

**From natura naturata to natura naturans:
Naturphilosophie and the Concept of Performing Nature**

**By
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In their introduction to a collection of essays in environmental philosophy, Bruce V. Foltz and Robert Frodeman claim that it is time to rethink nature and that today's commonly accepted use of the scientific understanding of the environment as the basis for environmental philosophy needs to be reexamined. Foltz and Frodeman wonder whether or not it is wise to link philosophical reflection about nature to the findings of the positive sciences whose results are notoriously subject to revision (see 4-5). Indeed, the deference to the findings and paradigms of the natural sciences within environmental circles is noteworthy and should be questioned critically. Most so-called interdisciplinary approaches to environmental problems take a scientific and problem-resolution framework. That may be satisfactory for narrowly conceived issues where immediate resolutions are sought for pressing problems, but as soon as larger cultural and historical concerns are addressed, a wider and deeper framework is needed such as embodied in philosophical reflection. Foltz and Frodeman turn to Heidegger and his claim that modern science is bound up with the modern project of the technological domination of nature (see 5) and, for that reason alone, cannot be idealized as a neutral model to guide our thinking of nature. According to Foltz and Frodeman, phenomenological models (such as Heidegger's ontology) provide a new and different "metaphysics" of nature in terms of offering a mode of reflection on the being of nature that shows itself and withholds itself (see 6). They could have easily turned to other contemporary critics of modernity such as Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno

who have also formulated a wide-scale critique of the process of enlightenment in the context of its collapse in fascist Europe and contemporary science's sell-out to models of dominating nature. I don't want to pursue either line of thinking in my essay but rather work through some alternative philosophical models of rethinking nature that were developed in response to Kant and that try to conceive of nature not solely in terms of its object status—as it is commonly viewed in scientific inquiries, but highlight its capacity for action and for a more subjective form of identity.

With Kant's Copernican turn, knowledge, action, and judgment were squarely placed within the constructive and synthetic faculty of the individual human intellect and its pursuit of freedom. After Kant, modern philosophy can no longer reconcile theoretical reason and rationality with an all-encompassing metaphysics. Moreover, practical reason is devoid of direct contact with communal conceptions of life. In fact, "modern thinking has relentlessly severed the making of aesthetic judgments from the imitation (*mimesis*) or figural representation of the natural object, from the expression of moral imperatives and the dictates of political engagement, as well as from preestablished identities and fixed determinations of the self" (De Vries 1). Kant's influential analytic of the sublime in his third critique models this type of critical thinking by placing the sublime not into natural objects (or by defining the sublime as a property of natural objects) but as residing in our ideas. Kant claims that:

[. . .] one immediately sees that we express ourselves on the whole incorrectly if we call some object of nature sublime, although we can quite correctly call very many of them beautiful; [. . .] We can say no more than that the object serves for the presentation of a sublimity that can be found in the mind; for what is

properly sublime cannot be contained in any sensible form, but concerns only ideas of reason [. . .]. (129)

Kant's transcendental critique seals modern philosophy's turn to a philosophy of subject, which has prompted many environmental critics to shun the tradition of German Idealism in their rethinking of the relationship between nature and the human world. In a companion piece to this paper I have presented a thorough analysis of the eco-critical positions that deal with nature and its presumed unproblematical existence vis a vis the constructionist position (working through Kant and his modern critics such as Theodor W. Adorno and Herbert Marcuse that present a dialectical model for rethinking nature in more active terms). In essence, dialectical conceptions of nature address both, the fact that nature "out there" really exists and the fact that it is always perceived through history and culture. A dialectical notion of nature highlights the historical, social, and cultural regimes that have produced what we call nature today without losing sight of the fact that there is a real object beyond these constructions—just not one we can ever hope to recover and that may not have existed in a primary state. In this paper I would like to present some philosophical positions from within the German tradition that have not had much currency in the English-speaking world. I am thinking of the tradition of *Naturphilosophie* that understood itself as a needed counterpart to Kant's critique of reason and develops further the thinking of natural objects outside of Kant's paradigm of transcendentalism. I claim that within German idealism there is a tradition of thinking about nature that embraces the idea of nature as active, as a subject-object that should be remembered when raising the issue of rethinking nature within a context of environmental philosophy. How this tradition

could be made fruitful for today's discussions will be one of the tasks of my contribution.

