian Massumi). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987, p. 17/10, 291–92/238, 360/293–4.

to produce pheromones of the female wasp. Such wasp-orchid nuptials are paradigmatic of what Deleuze and Guattari term “involutions,” non-filial blocks of becoming that span kingdoms and lead unlikely partners into creative mutual transformation. The account of “becoming-animal” that Deleuze and Guattari develop from this example, applied to the creative path of phenomenological investigation, returns us to Bergson’s insight into the “double form of the real,” only now differentiated into what Derrida calls “the heterogeneous multiplicity of the living”.⁸² As we have seen, philosophy is, for Bergson, a means of “becoming-wasp,” taking up the insect’s instinct for life in the self-reflective awareness of the intellect. Yet for Deleuze and Guattari, the becoming is a mutual resonance: as the entomological phenomenologist engages in a becoming-bee, the bee is equally caught up in a becoming-philosophical. The development of apian phenomenology must nevertheless negotiate the temptation to elevate our own poverty, our inability, finally, to disclose the as-such of the bee, into the principle of our superiority. In the end, it is just as impossible fully to claim the as-such for ourselves as it is to withhold it from the bee.⁸³

While the apparent unity of the honeybee hive had led to its use as a figure for obedient monarchism and harmonious democracy, any becoming-other is a far more fraught and complex event. Deleuze and Guattari’s wasp-orchid block plays with the orchid’s deceptions and the pollinator’s desires to create a new possibility of relation. This frenetic energy animates Sylvia Plath’s Bee sequence, a series of five poems in her collection *Ariel*. In “The Arrival of the Bee Box,” the speaker of the poem finds herself afraid of the “box of maniacs” she has ordered with its noise of “unintelligible syllables” and yet is unable to stay away from it. She imagines releasing the bees:

⁸² Derrida, J., *L’animal que donc je suis*, op. cit., p. 53/31.

⁸³ See: Derrida, J., *L’animal que donc je suis*, op. cit.; Lawlor, L. *This is Not Sufficient: An Essay on Animality and Human Nature in Derrida*, op. cit.

“I wonder how hungry they are.
 I wonder if they would forget me
 If I just undid the locks and stood back and turned into a tree.
 There is the laburnum, its blond colonnades,
 And the petticoats of the cherry.”⁸⁴

These lines convey the speaker’s ambivalent but hungry desire: even as she hopes the bees will ignore her, she imagines a petticoat of flowers that will make her their co-evolutionary sexual partner and invite an intimate invasion by the swarm. An apian phenomenology, conjured out of the perilous relationship of bees and beekeepers, with its promise of honey and stings, suggests that in denying the rich world of the bee we close ourselves off from the sweet possibilities of extending our loyalty beyond the reaches of humanity.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Plath, S. (1965), *Ariel*. New York: Harper & Row, p. 60.

⁸⁵ I thank Janet Fiskio for suggesting Plath’s poem as the final image for this paper and for her generous comments on an earlier draft.

STARRY SKY AS » THE GREATEST MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY «

Sublimity of the sky from Kant to
Santayana and beyond

Marko Uršič *

The concept 'sublime' was introduced into modern aesthetics by Edmund Burke (1756) although already the ancient author Pseudo-Longinus¹ wrote about "sublime beauty". Burke discerned the sublime from beautiful – and a similar conception was later developed by Kant in his famous pre-critical writing *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1764)² where he wrote that the subtle feeling was of a two-fold nature: the feeling of sublime <das Erhabene> and beautiful. For example, high oak trees and lonely shadows in the holy grove are sublime, while flower beds, low things and figure-shaped trees are beautiful; the night is sublime, the day is beautiful; deep solitude is sublime, but "in a frightening way" etc.³ In this treatise Kant (like Burke) deals more with the psychological and ethnological aspects of the beautiful and sublime,

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¹ Umberto Eco in his *History of Beauty (Storia della bellezza, 2004)* informs us that Pseudo-Longinus, an author from the Alexandrian period (1. century A.D.), saw sublimity mainly in impetuous and noble passions, moments of spiritual elevation which are put into words in Homeric epic poetry or in the great classical tragedies.

² In this treatise Kant does not mention Burke as his precursor in discerning the beautiful from the sublime, it might be he did not know him at the time. He mentions him only later in his "third critic", in which he says that Burke makes only an "empirical exposition of the sublime and beautiful" – while Kant develops a philosophical, transcendental approach of this difference.

³ The meaning of the concepts "the sublime" and Kant's *das Erhabene* (i.e. "spiritual elevation") are, from today's philosophical point of view *almost* synonymous (especially if they refer to Kant), but not quite so. The term 'sublime' bears in common usage also a different meaning and other connotations than the term 'spiritual elevation'; when we for example say that some poetry is sublime we usually don't mean that it is 'high', but that it is 'refined'; and the term "sublimation" in psychoanalysis means rather "refinement" or "diversion" (e.g. of *libido* in arts

it is only in his *Critique of Judgement* (1790) that he philosophically connects the aesthetics of art and the distinction between the beautiful and sublime with the teleology of nature.

First, let us have a look at how Kant in his third critique conceives beauty, be it the beauty of nature or of a work of art (the former being of primary importance for him): beauty is for Kant what “disinterestedly” pleases taste, so it is not primarily the characteristic of an object (its proportionality, harmony), as it used to be in classicism, but it has to be searched for in the *subjective* relation, in the aesthetic observing of objects. Kant took the “primacy of taste” in the aesthetic judgement, at least partially, from David Hume (*Of the Standard of Taste*, 1757). The important new stress is the “subjective general validity” of beauty,⁴ which leads Kant to the key “theorem” of transcendental aesthetics, with which he influenced also Hegel’s and Schelling’s conception of art: “*Beautiful* is what pleases in general and without a concept”.⁵ Or, as Kant explains later in more detail: “*An aesthetic idea* cannot become a recognition because it is a perception <*Anschauung*> (of the figurative faculty), for which an adequate concept can never be found. *An idea of the mind* can never become a recognition because it contains a *concept* (about the sensually transcendental) which can never be given an adequate perception”.⁶ The mind can never capture the cognitive *whole* in a concept, because the wholeness of cognition inevitably exceeds all possible experience, however, the whole could be found as the “general without concept” in the “aesthetic idea”, which is given to the subject in the perception, e.g., in the *observation of the individual beauty*. From Kant’s subjective (transcendental) approach to beauty it follows that “there can be no rule that would compel someone to recognize something as beautiful”,⁷ since every judgement that comes from this source is aesthetic: “The reason of its determination is the feeling of the subject

etc). However, like for Burke, also for Kant *das Erhabene* means: impetuous, majestic, extreme, excessive, also terrific...

⁴ Kant, I., *The Critique of Judgement*, §8.

⁵ Ibid., § 6.

⁶ Ibid., § 57, Remark 1.

⁷ Ibid., § 8.

not concept of the object.⁸ We might ask whether this attitude marked the beginning of the ever increasing “subjectiveness” of art criticism, which is today close to total arbitrariness? The latter was certainly not Kant’s aim because in his subjective aesthetic judgement he substitutes the idea of mind with the “ideal” of beauty: “*An idea* is actually a concept of the mind, *an ideal* is a notion of a single being as much as it adheres to the idea”.⁹ Then he puts the question: “But how do we get to such an ideal of beauty? A priori or empirically?”¹⁰ – and he answers that “only *a human* can present the ideal of *beauty* among all the things in the world, similarly as humanity can in his person, as an intelligent being, present the ideal of *perfection*”.¹¹ So it is obvious that in this conclusion Kant’s subjectivism does not imply aesthetic relativism, and further on he implements the thought of the “ideal of beauty” with his concept of *genius*, who embodies the spirit and taste of the age.

For our context, Kant’s theory of the sublime is more relevant than his theory of the beautiful. In *The Critique of Judgement* he discerns between the “mathematical” and “dynamical” sublime in nature: an example of the mathematical sublime is the starry sky, an example of the dynamical sublime is a stormy ocean – the former displays the immeasurableness of the *greatness*, the latter the immeasurableness of the *might* of nature. Kant’s “nominal definition of the sublime” goes as follows: “Sublime is the name given to what is absolutely great”,¹² absolutely great being “what is beyond all comparison great”;¹³ and that “is sublime in comparison with which all else is small”.¹⁴ The sublime evidences a faculty of mind <*Gemüt*, soul> to transcend all sense experience. Or, if we say it otherwise: with the sublime the mind as aesthetic “faculty” frees itself of the cognitive limitation in the domain of sensory experience. With Kant’s words: “But the point of capital importance is that the mere ability even to think it as a whole indicates a faculty of mind transcend-

⁸ Ibid., § 17.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Kant, I., *The Critique of Judgement*, § 25.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

ing every standard of sense”.¹⁵ The *cognitive* meaning of the sublime lies for Kant in this: “Nature, therefore, is sublime in such of its phenomena as in their intuition convey the idea of their infinity”.¹⁶ The infinity of nature, of the whole universe thus *returns* into the thought, more precisely, into the *aesthetic perception*, not only as a “regulative idea”, not only as an “ideal of the mind” (as in the transcendental dialectics of pure reason), but as the “actual” infinity, which is aesthetically “recognized” in the sublimity of the starry sky, the ocean, the nature.

An essential difference between Kant’s beauty and sublime is the following: “The beautiful in nature is a question of the form of object, and this consists in limitation, whereas the sublime is to be found in an object even devoid of form, so far as it immediately involves, or else by its presence provokes a representation of limitlessness, yet with a superadded thought of its totality”.¹⁷ What was unavoidably taken from pure reason, the “totality”, is now restored back to human judgement or to aesthetic “faculty” – as *infinity in the finite*. As is the beautiful so is the sublime “subjectively generally valid” but the latter is even more *inner* than the former, because “for the beautiful in nature we must seek a ground external to ourselves, but for the sublime one merely in ourselves and the attitude of mind that introduces sublimity into the representation of nature”.¹⁸ The feeling of sublime involves as its characteristic feature a mental movement combined with the estimate of the object, whereas taste in respect of the beautiful presupposes that the mind is in “restful contemplation, and preserves it in this state”.¹⁹ We may ask: don’t the stars fill the soul more with peace than with motion? And further: do they shine to us only in the motion of *our* “nature”, in the inner uneasiness and anxious fearful respect that the soul experiences when it looks towards them? And finally: *where* is the sublimity, “in myself” or “up there”? *How* do we observe the sublimity of the sky? We might find the answer in the following passage:

¹⁵ Ibid., § 25.

¹⁶ Ibid., § 26.

¹⁷ Kant, op. cit., § 23.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., § 24.

“So, if we call the sight of the starry heaven sublime, we must not found our estimate of it upon any concepts of worlds inhabited by rational beings, with the bright spots, which we see filling the space above us, as their suns moving in orbits prescribed for them with the wisest regard to ends. But we must take it, just as it strikes the eye, as a broad and all-embracing canopy: and it is merely under such a representation that we may posit the sublimity which the pure aesthetic judgement attributes to this object.”²⁰

In these thoughts we can recognize the originating point for later phenomenological thoughts about the “vicinity of stars”, existential inclusion of everything distant into the human *Lebenswelt*. – *How far are the stars?* How big are they? Old Heraclitus said that the “Sun is as big as it shows itself to us”, which is to say that “it has the width of a human foot” (DK 22 A 1). Among modern thinkers, after the discoveries of Copernicus and Galileo, we come across an “aesthetic” reaction against the immense dimensions of the sky in comparison to our life environment already by Kant, not only later by Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, by whom it manifests itself as the phenomenological “tendency of Dasein to vicinity”. Kant explicitly states that “all estimation of the magnitude of objects of nature is in the last resort aesthetic (i.e., subjectively and not objectively determined)”.²¹ That the stars are not only some foreign, immensely distant worlds but also *our*, “close” heavenly lights, we can strongly feel while looking at Van Gogh’s big shiny stars, at those numerous, *sensibly* present other suns, which are carried by mighty vortices of clouds above an earthly village and together with the soul of man that flames toward the heaven like a cypress... Yes, but if this sensible *experience* of the starry sky is the only one in which the soul, longing for an infinite fulfillment, for unlimited beauty, can wholly recognize itself,

²⁰ Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, § 29.

