

# Etheric Imagination in Process Philosophy *from Schelling & Steiner to Whitehead*

Dissertation Proposal for Prof. Jacob Sherman

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PLATE VI.—THE OTHER PARABLE.

[face pl. v.]

“Hermes, the First Master of this Art [Philosophy], says as follows: ‘The Water of the Air, which is between Heaven and Earth, is the Life of everything; for by means of its Moisture and Warmth, it is the medium between the two opposites,...and therefore it rains water on earth, Heaven has opened itself, and sent its Dew on earth, making it as sweet as honey, and moist. Therefore the Earth flowers and bears manifold colored blooms and fruits, and in her interior has grown a large Tree with a silver stem, stretching itself out to the earth’s surface. On its branches have been sitting many kinds of birds, all departing at Daybreak...This Tree gives us as well the fruit of Health, it makes warm what is cold, and what is cold it makes warm, what is dry it makes moist, and makes moist what is dry, and softens the hard, and hardens the soft, and is the end of the whole Art. ‘“

—*Splendor Solis: Alchemical Treatise of Solomon Trismosin* (1582)<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., LTD., 1920), 28.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This dissertation interprets the process philosophies of Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling (1775-1854) and Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947) as early and late modern expressions of what esotericist Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) called etheric imagination. Understanding the process philosophies of Schelling and Whitehead requires first coming to share the imaginative background animating their ideas: both were major contributors to the paradigm-remaking natural sciences of their day, and both were expressions of the Romantic reaction against Enlightenment rationalism. In order to better grasp their novel contributions to modern science and philosophy, I diachronically situate Schelling and Whitehead in relation to their shared esoteric sources and intellectual influences dating back to Plato, as well as synchronically trace how their ideas have continued to reverberate through various streams of post-modern thought. I draw connections between Schelling's alchemically inspired *Naturphilosophie* and Whitehead's geometrically intuited philosophy of organism by reading them in light of Steiner's esoteric conception of an *etheric* reality that mediates between spirit and nature, or mind and matter. The process-philosophical imagination is depicted as the emergence of an *etheric* organ of perception granting the process philosopher sub- and super-sensory insight into the nature of cosmogenesis. My dissertation will argue that the process-philosophical imagination, especially when read through the lens of Western esotericism, offers an alternative conception of modern science and rationality that can serve as the basis of a more ecologically grounded planetary civilization.

# CHAPTER BREAKDOWN

- I. Introduction: Why etheric imagination and process philosophy?
  - A. Etheric imagination as a participatory and transdisciplinary method of cosmologizing
  - B. Steiner's esoteric ontology as interpretive key to Schelling and Whitehead's process ontologies
  - C. Etheric imagination and process philosophy as way beyond transcendental idealism and scientific materialism, the metaphysical causes of the ecological crisis.
- II. History of Imagination in Esoteric Philosophy
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  - B. Neoplatonism (Plotinus, Proclus, Iamblichus)
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- III. The Ether in Natural Philosophy, Past and Present
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    - 3. Alchemical quintessence
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- C. Schelling, Steiner, and Whitehead's ether theories
1. Human mind as higher potency of nature's creativity (Schelling)
  2. Imagination as etheric organ of perception (Steiner)
  3. The ether of events (Whitehead)
- IV. Etheric imagination in Schelling, Steiner, and Whitehead as "plant-thinking" (Michael Marder, Elaine Miller)
- V. The geometrical imagination in Steiner, George Adams, and Whitehead
- VI. Conclusion: Towards an esoterically-informed re-imagination of contemporary civilization
- A. Schelling, Steiner, and Whitehead as sources of an alternative modernity
  - B. Re-imagining human-earth relations in light of etheric imagination: ecologizing modernity

## **THESIS STATEMENT**

*This dissertation makes the case that the process philosophies of Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling (1775-1854) and Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947) can be fruitfully interpreted as early and late modern expressions of what esotericist Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) called etheric imagination.*

# RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- 1) Demonstrate the hermeneutical relevance of Steiner's spiritual scientific concept of the etheric imagination to the post-Kantian process philosophies of Schelling and Whitehead (and their milieus).
- 2) Trace the history of the process-philosophical imagination from the ancient to the modern world, with special attention paid to those thinkers who directly influenced Schelling, Whitehead, and Steiner.
- 3) Critique the disenchanting dualisms of modern philosophy and deconstruct the techno-capitalist systems of domination it has unleashed upon the planet.
- 4) Construct an alternative conception of modernity based upon the insights of an esoterically informed, process-philosophical imagination.

# HISTORICAL BACKGROUND and LITERATURE REVIEW

This dissertation examines the metaphysics of imagination in the process philosophies of Schelling and Whitehead through the hermeneutical lens of a certain stream of Western esotericism. In describing the process-philosophical imagination as *etheric*, I aim in particular to cross-fertilize the process tradition with 20th century esotericist Rudolf Steiner's conception of the *Ätherleib*, or *ether body*. Rather than approaching Steiner, Schelling, and Whitehead as a museum curator, my dissertation will aim to breathe new life into their thought, to think with them towards a more imaginative philosophy of mind and nature enriched by the speculative resources of esoteric wisdom.

The concept of an ether body did not originate with Steiner, but he provides an example of a modern hermetic practitioner whose knowledge of natural science and deep familiarity with the esoteric history of philosophy, particularly German Idealism, make him among the best possible candidates for such a comparative project. Before he publicly acknowledged his occult experiences and took on the role of a spiritual teacher, Steiner was a celebrated academic philosopher.<sup>2</sup> When he was 21 years old, he began work in the Goethe archives in Weimar, eventually editing the Kürschner edition of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's scientific writings. While still at work in the archives, he composed his most well-developed philosophical treatise, published in English as *The Philosophy of Freedom: The Basis for a Modern World Conception* (1894), as well as two books on Goethe's phenomenological method of natural science: *The Theory of Knowledge Implicit in Goethe's World-Conception* (1886) and *Goethe's Conception of the World* (1887). In 1894, Steiner met Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche, who asked him to help organize her ailing brother

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<sup>2</sup> McDermott, ed. *American Philosophy and Rudolf Steiner* (2012), x.

Friedrich's archive; this led to Steiner's publication of *Friedrich Nietzsche: Fighter for Freedom* (1895). Steiner was also asked in 1896 to collaborate on a complete edition of Arthur Schopenhauer's work. These credentials make it clear that Steiner's scholarly abilities were second to none, despite any academic prejudices regarding his later, more explicitly esoteric research.

In his introduction to *The Hermetic Deleuze* (2012), Joshua Ramey laments the "general academic-philosophical prejudice" against esotericism, suggesting that this prejudice "constitutes a symptomatic repression of the complexity of both the history of modern philosophy and the stakes of contemporary culture."<sup>3</sup> Ramey's more pessimistic attitude is tempered by S. J. McGrath, who in the introduction to *The Dark Ground of Spirit: Schelling and the Unconscious* (2012) suggests that esotericism "is gaining respect in non-foundationalist academic circles" due largely to "the postmodern absence of authoritative arguments for continuing to exclude whole genres of Western literature from more canonically respectable studies in religion and philosophy."<sup>4</sup> Antoine Faivre argues in *Access to Western Esotericism* (1994) that the esoteric traditions have been treated with distrust by academics not only because of what is perceived to be their theological baggage and premodern epistemological foundations, but for the related reason that the transdisciplinary character of much esoteric work "is hardly compatible with the separation of [academic] disciplines, which resemble well labeled jars lining a pharmacy shelf."<sup>5</sup> The recent development of what Faivre calls "communicating vessels" is beginning to rectify this situation, but he remains concerned by the tendency for genuine transdisciplinarity to be reduced to "casual pluri- or interdisciplinarity." The methodological approach of my dissertation will be

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<sup>3</sup> Ramey, *The Hermetic Deleuze*, 6-8.

<sup>4</sup> McGrath, *The Dark Ground of Spirit: Schelling and the Unconscious* (2012), 21.

<sup>5</sup> Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism* (1994), ix.

explicitly transdisciplinary, which is to say my chosen method(s) will exemplify the boundary dissolving and even transgressive approach of much esotericism.<sup>6</sup>

The exact origins of the Western esoteric tradition are notoriously difficult to trace. According to *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, esotericism's beginnings "have long been a matter of controversy and are still largely a subject of research. The more these origins are studied, the farther they seem to recede in the past."<sup>7</sup> In her groundbreaking study of Renaissance hermeticism, Francis Yates argued that it was Isaac Casaubon's post-Christian dating of hermetic texts supposed by Renaissance magi like Ficino to predate Moses that definitively "shattered at one blow" the entire conceptual edifice of the esoteric *prisci theologi*.<sup>8</sup> In contrast to Yates, Garth Fowden makes the case that these early hermetic texts are more continuous with the Egyptian alchemical tradition than Casaubon realized.<sup>9</sup> The question of the origin of any tradition is inherently controversial. The true source of the hermetic tradition is especially contested due in no small part to its transdisciplinarity and penchant for cosmological and religious hybridization. Rather than try to stake out a position in this controversy, my research into the weird family of esoteric traditions will proceed without any assumption of purity. Steiner is foregrounded only because of his familiarity with the Western philosophical tradition, Schelling in particular, and modern science, not because his Anthroposophy is somehow the most authentic expression of esotericism.

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<sup>6</sup> According to Basarab Nicolescu (*Transdisciplinarity: Theory and Practice* [2008]), transdisciplinarity is defined by three basic methodological postulates: 1) the existence of levels of reality, 2) the logic of the included middle, and 3) complexity.

<sup>7</sup> *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Volume IV: Esotericism and Gnosticism.

<sup>8</sup> Francis Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (1964), 400.

<sup>9</sup> Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes: A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind* (1986), 34-35.

At the root of another controversy in esoteric studies was Yates' argument that the emergence of hermetic esotericism during the Renaissance—with its major emphases on the human being's creative participation in the transformation of nature, on mathematics as the language of nature, and on the Sun's centrality—set the stage for the Scientific Revolution.<sup>10</sup> The so-called “Yates thesis” has gone in and out of fashion in the last several decades of research on the history of science. In *The Occult Mind: Magic in Theory and Practice* (2007), Christopher Leirich makes the case that, after a period of intense criticism, “most recent scholarship has quietly, tentatively, even slightly shamefacedly begun to revive Yates' arguments.”<sup>11</sup> Most of Yates' critics focused on her methodological tendency to interpret esoteric figures on their own terms by applying the imaginative technique of reactualization. In contrast to the objectifying methods of the majority of contemporary scholars, who according to Leirich “implicitly or explicitly project an absolute break between themselves and those whom they study, allowing them to apply modern analytical perspectives without permitting [esoteric practitioners] to apply theirs,”<sup>12</sup> Yates' method was *participatory*. As a complement to transdisciplinarity, my research is also inspired by such a participatory research method. The participatory approach has been developed more recently in application to esoteric and religious studies in *The Participatory Turn: Spirituality, Mysticism, and Religious Studies* (2008), edited by Jorge Ferrer and Jacob Sherman. Among the major guiding threads of the participatory approach listed by Ferrer and Sherman are “the postcolonial revaluation of emic epistemologies, the postmodern emphasis on embodied

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<sup>10</sup> Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (1964), 447.

<sup>11</sup> Leirich, *The Occult Mind: Magic in Theory and Practice* (2007), 29. Leirich, like the other scholars of esotericism mentioned above, laments the academic marginalization of esotericism, blaming the lack of serious interest on the fact that mainstream academia is “hampered by various methodological and political blinders” (xi). Significantly for my project, he also notes that philosophers have been all too conspicuously absent from the conversation thus far.

<sup>12</sup> Leirich, *The Occult Mind: Magic in Theory and Practice* (2007), 46.

and gendered subjectivity, the feminist recovery of the sensuous and the erotic in religious inquiry and experience, the pragmatic emphasis on transformation and antirepresentationalism, the renewed interest in the study of lived spirituality, the resacralization of language, the question of metaphysical truth in religion, and the irreducibility of religious pluralism.”<sup>13</sup> A participatory research method requires explicit self-implication and an openness on the part of the researcher to transformation as a result of their research. It also depends upon a performative rather than simply descriptive style. Like Yates in her retrieval of Bruno’s magical practices, I am approaching my research topic not only to comparatively recount, but to integrally enact the ideas of the historical figures under consideration.

According to McGrath, though the esoteric schools represent a diverse set of theories and practices, they are nonetheless “united by a common enemy: the desacralization of nature (material nature, human nature, cosmological nature) by techno-science and capitalist consumerism.”<sup>14</sup> He argues that critiques of esotericism as “regressive,” “anti-modern,” and “anti-scientific” are misguided. Although esotericism shares modernity’s “impulse toward human amelioration through science,” it seeks this amelioration through an alternative conception of the human-cosmos relation: “Western esoteric nature-philosophy refuses to follow mainstream natural science and split mind from matter, spirit from animal, finite from infinite...Esoteric modernity is a road not *taken* in the history of science...a modern approach to nature which was openly rejected in the seventeenth century because it did not grant us the calculative control which techno-science demanded of the Western mind.”<sup>15</sup> Mircea Eliade points to the “victorious

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<sup>13</sup> Ferrer and Sherman, “The Participatory Turn in Spirituality, Mysticism, and Religious Studies” in *The Participatory Turn* (2008), 1.