Early on in the discussion of environmental perspectives on culture, Carolyn Merchant made the claim, coming from an eco-feminist perspective, that the modern world emerged on the basis of a repression of pre-modern knowledge of nature as living organism:

In investigating the roots of our current environmental dilemma and its connections to science, technology, and the economy, we must reexamine the formation of a world view and a science that, by reconceptualizing reality as a machine rather than a living organism, sanctioned the domination of both nature and women. (xxi)

Merchant presents a detailed account of how, between 1500 and 1700 "the organic conception of the cosmos gave way to a mechanistic model" (42), how this mechanistic model was reinforced and how it accelerated the exploitation of nature (and women) (43), how from then on nature was manipulated by machine technology (68), and how a new mechanistic order mandated what she calls the "death of nature" (193):

The rise of mechanism laid the foundation for a new synthesis of the cosmos, society, and the human being, constructed as ordered systems of mechanical parts subject to governance by law and to the predictability through deductive reasoning. A new concept of the self as a rational master of the passions housed in a machinelike body began to replace the concept of the self as an integral part of a close-knit harmony of organic parts united to the cosmos and society.

Mechanism rendered nature effectively dead, inert, and manipulable from without. (Merchant 214)

Merchant claims, however, that the organic view of nature did not disappear entirely with the rise of mechanism, but that it was instead accommodated. She turns to the Cambridge Platonists of the 1650s and 1660s who advocated a wise use of nature so that its abundance would not be exhausted, a position that seems similar in many ways to today's managerial approach to ecology (see Merchant 252). This organismic perspective has remained as "an important underlying tension, surfacing in such variations as the Romantic reaction to the Enlightenment, American transcendentalism, the ideas of the German Naturphilosophen, the early philosophy of Karl Marx, the nineteenth century vitalists, and the work of Wilhelm Reich" (Merchant 288).

Others have pointed to a need of an environmental vision that imagines land as agent and have emphasized the erotic component of the relation between humans and the land. Gretchen Legler, for example, wishes to install nature with its own form of desire and, correctly, points to the fact that Cartesian objectivity rests on reason separated from the body (see 24). In that same vein, others have theorized a desire for ecology, a desire for belonging to networks of the land that stems from a loss of unity with the land (Campbell 135). How could we rethink nature and the environment as a process rather than as a constant or a given (see Buell, *The Environmental Imagination* 8) and how could we grant more agency to nature? Karla Armbruster and Kathleen R. Wallace encourage us to identify alternative threads in the history of literary and philosophical attitudes toward nature in the West, threads where nature is granted more agency (see 9) and where the environment is conceived as an active subject, as an epistemological category that organizes around itself otherwise unrelated disciplines

and acts as a mode of exercising power over real territories and lives that the environment also displaces (see Mazel, "American Literary Environmentalism" 143f). In order to frame these important questions in more philosophical depth I will first turn to a reading of the quintessential philosopher of nature within the German Idealist tradition, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, whose philosophy responds critically to Kant and who works contemporaneously with Hegel, his fellow classmate at the Tübingen seminary in the 1790s.

With a new English translation of the *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature* in print as of 2004, a milestone of philosophical thinking about nature within the German Idealist tradition has been made available again for an English-speaking readership. I will cite from that edition and, for those who are able to read Schelling in German, provide the original as well so that readers will be able to appreciate his unique style. Keith R. Petersen, in his translator's introduction to the volume, argues for a reevaluation of Schelling's philosophy of nature in light of current trends in evolutionary and developmental biology, cosmology, ecology, critical theory, and science studies (see Schelling, *First Outline* xi). For Petersen, Schelling's insights are indispensable for reconsidering a unified view of nature: "For Schelling, nature philosophy is not merely another 'representation' of a nature to which human beings maintain only a distant and instrumental relation. For him, the first postulate of philosophy must express the dynamic synthesis of self and world, subject and object, as an ontological unity from which both terms are derived" (Schelling *First Outline* xv). Indeed, in his *Naturphilosophie* Schelling posits a place for the philosophy of nature next to and on the same plane as transcendental philosophy, quasi as its necessary counterpart in which the ideal is shown as springing from the real. Firstly and most importantly, Schelling conceives of the whole of nature as an ever-becoming process:

The *whole* of Nature, not just *part* of it, should be equivalent to an ever-*becoming* product. Nature as a whole must be conceived in constant formation, and everything must engage in that universal process formation. Everything that *is* in Nature must be viewed as something having *already become*. *No material in nature is primitive.* (Schelling, *First Outline* 28)

Die ganze Natur, nicht etwa nur ein Theil derselben, soll einem immer werdenden Produkte gleich seyn. Die gesammte Natur also muß in beständiger Bildung begriffen seyn, und alles muß in jenen allgemeinen Bildungsproceß eingreifen. Alles, was in der Natur ist, muß angesehen werden als ein Gewordenes. Keine Materie der Natur ist primitiv. (Schelling, *Werke II*, 33)

Schelling philosophically confirms the notion of the historical constructedness of nature. Within the philosophical framework of German Idealism (and its inheritors) there is no such thing as a nature that simply exists “out there,” but we have to think of nature as a product of a process that is constantly in the making (see di Giovanni 197ff on the continuities between Kant’s metaphysics of nature and Schelling’s romantic theories). Likewise, there is no trans-historical frame of orientation. All knowledge (and that includes nature) is constructed historically.

Given these basic positions, Schelling situates himself squarely in a post-Kantian and post-Hegelian framework of modern philosophical thinking that departs with traditional metaphysics and conceptualizes its core concepts as without fathomable ground. Thus nature as well as the subject of modern philosophy become part of what Manfred Frank has called “the romantic reinterpretation of the subject as self-relation without fathomable ground” (*What is Neostructuralism* 147): “This experience that the

subject of modern philosophy experiences itself as not-being-ground-of-its-own-subsistence has never been more clearly articulated in modern times than in the thought of early romanticism, in the philosophy of Schelling [. . .] and of Fichte [. . .]” (Frank, *What is Neostructuralism* 192). Frank goes on to build an argument for a Schellingian understanding of the subject not in terms of self-relation and reflectivity but in terms of a pre-reflexive knowledge of itself. Frank claims that the familiarity that consciousness has with itself does not come from a relation of reflection as there would be no criterion for recognition:

Schelling addressed to Hegel the question of how it could be possible for the absolute spirit to recognize itself *as* itself at the end of its path leading to self-knowledge, if it had not already had some knowledge of itself: nothing would be able to recognize itself *as* itself if it did not have a criterion for its identification in the form of a preceding (and self-familiar) knowledge. (*What is Neostructuralism* 260).

This criterion can be found in a pre-reflexive and non-relational familiarity of the self with itself which stems—and here is the important connection to the topic of nature—from the essential unity of the human being and nature: “Each moment of self-relation knows itself by means of the act, through which it is present to itself as a part of the whole” (Frank, *What is Neostructuralism* 263). Thus “Naturphilosophie includes ourselves within nature, as part of an interrelated whole, which is structured in an ascending series of ‘potentials’ that contain a polar opposition within themselves” like a magnet “whose opposing poles are inseparable from each other, even though they are opposites” (entry on “Schelling” in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy).

Not only does Schelling conceive of nature as a product of a historical process over time and the subject and nature as emerging from a structure of interrelatedness, he also conceives of nature in terms of endless activity:

Thus we have deduced here what type of product that *product always in becoming* would have to be, whose necessity we have deduced from the concept of an infinite activity of nature. In it, that continual alternation of combining and decomposing processes will take place which we have demonstrated in Nature as universal and necessary. (Schelling, *First Outline* 33)

Hier hätten wir also deducirt, von welcher Art jenes immerwerdende Produkt, dessen Notwendigkeit wir aus dem Begriff einer unendlichhen Thätigkeit der Natur abgeleitet haben, seyn müsse. In demselben nämlich wird eben jener continuirliche Wechsel von combinirenden und decombinirenden Processen stattfinden, den wir als allgemein und nothwendig in der Natur demonstirt haben. (Schelling, *Werke II*, 40)

Endless activity drives the product that is always in becoming, i.e., nature, continually alternating between processes of composition and decomposition. Universal nature is a whole, living organism and every individual in nature is an expression of this whole—a prototypical maxim of ecological thinking. Schelling goes on to explain the different stages of development in detail that the activity of nature makes possible through formation and inhibition (see Frank, *Eine Einführung in Schellings Philosophie* for a more detailed elaboration of Schelling's philosophical system). What is important for us is that through the re-conceptualization of an active nature Schelling succeeds in transcending the standpoint of separation of self and nature and is able to think life in

nature as well as freedom in humanity (see also Petersen's introduction to Schelling in *First Outline* xx).