²¹ Ibid., § 26. Of course, Kant was well aware of the actual enormity of the sky. When in his *Critique of Judgement* he writes about the possibility of illustrating enormous astronomical relations, he says among other things: “similarly the Earth’s diameter for the known planetary system; this again for the system of the Milky Way; and the immeasurable host of such systems, which go by the name of nebulae, and most likely in turn themselves form such a system, holds out no prospect of a limit” (Kant, *op. cit.*, § 26). Thus he knew – or at least sensed – that there exists an “immense group” of galaxies, although astronomers discovered this only at the beginning of the 20th century. Until then it was thought that they were all observable nebulae inside our Milky Way.

why then at all do we need science, astronomy, “objective truth”? Is it right to say, as Kant does, that “instead of the object, it is rather the cast of the mind in appreciating it that we have to estimate as sublime”?²² Surely it holds that “we must be able to see sublimity in the ocean, regarding it, as the poets do”²³ – but this does not mean that there is no sublimity also in science, in its “concepts about worlds”. Why deprive science of the sublime?

I try to answer this question with the assumption that Kant does not even search for the sublime in science, in rational cognition, but only in the aesthetic observation, because he already defines the sublime as an unlimited *greatness* and *might*, which are inaccessible to scientific cognition, since they lie *beyond* every possible cognition. Kant does but not consider (at least not explicitly) the sublime as *depth*, as the fathomless *mystery* of the world, nature, universe. In his frame of reflection it is certainly true that we cannot come to an experience of *unlimited* greatness and might of the universal ocean via science but only via our “aesthetic nature”. However, if we take a look beyond this frame of reference, we will see that both art and science express, each in its own way, the fathomless *depth and mystery of the world*. It is true that sciences cannot sing a hymn about the sublimity of nature, but the depth and mystery of the world reveal themselves in them as well, though in a different way, not in the “oceanic” sensation, but in the clear language of mathematics, woven in the immensely complicated abstract “veil”, which screens the senses, but at the same time unveils the deeper truth of Nature.

When we reflect upon these difficult problems, which even the wise Kant did not carry to an end, we have to take into account another thing: it is evident that our “mental faculty” prefers finiteness to infinity, and when it is confronted with infinity, “it represents all that is great in nature as in turn becoming little”.²⁴ Confronted with the immensity of the universe, we experience fearful respect, which is an essential element of the sublime, as Kant defines it – and in this experience we find more anxiety than delight and love. Under the starry sky we feel weak,

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., § 29.

²⁴ Ibid., § 26.

small, and that is why we turn into our *interior* where we find some other strength, *different* from nature:

“In the immeasurableness of nature and the incompetence of our faculty for adopting a standard proportionate to the aesthetic estimation of the magnitude of its realm, we found our own limitation. But with this we also found in our rational faculty another non-sensuous standard, one which has that infinity itself under it as a unit, and in comparison with which everything in nature is small, and so found in our minds a pre-eminence over nature even in its immeasurability.”²⁵

Kant’s pre-eminence of the mind over nature can be a source of consolation and reconciliation with our physical finiteness and death, because in spite of the fact that the irresistibility of the might of nature forces upon us the recognition of our physical helplessness as beings of nature, it reveals us a faculty of estimating ourselves as *independent* of nature, and discovers that our “pre-eminence above nature is the foundation of a self-preservation of quite another kind”²⁶ For Kant it is in this that the *ethical* importance of the aesthetic experience of the sublime lies: “In this way, external nature is not estimated in our aesthetic judgement as sublime so far as exciting fear, but rather because it challenges our power (one not of nature) to regard as small those things of which we are wont to be solicitous (worldly goods, health, and life)”.²⁷ These thoughts sound rather stoical and we could recognize in them also the platonic quest for eternity against the passing of all the natural world, but there is also an essential difference between Kant and the classics: when Kant speaks about the “pre-eminence of the mind over nature”, this pre-eminence is meant within the horizon of the modern *subjectivity* which tries to “overcome” nature as the “realm of necessity” by subduing it to the human “free will”, which is presumably “not nature”. But from this duality stems an incessant split between nature and mind, between body and soul, it is a source of the modern pain of incompleteness, which was not known to the classics, at least not in such “subjective” and individual sense, but rather in the tragic feeling of the

²⁵ Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, § 28.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

distance between the mortal humans and the immortal gods. Of course, Platonism tries to overcome the transitoriness of nature, namely in the eternity of the soul and mind, however – not by trying to overcome nature, but rather by shining through it with the eternal spirit.

* * *

Kant sharply distinguished the beautiful from the sublime, indeed he considered them as *opposites* – but this opposition is neither necessary nor obvious for our “sense of beauty”. We can also say that Kant’s subjective (i.e., inner) opposing to nature is far from the platonic admiring of the beauty of the sky, as expressed in Plato’s late dialogues, *Timaios*, *Philebos* and *Epinomis*. For Plato, nature is not opposite to mind (or spirit), at least not in a subjective sense like for most modern, post-Cartesian philosophers. But there are some fine exceptions ...

One of them is George Santayana who in his first and most known book *The Sense of Beauty* (1896) also wrote about the beauty and sublimity of the starry sky. He developed a kind of “platonic naturalism”, i.e., he stressed the spirit in nature and was engaged in non confessional, “cosmic” religiosity (he explicitly wrote about his relation to Platonism in his essay *Platonism and Spiritual Life*). In the introduction to his book *The Sense of Beauty* he says that “Platonism is a very refined and beautiful expression of our natural instincts, it embodies conscience and utters our innermost hopes”.²⁸ He tends to stress platonic *kalokagathia*, although his aesthetics is not just platonic in the classical sense, since his definition of beauty includes Kantian “subjectivity” by the concept of “pleasure”. Santayana defines beauty as “pleasure regarded as the quality of a thing”.²⁹ So in Santayana’s aesthetics different influences intertwine, besides Platonism and Kantianism also the influences of Hume, Schelling, and Schopenhauer, nevertheless his thought as a whole does not give an impression of eclecticism, rather of genuineness and coherence. Beauty for Santayana has also a theological sense because “the perception of beauty exemplifies that adequacy and perfection which

²⁸ Santayana, *The Sense of Beauty*, p. 12.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 51.

in general we objectify in an idea of God".³⁰ In *The Sense of Beauty* Santayana systematically treats beauty in its three main aspects: material, formal, and expressive (in the chapter about forms, for example, he speaks of the "charm of symmetry", following Platonism) – but it is not our purpose here to deal with the multiple nuances of his aesthetic philosophy, we will rather focus only at some of the fragments where he writes about the beauty of the sky and stars.

In paragraph 24 of *The Sense of Beauty* under the title "Multiplicity and uniformity" Santayana states that "we can have the sense of space without the sense of boundaries; indeed, this intuition is what tempts us to declare space infinite";³¹ interesting enough, he adds that "[s]pace would have to consist of a finite number of juxtaposed blocks, if our experience of extension carried with essentially the realization of limits"³² – which reminds us of the modern mathematical topology of the "Euclidean torus", that the universe could have if it was (maybe is) spatially "compact", concluded in itself. A nice feature of Santayana's philosophical method lies above all in his persistence in an "aesthetic" *experiencing* of the concepts which he treats, as well when he speaks about space: "The aesthetic effect of extensiveness is also entirely different from that of particular shapes. Some things appeal to us by their surfaces, others by lines that limit those surfaces",³³ but the beauty of the space itself exceeds these lines and surfaces with its immensity, with its "pure sense of extension",³⁴ which is form in its most elementary configuration – but Santayana does not hold the view of a vacuous *res extensa* or Kant's space as "a priori form" of our outer senses, since "the effect of extensity is never long satisfactorily unless it is superinduced upon some material beauty"³⁵ – at this point we can remind ourselves of the big monochromatic blue canvases of Yves Klein – "and the vast smoothness of the sky would grow oppressive if it were not of so tender a blue".³⁶ Yes, even

³⁰ Ibid., p. 13.

³¹ Santayana, op. cit., p. 101.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 102.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

the sky becomes low and dismal, it “lies heavy on us”, when the heavy clouds screen it from horizon to horizon – but at night, on the other hand, there is the glimmering “surface” of the stars to protect us from the fathomless blackness of the sky.

In the next, 25th paragraph under the title “Example of the stars” Santayana writes that “[a]nother beauty of the sky – the stars – offers so striking and fascinating an illustration of the effect of multiplicity and uniformity”.³⁷ If we ask ourselves *why* the stars are so beautiful to us, we might answer that it is because we *know* how mighty and distant, how big and shiny they are in comparison to our Earth, some of them even a thousand times brighter than our very bright Sun etc. – but Santayana thinks that the factual (in our times scientific, astronomical) knowledge about stars, which has evolved through history, is not essential at all for us to admire them. “Before the days of Kepler the heavens declared the glory of the Lord; and we needed no calculation of stellar distances, no fancies about a plurality of worlds, no image of infinite spaces, to make the stars sublime”.³⁸ The sensory aspect of what we observe is much more important for our feeling of the sublime, because various “theories”, interpretations change, while the perceivables – in our case the immense dimensions of the starred “heavenly arch” – are the “experiences which remain untouched by theory”,³⁹ and this is why it is so universal:

³⁷ Santayana, op. cit., p. 102–3.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 103. Observing the sky and stars has always been wonderful and amazing, also for those who didn't look for the “glory of gods” there. At this point we can quote some verses of Lucretius from his great cosmological poem *On the Nature of the Universe* (*De rerum natura*, 1st century B.C.), which speaks about how people would be astonished and mesmerized if they saw one night the starry sky for the *first* time. Today we have – like the inhabitants of imperial Rome – almost forgotten this majestic, *sublime* scene. (Lucretius II, 1030–39):

*Look up to the clear and pure colour of the sky,
and all the travelling constellations that it contains,
the moon and the bright light of the dazzling men;
if all these were now revealed for the first time to mortals,
if they were thrown before them suddenly without preparation,
what more wonderful than these things could be named,
or such as the nations would not have dared to believe beforehand?
Nothing, as I think: so wondrous this spectacle would have been,
which now, look you, all are so wearied with often seeing,
that no one thinks it worth while to look up towards the bright vault of heaven!*

³⁹ Ibid., p. 104.

we admire the *same* sky, wonder at the *same* stars as the Chinese, the ancient Sumerians, maybe even as some remote “Martians”. Beauty is for Santayana a more firm “ontological” basis of reality than thought, than “mere ideas” about the world, nature, the universe. In the numerous complicated and intertwined constellations of stars, in this biggest of all visible “patterns”, there lies a great beauty of complexity, for –

“the starry heavens are very happily designed to intensify the sensations on which their beauties must rest. In the first place, the continuum of space is broken into points, numerous enough to give the utmost idea of multiplicity, and yet so distinct and vivid that it is impossible not to remain aware of their individuality. The variety of local signs, without becoming organized into forms, remains prominent and irreducible. This makes the object infinitely more exciting than a plane surface would be. In the second place, the sensuous contrast of the dark background, – blacker the clearer the night and the more stars we can see, – with the palpitating fire of the stars themselves, could not be exceeded by any possible device.”⁴⁰

For the experience of the sublimity of the sky, it is essential its *sensuous* beauty which surpasses all human artefacts by its complexity and splendour. This sublimity is *not only* in the immense dimensions, not only in the infinite might and greatness – so that Kant’s formal dichotomy between “mathematical” and “dynamical” sublime is not enough for a complete understanding of the sublimity of the sky – since for Santayana, it is important to sense and feel the unconceivable *subtlety* of the universe which fascinates our souls with its *depth and mystery*. When we are mesmerized with the boundlessness of the sky, with thousands of starry lamps, we are not “lied heavily upon” by the unknown forceful might, by the unavoidable necessity of nature – on the contrary, we are elevated to the sublime beauty of the *whole*, to the totality of All that surrounds us and that we ourselves are: we don’t have to “overcome” nature with some other force, with mind distinct from nature, but we rather try to recognize ourselves as living, conscious minds *in nature*. And when we recognize *Thou art That* (*Tat Tvam Asi* from the Upanishads), then stems out of this highest recognition the elevated pathos, genuine ecstasy, excess of emotions, which is common to all diverse souls

⁴⁰ Santayana, *The Sense of Beauty*, p. 106.

and cultures, to all who see the stars “like impressive music, a stimulus to worship”.⁴¹ However, despite of this oneness of All, I as a human being retain my individuality and solitude in my personal soul, which is sublime in a different way – as a “single star [that] is tender, beautiful, and mild”,⁴² or as a single flower, a small earthly star amidst a vast landscape.⁴³

So, in what sense is Santayana’s philosophy a “platonic naturalism”? In his lovely treatise *Platonism and the Spiritual Life* he wrote that “those who think Platonism dualistic have simply not understood”.⁴⁴ Platonism is a philosophy of spirit and “why should [the spirit] quarrel with its earthy cradle?”.⁴⁵ Spirit is light, “spirit is awareness, intelligence, recollection”.⁴⁶ – Of course, there is no guarantee that the spirit will, after some centuries of modern dualism, return into nature, maybe this is only one of our postmodern illusions, and there is a founded fear that the development is heading right in the opposite direction, towards an even harder absence of spirit, be it in nature as well as in the social world. But there is probably at least something, maybe even many things, that depend on ourselves? On our thoughts, conceptions, feelings, on the spirit of every individual, of me, you, her, all of us? I believe that many things are up to us, living minds, and that one of the essential factors

⁴¹ Santayana, op. cit., p. 104.