<sup>14</sup> McGrath, *The Dark Ground of Spirit: Schelling and the Unconscious* (2012), 22.

<sup>15</sup> McGrath, *The Dark Ground of Spirit: Schelling and the Unconscious* (2012), 22.

offensive against the imagination” initiated during the Reformation and Counterreformation as the defining historical crisis that led a then germinal modernity away from the esoteric Renaissance vision of an ensouled cosmos and toward the disenchanting, techno-scientific modernity of today.<sup>16</sup> This crisis climaxed in 1600 when Giordano Bruno was burnt at the stake by the Catholic inquisition, chiefly for practicing natural magic. Ioan Couliano argues in *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance* (1987) (for which Eliade wrote the foreword quoted above) that the iconoclasm of both the Reformation and Counterreformation was symptomatic of the anxiety felt by members of the Protestant and Catholic church hierarchies concerning the influence of the esoteric imagination (a power so highly prized by Bruno he was willing to give his life for it) on Christian religious doctrine.<sup>17</sup> The immanence of divinity in an infinite universe—directly perceivable by the likes of Bruno and Nicholas of Cusa, “[for] whom the presence of God is made manifest in every stone, in every grain of sand”—was, along with the erotic mediating power of the imagination that allowed them to perceptually participate in the soul of the world, thoroughly repressed during the age of reformation and replaced by the dogma of an infinitely transcendent deity overseeing a dead, mechanical world.<sup>18</sup> “As soon as God withdraws into his complete transcendence,” writes Couliano, “his design runs into a ghastly silence. This ‘silence of God’ is, in reality, silence of the world, silence of Nature. To read the ‘book of Nature’ had been the fundamental experience in the Renaissance. The Reformation was tireless in seeking ways to close that book. Why? Because [it] thought of Nature not as a factor for rapprochement but as the *main thing responsible for the alienation of God from mankind*. By dint of searching, the Reformation

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<sup>16</sup> Eliade, forward to *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance* by Ioan P. Couliano (1987), xii.

<sup>17</sup> Couliano, *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance* (1987), 193.

<sup>18</sup> Couliano, *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance* (1987), 207.

at last found the great culprit guilty of all the evils of individual and social existence: sinning Nature.”<sup>19</sup>

The process tradition, not unlike esotericism, has also found itself on the periphery of the Western philosophical canon, and is only more recently enjoying a resurgence through the creative retrievals of a number of theorists across multiple disciplines (including physics, chemistry, biology, cosmology, psychology, sociology, political science, systems theory, and philosophy). Most standard readings of the history of modern philosophy consider Schelling to be a mere stepping-stone between Fichte’s subjective and Hegel’s absolute idealism. Though usually characterized along with them as an “idealist” himself, I will follow thinkers like Iain Hamilton Grant,<sup>20</sup> Jason Wirth,<sup>21</sup> Chenxi Tang,<sup>22</sup> and Arran Gare<sup>23</sup> by situating Schelling within the process tradition as a thinker primarily of *nature* (be it human, divine, or cosmic nature). As Wirth puts it, “Schelling continued to think *of* and *from* the site of nature in its ongoing surprises and revelations.”<sup>24</sup> Rather than constructing the natural world as a mere phenomenal appearance by way of the categorical logic of spirit (as idealists like Kant, Fichte, and Hegel were wont to do), Schelling’s position from the beginning, according to Tang, was that “the subject constitutes himself by reflecting on his origin in, and emergence from, nature,” which is to say

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<sup>19</sup> Couliano, *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance* (1987), 208.

<sup>20</sup> *Philosophies of Nature after Schelling* (2006).

<sup>21</sup> “Schelling’s Contemporary Resurgence: The Dawn After the Night When All Cows are Black,” in *Philosophy Compass* 6/9 (2011): 585–598; *The Conspiracy of Life: Meditations on Schelling and His Time* (Albany: State University of New York, 2003).

<sup>22</sup> *The Geographical Imagination of Modernity: Geography, Literature, and Philosophy in German Romanticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 210-223.

<sup>23</sup> “The Roots of Postmodernism: Schelling, Process Philosophy, and Poststructuralism,” in *Process and Difference: Between Cosmological and Poststructuralist Postmodernisms* (2002), ed. by Catherine Keller, 33-39. “From Kant to Schelling to Process Metaphysics: On the Way to Ecological Civilization” in *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2011.

<sup>24</sup> “Schelling’s Contemporary Resurgence,” 588.

that “the Schellingian subject is thus quintessentially a geographic subject that constitutes himself by tracing his origin in the earth.”<sup>25</sup> Similarly, Eric Voegelin emphasized Schelling’s anti-Cartesian understanding of the subject’s relation to nature: “The ego is not an ultimate entity with faculties of reasoning but a medium through which the substance of the universe is operating in its processes.”<sup>26</sup>

The recent publication of his earliest writings, including an unpublished essay on Plato’s cosmological dialogue *Timaeus* written in 1794, further supports this unorthodox reading of Schelling as primarily a *Naturphilosoph*, rather than an idealist. Heidegger was the first to problematize the standard reading of Schelling as an idealist by arguing that, while he is “the truly creative and boldest thinker” of the German Idealist period, he nonetheless “drives German Idealism from within right past its own fundamental position.”<sup>27</sup> Contemporary Heideggerian John Sallis goes so far as to argue that Schelling’s philosophy of nature amounts to a modern re-inscription of Plato’s ancient doctrine of the Chora.<sup>28</sup>

Wirth finds it regrettable that “many have long thought that we are done with Schelling, that he is a ‘dead dog.’”<sup>29</sup> It seems that the only respectable academic tasks remaining are to “[dissect] the corpus of Schelling into its various periods and phases,...expose inconsistencies in his thinking, attach various isms to his arguments, [and/or to] situate him in some narrative

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<sup>25</sup> *The Geographical Imagination of Modernity*, 116.

<sup>26</sup> Voegelin, *History of Political Ideas: The New Order and Last Orientation* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999), 207.

<sup>27</sup> Heidegger, *Schelling’s Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom* (1936/1985), 4.

<sup>28</sup> Sallis, *Pli 8* (1999), 76.

<sup>29</sup> Wirth, *The Conspiracy of Life: Meditations on Schelling and His Time* (2003), 1. Wirth here employs the philosopher Gotthold Ephraim Lessing’s epithet originally coined as a reference to Spinoza, a controversial figure in Germany at the turn of the 19th century, as well as a major influence on Schelling.

within the history of philosophy.”<sup>30</sup> More recently, however, this sentiment seems to be shifting; as Wirth writes, “after more than a century and a half of neglect, Schelling’s time has come.”<sup>31</sup> One of the principle reasons for this emerging Schelling renaissance, I’ll argue, is the relevance of his process-oriented *Naturphilosophie* to the task of re-thinking the relationship between humanity and earth in light of the planetary ecological crisis. Though the influence of Christianity remains evident in Schelling’s work, as with Steiner and Whitehead, his theology would be considered heretical by most mainline churches due to what Faivre refers to as the “temptation” of his *Naturphilosophie* “to bring to light what had been continuously repressed in Christianity: to wit, Nature.”<sup>32</sup>

The longstanding neglect of Schelling, especially in the Anglo-American academy, has not been without reason. There is indeed something strange and extravagant, even occult, about Schelling’s thought, at least when judged from within the intellectual strictures of modern academic philosophy. However, the severity of the ecological crisis has brought many of the foundational assumptions of modern philosophy into doubt,<sup>33</sup> opening the way for a reconsideration not only of Schelling’s conception of an ensouled cosmos, but of a whole swathe of previously marginalized esoteric philosophical literature. Schelling’s approach to philosophy was deeply influenced by the theosophy of Jakob Böhme, Friedrich Christoph Oetinger, Philipp Matthäus Hahn, and Franz von Baader, making the cross-fertilization of the process and esoteric traditions sought in my dissertation all the more appropriate. Schelling was also at the heart of

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<sup>30</sup> Wirth, *The Conspiracy of Life: Meditations on Schelling and His Time* (2003), 1-2.

<sup>31</sup> Wirth, ed., *Schelling Now: Contemporary Readings* (2005), 9.

<sup>32</sup> Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism* (1994), 82.

<sup>33</sup> Schelling was ahead of his time in this respect, writing in 1809 that “The entire new European philosophy since its beginning (with Descartes) has the common defect that nature is not available for it and that it lacks a living ground” (*Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, 26).

the Romantic movement in Germany and was perhaps the most important of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's philosophical influences. According to Wouter Hanegraaff, "esotericism nourished Romanticism in its aspirations toward knowledge of the Absolute," making possible an "extra-rational" form of insight mediated by the power of imagination, which can both "[place] one in synchrony with the rhythm of the universe" and grant one "[communication] with the Pure Actuality of the Godhead."<sup>34</sup> Unlike many traditional esotericists, Schelling rejected the idea of elite societies with their secretive rites of initiation. The esoteric streak running through his work has been described as "remarkable" due to its emphasis on revealing "mystery in broad daylight."<sup>35</sup>

Though he has always been somewhat influential among American theologians, until quite recently Whitehead has been unduly neglected by scientists and philosophers. According to Michel Weber and Anderson Weekes, this neglect is largely the fault of Whiteheadians themselves, whose almost total focus on scholastic textual exegesis and lack of interdisciplinary outreach has threatened Whitehead's ideas with extinction by creating the perception that they are only available "in fossil form."<sup>36</sup> Weber and Weekes' negative assessment of the last half-century of Whitehead scholarship is probably overstated, especially considering the many examples of interdisciplinary engagement in the work of Whiteheadian theologians like Charles Hartshorne, John Cobb, and David Ray Griffin.<sup>37</sup> Though there may have been an element of "scholasticism" that assumed the superior capacity of Whitehead's technical system to conduct

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<sup>34</sup> Hanegraaff, ed. *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism* (2006), 1001.

<sup>35</sup> Hanegraaff, ed. *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism* (2006), 1040.

<sup>36</sup> *Process Approaches to Consciousness in Psychology, Neuroscience, and Philosophy of Mind* (2009), 2.

<sup>37</sup> Indeed, Griffin has already initiated a conversation between Whitehead and Steiner in his essay "Steiner's Anthroposophy and Whitehead's Philosophy" in *American Philosophy and Rudolf Steiner* (2012), ed. by Robert McDermott, 135-181.

and translate interdisciplinary disagreement, the more probable reason for process philosophy's academic marginalization is the fact that (as with similarly marginalized figures like Schelling, Steiner, and hermetic esotericism generally) it conceives of nature as enchanted and takes panpsychism and the existence of an encosmic divinity seriously.

Whether or not Weber and Weekes' have exaggerated the insularity of the earlier waves of Whitehead scholarship, they represent part of a rising tide of outsiders who are, as they put it, "storming the museum."<sup>38</sup> A major contributor to this storm, Isabelle Stengers, argues that the Whiteheadian palette is currently being greatly enriched "by practitioners from the most diverse horizons, from ecology to feminism, practices that unite political struggle and spirituality with the sciences of education...in a singularly lively and tenacious way."<sup>39</sup> Yet another representative of the contemporary tidal shift toward Whitehead, Bruno Latour, was first introduced to "the other metaphysics"<sup>40</sup> when Stengers shared one of the astonishing implications of Whitehead's adventure in cosmology with him: "the risk taken by rocks—yes, rocks—in order to keep on existing."<sup>41</sup> What startled Latour into taking the time to acquaint himself with Whitehead's strange conceptual scheme was precisely the latter's uncommon sensitivity to "a completely autonomous mode of existence that is very inadequately encompassed by the notions of nature, material world, exteriority, object."<sup>42</sup> My dissertation will argue that this slippery mode of

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<sup>38</sup> *Process Approaches to Consciousness in Psychology, Neuroscience, and Philosophy of Mind* (2009), 2.

<sup>39</sup> Stengers, *Thinking With Whitehead: A Free and Wild Creation of Concepts* (2011), 6.

<sup>40</sup> Latour, "Biography of an Investigation: On a Book about Modes of Existence, Draft of an article for a dossier on *AIME* in Archives de philosophie (trans. by Cathy Porter), 12. <http://www.bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/126-KARSENTI-AIME-BIO-GB..pdf> [accessed 11/12/2013].

<sup>41</sup> Latour, "Biography of an Investigation: On a Book about Modes of Existence," 15.

<sup>42</sup> Latour, "Biography of an Investigation: On a Book about Modes of Existence," 16.

existence described by Latour as that of “Reproduction”<sup>43</sup> and by Whitehead as the creative process underlying the apparent products of nature can be fruitfully compared to what Schelling and Steiner refer to as the *ether* or *etheric dimension* of nature.

One of the major goals of my dissertation is to show that, along with Western esotericism, process philosophy also contains the seeds of an alternative conception of modernity no longer bent on the domination of human and earthly nature by alienated modes of theoretical and practical rationality. Both the esoteric and process traditions can provide the disenchanted philosophical imagination with *a new way of seeing* the universe—a way of seeing (i.e., *the etheric imagination*) which in turn may provide humanity with *a new way of living* in concert with the wider community of life on earth.