As opposed to Kant's transcendental philosophy, Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* wishes to deduct the ideal from the real. In Paragraph One of his "Introduction to the Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature, or, On the Concept of Speculative Physics and the Internal Organization of a System of Science" from 1799, Schelling defines: "What we call Philosophy of Nature is a Necessary Science in the System of Knowledge" (*First Outline* 193):

Now if it is the task of transcendental philosophy to subordinate the real to the ideal, it is, on the other hand, the task of the philosophy of nature to explain the ideal by the real. The two sciences are therefore but one science, differentiated only in the opposite orientation of their tasks. Moreover, as the two directions are not only equally possible, but equally necessary, the same necessity attaches to both in the system of knowledge. (Schelling, *First Outline* 194)

Wenn es nun Aufgabe der Transzendentalphilosophie ist, das Reelle dem Ideellen unterzuordnen, so ist es dagegen Aufgabe der Naturphilosophie, das Ideelle aus dem Reellen zu erklären: beide Wissenschaften sind als Eine, nur durch die entgegengesetzten Richtungen ihrer Aufgaben sich unterscheidende Wissenschaft; da ferner beide Richtungen nicht nur gleich möglich, sondern gleich nothwendig sind, so kommt auch beiden im System des Wissens gleiche Nothwendigkeit zu. (Schelling, *Werke II*, 272-3)

Transcendental philosophy and nature philosophy are two aspects within a philosophical system that Schelling calls "speculative physics" and they have to be

thought together. Within this system nature emerges as object as well as subject, as product as well as producer:

Insofar as we regard the totality of objects not merely as product, but at the same time necessarily as productive, it becomes *Nature* for us, and this *identity of the product and the productivity*, and this alone, is implied by the idea of nature, even in the ordinary use of language. *Nature* as a mere product (*natura naturata*) we call Nature as *object* (with this alone all empiricism deals). *Nature as productivity* (*natura naturans*) we call *Nature as subject* (with this alone all theory deals). (Schelling, *First Outline* 202)

Insofern wir das ganze der Objekte nicht bloß als Produkt, sondern nothwendig zugleich als produktiv setzen, erhebt es sich für uns zur Natur, und diese Identität des Produkts und der Produktivität, und nichts anderes, ist selbst im gemeinen Sprachgebrauch durch den Begriff der Natur bezeichnet. Die Natur als bloßes Product (*natura naturata*) nennen wir Natur als Objekt (auf diese allein geht alle Empirie). Die Natur als Produktivität (*natura naturans*) nennen wir Natur als Subjekt (auf diese allein geht alle Theorie). (Schelling, *Werke II*, 284).

The empirical sciences deal with nature as product; they adopt an attitude of domination and subjugation in their relation to nature, the object of their inquiry. Theory (i.e., philosophy) deals with the productive aspect of nature as subject and highlights the active role nature can play in creating reality. Both aspects, nature as pure identity and nature as self-object, need to be acknowledged since nature is always already intertwined with history.

Schelling explains this by giving the following example in a footnote:

A traveler in Italy makes the remark that the whole history of the world may be demonstrated on the great obelisk at Rome—so, likewise, in every product of Nature. Every mineral body is a fragment of the annals of the Earth. But what is the Earth?—Its history is interwoven with the history of the whole of Nature, and so passes from the fossil through the whole of inorganic and organic Nature, until it culminates in the history of the universe—one chain. (Schelling, *First Outline* 207 FN)

Ein Reisender nach Italien macht die Bemerkung, daß an dem großen Obelisk zu Rom die ganze Weltgeschichte sich demonstrieren läßt;--so an jedem Naturprodukt. Jeder Mineralkörper ist ein Fragment der Geschichtsbücher der Erde. Aber was ist die Erde?—Ihre Geschichte ist verflochten in die Geschichte der ganzen Natur, und so geht vom Fossil durch die ganze anorganische und organische Natur heraus bis zur Geschichte des Universums—Eine Kette. (Schelling, *Werke II*, 291)