⁴² Ibid., 107.

⁴³ The beauty of the landscape is comparable to the sublimity of the sky. Santayana in paragraph 33 of *The Sense of Beauty* under the title “Example of landscape” writes: “The natural landscape is an indeterminate object; it almost always contains enough diversity to allow the eye a great liberty in selecting, emphasizing, and grouping its elements, and it is furthermore rich in suggestion and in vague emotional stimulus. [...] This is a beauty dependent on reverie, fancy, and objectified emotion” (Santayana, op. cit., 133). – This beautiful fragment induces us to think about the “architecture” of gardens, cultivated landscapes, about the difference between, for example, the French geometrical and English “landscape” garden in the 18th century. But the greatest masters of the harmony of nature and spirit are zen masters of gardens: the symbolic beauty of wavy sand surfaces, from which conical “mountains” rise here and there, those rocky “isles” and stony “stelae”, the minimalistic “graphic” of these structures, which connect the interior of the temples with the exterior of the landscape (the dividing line between them is almost erased but nevertheless it persists), the “shaped emptiness”, which is at the same time accomplished perfection, that uniformity-in-multiplicity, which pleases and frees the spirit – all this sublime beauty of temples-gardens in Kyoto impresses itself permanently on the visitor’s memory.

⁴⁴ Santayana, *Platonism*, p. 237.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 250.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 274.

that in our present determine the future is recognizing the eternal *spirit in the beauty of nature*.

* * *

Why could we say that the starry sky is “the greatest museum of natural history”? Following Einstein’s theory of relativity, space and time are united into the four-dimensional continuum of space-time; and relativity is the founding stone of modern cosmology. So, when we look deep into space, when we see in our telescopes distant galaxies, which are millions, even billions of light-years away from us, we look into *past times* of our universe, since light – which only seems to travel with infinite speed – is indeed travelling quite slow in the vast cosmic distances. For example, the distant “quasars” (i.e., quasi-stellar objects), which are considered to be very bright cores of the ancient, then still “active” galaxies, appear and disappear within a certain “layer” of the cosmic space-time, not unlike the fossils of dinosaurs appear and disappear within the geological layers between the late Triassic period and the Cretaceous-Tertiary period: deeper in space means deeper in time. Besides that, in the expanding universe, everything that was once “very small” (of course, sizes of objects are relative, according to Einstein) is nowadays very big. Brian Greene, one of the best known writers of modern cosmology, wonders in his book *The Fabric of the Cosmos*: “According to [cosmic] inflation, the more than 100 billion galaxies, sparkling throughout space like heavenly diamonds, are nothing but quantum mechanics writ large across the sky. To me, this realization is one of the greatest wonders of the modern scientific age”.⁴⁷ And this is really a wonder! A *sublime* wonder, revealed by modern science. And if we continue our journey in space-time, coming closer and closer to the very beginning of our universe, we find (namely all around us, just everywhere) the oldest of all cosmic “fossils” – the “background radiation”, the *cosmic* radiation which is nowadays very cold (minus ~ 270 °C, i.e., only 2,7 degree above the absolute zero temperature), but which was very hot, brilliant as the sun’s surface, when it began its way in space-time: at *that* time,

⁴⁷ Greene, p. 308.

the whole of the sky was brilliant as the sun's surface is today! But this is still not the end of the cosmic "fossil story": on the "surface" of the cosmic background radiation, the "blueprint" of the big-bang itself (or at least of the cosmic inflation in the first second) is imprinted: from the patterns, tiny anisotropies in cosmic radiation science can "read" the very beginnings of the Story. Of course most of these "signs" still have to be deciphered, but the work is in progress. Paul Davies in his book *The Cosmic Blueprint* (1987, revised edition 2004) puts it more precisely, saying that "there is no detailed blueprint, only a set of laws with an inbuilt facility for making interesting things happen".⁴⁸ This was also Einstein's way of thinking when he remarked that the Lord was "subtle" <raffiniert>, but not "malicious".⁴⁹ So, we may conclude: when we gaze into the starry sky, we see God's creation, as theists believe, or, as pantheists (including myself) might say, we stand "face-to-face" to *Deus sive natura*. And that's why we indeed have to include this greatest view into our "Museum of Natural History" – we must *remember the sublimity of the sky* which inspired our ancestors with awe and wonder, and which may be the distant future of *homo sapiens*.

Translated by Peter Lukan

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5. Santayana, G. (1955), *The Sense of Beauty*. New York: Random House.

⁴⁸ Davies, p. 202.

⁴⁹ See also: Uršič 2006, p. 276.

6. Santayana, G. (1957), *Winds of Doctrine & Platonism and the Spiritual Life*. New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers.
7. Uršič, M. (2006), "Einstein on Religion and Science", *Synthesis Philosophica* 42, Vol. 21, Fasc. 2, pp. 267–283 (also online, in the author's homepage: <http://www2.arnes.si/~mursic3/>).

HACIA UNA HISTORIA NATURAL DEL DAÑO DESDE SEBALD A KANT

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La cultura contemporánea – en la literatura, en las artes plásticas, en la filosofía — ha ejercitado una peculiar inflexión cuando ha realizado el trabajo del daño con el que, en los últimos decenios, las sociedades se han enfrentado a los males de la destrucción, de la guerra, de la desposesión y la violencia. Esa inflexión propone que, para anclar la experiencia del daño en el tiempo y en la particularidad de las acciones, nuestra percepción se ilumina y se aclara al pasar por un momento de regreso a la naturaleza; propone que el daño, paradójicamente, muestra su rostro humano, su aterrador rostro negativo, al “re-naturalizarse”. Esta idea de una historia natural del daño, de las maneras en las sufrimos y ejercitamos los males antes dichos, no es obvia: la naturaleza, la primera naturaleza de las piedras y de las plantas, se rige por leyes necesarias en las que no cabe la imputación moral. ¿Cómo, entonces, regresar a la naturaleza, a la historia natural, para pensar la historia del daño? Esta paradójica propuesta propone una manera de comprender la vida moral en la historia que cuestiona la barrera absoluta entre el reino de la libertad, en el que no hay necesidad, y el reino de la naturaleza, donde mora la determinación causal, que trazaron las ilustraciones leibniziana y kantiana. Estas tensiones paradójicas operan en el concepto de historia natural de dos maneras diferentes y se han expresado en dos tradiciones de problemas. La primera conforma una posición sobre las categorías filosóficas –determinación y libertad— que acabo de emplear. La segunda abre la cuestión de una mirada sobre la naturaleza como la que aporta la ciencia. La primera forma filosófica de entender el concepto de historia natural es la que empleó Adorno, tras los pasos de Benjamin, en los años treinta del pasado siglo. Se centra en el choque –dialéctico decía

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él—entre los conceptos de naturaleza e historia y propone y requiere, entonces, modificar la manera de pensar y de acercarnos a la experiencia¹. Ese concepto rompe las barreras conceptuales entre el reino de la naturaleza y la libertad y reaparece el programa tardío de la primera Escuela de Frankfurt. Adorno, ya en el ciclo de pensamiento de *Dialéctica Negativa*, en los años sesenta, siguió cuestionando las relaciones entre naturaleza y libertad tal como aparecían en el pensamiento ilustrado, a la vez reconociéndoles su inevitabilidad y resistiéndose a ellas².

Esta primera propuesta puede hacerse más turbadora si añadimos a la tensión ínsita en la idea de una historia natural el pensarla específicamente como el lugar en el que pensar el daño. Si atendemos a los daños que sufrimos y que infligimos, su negatividad o bien queda subsumida como un mal necesario en un mayor e invisible plan de la naturaleza (así en Kant), o bien, sin él, nos desarbola casi sin forma alguna de poderlo pensar. Si los daños no obtienen su sentido en un relato de una historia, si no salvífica al menos salvadora, ¿cómo pensar su negatividad que repudiamos? Porque solemos pensar que las cosas son inocentes y que, por el contrario, sólo las acciones de los seres humanos, cuando pueden ser diferentes a como son, cuando pudieron ser diferentes a como fueron, las acciones de la segunda naturaleza de los seres humanos, son objetos posibles de la imputación moral de considerarlas dañinas. Pero ¿cómo proponer, entonces, que para hacernos comprensible el daño, al menos para alcanzar la forma de comprensión que permita pensar en su trabajo y en oponernos a él, hemos de volverlo naturaleza, hemos de regresar a la naturaleza?

¹ Adorno, T.W. (1984), “The Idea of Natural History”, *Telos*, vol. 60 (Summer, 1984) pp. 111–124. Cfr. el detallado comentario de Pensky, M., (2004), “Natural History: the life and afterlife of a concept in Adorno”, *Critical Horizons*, 5, 1 (2004), pp. 227–258. La prehistoria del concepto en Benjamin ha sido estudiada por: Buck-Morss, S. (1977), *The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin and the Frankfurt Institute*. New York: The Free Press, y en (1989), *The Dialectics of Seeing. Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press. Hanssen, B. (1998), *Walter Benjamin's Other History*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

² Adorno, T.W. (1975), *Dialéctica Negativa* (trad. J.M. Ripalda). Madrid: Taurus, pp. 211–296; Schröder, T. (ed.) (2000), *Problems of Moral Philosophy* (trad. de R. Livingstone). Cambridge: Polity Press; Tiedemann, R. (2001), *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* (trad. de R. Livingstone). Cambridge: Polity Press. Cfr. Tafalla, M. (2003), *Theodor W. Adorno. Una filosofía de la memoria*. Barcelona: Herder.

Pero, en segundo lugar, hay, incluso, algo todavía más inquietante en la idea de una historia natural del daño, y a ello apunta la segunda manera, una manera científicamente re-naturalizadora, de entender el sentido de una propuesta que la quiera emplear. El daño se nos presenta en la experiencia como el tejido de voces y posiciones —víctimas, victimarios, jueces, curadores— que colaboran en su trabajo. La idea de historia natural en su segunda versión aporta un pliegue especial a ese conjunto de voces y posiciones de experiencia: indica que las experiencias del daño requieren también la voz en tercera persona, aquella en la que adoptamos la posición de decir “así aconteció aquello”; esa perspectiva objetiva es la que se expresa, no sólo, pero paradigmáticamente, en la ciencia. ¿Cómo se hacen compatibles la autoridad de la experiencia en primera persona, que habla de lo vivido, pensado, sentido, de lo personalmente sufrido, con la perspectiva en tercera persona que parece establecer sus enunciados con independencia del sujeto?

No abordaré estas preguntas de manera directa. Me empezaré fijando, más bien, en el trabajo de G.W. Sebald, que ha hecho explícita la tesis de la re-naturalización del daño y la ha puesto en práctica en sus novelas y ensayos. Lo que sugeriré es que la obra de Sebald muestra un peculiar entrecruzamiento de las dos maneras de entender la historia natural, que se encuentra él mismo elaborando una posición, en el campo específico de una poética del daño, que requiere de esas dos formas de entenderla. Ello servirá para atender a una cuestión relevante para la comprensión del pasado como historia natural: siguiendo a Sebald, cabe pensar algunos daños —en su caso, el de los bombardeos bélicos sobre poblaciones civiles— como parte de un ciego mecanismo de destrucción dotado de una fuerza imparable de aniquilamiento y devastación. Pero, en el último epígrafe, dando un paso de distancia con respecto a Sebald, me detendré en una interpretación filosófica que intenta dar una explicación sistemática de cómo entender la idea de una historia natural del daño, atendiendo a su dimensión temporal del futuro. Mi propuesta será que una lectura de Kant —la que interpreta el imperativo categórico como la forma de aquella acción que la contempla como si hubiera de ser una ley de la naturaleza— resulta iluminadora. Querré entender cómo la idea de la necesidad práctica —la que anida en la propuesta del “nunca más” que

elevamos ante el daño—es la manera de superar las fronteras, ya borrosas, de la necesidad natural y de la posibilidad de la libertad.