Imagination itself, even if discussed outside the context of esoteric cosmologies, has had a rather ambiguous, even tumultuous, relationship to philosophy going all the way back to Plato (who infamously denied poets entry to his ideal city).<sup>44</sup> For many philosophers in the Western tradition, its ineffable, largely non-rational and often erotically charged powers are considered deeply suspect, both for epistemological and for ethical reasons—*this even when imagination plays a central role in their own philosophical systems!* For example, as Alexander Schlutz argues, even though Descartes “forcefully excludes imagination from his conception of the *cogito*,”<sup>45</sup> he nonetheless draws upon its poetic powers repeatedly in his physical speculations, and even admits during his autobiographical narration in *Discourse on the Method* (1637) that “doubt itself...is a product of

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<sup>43</sup> Latour, *An Inquiry Into Modes of Existence: An Anthropology of the Moderns* (2013), see especially Ch. 4: “Learning to Make Room.”

<sup>44</sup> Though of course, Plato’s true understanding of the poetic power of imagination is hardly left floating on the surface of his dialogues for all to see. He may have banished the poets from the city in words discussed in his *Republic*, but this very work, as an imaginative act and enduring artifact, itself testifies that he was one of the most creative poets in the history of letters.

<sup>45</sup> Schlutz, *Mind’s World: Imagination and Subjectivity from Descartes to Romanticism* (2009), 4.

imagination.”<sup>46</sup> Similarly, though Kant affirms imagination as an “indispensable function of the human soul,” he also denigrates it as “a potential source of madness, delusion, and mental derangement.”<sup>47</sup> I will revisit the paradox of this “double gesturing” by the major figures in the history of philosophy throughout my dissertation, connecting it to the polar, oscillatory dynamism so characteristic of imagination. I will attempt to articulate a less ambiguous, esoterically-inflected approach to the philosophical imagination (i.e., as *etheric*) that is responsive to the challenges made evident by these and other major figures in the Western philosophical canon, especially those who were significant influences on Steiner, Schelling, and Whitehead.

The approach of my dissertation is based on the methodological wager that *imagination’s* place in philosophy cannot be properly understood outside the context of the esoteric practice of *magic*. Magic should be understood as “a science of the imaginary” based in a skilled deployment of the persuasive power of erotic impulses within oneself and upon the societies to which one belongs.<sup>48</sup> This is what the young Schelling meant when he called for the making-aesthetic of ideas by a “sensual” philosophy: “I am convinced,” he wrote, “that the highest act of reason...is an aesthetic act, and that truth and goodness are united like sisters only in beauty—The philosopher must possess just as much aesthetic power as the poet...Poetry thereby obtains a higher dignity; it becomes again in the end what it was in the beginning—teacher of the human race because there is no longer any philosophy, any history; poetic art alone will outlive all the rest of the sciences and arts...Then external unity will reign among us. Never again the contemptuous glance, never the blind trembling of the people before its wise men and priests. Only then does *equal* development of *all* powers await us, of the individual as well as of all

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<sup>46</sup> Schlutz, *Mind’s World: Imagination and Subjectivity from Descartes to Romanticism* (2009), 77.

<sup>47</sup> Schlutz, *Mind’s World: Imagination and Subjectivity from Descartes to Romanticism* (2009), 4.

<sup>48</sup> Couliano, *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance* (1987), xviii.

individuals. No power will be suppressed any longer, then general freedom and equality of spirits will reign.”<sup>49</sup> To the extent that philosophers have any influence over the course of spiritual or political history, it is because they have broken through prosaic contradictions into the imaginative background animating the common sense of their age. Without the erotic power of etheric imagination, philosophy loses the conditions necessary to resolve the contradiction between the corporeal and the incorporeal, between the intellect and the senses, between mind and nature, because, as Aristotle was the first to formulate, the soul understands nothing without images.<sup>50</sup> Redeeming imagination from its philosophical exile, then, is as much a task of careful intellectual reconstruction as it is an act of radical political instigation.

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<sup>49</sup> See “The Oldest System-Programme of German Idealism,” which most scholars now agree was originally composed by Schelling, even if the only surviving copy is in Hegel’s handwriting.

<sup>50</sup> Couliano, *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance* (1987), 5.

# THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES on ETHER and IMAGINATION

In describing the power of imagination in the work of Schelling and Whitehead as *etheric*, I aim not only to cross-fertilize the process tradition with Rudolf Steiner's esoteric conception of the *Ätherleib*, or *ether body*, but to creatively retrieve Schelling and Whitehead's own cosmological ether theories.

Schelling shared the cosmological ether theory with most of his scientific contemporaries.<sup>51</sup> He identified the infinite elasticity of the ether with the original polarity of forces animating both the one soul of the universe and the many souls within it.<sup>52</sup> Schelling describes the relation between the universal World-Soul and individual organisms by analogy to a ruling star and its subsidiary planets. Like all stars, our sun obtained its “self-illuminating” quality by precipitating a universally distributed “common solvent medium.”<sup>53</sup> The sun serves as the local source of the positive force of light for our solar system, a force which bathes the entire system in a common atmosphere.<sup>54</sup> This positive light-force exists in etheric tension with the negative force of gravity associated with each planetary body. “In all nature,” writes Schelling, “neither of these forces exists without the other. In our experience, as many individual things (particular spheres, as it were, of the universal forces of nature) arise as there are different degrees in the reaction of the negative force. Everything terrestrial has this property in common: that it is

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<sup>51</sup> Iain Hamilton Grant, “Introduction to Schelling’s *On the World Soul*,” *Collapse: Philosophical Research and Development*, VI, 65.

<sup>52</sup> Miklós Vassányi, *Anima Mundi: The Rise of the World Soul Theory in Modern German Philosophy*, 143, 384; Frederick Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle Against Subjectivism*, 541-547.

<sup>53</sup> Schelling, *On the World-Soul*, transl. Iain Hamilton Grant, in *Collapse: Philosophical Research and Development VI* (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2010), 87.

<sup>54</sup> Schelling speculates that all stars, including the sun, “yet belong to a higher system, governed from a common central body” with its own even more widely distributed etheric atmosphere (*On the World-Soul*, 90). Contemporary astrophysics now knows these higher systems to be galaxies with their central supermassive black holes and mysterious “dark matter” envelopes (dark matter=the negative pole of galactic ether?).

opposed to the positive force that radiates to us from the sun. *In this original antithesis lies the seed of a universal world organization.*<sup>55</sup> For Schelling, the ether is not just a scientific hypothesis about the natural world, it is the speculative philosophical principle required to justify the pursuit of scientific knowledge of the physical world in the first place. If there were no organic unity to nature—if nature were not a self-organizing whole, but just a random assemblage of externally related parts—then we could never learn anything by way of natural scientific investigation. Schelling’s ether theory secures the possibility of natural science through the organ of etheric imagination, whereby the spiritual ether “in me” finds its point of indifference with the natural ether “out there.”<sup>56</sup> Or as Schelling himself put it, “What in us *knows* is the same as what is known.”<sup>57</sup> Conscious human knowing is thus but a higher potency of the original antithesis animating unconscious nature. Light, according to Schelling, though not yet conscious, “is itself already a seeing, and the original seeing at that.”<sup>58</sup> Schelling’s account of the dynamic series of stages (*Stufenfolge*) leading from the unconscious ground of Nature to the freedom of human consciousness requires for its coherence, according to J.-F. Marquet, that there exist a “‘first force of nature,’ a naturally expansive and centrifugal fluid, the ether, of which light will be the

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<sup>55</sup> Emphasis mine. Schelling, *On the World-Soul*, transl. Iain Hamilton Grant, in *Collapse: Philosophical Research and Development VI*, 92.

<sup>56</sup> According to Frederick Beiser, Schelling thereby “[reintegrates] the transcendental ‘I’ into nature” by showing how human self-consciousness is a more intense expression of nature’s original etheric forces (*German Idealism: The Struggle Against Subjectivism*, 559).

<sup>57</sup> Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, trans. Bowie, 130.

<sup>58</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 75. See also Merleau-Ponty’s quotation of Schelling’s understanding of light as “the symbol of primordial and eternal knowing which is imaginatively replicated [*einbildet*] in Nature” [Karl Jaspers, *Schelling: Große und Verhängnis* (Munich: R. Piper, 1955), 291]. Merleau-Ponty comments that light “penetrates everywhere, [exploring] the field promoted by our gaze and [preparing] it to be read. Light is a sort of concept that walks among appearances; it does not have a subjective [i.e., conscious] existence, save when it becomes for us...Nature is lent to our perception. We are the parents of a Nature of which we are also the children. It is in human being that things become conscious by themselves; but the relation is reciprocal: human being is also the becoming-conscious of things (*Nature*, 42-43).

phenomenal manifestation.”<sup>59</sup> Following Marquet, William Hamrick and Jan Van Der Veken contrast Schelling’s attribution of primal knowing (*Urwissen*) to Nature’s etheric fluid to Kant’s account of the cognitive role of imagination: whereas for Kant, *transcendental* imagination is a subjective faculty responsible for synthesizing the soul’s experience of a fundamentally withdrawn world, for Schelling, *etheric* imagination is “a knowing that is not separate and distinct from its object because the former [etheric knowing] is simultaneously the production of the latter [etheric nature].”<sup>60</sup>

The ether remained the foundation of science’s understanding of electromagnetic phenomena until Einstein dismissed it as “an unnecessary burden on space” in 1905.<sup>61</sup> In 1916, Whitehead began articulating a new cosmological ether theory as a direct response to Einstein’s replacement of the traditional “material ether” with a pre-given “space-time fabric.” By 1918, Einstein also began to recognize that his general theory of relativity had in effect replaced the old mechanical ether with a new ether, which he explicitly identified with the gravitational field of space-time.<sup>62</sup> However, in place of Einstein’s static ontology of warped space-time “tubes” pieced together out of their interaction with instantaneously present material substances, Whitehead constructed an “ether of events” on the basis of his own novel process ontology.<sup>63</sup> “On the old theory of relativity,” Whitehead writes, “Time and Space are relations between materials; on our

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<sup>59</sup> Marquet, “Schelling,” *Encyclopedia Philosophique Universelle* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1992), 2085-2093.

<sup>60</sup> Hamrick and Veken, *Nature and Logos: A Whiteheadian Key to Merleau-Ponty’s Fundamental Thought* (Albany: State University of New York, 2011), 136-137.

<sup>61</sup> Leon Lederman, *The God Particle*, 101, 375.

<sup>62</sup> Ronny Desmet, “The Rebirth of the Ether” in *Chromatikon III: Yearbook of Philosophy in Process*, ed. by Michel Weber and Pierfrancesco Basile (2007), 76.

<sup>63</sup> Whitehead, *The Principle of Relativity* (New York: Cosimo, 1922/2007), 36-38; Whitehead, *The Principles of Natural Knowledge* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1919), 25.

theory they are relations between events.”<sup>64</sup> Whitehead’s ether of events is not the undetectable “shy ether behind the veil” hypothesized to exist by 19th century physicists; rather, “the ether is exactly the apparent world, neither more nor less.”<sup>65</sup> The ether, in other words, is that which gives experiential coherence and causal continuity to “the whole complex of events” constituting the universe.<sup>66</sup> For Whitehead, as for Schelling, the ether is no mere scientific hypothesis about a supposedly mind-independent external world. Rather, it is a metaphysical principle constructed precisely to avoid the “unfortunate bifurcation” between subjective mind and objective nature by “[construing] our knowledge of the apparent world as being an individual experience of something which is more than personal.”<sup>67</sup> “Nature,” Whitehead continues, “is thus a totality including individual experiences, so that we must reject the distinction between nature as it really is and experiences of it which are purely psychological. Our experiences of the apparent world are nature itself.”<sup>68</sup>

Throughout his career, Whitehead continued to develop a precise mathematical description for the evental ether using the tools of projective geometry. Apparently, Whitehead was among the first to wonder whether the abstract imaginations of projective geometry could be applied to actual processes in the physical world.<sup>69</sup> He first articulated the ether in terms of what

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<sup>64</sup> Whitehead, *The Principles of Natural Knowledge*, 26. For more on Whitehead’s philosophical critique of Einstein’s interpretation of relativity theory, see also my own *Physics of the World-Soul: The Relevance of Alfred North Whitehead’s Philosophy of Organism to Contemporary Scientific Cosmology* (2013), 35-43 [<http://matthewsegall.files.wordpress.com/2010/05/physics-of-the-world-soul-whitehead-and-cosmology.pdf>] (accessed 5/1/2013).

<sup>65</sup> Whitehead, *The Principle of Relativity*, 37.

<sup>66</sup> Whitehead, *The Principles of Natural Knowledge*, 66.

<sup>67</sup> Whitehead, *The Principle of Relativity*, 62.

<sup>68</sup> Whitehead, *The Principle of Relativity*, 62.