Nature cannot be conceived as apart from history. Nature as subject has the capacity to produce and can be conceived as identical with itself. Nature as object splits this identity into a self-object relation. Schelling conceives of the essential duality of nature (as subject-object) thus explaining its conditioned and unconditioned state, its capacity of producing as well as its state as a product. In fact, it has been argued that “if the essence of nature is that it produces the subjectivity which enables it to understand itself, nature itself could be construed as a kind of ‘super-subject’” (entry on “Schelling” in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy). We can see that the potentials of Schelling’s philosophy of nature for a reconceptualization of the relationship between

nature and humans are vast. My intention of introducing this material into environmental criticism, however, is not necessarily to point to this body of knowledge that was conceived two hundred years ago and say: look, here we have a different—and better—understanding of environmental philosophy. We have to be cautious when importing ideas that are historically distant from us and have arisen in a network of discussions that we may or may not be fully aware of today. In fact, I don't think we can simply import conceptions from pre-modern times (as did Merchant) or from other cultures (such as indigenous knowledges as is frequently the case in disciplines like anthropology) without reflecting on that historical, geographic, and cultural difference. By the same token, Schelling's ideas about a philosophy of nature were conceived in a context that is absolutely modern and still valid for Western cultures today. We still live in a post-Kantian world and are still dealing with the challenges posed by his model of transcendental critique. A strong reformulation of the role of nature in environmental philosophy from within the tradition of German Idealism may come as a welcome corrective of radical subject positions (that is the attractive part of it).

To establish another contemporary context, I would like to discuss the ideas of another German philosopher who, some thirty years later, also responded critically to the philosophy of his time, mainly to Hegel, i.e., Arthur Schopenhauer. The environmental philosopher Max Oelschlaeger mentions Schopenhauer among others (including Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley, and Spinoza) in his chapter on the Romantic reaction to modernism and the emergence of the idealized notion of wild nature as oasis free of the ills of civilization (see 111). In that context, Oelschlaeger claims that in his philosophy Schopenhauer conceives of the natural world as irreducible to mere matter-in-motion, to an object status so to speak, and instead

follows Schelling in the idea of nature as organism (see 126ff). Oelschlaeger frames Schopenhauer as a critic of the metaphysics of modernism:

Schopenhauer believed that nature could not be reduced to either an infinite idea Dei or to Kantian-Newtonian categories. Alternatively, Schopenhauer recognized that *the idea* of nature-as-a-machine was precisely that—a human construction arbitrarily imposed on an independent or autonomous other. [. . .] The natural world was not just our idea of nature; it was alive and organic, subjective and striving, manifesting itself through a mysterious power Schopenhauer called *qualitas occulta*. This enigmatic power—which the individual could know directly and immediately—explained the animate qualities of nature. Scientific inquiry itself could never reveal the reality of the will (of the *qualitas occulta*) to the inquiring thinker [. . .]. (125-26).

In sum, similar concerns are addressed in Schopenhauer's philosophy than in Schelling's although, as is well known, at the center of Schopenhauer's world stands desire, the "will" as the inner content and driving force of the world. Schopenhauer's will exists prior to being, prior to subjects, prior to thought, and certainly also prior to nature (I will summarize Schopenhauer's argument in my critical discussion and then provide the relevant passage in German as citation). Discursive thought cannot transcend the nature of the will as it could in Kant's universe. But through will we can participate in the underlying reality that lies beyond mere phenomena (for a summary discussion of Schopenhauer's philosophy see the article on him in Wikipedia and the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy; for a detailed critical analysis see Awet Mogus's article in the Galilean Library Manuscript). Will has been defined as "a mindless,

aimless, non-rational urge at the foundation of all of our instinctual drives, and at the foundational being of everything" (entry on "Schopenhauer" in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy). As opposed to the philosophical conceptions devised by the other German idealists, Schopenhauer's will is not directed and it is not rational. Will is completely separate from knowledge, intellect, even from soul ("Der Grundzug meiner Seele, welcher sie zu allen je dagewesenen in Gegensatz stellt, ist die gänzliche Sonderung des Willens von der Erkenntnis, welche beide alle mir vorhergegangenen Philosophen als unzertrennlich, ja, den Willen als durch die Erkenntnis, die der Grundstoff unsers geistigen Wesen sei; bedingt und sogar meistens als seine bloße Funktion derselben angesehen haben"; Schopenhauer 19-20).