El potente universo narrativo de Sebald — *Los emigrados*, *Los anillos de Saturno*, *Vértigo* y *Austerlitz* — está escrito en una intersección de géneros; acude también, como Alexander Kluge³, a la palabra y a la imagen. En esa prosa, reflexiva e intermediática, se entretajan también voces y perspectivas diversas. Ese tejido de voces – encarnados en personajes que interrogan, que buscan, que refieren a otros — es una necesidad para que el trabajo del daño pueda llegar a realizarse: el daño, el más opaco de los objetos, la más compleja de las experiencias, requiere la concurrencia de voces y de perspectivas para llegar a ser nombrado y para que pueda realizarse el trabajo sobre él. Esas voces ponen en práctica distintas autoridades – lo que es adecuado llamar las respectivas autoridades en primera, en segunda y en tercera persona. Son testigos que, en primera persona, relatan sus trayectorias y sus vidas; son interpeladores, que en segunda persona, cuestionan. Son enunciados y análisis que, en tercera persona, describen y definen los daños. Estas perspectivas y las voces remiten a los espacios y los lugares desde los que hablan; las autoridades que las diversas voces ponen en ejercicio parecen apoyarse en la autoridad o en el privilegio de perspectiva que les dota el lugar desde el que hablan, relatan o enuncian. Destacan entre ese privilegio de los lugares, que confieren autoridades diferenciales, lo que, por emplear los términos de Kluge, se llaman la perspectiva “desde arriba” y la perspectiva “desde abajo”.

Sebald toma de Kluge la meditación que en la obra de éste se ejercita sobre las diferencias entre esas dos formas de ver. Kluge las empleó en su

³ Un análisis del carácter intermediático de Kluge, cuya obra marca fuertemente los trabajos de Sebald, puede verse en Malkmus, B. (2009), “Intermediality and the Topography of Memory in Alexander Kluge”, *New German Critique*, 107 (Summer 2009), pp. 231–252. Cfr. Jameson, F. (1968), “On Negt and Kluge”, *October* 64 (1968), pp. 151–177. Para el contexto de Kluge, cfr. Langston, R. (2008), “The Work of Art as Theory of Work: Relationality in the Works of Weiss and Negt & Kluge”, *The Germanic Review*, 83, 3 (Summer 2008), pp. 195–216.

relato sobre los bombardeos sobre Halberstadt⁴ al que Sebald dedica una especial atención. El contraste entre la perspectiva del bombardero y la de quien sufre sus efectos aparecen visualmente también en su película *Die Patriotin (La patriota)* de 1979 como parte de la indagación que la protagonista hace sobre la historia alemana (una tarea imposible, sostiene, hasta que no se tenga lúcida cuenta de lo que es hacer la historia misma en el presente)⁵. Sebald acude con frecuencia a la topología del “ver desde arriba” en varias de sus obras al mencionar qué vemos, qué sentimos, desde la altura de determinados edificios⁶. Esa perspectiva está marcada por ser tanto una distancia que permite, o que constituye objetividad como un alejamiento que genera extrañeza, si no extrañamiento. Esta tensión entre la objetividad y el extrañamiento es el marco en el que operan las discusiones sobre la perspectiva de la historia natural.

Si traigo a colación el extrañamiento es porque la mirada “desde arriba” tiene problemáticas cercanías a un postulado frankfurtiano, cuyo peso ambiguo va a tener importancia en lo que diré: en el centro de la *Dialéctica de la Ilustración* de Adorno y Horkheimer estaba la crítica a la forma de la objetivación de la experiencia y de alienación que producía la razón instrumental. En grandes segmentos del trabajo de la Escuela de Frankfurt se analiza cómo la razón instrumental comparte el punto de vista objetivo (pensado ya como objetivante) de la ciencia, al menos de una ciencia que en su autocomprensión positivista declara irracionales y fantasmáticas todas las otras formas del espíritu. Una inflexión especial

⁴ Este relato, (2008) *Der Luftangriff auf Halberstadt am 8. April 1945*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, escrito a comienzos de los 70, es analizado por Sebald en *Historia natural de la destrucción* (citaré por la edición inglesa: (2003), *On the Natural History of Destruction*. Londres: Penguin, como NHD y la página; en este caso, pp. 61 ss.). Este relato ha sido también analizado por otros críticos, como Huyssen, A. (1995), *Twilight Memories: Making Time in a Culture of Amnesia*. Nueva York: Routledge, y Schlant, E. (1999), *The Language of Silence. West German Literature and the Holocaust*. Nueva York: Routledge, pp. 65 ss.

⁵ Kluge empezó la contraposición de perspectivas en su ensayo teórico con Negt, O. (1993), *Public sphere and experience*, (ed. M Hanssen). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. Ese mismo contraste se desarrolla más elaboradamente en Negt, O. y Kluge, A. (1981), *Geschichte und eigensinn*, 3 vols. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp. Cfr. el ensayo de Fredric Jameson citado en n. 3.

⁶ Por ejemplo, en (2001), *Vértigo* (Barcelona: Debate, p. 94), en el relato “All’estero”, se imbrican la parálisis de la memoria inmediata con la visión de la ciudad de Milán, entre la niebla, vista desde la galería más alta de la catedral. En (2002), *Austerlitz* (Barcelona: Anagrama, pp. 275–280) se analiza la topología de alturas de la Biblioteca Nacional de París, relacionándola con las formas de conocimiento.

de esta es la objetivación misma del trabajo y de la organización social, lo que Kluge denominará “la organización social de la felicidad”. El supuesto teórico de estas críticas es que la razón instrumental y la ciencia, la eficacia y el control burocrático y sistémico se ejercitan desde la asunción del punto vista en tercera persona. Desde ese supuesto, la objetividad conlleva el extrañamiento de la experiencia. Sería, estrictamente, lo opuesto a la actitud en primera persona con la que participamos activamente en el mundo de la vida. Acudir a la perspectiva “desde arriba”, en tercera persona, parecería alejarnos de aquella que, en su opuesto, tendrían las víctimas, como las de los bombardeos en el relato de Kluge. Podría, así, pensarse —como hicieron, de maneras diversas, la Escuela de Frankfurt y Heidegger— que lo se pudiera quizá ganar con el relato objetivo del daño, en la perspectiva en tercera persona, es antitético de lo que un relato personal, o subjetivo, puede suministrarnos. Nunca el testimonio de lo vivido por las víctimas o el relato de nuestra propia existencia se puede reducir a lo que ven quienes dejan caer sobre nosotros los daños que sufrimos; solemos, por el contrario, presentar esas perspectivas como opuestas y antitéticas.

Pero esa sospecha, que permanece aún con una seductora potencia en el pensamiento crítico hasta nuestros días, es a la larga insostenible. La perspectiva en tercera persona, la mirada “desde arriba”, y por fuertemente que nos atraiga la metáfora al identificarse con la de los bombardeos sobre las ciudades que destruyen, no equivale o no ha equivaler a la perspectiva del victimario. Ni siempre fue así ni ha de serlo, como el mismo programa de la historia natural propone. No siempre la objetividad es destrucción de la experiencia. También la perspectiva en tercera persona, porque busca objetividad y la realiza, abre espacios de experiencia. No sólo se los abre al espectador concernedo o a quien, pasado el tiempo del daño, realiza su trabajo; se los abre, quizá ante todo, a las víctimas mismas, como diré. Esa perspectiva tiene un efecto iluminador, con frecuencia terapéutico, sobre la experiencia del daño: puede ayudar a ponerle nombre y cifra, puede romper la barrera de silencio o de impotencia para describir y aprehender el sufrimiento. Por eso es posible sugerir que no sólo en Sebald, sino también incluso en Kluge, cuando la perspectiva “desde arriba” es el lugar del extrañamiento lo es porque también es la perspectiva de la objetividad, de una objetividad o de una

búsqueda de ella que produce extrañeza que también conlleva un conocimiento sin el cual el daño quedaría en una parte esencial innombrado. Quizá cabe decir más: produce conocimiento, un conocimiento necesario, porque produce extrañeza.

No es, tal vez, la extrañeza que produce, como una ruptura y un choque, la práctica de la historia natural en Benjamin y que teoriza Adorno, pero tiene muchos puntos de conexión con ella y de ella recupera muchas estrategias, como el constante uso intermediático de fotos o diagramas de objetos, de plantas, de animales, de ruinas. Los marca, ciertamente, como Benjamin insistía en su estudio sobre el drama barroco⁷, con la huella de lo que pasa y muere. Por eso, a la vez, ver las acciones como parte de la historia natural es asignarles el carácter mortal de lo que decae, de lo que es transitorio⁸. No sólo está esta marca de lo que se desvanece y pasa; también, plegado sobre ella, está el más inquietante diagnóstico de Benjamin, que tan fuertemente marcó el pensamiento de la teoría crítica, de que todo monumento de civilización lo es, también, de barbarie. Esta idea no surge tanto de la decadencia de los significados al verlos como parte del mundo natural, cuanto de una de sus consecuencias: precisamente porque podemos verlos en ese mundo, descubrimos que lo que pretendía ser esfuerzo de civilización puede ser descrito como origen de una barbarie que es su resultado.

Esas ideas están, ciertamente, en Sebald. Mas cabe también sostener que la extrañeza de la experiencia que comporta el mirar “desde arriba” aporta una forma de conocimiento, o una búsqueda de él, que impulsa e inquieta: la pregunta por cómo fue posible la lógica mortal de los bombardeos, al igual que la más radical pregunta por cómo se desencadenó el Holocausto, añaden un pliegue al horror de la destrucción, pero permiten también mirarla de cara. El carácter fáctico de lo que es verdadero —así son las cosas, así fueron— es lo que permite romper con que lo que antes tomábamos por tal y que él demuestra ya errado. A Sebald, como veremos en seguida, le desasosiegan las incapacidades alemanas para comprender la experiencia de los bombardeos aliados sobre la población civil, y el carácter objetivo del relato del daño que aporta la perspectiva

⁷ Benjamin, W. (1990), *El origen del drama barroco alemán* (trad. J. Muñoz). Madrid: Taurus.

⁸ Pensky, op. cit., p. 231

de la historia natural muestra, precisamente, lo falso, o lo inarticulado, que anida en esas incapacidades.

Aunque Sebald no acuda de manera explícita a la idea de historia natural que elaboraron Benjamin y Adorno, sino que recurra a las ideas del primatólogo y científico Solly Zuckermann, a quien podríamos tomar como representante de la interpretación alternativa de la idea de historia natural, las huellas de aquella herencia están peculiarmente presentes, aunque quizá escondidas⁹. Kluge la asume de forma más explícita. Ver los resultados de las acciones humanas sometidas al dictado de la decadencia, convertirse en ruinas, parece arrancarlas de estatuto de aquello que el sujeto puede reconocer como suyo, de lo que puede recordar. Nuestro saber de la naturaleza no requiere de memoria y el proceso de deshumanizar es el proceso del olvido; la decadencia, el pasar de las cosas, es la “marca del olvido del sufrimiento que constituye los materiales del tiempo histórico”¹⁰. La idea de un trabajo de la memoria contra ese olvido, de una reminiscencia explícita y críticamente realizada, encuentra en la negatividad de lo olvidado el motivo de su propia tarea: sobre todo, abre la posibilidad de un sujeto que hace algo —rememorar, criticar el olvido— y que, al hacerlo, es resistencia. Por eso, Sebald reitera ese trabajo: esta memoria, más bien esta rememoración, es la tarea de encontrar un significado en las cosas que las muestre como huellas y como emblemas del daño. Es como si debiéramos naturalizar el daño, ver sus resultados como objetos, como cosas, para, a la vez, resistirnos a dejarles en ese estatuto de amoralidad. Mas sólo podemos hacer esto último si insistimos en lo primero: sólo podemos re-significar si antes hemos des-significado como aquello que no fue comprendido. Sólo podemos entender un fragmento de historia si lo vemos, primero, como algo objetivamente yerto, como un fragmento de la naturaleza, cósicamente inocente. Sólo podemos reconocer el daño si antes lo hemos visto, extrañadamente, con las mismas marcas de la destrucción natural. E, inversamente, lo que ya tomábamos como naturaleza decaída, como

⁹ Hutchinson, B. (2009), *W.G. Sebald – Die dialektische Imagination*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, analiza con detalle esas huellas, sobre todo en lo que tiene que ver con las técnicas narrativas y el estilo de Sebald. Cfr., especialmente, para los efectos de lo que aquí se busca, pp. 145–171.