<sup>69</sup> Francis Zucker, “Three Counter Strategies to Reductionism in Science,” in *Mind in Nature: the Interface of Science and Philosophy* (1974) by John B. and David R. Griffin Cobb, Jr. (<http://www.religion-online.org/showchapter.asp?title=2066&C=1847> [accessed 11/13/13]).

he called “anti-space” in his 1898 book *A Treatise on Universal Algebra*.<sup>70</sup> In a review of this book in 1899, Hugh MacColl referred to Whitehead’s concept of the “manifold” (derived originally from the non-Euclidean geometry of Riemann) as “the *ether* of mathematical conceptions.”<sup>71</sup> It would be easy enough to draw purely conceptual links between Whitehead’s ether theory and Steiner’s indications that projective geometry grants the scientist imaginative insight into the etheric dimension of nature.<sup>72</sup> It turns out the link between the two is even more direct due to the personal influence of Anthroposophical mathematician George Adams on Whitehead: Adams studied with Whitehead at Cambridge beginning in 1912.<sup>73</sup> From Adams’ perspective, in order to understand the etheric dimension of nature it is necessary to overcome the static geometry of Euclid, which gives us a conceptual picture of space as a container of physical objects, through the development of a *new geometry*, variously termed *projective*, *synthetic*, or *dynamic*, that “apprehends ‘space in becoming’” by penetrating to the intensive “space-creative process” underlying extended space.<sup>74</sup> “We must learn to see in Nature,” Adams writes, “not only what is ready-made (and therefore dying) but what is new-becoming in her life. We have to liberate imagination from the bondage of the finished forms of space.”<sup>75</sup> Whitehead began to recognize the need to overcome the scientific bifurcation of nature between mind and matter while developing his own alternative version of Einstein’s theory of relativity; as noted above, he

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<sup>70</sup> Whitehead, *A Treatise on Universal Algebra, with applications* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1898), 354, 365.

<sup>71</sup> Desmet, “The Rebirth of the Ether” in *Chromatikon III: Yearbook of Philosophy in Process*, ed. by Michel Weber and Pierfrancesco Basile (2007), 5n33.

<sup>72</sup> See for example Steiner’s *The Fourth Dimension: Sacred Geometry, Alchemy, and Mathematics* (Great Barrington: Anthroposophical Press, 2001).

<sup>73</sup> Olive Whicher, *George Adams: Interpreter of Rudolf Steiner: his life and a selection of his essays* (Sussex: Henry Goulden Ltd., 1977), 12-13.

<sup>74</sup> George Adams, *Physical and Ethereal Spaces* (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1965), 6.

<sup>75</sup> Adams, *Physical and Ethereal Spaces* (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1965), 6.

overcame this bifurcation by replacing the Einsteinian notion of insensate and durationless material instants with the notion of etheric events of perspectival perception as basic to nature. In Adams' terms, the new dynamic geometry underlying Whitehead's ether theory "[imagined] every point of space as a potential eye-point able to receive into itself all forms and pictures of surrounding space."<sup>76</sup> In Hamrick and Veken's terms, building on Merleau-Ponty's late Whiteheadian ontology, overcoming the bifurcation of nature requires coming to *conceive* space as we *perceive* it—not as an objective thing “laid out simultaneously as *partes extra partes*,” as though “our living spatiality [derived] from [the] more ontologically primary” metrical space of Euclid—but rather as a polymorphic non-metrical topological or projective space that, because of its “enveloping, overlapping, encroaching, coiling over, [folding], and intertwining” character is “organically bound up with us,” continually metamorphosing with the changing perceptual contours brought forth by the intra-enaction of the community of living organisms composing the cosmos.<sup>77</sup>

This “intertwining” of lived space with living organisms follows from Whitehead's critique, rooted in his novel interpretation of relativity and quantum theories, of the related doctrines of “simple location” and “external relation.” These doctrines are implied by the Euclidian mentality and provide the basis of Newton's cosmology, wherein individual bits of matter are “conceived as fully describable apart from any reference to any other portion of matter.”<sup>78</sup> In contrast, the new, non-metrical imagination of space-time developed by Steiner, Adams, and Whitehead describes a universe in which, while a physical event can rightly be

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<sup>76</sup> Adams, *Physical and Ethereal Spaces* (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1965), 13.

<sup>77</sup> Hamrick and Veken, *Nature and Logos: A Whiteheadian Key to Merleau-Ponty's Fundamental Thought* (Albany: State University of New York, 2011), 94-96.

<sup>78</sup> Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: The Free Press, 1933), 156.

ascribed to a “focal region,” it must be added that the influence of any physical event “streams away from it with finite velocity throughout the utmost recesses of space and time... [The event] is a state of agitation, only differing from the so-called external stream by its superior dominance within the focal region.”<sup>79</sup> The denial of the doctrine of simple location implies that every physical event is in some sense a superposition of the innumerable multitude of other events making up the universe: “Thus the physical fact at each region of space-time is a composition of what the physical entities throughout the Universe mean for that region.”<sup>80</sup> Whitehead adds that such facts are not compositions of “mere formulae”; rather, the concrete composition of things merely “illustrate formulae,” whereby “the fact is more than the formulae illustrated.”<sup>81</sup> Turning to non-metrical, topological formulations of space-time as an “ether of events” allows philosophers of nature to avoid committing the “fallacy of misplaced concreteness” that results from mistaking one’s favored geometry (whether Euclidean, Riemannian, or otherwise) for the concrete composition of the physical world (as Einstein did).<sup>82</sup>

As for the esoteric conception of an ether body, although it did not originate with Steiner, he provides an example of a 20th century hermetic practitioner whose knowledge of modern science, not to mention his deep familiarity with German Idealist philosophy, make him among the best possible candidates for a comparative project of this type. Steiner, like Schelling and Whitehead, explicitly distinguishes his own use of the concept from the “hypothetical ether of

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<sup>79</sup> Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: The Free Press, 1933), 157.

<sup>80</sup> Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: The Free Press, 1933), 158.

<sup>81</sup> Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: The Free Press, 1933), 158.

<sup>82</sup> As Merleau-Ponty, building on Whitehead, points out: “different geometries are metrics, and metrics are neither true nor false and, therefore, the results of these different metrics are not alternatives” (*La Nature, Notes, Cours du Collège de France*. Ed. Dominique Seglard [Paris: Editions de Seuil, 1994], 103, 141; Transl. Hamrick and Veken).

the physicist.”<sup>83</sup> The ether body is therefore not best imagined as an invisible gaseous substance floating around the physical body of an organism. To imagine the ether as an extended, three-dimensional bod—even if a “subtle” body—is only to fashion an idol, to reflect upon a finished product instead of intuiting the creative process responsible for generating that product. An organism’s *Ätherleib* is then better imagined as a continually self-generating four-dimensional vortex of *Ätherkräfte*, or etheric forces. These forces are the anti-spatial form-generating and form-remembering “agent-patients” of cosmic evolution.<sup>84</sup> They are perceivable only to a self-cultivated (i.e., not innate or given by the birth of the physical body) etheric organ of affective thinking/intuitive intellection: the etheric imagination. The etheric imagination is not generated by the brain, but is rather the conscious expression of an otherwise unconscious morphogenic process that is itself responsible for generating the physical brain and body.<sup>85</sup> As a four-dimensional process, the activity of the *Ätherkräfte* that both generate the body and rise to consciousness as etheric imagination are best pictured, if they must be pictured at all, as an undulating torus fluidly turning itself inside-out to leave the living organism in its wake.

Picturing the activity of the etheric forces is ultimately impossible since pictures are derived from sense experience of extended, spatialized bodies, but the toroidal image seems to me better than imaging some kind of gaseous cloud floating around and guiding an otherwise mechanical physical body. The difficulty of grasping the concept of the anti-spatial ether put forward by Schelling, Steiner, and Whitehead will be lessened, according to Adams, only if we

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<sup>83</sup> Rudolf Steiner, *Theosophy: An Introduction to the Supersensible Knowledge of the World and the Destination of Man*, transl. by E. D. S. (Chicago: Rand McNally & Company Publishers, 1910), 28.

<sup>84</sup> As “agent-patients,” these etheric forces are akin to Whitehead’s dipolar actual occasions, the “buds of experience” responsible both for the prehension of past form and the ingression of future form in the creative advance of nature.

<sup>85</sup> Whitehead’s understanding of the relationship between the physiology of the brain and the ether of events leads him to suggest that the “nature” known to materialistic science “is an abstraction from something more concrete than itself which must also include imagination, thought, and emotion” (Whitehead, *The Principle of Relativity*, 63).

stretch the old geometrical imagination by “developing the pure mathematical thought-forms of ethereal space,” thereby allowing us to “acquire a new spatial feeling” that will in turn “fertilize our knowledge of external Nature.”<sup>86</sup>

According to Steiner, “We can only find nature outside us if we first know her *within* us. What is akin to her within us will be our guide.”<sup>87</sup> Steiner’s participatory epistemology is shared by Schelling and Whitehead. “So long as I myself am *identical* with Nature,” says Schelling, “I understand what a living nature is as well as I understand my own life.”<sup>88</sup> “As soon, however, as I separate myself, and with me everything ideal from nature,” he continues, “nothing remains to me but a dead object, and I cease to comprehend how a *life outside* me can be possible.”<sup>89</sup> Whitehead similarly argues that understanding the life of the actual occasions of nature requires first becoming conscious of, and then imaginatively generalizing the etheric structure-dynamic underlying *our own* conscious experience to *all* the individualities of nature. Such generalization allows for the creation of experiential categories applicable to the etheric dimension of *any* actual occasion.<sup>90</sup> Only with etheric imagination can the process philosopher intuit the formative forces flowing through the natural world *behind* or *within* its outward sensory surfaces. Such an imaginative thinking represents the individual’s discovery within themselves of the etheric forces of *natura naturans*, the *inner* dimension of nature that is always in dynamic motion, sloughing off external nature (*natura naturata*) like a snake shedding its skin. “Nature alive,” as Whitehead called

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<sup>86</sup> Adams, *Physical and Ethereal Spaces* (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1965), 26.

<sup>87</sup> Steiner, *Intuitive Thinking as a Spiritual Path: A Philosophy of Freedom*, 25.

<sup>88</sup> Schelling, *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, 36.

<sup>89</sup> Schelling, *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, 36.

<sup>90</sup> Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 221.

it,<sup>91</sup> never sits still long enough to be caught in the conceptual net of merely reflective sense-bound understanding. “Nature speaks to us the more intelligibly the less we think of her in a merely reflective way,” writes Schelling.<sup>92</sup> To think nature as living, our own thinking must come to life, must become *etheric*.

According to Owen Barfield, the forces of the etheric organ of perception can be understood as “imagination operating in reverse...Whereas imagination uses the spatial to get to the non-spatial, what the organic [etheric] force is doing is moving out of the non-spatial realm (the creative logos, if you like) to convert it into space—[it moves out] of the immaterial producing a material, spatial world...What the etheric does is, to put it crudely, convert time into space.”<sup>93</sup>

As the spiritual source of the “force of imagination” (a literal translation of *Einbildungskraft*), the etheric organ and its formative-forces, when properly cultivated, can release the philosopher from the Kantian restrictions placed on knowing by opening the normally sense-inherited intellect to the sub-sensory “intensive depth”<sup>94</sup> or super-sensory “inner infinitude”<sup>95</sup> of living Nature, there revealing the invisible creative forces animating her from the inside out.

In the terms of Whitehead’s three-fold theory of perception, which my dissertation will explore in relation to the synthetic role of imagination, non-etheric perception of external nature via bare sensory universals adhering to material substances that obey abstract laws is in some sense derived from perception “spatialized” in the mode of “presentational immediacy,” while etheric perception of the creative life of the sub-sensory dimension is connected with perception

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<sup>91</sup> Whitehead, *Modes of Thought* (1938)

<sup>92</sup> *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, 35.

<sup>93</sup> *Towards Interview* (1980), 9.

<sup>94</sup> Henri Bortoft, *The Wholeness of Nature: Goethe's way toward a science of conscious participation in nature* (Aurora: Lindisfarne Press, 1996), 69.

<sup>95</sup> George Adams and Olive Whicher, *The Plant Between Sun and Earth* (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1982).

in the temporal mode of “causal efficacy.” Whitehead’s third mode of perception, “symbolic reference,” imaginatively synthesizes our intuitions of space and time into the meaningful and coherent world of everyday life. The synthetic work (or play) of the force of imagination can be in service either to the maintenance of the habits of every day conscious experience (commonsense), or else to the creative disruption of those habits in favor of alternative imaginations of the flow of etheric time-space.

The etheric image-forces animating Nature and her organisms are every bit as alive as I am. The etheric imagination which perceives organic Nature is then not simply the transcendental ground of the ego’s sensory intuitions of the physical world—*it is the genetic principle of the universe itself, the poetic root of all life* (a creative *abyss* rather than a stable ground). Unlike Kant’s transcendental faculties of understanding, reason, and judgment, which provide only the necessary universal conditions of possible (theoretical, ethical, or aesthetic) experience, etheric imagination provides the necessary conditions of *actual experience* (whether of truth, goodness, or beauty). Etheric imagination schematizes not only the formal or abstract, but the material and concrete dimensions of experiential reality—that is, it not only makes possible the universal and impersonal, it actualizes the unique and individual.