It is the willingness to understand the world as an integrated whole that makes Schopenhauer's philosophy interesting from an ecological perspective. Within Schopenhauer's framework of the world as will, there is no teleology (no God), and also no meaning; it is a world beyond good and evil. In 1836 he writes the treatise "Über den Willen in der Natur" in which he criticizes the contemporary sciences for dominating nature and defining nature as a play of chemical forces. In his philosophy, on the other hand, Schopenhauer wishes to marry the empirical sciences with metaphysics in his conception of the will of nature. Rational knowledge becomes a mere secondary substratum of the will that can be found in all perceptions, in organic as well as inorganic nature ("dieser sich auch in allen Erscheinungen der erkenntnislosen, sowohl der vegetabilischen als der unorganischen Natur nachweisen läßt"; Schopenhauer 3).

Similar to Schelling, Schopenhauer conceives of the world as an integrated whole and describes the system of integral parts that make up this whole. The original source of all living functions, however, is an unconscious will, from which all processes within the functioning of the organism can be deduced and which represents the prime

driving force of life (“aus diesem alle Vorgänge im Getriebe des Organismus, sowohl bei krankem, als bei gesundem Zustande, ableiten und ihn als das *primum mobile* des Lebens darstellen”; Schopenhauer 9). Will determines the vegetation, will is the primary agency that drives organisms, will leads to external actions of the body, will is blind, the body is will in form of representation (see Schopenhauer 34). If we want to understand nature we should not compare it with our own actions (“Wollen wir aber das Wirken der Natur verstehn, so müssen wir dies nicht nur durch Vergleichung mit unseren Werken versuchen”; Schopenhauer 56). We project telos into nature through our intellect. Kant’s transcendental philosophy, according to Schopenhauer, focuses on the subject and posits consciousness as a given. Kant deduces from there that the world is made up of appearances. Schopenhauer, in other hand, starts with the natural object as the given, to which intellect belongs (Kants Transzendentalphilosophie “nimmt zu ihrem Standpunkt das Subjektive und betrachtet des Bewußtseyn als ein Gegebenes aber aus diesem selbst und seiner apriori gegebenen Gesetzlichkeit erlangt sie das Resultat, daß was darin vorkommt nichts weiter, als bloße Erscheinung, seyn kann. Wir hingegen sehn von unserem realistischen, äußern, das Objektive, die Naturwesen, als das schlechthin Gegebene nehmenden Standpunkt aus, was der Intellekt seinem Zweck und Ursprung nach ist und zu welcher Klasse von Phänomenen er gehört”; Schopenhauer 72). Schelling’s philosophy of nature serves as a corrective to transcendental philosophy in that it conceives of nature as subject-object and as activity. The self is intimately familiar with itself (before reflection) because of the original unity between self and nature. Schopenhauer attributes a prior mode to all existing beings, the will, through which we are originally connected with nature and can participate in it through the thinking of will.

A more modern, post-Freudian reconceptualization of nature as subject-object within the tradition of German Idealism (or, rather, its critical-material turn) is that of Herbert Marcuse, one of the few members of the Frankfurt School who kept active in American academia, especially during and after the student revolution in the late sixties (most other members such as Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno had returned to Germany after the war where they were involved with their local university and its own struggle to redefine itself in the challenge of student protest). In 1970 Marcuse gave a series of lectures at Princeton and at the New School in New York, one of which deals with “nature and revolution” and the role of a new relation between man and nature in a coming revolution. Specifically, Marcuse posits nature as an ally in the struggle against exploitative (capitalist) societies. Like his predecessors, the German idealists, Marcuse conceives of nature as a historical entity and is very clear about the fact that we cannot simply return to notions from a pre-technological stage. “Liberation of nature,” he states, “is the recovery of the life-enhancing forces in nature” (60). These life-enhancing forces in nature are, to be sure, mainly of an aesthetic nature. Marcuse refers back to the early Marx in reconceiving nature as subject-object, i.e., as manifestation of subjectivity without telos (echoing Schopenhauer) (see 65-66). As a Marxist, Marcuse’s ultimate goal, however, is the liberation of people from oppression and he questions whether or not the human appropriation of nature can ever be completely free of violence. In his Marxist universe, human solidarity must be privileged over animal and plant rights (to that extent, his ideas challenge a deep ecological perspective in interesting ways). But he nevertheless advocates that we should still try to find a better relation between nature and human beings by recapturing the aesthetic qualities in nature to counteract dominating aggressiveness. In the end, Marcuse speculates about a more “feminine” society where eros would rule over aggression (see 75ff), where