¹⁰ Pensky, op. cit., p.243.

restos o como objetos (fósiles, ruinas, sepulcros) puede ser re-significado. Estos movimientos de olvido y de remoración, de extrañamiento y de re-significación, que acontecen en la idea de historia natural tienen, quizá, un inquietante pliegue de ambigüedad y permiten ser leídos de maneras diversas. Pueden enmarcarse en un proyecto —de nuevo, barroco, en la interpretación de Benjamin— de melancolía o pueden también entenderse como una forma de resistencia a ella.

La interpretación de la obra de Sebald que ha hecho la crítica literaria ha insistido más en lo primero¹¹. En general, su diagnóstico es que la perspectiva de la historia natural no deja, al cabo, lugar alguno para la subjetividad. En estas críticas vemos a Sebald como a la mujer de Lot, quien quedó convertida en estatua de sal al volver el rostro para contemplar la destrucción de Sodoma. La mirada, fascinanda, hacia el pasado visto como destrucción puede tener el efecto de cosificar el gesto de regreso a la historia natural. Estas críticas ven más a Sebald como un ejemplo de un síndrome de memoria incompleta, o incluso prisionera de sus propias imposibilidades, que como un ejercicio de crítica. El escritor es ubicado como un ejemplo señalado de las dificultades de la memoria alemana, cuya marca melancólica queda especialmente subrayada. Sin negarles su verdad, que tiene una fuerte apoyatura textual, quisiera sospechar que en Sebald hay algo también de resistencia a esa dificultad de la memoria y a sus embrujos. Lo que quizá es posible acentuar es que, en el ámbito de la compleja constelación de la memoria alemana y de sus traumas, Sebald esboza un quiebro especial de resistencia: porque parte de lo que considera algunos callejones sin salida de los anteriores esfuerzos de rememoración, esboza un programa estético que apunta a una dirección de salida, quizá porque no haya melancolía cumplida que no contenga un momento de resistencia a ella misma. Cabe, en efecto,

¹¹ Fritzsche, P. (2006), "W.G. Sebald's Twentieth-Century Histories", en: *W-G- Sebald. History. Memory. Trauma*, (S. Denham y M. McCulloh eds.). Berlin: Walter de Gruyter; Morgan, P. (2005), "The Sign of Saturn. Melancholy, Homelessness and Apocalypse in W.G. Sebald's Prose Narratives", *German Life and Letters* 58:1 (January 2005), pp. 1468–0483 (online); Huyssen, A. (2001), "On Rewritings and New Beginnings: W.G. Sebald and the Literature about the Luftkrieg." *Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik*, 124 (2001), pp. 72–90; Ilseman, M. (2006), "Going Astray: Melancholy, Natural History, and the image of Exile in W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*", en: *W-G- Sebald. History. Memory. Trauma*, (S. Denham y M. McCulloh eds.). Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, pp. 301–314.

la posibilidad, una posibilidad, por así llamarla, terapéutica o crítica de que la historia natural del daño esté dirigida no tanto a los actores del pasado, como si fuese una exigencia no cumplida por ellos, una tarea que no podían llegar nunca alcanzar (dada su ciega condición de víctimas o de victimarios), sino que esté dirigida a nosotros, a las generaciones siguientes, que deben acudir a ella para comprender el trayecto que hasta nosotros ha conducido. Esa perspectiva nos ilumina al mostrar la necesidad de la ceguera de quienes, en el pasado, vivieron el daño, o su inevitabilidad, una ceguera que, por el contrario, no nos está permitida ya a nosotros respecto a aquellos hechos.

A los efectos de lo que comencé preguntando —cómo pensar el daño en los términos de la naturaleza—, parece adecuado fijarse en *Sobre la historia natural de la destrucción*, más que en la narrativa de Sebald. En ese texto se analizan los bombardeos aliados de las ciudades alemanas y las dificultades y limitaciones que mostraron los testigos y los escritores alemanes para dar cuenta de lo que estaba sucediendo¹². A pesar de sus detalladas indagaciones y de la precisa búsqueda de fuentes y de testimonios, que constituyen el primer capítulo de *Historia Natural de la Destrucción* y que concluye con las referencias a Solly Zuckerman, el ensayo de Sebald no tiene como objetivo una reconstrucción histórica o descriptiva ni es un acta de las ruinas; su búsqueda de objetividad y de precisión pretende un efecto sobre el presente: es más bien un ajuste de cuentas con la tradición intelectual alemana que tiene un tono a la vez acusador y programático, algo que se desarrolla en el segundo y tercer capítulos de ese ensayo. El segundo concluye con la reflexión —casi en simetría invertida con el final del primero— sobre la perspectiva de Benjamin sobre el aterrado ángel de la historia y con la manera en la que esa concepción de la historia natural se sigue de la obra de Kluge.

¹² *NHD*, op. cit. en nota 5. (2005), “Between History and Natural Destruction”, *Campo Santo*. Londres: Penguin. Estas ediciones póstumas de Sebald son diferentes en las recopilaciones alemana, inglesa y española. Citaré, como indiqué, por las versiones inglesas.

Al revolverse críticamente contra la tradición literaria alemana, o contra parte de ella, al establecer una posición de confrontación con las generaciones anteriores, su trabajo se inscribe en el espíritu epocal del trabajo de la memoria sobre el daño. Sebald pertenece a la generación de alemanes insatisfechos con la conspiración del silencio, como él la llama, que echó un manto de ocultación sobre la época nazi y que empieza a quebrar en los años sesenta. Ese silencio le genera una ambivalente relación con Alemania, una ambivalencia de pertenencia, la de sentirse incumbido por la historia ocultada, pero desde una incomodidad ante las maneras en las que, inicialmente en silencio, luego con voces que él considerará torpes y problemáticas, se iba definiendo el presente a la luz del pasado¹³. Su obra nace de esa incomodidad y de ese desencuentro y los atractores de su obra narrativa —el viaje, la búsqueda, la indagación— son la figura de su propio proceso de escritura. Pero los viajes, el conocimiento y la memoria, están llenos de obstáculos. Ni es fácil querer recordar, ni fácil el saberlo hacer. El silencio es el primero de esos obstáculos. También la historia del recuerdo del Holocausto en las voces de sus víctimas, un relato que llega hasta ahora mismo, es un accidentado camino de silencios, de osadías y de reconocimientos que va haciendo insustituible la importancia de las voces que se esfuerzan en hablar y en ser escuchadas. Con ello parece también haberse asentado con fuerza una idea: a la hora de definir el daño, la voz de la víctima tiene un especial privilegio. Sólo esa voz puede, ante el silencio, reiterar machaconamente “ese daño (me) fue hecho” y sólo ella puede desmontar el atrincheramiento protector del verdugo, y más cuando éste salió victorioso. Sólo la víctima puede poner en el centro de la experiencia la negatividad del daño. Por eso, son las voces de aquellas víctimas, como las del Holocausto, de las dictaduras sudamericanas o de la violencia del apartheid, las que han ido jalonando, entre tartamudeos y silencios, entre resistencias y reconocimientos, la certeza y la percepción del daño que se han ido acumulando desde las últimas décadas del siglo veinte.

¹³ Pueden hallarse estas y otras referencias biográficas en las conversaciones y entrevistas con Sebald recogidas en Schwartz, L.S. (ed.)(2007), *The Emergence of Memory: Conversations with W.G. Sebald*. Nueva York: Seven Stories Press.

Identifiqué antes los testimonios de las víctimas con la perspectiva en primera persona y siguiendo las sugerencias topológicas y epistémicas de Kluge y de Sebald con la mirada “desde abajo”. Frente a ella, la perspectiva “desde arriba” quedaba ligada —y esa era una de las intuiciones centrales de la idea de historia natural— a la tercera persona. Ésta, a su vez, tiene una relación directa, como dije, con la que practica la ciencia. Pero cabe argumentar, también, que la tercera persona, que es la que vehicula la búsqueda de la objetividad no está, no obstante, ausente del testimonio de las víctimas. Cuando la víctima indica “*este* daño (me) fue hecho” está, precisamente, indicando una realidad objetiva. Refiere tanto a una experiencia como a un hecho —un hecho en una experiencia vivida, y no sólo el hecho de que fuera vivida por ella. Hay un sutil equilibrio entre ambas cosas: la realidad de la vivencia experimentada y la realidad del daño realizado. No podemos privilegiar la primera sobre la segunda; sin ella, la experiencia puede someterse a todo tipo de sospechas; las que nacen del victimismo, por ejemplo. La voz en primera persona —y ese es el sentido del paréntesis en la expresión que he empleado: “este daño (*me*) fue hecho”—se dobla, se refuerza, con la verdad (que puede ser sometida a las contrastaciones, reinterpretaciones necesarias y oportunas para validarla) de la realidad del daño. Las condiciones de la enunciación, desde el contexto en el que ocurre a aquel en el que es recibida, son cruciales. Las voces de las víctimas y de los victimarios se enfrentan, precisamente, en ese terreno. Pero parecen, entonces, reclamar un espacio —una nueva posición epistémica en la topología del daño— de resolución. De hecho, las voces de las víctimas no están tanto dirigidas a los victimarios (aunque también) cuanto a un público que, como el espectador concernido, puede atenderlas (o, por el contrario, silenciarlas). Esa apelación transmite una doble fuerza: la de la primera persona que denuncia y que se hace presente como objeto del daño realizado (que un daño *le* fue infligido) y la de la tercera persona que reclama la objetividad de esa herida.

Puede ser oportuno detenerse un momento para esbozar una reflexión sistemática sobre lo que está teóricamente en juego para comprender

la lógica de devastación de los bombardeos y lo de ella puede aclarar la perspectiva en tercera persona. Sebald indaga esa peculiar fuerza imparabable de la destrucción acudiendo a algunas de sus claves: el dominio de los mandos de las fuerzas área sobre la estrategia de la guerra o, de acuerdo con los testigos, el carácter de algunos de esos mandos que parecían obstinados en una acción que sólo buscaba la destrucción por la destrucción misma¹⁴. Pero quizá sea descaminado entender esa obstinación en términos de patologías individuales. De manera más iluminadora, Elaine Scarry ha analizado el mecanismo de la guerra como una competición cuya regla es herir, dañar y cuyo objetivo es herir y dañar más que el oponente¹⁵. Tal caracterización —a la que podrían oponerse argumentos en una línea que indicara, por ejemplo, que el objetivo no es herir, sino defenderse o alcanzar la meta que se pretextó para el inicio de la contienda—no es novedosa; está en las definiciones de Clausewitz de que “el objetivo inmediato no es aquí conquistar el país enemigo ni destruir su ejército, sino simplemente causar un daño general” o de que ese objetivo es “incrementar el sufrimiento del enemigo”.¹⁶ El objetivo de la guerra es la destrucción misma; la mayor destrucción por parte del vencedor o la destrucción total del vencido.

Pero lo importante es el carácter autoreforzador del juego de la guerra que lo conduce a su final. Una vez puesto en marcha, su lógica es imparabable. Esa lógica interna de la guerra —la no detención de la destrucción hasta el final—se oculta con lo que cabe llamar su lógica externa, la que antes de la guerra, y después de ella, conforma las razones y se expresa con las intenciones aducidas que llevaron a ella o explica cómo tuvo que desarrollarse. Elaine Scarry, en su indagación sobre las formas del herir, del deshacer el mundo de las víctimas señala las maneras en las que esta segunda lógica de las intenciones oculta la realidad de la primera lógica de destrucción. En ello, sostiene Scarry, la guerra y la tortura se vuelven a parecer a pesar de sus diferencias. Ambas ocultan lo que hacen, lo que realizan: el daño del cuerpo, la destrucción de los cuerpos; ambas se apropian de los atributos del dolor, pero lo niegan¹⁷. Pero parecería,

¹⁴ *NHD*, pp.,19, 65.

¹⁵ Scarry, E., *The Body in pain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 60–157.

¹⁶ Scarry, op. cit, p. 65.