So what is real for the process-philosophical imagination? Following Whitehead, space-time—rather than being conceived of as the ready-made universal container within which dead material bodies collide—comes to be understood as the emergent product of an evolving ecology of organisms. As Steiner indicated, through etheric perception it becomes clear that there is not one universal space-time, but “an untold number of interpenetrating spaces” and times; in other

words, with the birth of every living organism, “there an ethereal space will shape itself about this central point as about *its* infinitude.”<sup>96</sup>

## **SIGNIFICANCE and METHODOLOGICAL SOURCES**

Just before his tragic death as a result of a train derailment in 2002, 25-year-old Cambridge PhD candidate Jonael Schickler finished his dissertation entitled *Metaphysics as Christology: An Odyssey of the Self from Kant and Hegel to Steiner*.<sup>97</sup> Schickler intended his dissertation to provide a philosophical interpretation of Steiner’s esoteric ontology by situating it at the culmination of German Idealism. In the foreword, George Pattison describes how Schickler sought “to show that Steiner is not to be sidelined into the category of ‘occult’ literature” because he wrote of dimensions of reality other than the physical, but rather should be recognized as “a genuine inheritor of the central problems of idealist philosophy.”<sup>98</sup> Schickler’s principle thesis is that the logical dimension of Hegel’s system remains ontologically under-determined because it fails to adequately respond to Kant’s skepticism regarding the human mind’s ability to know the ground of its sensory intuitions.<sup>99</sup> Schickler offers Steiner’s four-fold ontology, which includes etheric and astral dimensions, as a supplement to Kant and Hegel’s binary onto-logic of nature versus spirit. Though Kant speculated that the mysterious schematizing power of imagination

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<sup>96</sup> Adams, *Physical and Ethereal Spaces* (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1965), 25.

<sup>97</sup> London: Ashgate, 2005.

<sup>98</sup> Schickler, *Metaphysics as Christology*, xiii-xiv.

<sup>99</sup> *Metaphysics as Christology*, xix. Late in his life, perhaps due to the influence of Schelling (see “Kant’s Metaphysics of Nature and Schelling’s Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature” by George Di Giovanni in *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. 17, number 2, 1979, p. 197-215), Kant’s skepticism about knowing the ground of sensation softened. Here is his definition of metaphysics offered in the posthumously published (1804) *Preisschrift über die Fortschritte der Metaphysik*, ed. F. T. Rink, in vol. 20 of *Kant’s Gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1942), p. 260 (transl. John Sallis): “Metaphysics is the science of advancing by reason from knowledge of the sensible to knowledge of the supersensible.” From the perspective of my dissertation, metaphysics advances not by “reason” alone but also by disciplined *imagination*. In the next section on Marder’s “vegetal metaphysics,” I’ll unpack how the plant-like, etheric imagination can bridge the gap between sensation and cognition.

was at its root, his transcendental skepticism lead him to conclude that thought could never come to know its own sensory ground. Thought remained to this extent ignorant of the creative source of its own conceptual activity and so could not escape the chains of Kant's static table of categories or fixed limits of inner and outer intuition. For Kant, the power of imagination, though it was "presupposed in thought's act...[could not] become its content."<sup>100</sup> As for Hegel, though he succeeded in dialectically synthesizing the pure activity of thought with its *a priori* logical content, he did so, according to Schickler, "free of the realm of sense and so of that dark pit of the soul in which thought's creative light is imprisoned or held fast by the determinations of sensibility."<sup>101</sup> Though Steiner appreciated the developmental organicism of Hegel's thought, he considered its spiritual summit at pure conceptuality to be a "dead end" (*Totenpunkt*). "If we ask," according to Owen Barfield, "as Steiner himself does: where do we go from Hegel? then, just because we have already reached the summit, the only possible answer is: across the Threshold to clairvoyant perception, that is, to immediate, trans-conceptual awareness of the spiritual world."<sup>102</sup>

Like most historical accounts of German Idealism, Schickler focuses on the advance from Kant's transcendental to Hegel's absolute idealism, placing Schelling in the background. My dissertation foregrounds Schelling as the modern originator—not of Idealism—but of process philosophy. I will argue that the inversion of the Kantian transcendental accomplished in his *Naturphilosophie* in fact goes farther toward overcoming the subject-object split and freeing the creative light of imagination than Hegel's Absolute Idealism. In many respects, Schelling's

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<sup>100</sup> Schickler, *Metaphysics as Christology*, 139.

<sup>101</sup> Schickler, *Metaphysics as Christology*, 139.

<sup>102</sup> Barfield, "Rudolf Steiner and Hegel," in *Anthroposophical Quarterly* 18/2 (Summer 1973), 31-36.

recognition of the infinitely polarized formative forces of imagination at work beneath both the “I” (spirit) and the “not-I” (nature) foreshadows not only Whitehead’s dipolar ontology, but also Steiner’s etherically-informed philosophy of nature.

In his only other publication prior to death, an article entitled “Death and Life in Modern Thinking” (2001), Schickler considers Steiner’s four-fold ontological integration of the physical, etheric, astral, and spiritual dimensions of reality from the perspective of an epistemological phenomenology, turning to Herbert Witzmann’s<sup>103</sup> structurally isomorphic “biography of the concept in thinking.” Witzmann differentiates the life of the concept into its (i) actuality, (ii) intentionality, (iii) metamorphosis, and (iv) inherence, where each epistemic modality individuates the concept according to its particular position within Steiner’s four-fold ontological scheme [i.e., (i) spiritual-actuality, (ii) astral-intentionality, (iii) etheric-metamorphosis, and (iv) physical-inherence]. Schickler’s article mobilizes Witzmann’s epistemological phenomenology in an effort to bring to light the key structural-biographical difference separating analytically-oriented from post-modern thinkers.

Analytic philosophy, according to Schickler, is trapped at the physical-inherence level of the concept, whereby the concept “is held fast or dies, as a single mental image, into an unchanging percept.”<sup>104</sup> “By participating in worlds like this,” say Schickler, “the self casts itself into a dead space (the thinking content) that retains no trace of the vehicle (the thinking act) that brought it there.”<sup>105</sup> My dissertation will include a critique of analytic approaches to imagination,

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<sup>103</sup> Witzmann, *Strukturphänomenologie: Vorbewusstes Gestaltbilden Im Erkennenden Wirklichkeitenthüllen Ein Neues Wissenschaftstheoretisches Konzept Im Anschluss an Die Erkenntniswissenschaft Rudolf Steiners* [*Structural Phenomenology: Preconscious formations of real knowledge based on a new theoretical scientific concept in connection with Rudolf Steiner’s Spiritual Science*] (G. Spicker Verlag, 1983). Witzmann, like Schickler, was committed to bringing Steiner into conversation with contemporary academic philosophy.

<sup>104</sup> Schickler, “Death and Life in Modern Thinking,” 65.

<sup>105</sup> Schickler, “Death and Life in Modern Thinking,” 69.

in particular that offered by Gregory Currie and Ian Ravenscroft in their book *Recreative Minds: Imagination in Philosophy and Psychology* (2002). Currie and Ravenscroft artificially delimit imagination by ignoring its “magical” creative dimension to instead focus on its merely *recreative* or mimetic function, since the latter “is more amenable to description and analysis.”<sup>106</sup> Their basically scientific and materialist approach to thinking imagination will be shown to be trapped at the level of physical inherence, as described by Schickler. I will also critique Currie and Ravenscroft’s “recreative” account of learning by drawing upon Deleuze’s understanding the non-imitative and so initiatory basis of learning and education.<sup>107</sup> Thinking imagination adequately, I will argue, requires cultivating an etheric organ of perception. Thinking becomes imaginal only when it finds its roots in the creative movement of life itself.

Post-modern philosophy, according to Schickler, rises to the etheric-metamorphic level of thinking, whereby the concept “does not come to rest in something experienced as enduring and external to the thinker, but moves with restlessness and often caprice from one image or thought to another, constantly replacing old ideas with new ones.”<sup>108</sup>

The inherence level of the concept is the source of scientific materialism’s third-person perspective on nature, while metamorphic-etheric thinking is the source of the hermeneutical sensitivity that recognizes how every supposedly objective third-person theory is irrevocably bound up with first-person experiences and narratives.

I agree with Schickler that “the fluidity, immanence and extreme subtlety of much post-modern thinking is a clear sign of the beginnings of a cultural transition from the consciousness

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<sup>106</sup> Currie and Ravenscroft, *Recreative Minds: Imagination in Philosophy and Psychology* (2002), 11.

<sup>107</sup> *Difference and Repetition* (1968), p. 22-23, 164-167.

<sup>108</sup> Schickler, “Death and Life in Modern Thinking,” 69.

characteristic of scientific rationalism towards more participatory forms of knowing.”<sup>109</sup> Because post-modernists provide a contemporary example of the process-oriented imagination I hope to retrieve from the work of Schelling and Whitehead, I will draw variously upon the work of Robert Romanyshyn, Michael Marder, Markus Gabriel, Gilles Deleuze, and John Sallis in order to better apprehend the hermeneutical, vegetal, mythopoeic, metaphysical, and phenomenological aspects of the process-philosophical, or etheric, imagination. As Schickler diagnoses our contemporary philosophical situation, both analytic and some post-modern thinkers have “taken flight from the world of the senses.”<sup>110</sup> This flight from aesthetic experience allows much contemporary philosophy to remain indifferent to the deleterious ecological effects of what Whitehead called “the bifurcation of nature” between primary matter, which is dead and so lacks sense, and secondary mind, which is at least apparently sensitive and alive but nonetheless remains entirely cut off from the creative life of the earth and dreadfully afraid of the chaosmos beyond it.

Much contemporary philosophy has entirely lost sight of and so come to deny the spiritual dimension of human life between earth and sky. My dissertation finds itself responding to and drawing together a series of scholarly conversations that seem primed to speak to one another but have, as yet, failed to do so in any prolonged fashion. Everything turns, however, not merely on this conversation taking place, but on the *way* it takes place, for one is always in danger of treating Whitehead, Schelling, and Steiner as fascinating historical oddities, more interesting than relevant. In turning to thinkers like Romanyshyn, Marder, Gabriel, Deleuze, and Sallis, I aim to provide examples of contemporary scholars who have pioneered the riskier, participatory

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<sup>109</sup> Schickler, “Death and Life in Modern Thinking,” 69.

<sup>110</sup> Schickler, “Death and Life in Modern Thinking,” 75.

philosophical methods that will guide my own research. Though academic philosophy may have lost outward *sight* of the living spirit of nature, a process philosophy guided by etheric imagination reminds us that, as living organisms, we could never have lost *touch* with it. Romanyshyn’s methodological study of “alchemical hermeneutics,”<sup>111</sup> Marder’s de-idealizing “vegetal metaphysics,”<sup>112</sup> Gabriel’s mythopoeic logic and critique of scientism,<sup>113</sup> Deleuze’s “transcendental empiricism,” “geophilosophy,” and cultivation of a “body without organs,”<sup>1</sup> and Sallis’ “elemental phenomenology” and “logic of sense”<sup>115</sup> represent creative attempts to return to our senses by remaining faithful to the earth. They are each, in a post-Copernican (and post-Kantian) way, *geocentric thinkers*. “Within the earth form and matter exist as a unity,” says Schickler. “Where thinking loses the sensory present to a world of abstractions...it no longer experiences this unity.”<sup>116</sup> Romanyshyn, Marder, Gabriel, Deleuze, and Sallis, like Whitehead and Schelling, aim to restore philosophy by “calling it back to earth—albeit not from heaven, which it has renounced, but from that empty space in which it is suspended between heaven and earth [i.e., the dead, abstract space of conceptual inherence].”<sup>117</sup> They turn their attentive

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<sup>111</sup> Romanyshyn, *The Wounded Researcher: Research with Soul in Mind* (New Orleans: Spring Journal, 2007).

<sup>112</sup> Marder, *Plant-Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life* (New York: Colombia University Press, 2013).

<sup>113</sup> Gabriel, *Mythology, Madness, and Laughter: Subjectivity in German Idealism* (London: Continuum, 2008), 50-81.

<sup>114</sup> For the connection between Deleuze and Guattari’s BwO to esoteric conceptions of the etheric or subtle body, see “The Body of Light and the Body without Organs” by William Behum [SubStance, Issue 121 (Volume 39, Number 1), 2010, pp. 125-140 (Article)]; For the influence of Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie* and esotericism more generally on Deleuze, see Christian Kerslake’s “The Somnambulist and the Hermaphrodite: Deleuze and Johann de Montereggio and Occultism” in Culture Machine (<http://culturemachine.net/index.php/cm/article/view/243/225> , accessed 3/14/2013): “The history of the real and manifold influence of the post-Schellingian vein of 'occultism' on later nineteenth and early twentieth-century thought and culture has yet to be written.”

<sup>115</sup> Sallis, *Force of Imagination: The Sense of the Elemental* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000); Sallis, *Logic of Imagination: The Expanse of the Elemental* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012).