knowledge is reconceived as recollection, i.e., a synthesis reassembling bits and fragments which can be found in distorted humanity and in distorted nature (see Schmid Noerr 71ff).

I would like to come back to the notion of a more active nature and ask whether these scenarios of "Naturphilosophie" that were discussed above could be conceptualized as dramatizations of a more active nature (a suggestion I pick up from Alaimo 293)? What if we were to rethink nature as dramatic subject-object and as such as performing and performative? In their essay on "Performing the Wild: Rethinking Wilderness and Theater Spaces" Adam Sweeting and Thomas C. Crochunis examine the conventions of the realist stage and the rules of designated wilderness zones and interestingly "find parallels that reveal how carefully constructed human performances are essential to both kinds of spaces" (325). Both, the realist stage and the wilderness area, "rely on rigidly dualistic conceptualizations of space" (Sweeting/Crochunis 326) and both encourage "audiences or wilderness visitors to observe events as though they simply unfold on their own" (Sweeting/Crochunis 326). Nature as (realist) theater would be rethought as "something happening in a specific place" (Sweeting/Crochunis 329) which provides its audience/visitors "with a preserve of intense emotional experience that bring us in contact with another world" (Sweeting/Crochunis 330) but where the audience experience is very much predetermined and controlled. The analogy between realist stage conventions and the idea of a performing nature makes us perceive "new connections between nature and cultural forms" (Sweeting/Crochunis 334). A performing and performative nature is always a nature that is intertwined with history and cannot be thought of as apart from cultural processes. It is also a concept that emphasizes the fact that nature is always in process.

Which models of performance is nature adopting? That would be a completely rethought set of questions of how nature as subject-object relates to its environment. In his summary of so-called first-wave eco-critical models, Lawrence Buell has correctly pointed to the fact that all dramatic performances require a physical environment and that they can be analyzed as enactment of human emplacement (see Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism* 48ff). Indeed, if we took this idea of nature as performing subject/object of performance and applied it to cultural readings and/or readings of natural processes we could start looking at instances of nature in cultural documents as moments in which nature and culture interact theatrically (not as simply reflections of “real nature” out there). Acknowledging the dramatic character of nature gives it agency, firmly places nature into history, and sets up the stage for a more even relationship with culture, society, and the individual subject. It encourages readings of literature, theater, art, and other cultural forms as enactments of performing nature.

David Mazel has presented such a reading of the novel *The Last of the Mohicans* and called the concept of wilderness used in that text “fully performative” in the sense that the wilderness landscape is conceived as “a process of materialization that stabilizes overtime to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter” (“Performing Wilderness” 105-6), hence reiterating the point made above about the fake façade of wilderness as a permanent given. The theater critic Bonnie Marranca systematically thought through the relationship between ecosystems and cultural systems and reconceived of a work (of art, of theater, of literature, of cinema, etc.) as an environment linked to a cultural and aesthetic system: “A text, then, can be considered as an organism, and a collective of texts, images, or sounds as ecosystem. The interaction of this ecosystem and its cultural system elaborates an ethics of performance I want to acknowledge” (xiv). Dramatic and literary spaces thus become landscapes,

performance spaces become environments: “This direction in performance thinking signaled as essential recognition of the organic, living relationship between the body and its experience of space or environment, moving performance from the confines of a theater into the world” (Marranca xvii). Ecology as theater and theater as ecology challenges us to think through the consequences of reconceiving an active nature as subject-object and as performative, a move that was suggested by Schelling’s philosophy of nature in response to the parameters of Kant’s transcendental critique.

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