¹⁷ Op.cit., p. 139.

entonces, que lo que de imparable tiene la lógica de la guerra —la imposibilidad de detener la maquinaria de la destrucción— no obedece a las pautas de la lógica de la interpretación, o de las interpretaciones, de lo que lo que es o en ella ocurre, sino a una ciega necesidad de aquel alcanzar, contra los esfuerzos del enemigo que simétricamente busca lo mismo, la destrucción del contrario. Ese ejercicio parece poseer, por el carácter no visible de su lógica de competición a muerte, la fuerza de lo imparable. A diferencia de otras competiciones que permiten abandonarlas y regresar a ellas, o que se reiteran con cierta periodicidad, la competición autoreforzante de la guerra, su inevitabilidad, se apoya sobre la razón de que

su resultado lleva consigo el poder de su propio refuerzo; el ganador puede poner en práctica sus objetivos porque quien pierde no tiene el poder para reiniciar la batalla, no tiene la posibilidad ulterior [...] de cuestionar la naturaleza de la competición, su resultado o las consecuencias políticas de éste [...] [U]no de los participantes no volverá a tener la capacidad de desarrollar esa actividad.¹⁸

Los ejércitos son el mecanismo institucional para que eso acontezca; su misma estructura parece estar diseñada para llevar a cabo acciones cuyo significado puede no ser visto porque, se dice, tiene otras funciones: la paz o la defensa de ella. Tampoco desde abajo, desde la perspectiva de los soldados (como la que adopta el relato que enuncia una rodilla de un soldado herido en la película *Die Patriotin* de Kluge), se ve el sentido del proceso; su ceguera refuerza también la lógica mortal del juego. Si los estrategas no ven el sentido de esa lógica por causa de su misma puesta en ejercicio (y no son irrelevantes consideraciones económicas, como la rentabilidad de las inversiones, que llevan a establecer constricciones sobre lo que es posible hacer o lo que es imposible detener¹⁹), los soldados tampoco tienen la perspectiva necesaria y sólo poseen el dolor de sus heridas y una fiera voluntad de supervivencia. Por eso, sería una grave confusión pensar que los desastres de la guerra

¹⁸ Op. cit. p. 96.

¹⁹ En *NHD*, pp. 65 s., Sebald recoge un testimonio, a su vez recuperado por Kluge, de un piloto inglés que las bombas arrojadas sobre las ciudades eran demasiado costosas como para desperdiciarlas soltándolas sobre los campos o las montañas.

son producidos por una casualidad o por la imprevisibilidad de los accidentes, o que se producen por una falta de moralidad de las personas combatientes, quienes se dejarían llevar, sin contención, por la lógica de la destrucción de un enemigo inmediato ante él. Nada de eso explicaría la masiva puesta en marcha de los ingentes recursos necesarios en las guerras modernas o los cálculos de la eficacia de los recursos invertidos, ni explicaría el sistemático ocultamiento no ya de sus efectos sino de sus procedimientos. Todos esos recursos están diseñados para el ejercicio masivo de la destrucción que tiene que ser ciega —tiene que ser tan ciega como una fuerza de la naturaleza— a su propia intencionalidad. Tiene incluso que ser oculta para sus actores inmediatos, los soldados o los pilotos que bombardean las ciudades que les han sido asignadas como. La guerra tiene que, a la vez, presentarse como necesidad humana —de defensa, de protección— y negarse como la forma de necesidad que no se permite reposo hasta conseguir que el juego llegue a su fin.

Sebald, que conoce a Scarry, pues la cita a otros efectos, no formula ningún juicio moral sobre esta lógica, pero en su su poética se contiene una respuesta a la pregunta que nos hacíamos antes de cómo puede una mirada naturalizada ser, precisamente, moral. Pero la ausencia de tal juicio moral explícito no hace que la descripción que realiza, o la lectura que de ella podemos hacer, quede inmune a la dimensión moral de lo que se relata. Más bien —y esta es la tesis de la estética de Sebald, la marca explícita de la perspectiva de la historia natural que atiende a la objetualidad, a la coseidad de las huellas del daño— llegar a dar cuenta precisa de lo acontecido es el camino para cualquier consideración moral que, quizá por su radicalidad y su importancia, debe asumir un papel más central, aunque más oculto, pues, de lo contrario, y si se quiere poner en primer plano, la total magnitud del desastre puede, paradójicamente, impedirlo ver. Aprender una lección moral de los desastres implica, ante todo, darles la exacta, precisa, dimensión que tienen.

La inferencia de una propuesta como la de Sebald es que para poder emitir, cuando necesario sea, un juicio moral, o mejor, para mostrarlo y hacer patentes sus efectos, es oportuno ocultarlo o no presuponerlo a priori, no darlo por descontado de antemano. De esa manera, los hechos mismos, y ciertamente su presentación —la subrayada objetualidad de lo hecho y de lo que se hace— abren las puertas a un juicio que sólo el

lector, que sólo el espectador concernido, puede realizar: esa es su tarea y su responsabilidad. La moralización, por el contrario, es el mayor obstáculo en nuestra percepción del desastre, de la misma manera en que se interpone otro obstáculo paralelo, el de la incapacidad de precisar, cuando se acuden a los escasos relatos de los supervivientes de los bombardeos. Sebald indaga sus silencios y la torpeza de sus relatos, que con frecuencia acuden a clichés, para encontrar un camino de salida. Y, con partisanas excepciones —parcialmente a Nossack, a Kluge²⁰—, acusará, precisamente, a la generación de literatos alemanes que escribieron en la postguerra de incapacidad de ver y de incapacidad de describir.

Frente a ello, y como indiqué, la primera parte de *Historia Natural de la Destrucción*, dedicada al acopio de los datos de los bombardeos sobre Alemania, concluía con una referencia a Solly Zuckerman. Es esa primera parte la que acentúa la perspectiva desde arriba, mientras que la segunda muestra las dificultades que tiene la perspectiva desde abajo y a la que he hecho referencia en el párrafo anterior. Contra lo que pudiera parecer, dada la historia alemana inmediata del concepto de historia natural en Benjamin y Adorno, (¿o quizá para ocultarla? ¿Con qué sentidos y con qué efectos?), Sebald indica que el título “Historia natural de la destrucción” que él toma procede, originalmente, de una idea de Solly Zuckerman. En su autobiografía, a la que en diversos momentos acude Sebald, Zuckerman relata que Cyril Conolly, entonces editor de la revista mensual *Horizon*, la única que aún sostenía una reflexión crítica en el Reino Unido en los años de la guerra, le solicitó una colaboración para dar cuenta de su desasosiego ante la devastación que había visto en Aachen tras los bombardeos. Conolly le sugirió el título de “La historia natural de la destrucción”, pero Zuckerman no pudo escribir ese texto, relata, porque “mi primera vista de Colonia, y especialmente de su catedral, exigía a gritos una pieza más elocuente de lo que yo podría nunca escribir”²¹. El adjetivo “natural” en la idea de historia natural po-

²⁰ Véase, (2005), “Between History and Natural History”, *Campo Santo*. Londres: Penguin, 2005, pp.68–101.

²¹ Sebald recoge, en al comienzo *NHD* el intenso debate que tuvo lugar en el Reino Unido en 1941 sobre los bombardeos. Sebald adopta la perspectiva de Solly Zuckerman ((1988) *From Apes to Warlords*. Londres: Collins) que se opuso que los bombardeos tuviesen el objetivo de destruir moralmente al adversario. Cfr. También: Snow, C.P. (1961), *Science and Government*. Cambridge,

dría reflejar su peculiar mirada de científico que se aplica —con estudios estadísticos sobre el impacto de las bombas, con estudios de la fuerza de los impactos sobre los cuerpos— a la lógica destructiva de la guerra. Pero podemos vislumbrar —y en su autobiografía hay diversas muestras de ello, quizá algunas exculpatorias— que él mismo quedó moralmente afectado al ver, “desde abajo” lo que él tan eficazmente había colaborado a organizar “desde arriba”.

Diversos elementos están presentes en su desasosiego, algunos de los cuales pueden ser relevantes para el significado que él podría haber atribuido a la idea de una historia natural de la destrucción. Señalaré dos: en primer lugar, lo que Zuckerman percibe es que, con frecuencia, como sucede con los mandos aliados encargados de la maquinaria aérea inmediatamente concernida con los bombardeos, la ciega voluntad o determinación de la destrucción por medio de las bombas no les permitía percibir la ineficacia de sus actos; la ceguera a una consideración objetiva de la mejor manera de detener la maquinaria bélica alemana (Zuckerman proponía, contra la posición dominante en la R.A.F., la destrucción de los sistemas de transporte) parecía obedecer a una fuerza vital —a una voluntad sin percepción— que caminaba imparable. Lo que Zuckerman parece decir es, entonces, que una distancia objetivante, a diferencia de la mera voluntad, es condición de la eficacia en la consecución de los fines bélicamente propuestos. Desde otra perspectiva, Zuckerman parece coincidir, entonces, con los análisis de Scarry: la invisibilidad de la lógica de la destrucción en la guerra. En segundo lugar, el desasosiego moral de Zuckerman parece, peculiarmente, acendrarse cuanto mayor es su perspectiva objetiva sobre los efectos destructores. A mayor objetividad, mayor desasosiego, parece estarnos diciendo, como cuando al final del primer volumen de su autobiografía, recuerda a Tácito: “cuando crean devastación, lo llaman paz”²².

Mass.: Harvard University Press. Para entender el contexto en el Zuckerman planteó el papel del científico en la política, puede verse la biografía de Peyton, J. (2001), *A Scientist out of the Ordinary (Solly Zuckerman)*. Londres: John Murray. La cita del texto es de Zuckerman, op. cit., p. 322. Tras su visita a Berlín, y contemplar su devastación, Zuckerman vuelve a lamentar no haber escrito ese artículo (ob. cit., p. 328).

²² Zuckerman, op. cit., p. 364.

No podemos calibrar todos los sentidos del choque emocional de Zuckerman. Sí podemos saber, no obstante, qué puede intentar el mismo Sebald apropiándose de su rúbrica de “Historia Natural de la Destrucción”. Quizá, en primer lugar, califica la necesidad de una mirada externa, y extrañada, sobre la destrucción que podía verse. Sólo los escritores exilados parecían poder percibir a su regreso cuánta desolación quedaba como herencia del Tercer Reich, sólo la mirada extranjera de los periodistas fue la capaz de describir, con la precisión deseada, la acumulación de ruinas entre las que paseaban, a veces indiferentes, a veces como fantasmas, casi siempre ciegos, los supervivientes. Tanto la destrucción física como la destrucción humana son, a ojos de estos visitantes, como hechos y sucesos de la naturaleza. No es la mirada interior, la nublada mirada de aquellos fantasmas, ni la mirada sentimentalmente opaca y densa de los escritores, sino la mirada exterior y extrañada la que practica, la que puede practicar, esa exigente naturalidad. Mas aún, incluso, es una mirada natural, naturalizada, sobre la destrucción misma, como si lo que hace la ya ciega mano humana nos hiciera regresar a la naturaleza misma, a su incógnita finalidad.

El concepto de naturaleza que parece estar jugando aquí a la vez restringe de ella toda intencionalidad, pero la dota, paradójicamente, de todo significado. En ese punto se entrecruzan las dos formas de historia natural, la mirada que descende de Benjamin y la que había practicado Zuckerman. La ciega naturaleza es el prisma para contemplar nuestras acciones que se desvelan con aquella misma ceguera. Esa fuerza natural no es tanto física cuanto biológica, la resistencia a desaparecer de la fuerza misma de la vida que parece encarnarse en la voluntad; en la voluntad de destruir y en la voluntad de sobrevivir. Este tenso naturalismo (un naturalismo aterrado ante las heridas, como el Zuckerman) a la vez reclama objetividad y se duele de ella. El retrato de las cosas, tal vez porque hace patente la inocencia de los objetos, clama el tamaño de la destrucción. Este reclamo de la absoluta cosificación de todo —de las huellas materiales del daño— requiere una forma de enfoque que, precisamente por su dificultad, convierte la precisión de lo que describimos y contamos en una tarea cargada de responsabilidad. De forma explícita, Sebald recoge una reflexión de Canetti a propósito del diario del Dr. Hachiya de Hiroshima en el sentido de que quizá la única forma de dar

cuenta de qué es sobrevivir en tal catástrofe es por medio de un texto “notable por su precisión y su responsabilidad”²³.

Cabe preguntarse si esa responsable precisión no se opone, precisamente, a la fuerza, también natural, de sobrevivir a la destrucción, como aquellas hierbas y flores que, tras las temperaturas infernales, y al calor de las ruinas, empezaron a nacer entre los escombros de las ciudades destruidas. ¿No será este imperativo, ciego, de la vida, la forma más clara de declarar inútil la tarea de la rememoración? ¿Por qué recordar si hay que vivir? Probablemente estas preguntas, que no son de Sebald sino mías, no tengan respuesta, o la tengan negativa —no hay que recordar— en el momento mismo de la catástrofe. Sólo tienen sentido, y además como interrogante moral, después, lo suficientemente después, cuando aquella experiencia de destrucción se descubre con significado para alguien: para Sebald, para nosotros, que encontramos en ella —y en el silencio que la acompañó— un motivo de inquietud. Sólo tienen sentido desde una peculiar forma de mirada “desde arriba” que no es la del extrañamiento, sino la de una extrañeza que dé cuerpo a la imposibilidad de reconocernos reconciliados con el daño. Es esta una objetividad que no desconoce el significado de la destrucción, sino que es capaz de ver lo que no vieron ni los que la iniciaron ni los que la sufrieron. Es un naturalismo que no excluye, sino que incrementa y acendra, el horror de la experiencia. Y lo incrementa, además, porque aquella fuerza ciega de la vida que, para poder ser pospuso la memoria, ciega también su sentido y olvida cómo colaboró ella misma a formas anteriores de devastación. La fuerza ciega de la supervivencia es paralela, en su olvido, en su falta de concepto, a la voluntad ciega que produjo la destrucción.