<sup>116</sup> Schickler, “Death and Life in Modern Thinking,” 75n19.

<sup>117</sup> Schelling, *Clara*, 4.

imaginings to the etheric forces creatively differentiating into *Yggdrasil*, the Tree of Life, the Cosmic Organism. “A tree that draws strength, life, and substance into itself from earth,” writes Schelling, “may hope to drive its topmost branches hanging with blossom right up to heaven. However, the thoughts of those who think from the beginning that they can separate themselves from nature...are only like those delicate threads that float in the air in late summer and that are as incapable of touching heaven as they are of being pulled to the ground by their own weight.”<sup>118</sup> The etheric or “formative-force body” is, according to Steiner, “the paragon of all wisdom in the earthly sense, and in much higher senses, too.”<sup>119</sup> In the appendices which follow, I detail the methodological contributions of the above thinkers to my own project.

### **Appendix A: Romanyshyn’s Alchemical Hermeneutics**

Robert Romanyshyn has developed a depth psychological method informed by hermeneutic phenomenology but spiritually rooted in alchemy. In approaching my research on the etheric imagination, I’ve turned to Romanyshyn’s method of alchemical hermeneutics because it allows for the retrieval of pre-modern esoteric wisdom in a post-modern academic context. An alchemical hermeneutics avails me of many of the same symbolic spells and metaphoric magic once invoked by ancient alchemists in the ritual performance of their ensouled universe stories. Romanyshyn has made it possible to become methodologically aware of the force of etheric imagination, both as I discover it in the course of researching the history of philosophy, and as I attempt to creatively re-enacted it by making this history relevant to

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<sup>118</sup> Schelling, *Clara*, 5.

<sup>119</sup> Lecture in Dornach, July 21, 1923; published by Robert McDermott in *The New Essential Steiner* (2009), 262.

contemporary theory and practice. My study of esoteric philosophy can thus itself proceed by way of a magical method, or esoteric mathesis.

Romanyshyn etymologically links “method” to the images of a path or a journey. When one articulates a method, they are mapping out the journey to be taken from a place of not knowing one’s topic to the place of coming to know it.<sup>120</sup> A researcher’s chosen method already incarnates and enacts his beliefs about his subject. The “transference field” that emerges between a researcher and his work is a function of these beliefs and the metaphors deployed to support them. Romanyshyn argues that anxiety concerning the ambiguous presence of the subject in scientific work provides the principle motivation underlying “method” in the sciences.<sup>1</sup> Scientific method in this sense becomes “technique” and is “designed to replace the presence of the researcher as subject.”<sup>122</sup> In practice, such methods only succeed in repressing the “transference field”<sup>123</sup> that inevitably emerges between a researcher and his or her work.

“Method is a perspective that both reveals a topic and conceals it,” writes Romanyshyn.<sup>124</sup> Whitehead similarly suggests that, while “theory dictates method,” method provides the criteria determining in advance what can count as evidence in support of the theory.<sup>125</sup> This means the researcher must remain hermeneutically sensitive to the way the metaphors deployed by his theoretical method have their generative roots in the polarity between

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<sup>120</sup> Romanyshyn, *The Wounded Researcher*, 215.

<sup>121</sup> Romanyshyn, *The Wounded Researcher*, 208.

<sup>122</sup> Romanyshyn, *The Wounded Researcher*, 209.

<sup>123</sup> The “transference field” is “the alchemical vessel in which the complex researcher and the unfinished business in the soul of the work are mixed” (Romanyshyn, *The Wounded Researcher*, 227).

<sup>124</sup> Romanyshyn, *The Wounded Researcher*, 212.

<sup>125</sup> Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 221-222.

identity and difference. The goal is to maintain a tension between these poles in the deployment of metaphors, without allowing them to slacken such that one or the other pole becomes the sole focus of one's theory.<sup>126</sup> If identity becomes the focus, the researcher becomes trapped in a sort of literalist realism, while if difference becomes the focus, he becomes trapped in relativism. It follows that we should not ask whether a theoretical method is true or false; rather, we should remain ever-attentive to the scope of its pragmatic application in the elucidation of experience.<sup>127</sup>

Romanyshyn draws on Martin Packer and Richard Addison's *Entering the Circle: Hermeneutic Investigation in Psychology* (1989) by suggesting that philosophers and psychologists have been limited to a set of "traditional twins" in pursuit of an acceptable method (acceptable because it apes the sciences): rationalism and empiricism. "In both stances," they write, "method is considered a matter of procedure or technique, involving analytical operations that require no involvement of human judgment and valuation."<sup>128</sup> Romanyshyn, like Schelling, Steiner, and Whitehead, opts for a third way beyond the simple opposition between empiricism and rationalism by articulating an imaginal approach to philosophical hermeneutics.

For Schelling, it may seem at first that idealism would be privileged over empiricism, but even in his early *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800),<sup>129</sup> he already understood how these apparently distinct philosophical schools represent the dependently co-arising active/intellectual and passive/sensory poles of imagination. Imagination always oscillates between the ideal and

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<sup>126</sup> Romanyshyn, *The Wounded Researcher*, 213.

<sup>127</sup> Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 221.

<sup>128</sup> Romanyshyn, *The Wounded Researcher*, 27.

<sup>129</sup> Before his later differentiation between negative, rationalistic philosophy, and positive, "metaphysically empiricist," philosophy.

the real without settling on either as primary.<sup>130</sup> From Whitehead's perspective, both the empiricist and the rationalist branches of modern epistemology stem from the same set of related mistakes: 1) the assumption that the five senses are the only definite "avenues of communication" between human experience and the external world, and 2) the assumption that conscious introspection is our sole means of analyzing experience.<sup>131</sup> The first mistake ignores the fact that "the living organ of experience is the living body as a whole."<sup>132</sup> This "living organ" is etheric imagination, capable of perceiving the creative advance of nature by consciously synthesizing a normally sub-sensory mode of experience referred to by Whitehead as "causal efficacy." The second mistake ignores the way that conscious introspection, though it "lifts the clear-cut data of sensation into primacy," for that very reason "cloaks the vague compulsions and derivations which form the main stuff of experience."<sup>133</sup> Whitehead's speculative philosophical method, like Romanyshyn's psychologically-informed method of alchemical hermeneutics, attempts to draw its data not only from the clear and distinct ideas of conscious attention, but from the unconscious depths of psychosomatic experience.

Rather than attempting to remove the subject from research by repressing the transference field between researcher and work, an alchemical hermeneutics is ever attentive to the depths of the unconscious psyche, depths ranging "from the personal through the cultural-historical and collective-archetypal to the eco-cosmological realms of the psychoid archetype."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 70.

<sup>131</sup> Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 225.

<sup>132</sup> Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 225.

<sup>133</sup> Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 226.

<sup>134</sup> Romanyshyn, *The Wounded Researcher*, 210. The "psychoid," following Jung, is "the place where consciousness matters and matter is 'conscious'" (Romanyshyn, *The Wounded Researcher*, 255).

Contrary to those who cling to the solar rationality of consciousness by dismissing the unconscious as purely irrational, Romanyshyn affirms the capacity of the unconscious to think in its own *lunar* way, a way of thinking the ancients believed was reflective of the *lumen naturae*, the “light of nature.” Despite the daytime brightness of our egoic consciousness, we still ultimately live within the unconscious of nature and so remain at least dimly aware of nature’s “dark-light.”<sup>135</sup> Just as Plato suspected in *Timaeus*, the soul is active in perception due to a dark-light that streams from the eyes to meet the day-light reflected off of material things. Before the “dayenglish” of our spoken signs, “dark precursors” silently run ahead of consciously representable meaning to dissolve and coagulate the unrepresentable meaning of things themselves. The meaning of the world, like language itself, is encrypted. If words, sentences, and stories lose their living spirit, language dissolves into letters, mere broken bones lying still in a silent crypt. An alchemical hermeneutics approaches imaginative work as a magical, theurgical practice—a practice capable, with proper cultivation, of raising the dead letter to its spiritual meaning.

As in alchemy, the key to an imaginal process philosophy is to continually “dissolve and coagulate,” since the goal is not to arrive at some final meaning as a solution, but to continually dissolve the meanings that emerge until the deeper soul of the work has been heard.<sup>136</sup> We can be sure myth is operating unconsciously whenever we read a philosopher claiming self-certainty in method and meaning. To make myth consciously, we must engage the process of knowing poetically, which is to say, we must approach philosophy imaginatively. This means re-searching not for explanation, and not simply for understanding, but primarily for *transmutation* of both self

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<sup>135</sup> Romanyshyn, *The Wounded Researcher*, 256.

<sup>136</sup> Romanyshyn, *The Wounded Researcher*, 233.

and world. In service to such transmutation, an alchemical hermeneutics takes seriously not only conscious thoughts and sensations, but unconscious feelings and intuitions. In other words, all four of Jung’s psychological functions, or imaginal powers, are brought to the table (thinking, sensing, feeling, and intuiting). As an imaginal method, alchemical hermeneutics begins at the root of these four functions: *imagination*, which is not simply the common sense, but rather the protean *organism without organs* underlying each sense organ’s specialized function.<sup>137</sup>

### Appendix B: Marder’s Vegetal Metaphysics

To become rooted in the etheric forces of imagination, the process philosopher must learn to think like a plant. **Michael Marder**’s “vegetal metaphysics” provides a contemporary example of the power of plant-thinking to (re)turn modern philosophy to its etheric senses. Marder’s critical account of the history of Western metaphysics exhaustively details philosophy’s theoretical incoherences and practical inadequacies as regards the vegetal dimension of reality. He shames Aristotle for the “violence” his formal logic of identity and non-contradiction “unleashed against plants,”<sup>138</sup> diagnoses Hegel’s negative dialectic as a mere symptom of his “[allergy] to vegetal existence,”<sup>139</sup> and regrets Husserl’s essentializing “failure to think the tree” itself.<sup>140</sup>

To be fair to these philosophers, Steiner’s four-fold ontology is an evolutionarily reformulated version of Aristotle’s psychological anthropology as described in *De Anima*, wherein “physical...,vegetative, sensitive and intellectual souls” are each set to work within the whole

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<sup>137</sup> See my discussion of Deleuze’s “body without organs” in relation to the synthesis of the faculties.

<sup>138</sup> Marder, *Plant-Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life*, 21.

<sup>139</sup> Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 126.

<sup>140</sup> Marder, *Plant-Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life*, 75-78.

human being.<sup>141</sup> Husserl, like Steiner, was initiated into the intentional structure of consciousness by Franz Brentano, but ultimately both Steiner's and Husserl's etheric imaginations hearken to a form of post-Copernican geocentrism ("the original ark, earth, does not move"<sup>142</sup>). As for Hegel, Schickler points to Steiner's mediating conception of a living ether circulating between mind and nature as a cure for his allergic reaction to the supposed linearity of plants (by which he understood them to be closer to crystals than to animals).<sup>143</sup> Hegel's dialectical logic forces him to leave the blind growth of plant-life outside the autopoietic circle of the Concept, thereby alienating the self-conscious mind from a dead, petrified nature.<sup>144</sup> Unlike Hegel and the idealist tradition, who "[retreated] from the world of the senses" and so failed "to consider an ontology intrinsic to life," Steiner "[cultivated] organs of cognition which [enabled] him to enter ever more deeply into" the etheric sub-dimension of the sensory world.<sup>145</sup> In Marder's terms, Steiner learned to think like a plant. "The plant sets free the entire realm of petrified nature, including mineral elements, if not the earth itself," writes Marder.<sup>146</sup>

David Hume, though not mentioned in Marder's historical account, had his own bout of vegetal thinking in the midst of composing his *Dialogues on Natural Religion*, dialogues in which Cleanthes at one point is made to deploy an ontophytological critique of Philo's over-determined analogization of the universe to an animal. Unlike an animal, argues Cleanthes, the universe we

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<sup>141</sup> Schickler, *Metaphysics as Christology*, 162.

<sup>142</sup> Edmund Husserl, "Foundational Investigations of the Phenomenological Origin of the Spatiality of Nature," trans. Fred Kersten, in *Husserl, Shorter Works*, ed. Peter McCormick and Frederick A. Elliston (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 222-33.

<sup>143</sup> Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 124-126.

<sup>144</sup> See *Petrified Intelligence: Nature in Hegel's Philosophy* by Alison Stone (New York: SUNY, 2005).

<sup>145</sup> Schickler, *Metaphysics as Christology*, 143.