¿Pero en dónde nos sitúa este horror, esta negatividad que se vive y se percibe físicamente? ¿Cuál es su sentido? El trabajo de la memoria que abre la historia natural sólo tiene sentido porque esa mirada no nos convierte en estatuas de sal por haber vuelto el rostro a contemplar la devastación del fuego divino de lo que dejamos atrás, porque el desasosiego que produce lo visto no impide el camino, aunque sea de huida.

²³ *NHD*, p. 53.

Las últimas preguntas no se refieren sólo, entonces, a una historia natural del daño que mira hacia el pasado. Más bien anclan en el presente, en el presente mismo de la crítica y de su recepción, lo que la historia natural ha dejado ver. Lo hacen porque eso que hemos visto no se ha desligado de un desasosiego que, para resolverse, ha de mirar hacia el futuro. El horror de la devastación puede, ciertamente, entenderse bajo la rúbrica de aquella mirada, entre Benjamin y Adorno, que declara barrocamente la transitoriedad, lo pasajero y lo desvanecido de lo que ha acontecido: *Ya* nunca más aquello será recuperado. Pero he indicado, también, que el horror de la devastación surge del choque de perspectivas —la del espectador desde arriba, la de la experiencia a pie de tierra— que ha hecho posible la historia natural misma. La ciega voluntad, que crea las ruinas y es motivo del terror que ante ella nos surge, parece abrir otro sentido de ese mismo “nunca más”: aquel que, con mayor coraje, se presenta en forma imperativa y añade signos de exclamación: “¡Nunca más!”. Pero, de nuevo, ¿qué sentido tiene esta exclamación exigente? ¿Quién la enuncia y a quién compromete?

El mayor problema al que se enfrenta esta pregunta por el sentido del imperativo —que acumula a la vez una protesta y una determinación—, el primero que habrá que despejar, es que se ha tendido a pensar, apresuradamente, en términos de esperanza o de confianza. Sebald, en su comentario de Kluge con el que finaliza el segundo capítulo de *Historia natural de la destrucción*²⁴, y a pesar de que éste, “el más ilustrado de los escritores”, considera que “un entendimiento adecuado de las catástrofes (...) es un primer requisito de la organización de la felicidad”, se pregunta:

¿No será la destrucción una prueba irrefutable de que las catástrofes que crecen, por así decirlo, en nuestras manos y que parecen explotar de repente son un tipo de experimento que anticipan el momento en que abandonaremos todo lo que hemos pensado, durante tanto tiempo, que era nuestra historia autónoma y regresaremos a la historia de la naturaleza?²⁵

²⁴ NHD, p. 64 ss.

²⁵ NHD, p. 67.

Sebald sospecha, pues, que los textos de Kluge no contienen —o no podrían ni deberían contener— tanto una promesa de confianza, sino la serena desesperación que se contiene en las *Tesis de la filosofía de la historia* de Benjamin, en la que el ángel de la historia contempla aterrado la pila de ruinas que se amontona ante él.

Pero la catástrofe de la que nos habla Sebald, y por mucho que hubiera de ser descrita en tales términos de des-esperanza, si no desesperación, o quizá, precisamente, por eso, no está inmune a la imputación de responsabilidad. Precisamente, porque podemos ser imputables por ella, nos desasosiega, como a Zuckerman, y nos interpela: los lectores, los ciudadanos del presente que han seguido la lección de la historia natural, somos partes implicadas. Sebald dice que la catástrofe “crece en nuestras manos” y la pregunta que parecería poderse sólo responder con la frialdad lúcida del desangeliamento arrastra también un ulterior cuestionamiento sobre lo que nuestras manos hacen o no hacen, sobre lo que pueden hacer o no pueden hacer, para que esa catástrofe crezca o no crezca, aunque sea sin el abrigo de la esperanza. La devastación narrada abre la posibilidad de la acción y la requiere. Creo que la manera en que ese interrogante está en Sebald es —tal vez como le corresponde a un escritor y a un crítico—, precisamente, la formulación de su terapéutica poética de la precisión. Que su obra literaria, no obstante, formule esa poética en el marco recurrente de la melancolía —y que eso sea lo que induce el diagnóstico de que permanece atrapado en el pasado— no nos evita a los lectores, a cuya reflexión nos fue sometida como propuesta, la pregunta por nuestro propio presente. La inestable inferencia que estoy intentando sugerir es que la desazón moral que suscitan la historia natural y un exigente contexto histórico —precisamente el contexto en el que se formula la propuesta— nos requieren a los lectores, a los destinatarios de la reflexión, intentar responder al sentido del imperativo categórico de que el daño no se repita. El problema es que, en los términos en los que se viene presentando, ese posible rendimiento de la idea de historia natural no acaba por poderse plantear: no tanto la falta de esperanza, sino el concepto mismo de naturaleza empleado, impiden hacerle lugar a un “¡nunca más!” re-naturalizado. Es necesario, estimo, salir en parte de esos términos sin perder, no obstante, lo que pudiéramos haber aprendido en el viaje.

Lo que hay que preguntar es el sentido de la acción que produce o no produce destrucción, que reincide en dañar o que evita el daño. Adorno lo formuló en los términos del nuevo imperativo de que Auschwitz no se repitiera, que no se repitiera nada semejante²⁶. A la propuesta de Adorno le subyace la absoluta negatividad de una experiencia —la experiencia del Holocausto— que aparece como un hecho que es toda la fundamentación posible para el rechazo de lo vivido en ella; ese hecho se proyecta en un tipo —evitar lo que es semejante a Auschwitz—, como la necesidad de una nueva acción, la que evite la reiteración de lo que típicamente aquello fue un caso²⁷.

Quisiera formular el sentido del imperativo categórico del “¡nunca más!” combatiendo, por así decirlo, en dos frentes: por una parte, es necesario hacerle un lugar al rechazo del mecanismo natural de devastación en el seno mismo de la naturaleza; eso implica oponerse a una concepción dualista que separa naturaleza y libertad, ubicando la libertad en la naturaleza. Por otra parte, es necesario pensar la naturaleza en términos que la permitan acoger los ejercicios de la libertad, las formas de su negación concreta de los daños²⁸. Si el primer frente requiere una interpretación distinta de Kant (distinta de la comunmente aceptada, distinta también, quizá, de la autocomprensión de su proyecto por el mismo Kant), el segundo frente requiere, por su parte, una crítica a la propuesta de Adorno. Éste concebía el reino de la naturaleza en términos de una causalidad, de una forma de determinación, que no puede hacerle lugar al sentido de exigencia y de determinación que contiene el nuevo imperativo. En los términos de Adorno, se hace quizá imposible pensar el rechazo del daño como parte de la misma naturaleza. Esos términos indican, por ejemplo, que “[l]a causalidad es objetiva y subjetivamente el hechizo de la naturaleza dominada [...] La causalidad es simplemente la naturalidad bárbara del hombre, que éste continúa como causalidad

²⁶ Adorno, *Dialéctica Negativa*, op. cit., p. 365.

²⁷ Cfr. M. Tafalla, op. cit., quien desgana los sentidos de estas nociones de experiencia y de negatividad.

²⁸ “Sólo hay una forma de comprender la libertad: en negaciones concretas, a partir de la figura concreta de lo se le opone” indica Adorno en *Dialéctica Negativa*, op. cit., p. 230.

sobre la naturaleza”²⁹. Esta noción de causalidad —y la idea de naturaleza que conlleva— no permite pensar el sentido que tiene el “¡nunca más!”.

El coste de rechazar la noción de causalidad —aunque sea por el expediente de llamarla idealista, de hacerla víctima del principio de identidad del idealismo— es que la historia natural de la destrucción que nos hizo vislumbrar, aterrado, Zuckerman, la historia natural que parte de la objetividad de la ciencia, queda cercenada, como quedaría condenada la conciencia moral que surge del desasosiego que ese relato objetivo provoca³⁰. Si, por una parte, es necesario despojarle a la libertad del aura de algo sublime e innombrable que la hace incompatible con el mundo de la experiencia, por otro es necesario dejar de pensar la naturaleza y la causalidad como si fueran un espacio en el que no cabe el repudio de nuestros daños. Por eso, creo que cabe argumentar, *pace* Adorno, que precisamente porque las acciones humanas pueden ser vistas como ciega causalidad estrictamente natural, porque pueden ser objeto de la mirada de la ciencia, pueden *también* ser objeto de rechazo y el contenido del nuevo imperativo moral. Este, ciertamente, no mirará ya sólo “desde fuera” o “desde arriba” aquellas acciones: por el contrario, adoptará también la perspectiva “desde dentro” o “desde abajo” de quien sufre y de quien actúa. Tal vez lo importante de lo que vengo sugiriendo es que no es la mera “naturalidad bárbara” del ser humano la que hace devastadora a la naturaleza; es la naturaleza, con su ciegas fuerzas de vitalidad y de destrucción, que se hace visible y presente en la acción, la que permite que la acción y el juicio repudien el daño. Pero, entonces, la pregunta de cómo puede pensarse el rechazo del daño en términos también naturales —en una naturalidad del presente y del futuro— vuelve a plantearse y si cabe con más urgencia. Por indicarlo, precisamente, en el terreno en el que Adorno lo sitúa, y por escandaloso que pudiera parecer, cabe pensar que incluso en los términos estrictos de Kant no es imposible concebir una relación directa, conceptualmente directa, entre naturaleza y libertad.

²⁹ Adorno, *Dialéctica negativa*, op. cit., pp. 267 s.

³⁰ “La conciencia moral es el estigma de infamia que arrastra la sociedad sin libertad” nos dice en *Dialéctica Negativa*, op. cit., p. 273.

John Rawls ha presentado una explicación e interpretación del imperativo categórico partiendo —lo que no es frecuente— de la formulación llamada de la ley de la naturaleza³¹. Es interesante recoger la manera en la que Kant introduce esta formulación porque, estimo, va al centro del problema que estamos planteando. En la *Fundamentación*, tras introducir la idea general de que el imperativo es único —“obra sólo según la máxima a través de la cual puedas querer al mismo tiempo que se convierta en ley universal”³², Kant indica:

Dado que la universalidad de la ley según la cual suceden efectos constituye lo que se llama propiamente *naturaleza* [...], esto es, la existencia de las cosas en tanto que está determinada según leyes universales, tenemos que el imperativo universal del deber también podría rezar así: *obra como si la máxima de tu acción fuese a convertirse por tu voluntad en una ley universal de la naturaleza*.³³

Rawls reconstruye el sentido de esta fórmula indicando que el agente, que adopta ante sí mismo una actitud universalizadora, se plantea la hipótesis de que todos harían algo como si una ley de la naturaleza se tratara (“como si tal ley nos hubiera sido implantada por instinto natural”, dice exactamente Rawls³⁴); en un paso ulterior, esta nueva ley de la naturaleza así propuesta se concibe en relación conjunta con otras leyes de la naturaleza y el agente (estrictamente, todos los agentes de consuno) pondera cómo pudiera ser un mundo natural así re-configurado que Rawls propone que llamemos “un mundo social ajustado”. El sentido, pues, de la fórmula es determinarnos a que nuestra acción, por su voluntad, quede en acuerdo con ese mundo social ajustado que ponderemos como racionalmente aceptable —en la medida en que podamos conducir tal experimento mental, por así llamarlo. Si no podemos pensar coherentemente ese mundo o si no podemos ajustar nuestra voluntad para que suceda, nuestra máxima, la propuesta subjetiva que hacíamos de nuestros actos —indica Rawls que dice Kant— no será una máxima moral.

³¹ Rawls, J. (2000), *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy* (ed. Barbara Herman). Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, pp. 162–180. No seguiré el detalle de la reconstrucción de lo que Rawls denomina “el procedimiento del I(mperativo) C(ategórico).

³² Kant, op. cit., p. 173.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Rawls, op. cit., p. 168.

La propuesta de interpretación de Rawls no tiene menos problemas —tiene quizá los mismos y algunos más— que lo que indica la letra de Kant. Pero tal vez presente una sugerencia iluminadora a lo que venía planteando. Pensemos esta fórmula del imperativo en términos del daño. La historia natural del daño indicaba, en aquella parte de ella que mira hacia el pasado, que la voluntad ciega forma parte de la naturaleza y que la destrucción y la devastación que produce, y precisamente porque puede ser objeto de imputación moral, produce un horror —una desazón, un desasosiego— por su negatividad; por ello mismo, esa misma historia natural debería hacerle un lugar al nuevo imperativo categórico, negativo y experiencial, por decirlo en los términos de Adorno, del repudio del daño. La sugerencia de Kant sería ahora interpretada como diciéndonos: imagina un mundo social ajustado en el que aquel daño —y el tipo que ejemplifica— se diera ciegamente, como ley de la naturaleza; imagina un mundo social en el que ciegamente —con voluntad ciega— no hubiera esa devastación. Si podemos imaginarlo y deseirlo, si podemos concebirlo y hemos de proponernos realizarlo, tu máxima se ajustará a la gramática correcta de la moralidad. Lo que esta interpretación nos sugiere, entonces, es que hay que invertir el sentido (no la dirección, que marca el daño, sino su sentido) de la ciega voluntad: si mirando hacia el pasado sólo percibimos la estela de devastación que apila escombros ante nuestra mirada, una destrucción que ha provocado nuestra ciega voluntad de destrucción, una voluntad opuesta —que podemos pensar igualmente ciega— construirá, y se piensa capaz de construir, un mundo en el que aquella devastación ya no ocurra. Con este contraste de direcciones en el ejercicio de la voluntad, la idea de historia natural aparece como una contraposición entre la ciega voluntad que daña y algo distinto —la necesidad práctica— del “¡nunca más!” que surge, por su parte, del acendrado desasosiego que nos produce aquella ceguera y aquella voluntad. Eso es una forma de contraponer un voluntad sin conocimiento y un conocimiento tal vez difícil de alcanzar, una insatisfacción del conocimiento mismo, que deseáramos —y eso sería la moralidad— que rigiera nuestra voluntad.

Así interpretada —y, de nuevo, con independencia de otras muchas cuestiones que es necesario discutir con respecto a la ética de Kant, especialmente la de la confianza en el resultado de todo ello— la propu-

esta no está lejana, tal vez, de la que he desgranado al hilo de Sebald: dice que habrá de hacerse aquella acción o aquel tipo de acciones cuyos resultados pudiéramos aceptar si las vemos en forma de hechos naturales; e, idénticamente, que habrían de rechazarse aquellas otras que, vistas igualmente, pudieran parecernos repudiables. Tal vez, entonces, no haya distancia absoluta entre moralidad y naturaleza, entre la inocencia de las plantas y las piedras y la inmoralidad de las acciones. Ello no sería sólo en el momento de la destrucción, sino también en el momento de concebir qué puede hacerse para evitarla, porque, al cabo, lo que los humanos hacemos es, si es intramundano y no teológico, parte de la naturaleza, de una naturaleza que contiene, también la libertad. Tal vez es más comprensible verlo así que establecer una barrera, que siempre parece pertrecharnos de inocencias, entre naturaleza y moralidad.

A B S T R A C T S

David Kleinberg-Levin

Natural history: Reflections on its representation in the twentieth century museum

By way of a reflection on the Museum of Natural History in New York, in which I compare the Museum I knew as a child to the Museum as it is today, I draw on Foucault's early work, "Les Mots et les Choses" to shed light on a changing conception of natural history that is historically significant enough to justify being called a "paradigm shift". The shift has taken place on a number of different axes or dimensions, above all in regard to the mortification of animal life, the place of the human species in nature and evolutionary history, the representation of relations among the different races and ethnicities, the relation between the museum visitor and the exhibitions, and the responsibility, hence the role, of the museum in relation to the community it principally serves. This essay accordingly shows how, in the course of its history, the natural history museum has continued to be at the forefront of bold and provocative thinking about the nature of the human species.

David Kolb

Outside and in: Hegel on natural history

For Hegel, nature embodies the necessary structures described in his Logic, but spread out in space, the realm of externality. Human culture, on the other hand, develops by a complex process of internalizing its history through time. But this way of reading a Matter/Spirit dichotomy is too straightforward. For nature includes its own modes of internalization and its own kind of external recapitulation. Hegel knew that the face of the earth had been shaped by long-term geological processes that can be read in the current formations. If rocks and hills have a temporal dimension, what about current natural kinds and the fossils found in those rocks? Though Hegel rejected the theories of evolution current in his day, he had room for a historical unfolding of the Idea of Nature.

Jason Wirth

Mass extinction: Schelling and natural history

This is a reflection on the concept of “natural history” in the thinking of F.W.J. Schelling, the originator of Naturphilosophie. I further contextualize my discussion to include a serious consideration of mass extinction events in general and the current, sixth great extinction in particular. What does Schelling’s conception of natural history give us to think in light of the human originated great ruin of biotic communities? I will argue that Schelling invites us not merely to produce practical solutions, but to think the problem in light of a radical retrieval of the question of nature.

Key words: Schelling, the question of nature, natural history, mass extinction, the sixth great extinction

Max Pensky

Three kinds of ruin: Heidegger, Benjamin, Sebald

The ruined building is a site where natural history emerges as a dialectical construction: abandoned and shattered, the ruin becomes saturated with meaning, a site for allegorical projection, an incitement for moral ambitions, and a theme for discourses of collective memory. While a discourse as old as European modernity deals with this construction as a form of moral catechism, the experience of the ruined European city in the 20th century generates new forms of this modern discourse. In this paper, three distinct variants of the natural history of ruin are discussed. Heidegger seeks to interrupt or evacuate the natural history of ruin by means of a pastoral philosophy that makes ruin impossible; Walter Benjamin’s analyses of the physiognomy of the big city attempt a form of post-subjective dialectics in which ruin becomes omnipresent, even independently of the experience of ruin; finally, W.G. Sebald’s prose explorations of abandoned buildings, despite their literary beauty, return to the earlier moral catechism that, ironically, he believes the war experience had rendered suspect.

François Raffoul

Heidegger and the aporia of history

It is striking to note that when the question of history first emerged in Heidegger's path of thinking, namely in the 1915 essay, "The Concept of Time in Historical Science," it was in contrast with and in opposition to the motif of nature and natural sciences; as if history in its proper being could only be accessed from such a break with nature, an "other" of history that nonetheless will continue to haunt Heidegger's conceptualization of history: History remains in a relation to nature as to a non or pre-historical ground that both threatens it and makes it possible. I will follow this aporia, from its first articulation in the 1915 lecture through Heidegger's overcoming of the epistemological horizon of the question, and the eventual subordination of nature under historical time in "Being and Time", finally making forays in texts from the thirties on the notion of earth.

Françoise Dastur

Nature et historicité

On a coutume dans la pensée moderne d'opposer la nature, domaine de la répétition éternelle des mêmes phénomènes, à l'histoire, lieu de l'inventivité et du progrès humain. Les théories de l'évolution de Lamarck à Darwin ont commencé à rendre problématique une telle opposition. C'est à partir de ces théories que, dans la biologie moderne, l'accent a été mis sur la nécessaire relation de l'organisme vivant à son environnement et sur le caractère processuel, en devenir constant, de celui-ci.

On se propose, en prenant d'abord pour référence la conception de « l'élan vital » que Bergson développe dans *L'évolution créatrice* (1907), puis les réflexions que Heidegger a consacrées à la question du vivant dans son cours de 1929/30 (GA 29/30) et celles que Merleau-Ponty a consacrées à la question de l'animalité dans *La Structure du comportement* et dans ses cours du Collège de France, de se demander, à partir des travaux de Spemann, de Boveri et de von Uexküll, s'il ne faut pas attribuer aux êtres vivants une historicité qui leur serait spécifique.

Glen Mazis

"Each authentically embodied step is the walk of natural history"

This essay explores the way in which Maurice Merleau-Ponty reconfigured the relationship between human being and the natural world on the basis of his

analysis of perception and the key role of embodiment in changing the sense of meaning itself, the centrality of the subject, and the nature of time. In turn, these shifts in philosophical perspective will change the status of natural history from a discipline examining the beings with whom we are in a cause and effect relationship and with whom we share a long history of interaction to a study of the depths of human time in another sense of time embedded within the natural world and to an extended sense of our own embodiment in the depths of the natural world, and in particular, to an extended sense of our own animality. Given Merleau-Ponty's idea of depth as the unity of impossibles, time's depth will be seen to contain the dehiscent sense of geological time as a past immediately present without intermediary; and the depth of human embodiment will be seen to be an inter-animality that signifies we are co-perceivers with creaturely beings.

Dennis J. Schmidt

On soil and soul: The philosophical question of the garden

The idea of the garden represents the idea of a quite distinct place: neither wild nature, nor simply a human product. It is always a collaboration, a middle ground, that escapes the usual categories of nature and art that, since Aristotle, we have used to categorize the appearances in our world. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the philosophical significance of the garden. More precisely, its purpose is to ask what sense of the nature and what sense of the self is set to work in the garden. The claim is that the question of the garden is, in the end, a question that asks how we are to live in a world not of our own making. Kant and German Romanticism are taken as making interesting and productive suggestions as to how the garden might be thought in such a context of concerns.

Ted Toadvine

The entomological difference: On the intuitions of hymenoptera

Philosophers have frequently drawn examples and metaphors from the insect world, with honeybees occupying a privileged position as analogues of human community and intelligence. At stake in the appropriation of the hive as an ambivalent double of human society is less the nature of insects than the contestation of our own nature, and especially our relation with nature writ large. This tradition, already apparent in classical authors such as Aristotle and Vergil, finds its twentieth-century continuation in the writings of Maurice Maeterlinck, Henri Bergson, Jakob von Uexküll, Max Scheler, and Martin Heidegger. Tracing the philosophi-

cal appropriations of the figure of the bee through these authors, we confront the irreconcilability of human and bee perspectives, the relation between instinct and intelligence, and the problem of whether the bee has a “world.” The bee’s resistance to our transposition and appropriation discloses the Janus-faced character of invitation and refusal that constitute our inter-animality. This suggests an apian phenomenology that gathers scientific and poetic resources for a becoming-bee and celebrates the heterogeneous multiplicity of the real.

Marko Uršič

Starry sky as »the greatest museum of natural history«: sublimity of the sky from Kant to Santayana and beyond

Immanuel Kant, beside Edmund Burke, introduced the term “sublime” <das Erhabene> in his aesthetic considerations of nature. In *The Critique of Judgment* (1790), Kant distinguished between the concepts of beautiful and sublime, and defined two kinds of sublimity, “mathematical” and “dynamical”, namely relating to the overwhelming greatness and might of an object, respectively. The starry sky is “mathematically sublime” at the utmost sense; an example of “dynamical sublimity” is a stormy ocean. – George Santayana in his book *The Sense of Beauty* (1896) considered the beauty and sublimity of the sky in a rather different manner, as an “infinite smoothness” of the “blue void”, and as the most perfect “diversity” of constellations in the “uniqueness” of vision and mind which “senses” this utmost sublimity in nature. – This paper has two principal aims: 1. to compare Kant’s and Santayana’s “aesthetic” visions of the starry sky; 2. to consider whether and in what sense these two visions are relevant for modern cosmology.

Key words: Kant, Santayana, beauty, sublimity, cosmology.

Carlos Thiebaut

For a natural history of harm: Looking back from Sebald to Kant

The idea of a non-metaphysical approach to the question of harm (naming it and facing it) can receive support from the perspective of natural history not only in addressing the inhumanity of past harms, but also in understanding and responding to the moral claim in the cry of “never again!” that these harms elicit. The essay focuses, first, on G. W. Sebald’s texts, especially his *Natural History of Destruction*, in order to comprehend how two distinct conceptions of natural histo-

ry—one deriving from Benjamin and Adorno, the other from Solly Zuckerman’s scientific approach—intertwine in the understanding of past harms. The essay then reflects on the “never again” that such an understanding calls for and argues that it requires moving beyond both these theoretical frames. A new reading of the categorical imperative, in Kant’s formulation of the “law of nature”, is accordingly suggested as a better theoretical approach to confronting the inhumanity of harm and addressing the injustices and other forms of grievance that emerge from such harm.

P O L I G R A F I

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1. W. Halbfass, *India and Europe*. State Univ of New York, New York 1990, pp. 245–256.
2. W. Halbfass, op. cit., p. 55; cf. also n. 34.
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