<sup>146</sup> Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 127.

experience has “no organs of sense; no seat of thought or reason; no one precise origin of motion and action.” “In short,” Cleanthes jests, “[the universe] seems to bear a stronger resemblance to a vegetable than to an animal.”<sup>147</sup> Cleanthes’ does not really believe the universe is a self-generating plant, he only suggests as much in order to undermine the credibility of Philo’s animal analogy.<sup>148</sup> Philo responds by accepting the critique of the animal analogy, but then opportunistically turns the relative credibility of the vegetable analogy against Cleanthes’ own argument for design: “The world plainly resembles more...a vegetable, than it does a watch or a knitting-loom,” says Philo. “Its cause, therefore, it is more probable, resembles...generation or vegetation...In like manner as a tree sheds its seed into the neighboring fields, and produces other trees; so the great vegetable, the world, or this planetary system, produces within itself certain seeds, which, being scattered into the surrounding chaos, vegetate into new worlds.”<sup>149</sup> Philo, of course, is no more sincere in his vegetal speculations than Cleanthes was in his. He doubts whether philosophy will ever have enough data to determine the true nature and cause of the universe. In the intervening two centuries since Hume published his *Dialogues*, mathematical and technological advances have allowed scientific cosmology to drastically expand and complexify the range of data available to assist the natural philosopher’s speculative imagination. Modern scientific cosmology, especially when interpreted in light of the organic process ontology of Schelling and Whitehead, with their emphasis on self-organization and evolutionary emergence, only seems to have made the reality of Hume’s giant vegetable more probable.

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<sup>147</sup> Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1779), VI.

<sup>148</sup> Cleanthes really believes the universe to be a law-abiding machine designed, built, and maintained by a perfect God.

<sup>149</sup> Hume, *Dialogues on Natural Religion* (1779), VII.

Marder’s “plant-nature synecdoche,” which posits that plants are “the miniature mirror of *phusis*,”<sup>150</sup> has only become more scientifically plausible in the intervening centuries since Hume’s vegetal conjecture. Why, despite the breadth of his “ontophytological” deconstruction of Western metaphysics, Marder makes no mention of Hume’s imaginatively generative double gesturing toward plants, I do not know.

Hume, of course, was not the first to philosophize about the vegetal life of the universe. That honor belongs to Plato, who wrote in *Timaeus* that the philosopher is a “heavenly plant” or “heavenly flower.” “We declare,” Plato has Timaeus say, “that God has given to each of us, as his daemon, that kind of soul which is housed in the top of our body and which raises us—seeing that we are not an earthly but a heavenly plant—up from earth towards our kindred in the heaven. And herein we speak most truly; for it is by suspending our head and root from that region whence the substance of our soul first came that the divine power keeps upright our whole body.”<sup>151</sup>

The next to carry forward Plato’s plant-thinking was Plotinus, into whose philosophy Marder writes that “there is no better point of entry...than the allegory of the world—permeated by what he calls ‘the Soul of All’—as a single plant, one gigantic tree, on which we alongside all other living beings (and even inorganic entities, such as stones) are offshoots, branches, twigs, and leaves.”<sup>152</sup> Plotinus’ World-Tree grows from a single inverted root. The inverted root of the World-Tree is an image of the ever-living One that, though it “gives to the plant its whole life in

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<sup>150</sup> Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 120.

<sup>151</sup> Plato, *Timaeus*, 90a-b.

<sup>152</sup> Marder, “The Philosopher’s Plant 3.0: Plotinus’ Anonymous ‘Great Plant’” (2013), <http://www.project-syndicate.org/blog/the-philosopher-s-plant-3-0--plotinus--anonymous--great-plant> (accessed 4/24/2013).

its multiplicity,”<sup>153</sup> itself remains forever “unaffected by the dispersion of the living.”<sup>154</sup> Neither Marder, Whitehead, or Schelling accepts Plotinus’ emanational monism. Marder calls for an “anarchic radical pluralism,”<sup>155</sup> a title which could just as well describe Whitehead and Schelling’s process ontologies. Nonetheless, though they reject monism in favor of pluralism, all three carry forward Plotinus’ root image of an organic, vegetal universe.

Marder, like Schelling and Whitehead, conceives of nature “as suffused with subjectivity.”<sup>156</sup> He likens the life of the plant (*phutō*) to the whole of nature (*phusis*), arguing that plant-life “replicates the activity of *phusis* itself.”<sup>157</sup> “*Phusis*,” continues Marder, “with its pendular movement of dis-closure, revelation and concealment, is yet another...name for being.”<sup>158</sup> Hume had Philo argue against the plausibility of divining the nature of the whole based on an acquaintance with its parts,<sup>159</sup> but in daring to ontologize the vegetal life of the whole of nature (making its “life” more than a “mere” metaphor), Marder displays his allegiance to the ancient hermetic principle of correspondence: “as it is above, so it is below; as it is below, so it is above.”<sup>160</sup>

The hermetic principle of polar correspondence between the one above and the many below is not simply an abstract mental concept. It is a magical symbol whose power is enacted

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<sup>153</sup> Plotinus, *Ennead* III.8.10, 5-15.

<sup>154</sup> Marder, “The Philosopher’s Plant 3.0: Plotinus’ Anonymous ‘Great Plant.’”

<sup>155</sup> Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 58.

<sup>156</sup> Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 35.

<sup>157</sup> Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 28; Both “plant” and “nature” derive from the same Greek prefix (*phuo-*) and verb (*phuein*), meaning “to generate,” or “to bring forth.”

<sup>158</sup> Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 28-29.

<sup>159</sup> Hume, *Dialogues on Natural Religion*, VI.

<sup>160</sup> *The Emerald Tablet*.

not only in the ideal meanings of the mind, but in the living movements of nature. These movements are made most obviously apparent by the mystery of the seasonal life-cycle of the plant realm. Though Hume clearly recognized that plant-life presented a definite limit to traditional metaphysical speculation, he remained uninitiated into the death/rebirth mystery esoterically encrypted in this vegetal threshold. Whitehead also invoked the hermetic principle of polarity by balancing Plato and Plotinus' preferential treatment of the One with his own more Heraclitian "Category of the Ultimate": *Creativity* is an ultimate category that dissolves the classical metaphysical dichotomy separating the single supreme Creator from Its many subsidiary creatures. "Creativity," writes Whitehead, "is the universal of universals characterizing ultimate matter of fact. It is that ultimate principle by which the many, which are the universe disjunctively, become the one actual occasion, which is the universe conjunctively."<sup>161</sup> Through this process of creative advance from disjunction to conjunction, a novel entity is created that was not present in the prior dispersion. "The novel entity," continues Whitehead, "is at once the togetherness of the 'many' which it finds, and also it is one among the disjunctive 'many' which it leaves; it is a novel entity, disjunctively among the many entities which it synthesizes. The many become one, and are increased by one."<sup>162</sup> The many down below thereby enter into and pass through the one up above, just as the one up above enters into and passes through the many down below. Schelling also creatively inherits the hermetic principle of correspondence by analogizing the metaphysical polarity of the many below and the one above to the physical pulsation—the "systole" and "diastole" rhythm—of living nature. "The antithesis eternally produces itself," writes Schelling, "in order always again to be consumed by the unity, and the

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<sup>161</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 21.

<sup>162</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 21.

antithesis is eternally consumed by the unity in order always to revive itself anew. This is the sanctuary, the hearth of the life that continually incinerates itself and again rejuvenates itself from the ash. This is the tireless fire through whose quenching, as Heraclitus claimed, the cosmos was created.”<sup>163</sup> Schelling offers the telling example of a tree to show how this cosmogenetic rhythm resonates through the whole to the parts and back again: “Visible nature, in particular and as a whole, is an allegory of this perpetually advancing and retreating movement. The tree, for example, constantly drives from the root to the fruit, and when it has arrived at the pinnacle, it again sheds everything and retreats to the state of fruitlessness, and makes itself back into a root, only in order again to ascend. The entire activity of plants concerns the production of seed, only in order again to start over from the beginning and through a new developmental process to produce again only seed and to begin again. Yet all of visible nature appears unable to attain settledness and seems to transmute tirelessly in a similar circle.”<sup>164</sup>

Schelling is not only one of a handful of philosophers to escape deconstruction by Marder’s vegetal anti-metaphysics, he even earns Marder’s praise for defending the continuity between life and thought.<sup>165</sup> Schelling suggests that “every plant is a symbol of the intelligence,”<sup>166</sup> and that this symbolic intelligence finds expression precisely in the plant’s power of “sensibility,” which—even when the pendulum of organic nature has swung toward its opposite but complimentary pole of “irritability”—remains the “*universal* cause of life.”<sup>167</sup> The whole of nature being organic, its supposedly inorganic material dimension is therefore described

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<sup>163</sup> Schelling, *The Ages of the World*, transl. Jason Wirth (New York: SUNY, 2000), 20-21.

<sup>164</sup> Schelling, *The Ages of the World*, transl. Jason Wirth (New York: SUNY, 2000), 21.

<sup>165</sup> Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 157.

<sup>166</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 122.

<sup>167</sup> Schelling, *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*, 146.

by Schelling as only one half of the universal polarity between gravity and light, where light as the formal/ideal force exists in dynamic tension with gravity as the material/real force. What appears at first to be inorganic matter, when considered in its full concreteness as always already conditioned by the universal communicability of light, is really just the germ of organic life.<sup>168</sup> As an illustration of the life-producing relationship between gravity and light, Schelling offers the example of the electromagnetic connection between earth and the sun responsible for calling forth plant-life out of the planet.<sup>169</sup> Steiner similarly remarks that any attempt to understand the inorganic, mineral dimension of earth independently of the plant-life it supports will remain hopelessly abstract: “Just as our skeleton first separates itself out of the organism,” says Steiner, “so we have to look at the earth’s rock formations as the great skeleton of the earth organism.”<sup>170</sup> Steiner further argues that the cultivation of etheric imagination will allow the philosopher to come to see “the plant covering of our earth [as] the sense organ through which earth spirit and sun spirit behold each other.”<sup>171</sup> The mineral and plant realms are to earth what the skeletal and sensorial organs are to the human body. As Plotinus wrote, “earth is ensouled, as our flesh is, and any generative power possessed by the plant world is of its bestowing.”<sup>172</sup>

A process philosophy rooted in the power of etheric imagination requires an inversion or reversal of our commonsense experience of the universe. It is as if the world were turned inside out, or as if we were walking upside down upon the earth, with our head rooted in the ethereal

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<sup>168</sup> Schelling, *First Outline of the System of a Philosophy of Nature*, 186.

<sup>169</sup> Schelling, *First Outline of the System of a Philosophy of Nature*, 185-186.

<sup>170</sup> Steiner, *The Spirit in the Realm of Plants*, transl. by G. F. Karnow (Spring Valley, NY: Mercury Press, 1984); <http://wn.rsarchive.org/Lectures/19101208p01.html> (accessed 4/23/2013).

<sup>171</sup> Steiner, *The Spirit in the Realm of Plants*, transl. by G. F. Karnow (Spring Valley, NY: Mercury Press, 1984); <http://wn.rsarchive.org/Lectures/19101208p01.html> (accessed 4/23/2013).

<sup>172</sup> Plotinus, *Ennead* IV.2.27.

soil of formative forces streaming in from the cosmos above, our limbs yearning for the living ground below, and our heart circulating between the two in rhythmic harmony. Rather than stretching for the abstract heights of the intelligible as if to steal a glimpse of heaven, the force of etheric imagination returns philosophy's attention to earth, and to the roots, branches, leaves, flowers, fruits, and seeds of *plants*, earth's most generous life forms, and indeed the generative source of life itself. Thinking with etheric imagination is thinking with a plant-soul. Plant-souls, according to Marder, partake of a "kind of primordial generosity that gives itself to all other creatures, animates them with this gift,...allows them to surge into being, to be what they are."<sup>173</sup>

Heraclitus' oft cited fragment 123—"nature loves to hide" (*phusis kryptesthai philei*)—should not be understood as a negation of the generous growth of the plant realm described by Marder.<sup>174</sup> As with the natural world, there is more to Heraclitus' paradoxical statement than first meets the eye. The earliest recorded use of *phusis* in ancient Greek literature is in Homer's *Odyssey*, where it refers specifically to the "magic" and "holy force" of the *molii* plant given by Hermes to Odysseus to keep his "mind and senses clear" of Circe's sorcery. The *molii* plant grows duplicitously into "black root and milky flower" and can be safely uprooted only by the gods.<sup>175</sup> As we've seen, then, *phusis* suggests not only a tendency toward concealment in the darkness of the soil, but also a tendency toward revelation in the light of the sun. As is typical both of the plant-life of nature and of the semantic structure of his sentences, there is an underlying duplicity to Heraclitus' fragment. Understanding the poetic meaning of his occult philosophy, or of a plant's process of growth, is impossible without cultivating a logic of etheric imagination.

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<sup>173</sup> Marder, *Plant-Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life*, 46.

<sup>174</sup> Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 28.

<sup>175</sup> *Odyssey*, Book 10, lines 328-342.

The logics of techno-scientific manipulation and abstract conceptual analysis, in attempting to uproot and expose the etheric dimension of mind and nature to total illumination, succeed only in making it perish.<sup>176</sup> Instead of objectifying nature, etheric imagination approaches it hermeneutically (i.e., with Hermes’s help), not by “[shying] away from darkness and obscurity,” but by letting plants “appear in their own light...emanating from their own kind of being.”<sup>177</sup> Marder’s plant-thinking approaches a logic of imagination, in that he aims to begin his vegetal philosophizing, not from the purified perspective of disembodied rationality, but *in media res*, always in the middle of things: “To live and to think in and from the middle, like a plant partaking of light and of darkness...is to...refashion oneself—one’s thought and one’s existence—into a bridge between divergent elements: to become a place where the sky communes with the earth and light encounters but does not dispel darkness.”<sup>178</sup>

Only by finding its vegetal roots can philosophy become *planetary*, true to the earth and to the plant-like, etheric forces of imagination. But because the etheric imagination is in fact abyssal/ungrounded, its plant-like growth must be inverted: it has “underground stems” and “aerial roots,” as Deleuze and Guattari put it.<sup>179</sup> Or, as Gaston Bachelard suggests, the properly rooted philosopher imagines “a tree growing upside down, whose roots, like a delicate foliage, tremble in the subterranean winds while its branches take root firmly in the blue sky.”<sup>180</sup> For Bachelard, the plant is the *root image* of all life: “The imagination [must take] possession of all the

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<sup>176</sup> Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 30.

<sup>177</sup> Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 30.

<sup>178</sup> Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 178.

<sup>179</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 15.

<sup>180</sup> Bachelard, *Poetic Imagination and Reverie*, 85.

powers of plant life,” he writes. “It lives between earth and sky...[it] becomes imperceptibly the cosmological tree, the tree which epitomizes a universe, which makes a universe.”<sup>181</sup>

Marder argues that “plants are resistant to idealization,”<sup>182</sup> which is just another way of saying that the plant-realm is the etheric receptacle of Ideas, the resistance providing matrix that, in the course of evolutionary history, gradually raises unconscious nature to consciousness of itself as spirit. Etheric imagination is the esemplastic power through which eternal Ideas become incarnate in the concreting occasions of the world, like seeds taking root in the ground, growing skyward through branch, leaf, flower, and fruit, only to fall again into the soil to be born again, and again... Marder’s “post-metaphysical task of de-idealization” makes him especially attentive to the association between the aesthetic power of plant-life (particularly flowers) and the pathos of death: flowers—“the free beauties of nature,”<sup>183</sup> as Kant called them—have since the beginning of history been customarily “discarded along the path of Spirit’s glorious march through the world,” “abandoned” and thereby “freed from dialectical totality.”<sup>184</sup> “In contrast to the death borne by *Geist*,” continues Marder, plant-life can become “neither mediated nor internalized.”<sup>185</sup> Idealist philosophy is therefore always in a rush to “[unchain] the flower from its organic connection to the soil and [put] it on the edge of culture as a symbol of love, religious devotion, mourning, friendship, or whatever else might motivate the culling.”<sup>186</sup> The end result of

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<sup>181</sup> Bachelard, *Poetic Imagination and Reverie*, 85. The inverted tree is a common motif in hermetic literature.

<sup>182</sup> Marder, *Plant-Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life*, 13.

<sup>183</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgment*.

<sup>184</sup> Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 126.

<sup>185</sup> Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 126.

<sup>186</sup> Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 123.

modern idealist rationality's "thorough cultivation" and "biotechnological transformation" of plant-life is "a field of ruins."<sup>187</sup>

The "economic-teleological" principle guiding modern rationality—whereby, for example, "trees in and of themselves have no worth save when turned into furniture"<sup>188</sup>—is largely the result of Kant's failure to grasp the *life* of nature as more than a merely *regulative* judgment of the understanding: while he found it acceptable for human subjects to *think* the internal possibility of nature as organic, he refused to grant that life could be understood as *constitutive* of nature itself. "It is absurd," Kant writes, "to hope that another Newton will arise in the future who would explain to us how even a mere blade of grass is produced."<sup>189</sup> It followed that the only avenue open to reason in its untamable desire to know nature was by way of the "economic-teleological" principle, whereby the philosopher of nature, in order to know his object, "must first manufacture it."<sup>190</sup> In order to avoid the deleterious ecological effects of modern rationality, which in its techno-capitalist phase has succeeded in turning the entire planet into mere raw material awaiting consumption, it is necessary to return to and to heal the simultaneously vegetal and sensorial repression from which this rationality stems.<sup>191</sup>

The repression of vegetal existence, according to Marder, began as early as Aristotle, who was willing to grant of plants, due to their lack of both locomotion and perception, only that they

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<sup>187</sup> Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 128.

<sup>188</sup> Bruce Matthews, *Schelling's Organic Form of Philosophy: Life as the Schema of Freedom*, 4; Schelling, *Schellings sämtliche Werke*, I/7, 18.

<sup>189</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, §75.

<sup>190</sup> Kant, *Opus Postumum*, trans. Eckart Förster, 240.

<sup>191</sup> Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 22.

“seem to live.”<sup>192</sup> This *seeming* life of plants, which from the perspective of the formal logic of Aristotle presented a taxonomic problem (i.e., are plants ensouled, or not?), from the perspective of a logic of imagination (no longer subject to the principle of non-contradiction) reveals precisely what has been repressed by so much of Western metaphysics: that it is towards the ambiguous ontology of plant-life that philosophy must turn if it hopes to discover the ground of sensory experience. Aristotle does finally grant a kind of life to plants by pointing to their nutritive capacity (*to threptikon*), which in animal life is homologous to the haptic sense (i.e., touch).<sup>193</sup> Touch is the basis of all *aesthesis*, only subsequently becoming differentiated into the other specialized senses.<sup>194</sup> In light of the vegetal origins of sensation, Marder is lead to wonder “whether the sensory and cognitive capacities of the psyche, which in human beings have been superadded to the vegetal soul, are anything but an outgrowth, an excrescence, or a variation of the latter. The sensitivity of the roots seeking moisture in the dark of the soil [or leaves seeking light in the brightness of the sky]...and human ideas or representations we project, casting them in front of ourselves, are not as dissimilar from one another as we tend to think.”<sup>195</sup>

Whereas Kant argued that “real metaphysics” must be “devoid of all mixture with the sensual,”<sup>196</sup> Marder suggests that the idealist reduction of plant-life to dead linear crystals<sup>1</sup> “[survives] in human thought in the shape of Kantian immutable categories and forms of

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<sup>192</sup> Emphasis added. Aristotle, *De anima*, 410b23.

<sup>193</sup> Aristotle, *De anima*, 413b1-10.

<sup>194</sup> Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 38.

<sup>195</sup> Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 27.

<sup>196</sup> Kant, *De mundi sensibilis atque intelligibilis forma et principiis*; AK II, 394, transl. Bruce Matthews, *Schelling's Organic Form of Philosophy*, 4.

<sup>197</sup> Hegel considered plant growth to be linear, like crystals, whereas proper animals are elliptical in their movements (see pages 32-33 above).

intuition to which all novel experiences must in one way or another conform.”<sup>198</sup> Instead of forcing lived experience to obey the crystalline categories of thought, Marder’s plant-thinking, akin to the logic of etheric imagination guiding my dissertation, “destroys the Procrustean bed of formal logic and transcendental *a priori* structures—those ideal standards to which no living being can measure up fully.”<sup>199</sup>

The plant-thinking of etheric imagination breaks through the crystalline molds of “dead thought”—what Bergson called “the logic of solids”<sup>200</sup>—to bring forth instead a *plastic* logic, a way of *thinking-with* the creative life of nature, rather than against it.<sup>201</sup> Whereas in a crystalline logic of solids, thought “has only to follow its natural [intrinsic] movement, after the lightest possible contact with experience, in order to go from discovery to discovery, sure that experience is following behind it and will justify it invariably,”<sup>202</sup> in a fluid logic of plastics, thought becomes etheric, overflowing the sense-inherited intellect’s *a priori* categorical antinomies and pre-determined forms of intuition to participate in the imaginal life of cosmogenesis itself. “A theory of life that is not accompanied by a criticism of knowledge,” according to Bergson, “is obliged to accept, as they stand, the concepts which the understanding puts at its disposal: it can but enclose the facts, willing or not, in preexisting frames which it regards as ultimate.”<sup>203</sup> The plasticity of etheric imagination, on the other hand, preserves the unprethinkability of the creative advance

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<sup>198</sup> Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 163.

<sup>199</sup> Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 164.

<sup>200</sup> Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, transl. by Arthur Mitchell (New York: Barnes and Noble, 2005), xvii.

<sup>201</sup> Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 166.

<sup>202</sup> Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, xviii.

<sup>203</sup> Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, xx.

of nature by remaining “faithful to the obscurity of vegetal life,” protecting it from the searing clarity of crystallized rationality.<sup>204</sup>

Like Marder and Bergson, Schelling refuses to accept modern rationality’s inability to know the life of nature. For Schelling, after the Kantian revolution, philosophy began to deal “with the world of lived experience just as a surgeon who promises to cure your ailing leg by amputating it.”<sup>205</sup> Instead of amputating the life of nature, Schelling attempted to reform philosophy’s bias toward abstraction by returning it to its senses. He strove to root philosophy in “that which precedes the *logos* of thinking,” namely, “an aesthetic act of *poesis*” paralleling the creative *naturans* that underlies the dead *naturata* of the natural world.<sup>206</sup> Schellingian philosopher Bruce Matthews likens the imaginative act at the generative root of Schelling’s philosophy to “the explosive power of the sublime.” “This initial moment of aesthetic production,” continues Matthews, “provides us with the very real, but very volatile stuff of our intellectual world, since as aesthetic, this subsoil of discursivity remains beyond the oppositional predicates of all thought that otherwise calms and comforts the knowing mind.”<sup>207</sup>

Marder’s plant-thinking, like Schelling’s logic of etheric imagination, “rejects the principle of non-contradiction in its content and its form.”<sup>208</sup> “The human who thinks like a plant,” continues Marder, “literally becomes a plant, since the destruction of classical *logos* annihilates the

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<sup>204</sup> Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 173; For more on Schelling’s concept of “the unprethinkable,” see page 51 below.

<sup>205</sup> Schelling, *System der Weltalter: Münchener Vorlesung 1827/28 in einer Nachschrift von Ernst von Lasaulx*, ed. by Siegbert Peetz (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1990), 92.

<sup>206</sup> Matthews, *Schelling’s Organic Form of Philosophy*, 5.

<sup>207</sup> Matthews, *Schelling’s Organic Form of Philosophy*, 5

<sup>208</sup> Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 164.

thing that distinguishes us from other living beings.”<sup>209</sup> Unlike modern rationality, which is said to be self-grounding, plant-life is open to otherness, dependent on something other than itself (i.e., earth, water, air, and light). In the same way, etheric imagination receives its power from the elemental life of nature. It is no longer “I” who thinks nature; rather, “*it thinks in me.*” As Frederick Beiser wrote of Schelling’s intellectual intuition, through it “I do not see myself acting but all of nature acting through me.”<sup>210</sup> Or as Schelling himself put it, the philosopher who is etherically attuned to nature becomes “nature itself philosophizing (*autophusis philosophia*).”<sup>211</sup>

### Appendix C: Deleuze’s Pedagogy of the Concept

In *What Is Philosophy?*, **Gilles Deleuze** and Felix Guattari distinguish between a singular *pedagogy* of the concept and a universal *encyclopedia* of the concept.<sup>212</sup> What does it mean to say that Deleuze’s philosophical method is *pedagogical*, rather than encyclopedic? It means that philosophical concepts are not catalogued in advance, they are individually invented as needed to dissolve the poorly posed problems that emerge in the course of research.<sup>213</sup> In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze makes a similar distinction between *learning* and *knowledge*.<sup>214</sup> Knowledge is the memorization of specific facts and general laws that can only pretend to final comprehension, while learning is the incarnation of Ideas, an ongoing apprenticeship to problematic concepts that initiates one into the sub-sensory creativity of paradox.

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<sup>209</sup> Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 164.

<sup>210</sup> Frederick Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle Against Subjectivism 1781-1801* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 583.

<sup>211</sup> Schelling, *Schellings sämtliche Werke*, trans. Iain Hamilton Grant, 11:258.

<sup>212</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 12.

<sup>213</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 16.

<sup>214</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 164.

“Philosophers are always recasting and even changing their concepts,” Deleuze writes. “Sometimes the development of a point of detail that produces a new condensation, that adds or withdraws components, is enough. Philosophers sometimes exhibit a forgetfulness that almost makes them ill...as Leibniz said, ‘I thought I had reached port; but...I seemed to be cast back again into the open sea.’”<sup>215</sup> Deleuze, Whitehead, and Schelling follow Leibniz in beginning philosophy, not with the crystalline clarity of eternal essences, but with the confused sway of sympathetic perceptions. The perceived world, as Merleau-Ponty described it in a discussion of Schelling’s debt to Leibniz, “teaches us an ontology that it alone can reveal to us.”<sup>216</sup> Perception is thereby treated as “an original world,”<sup>217</sup> rather than a derivative copy. “All the bodies of the universe are in sympathy with each other,” writes Leibniz, “and though our senses are in response to all of them, it is impossible for our soul to pay attention to every particular impression. This is why our confused sensations result from a really infinite variety of perceptions. This is somewhat like the confused murmur heard by those who approach the seashore, which comes from the accumulation of innumerable breaking waves.”<sup>218</sup>

In his preface to *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze describes his method of writing from a place of ignorance; like Leibniz, he is always beginning again, lost in the sublime murmuring of the seashore where water rhythmically unites with earth. The philosophical researcher must accept that he can only begin writing in a muddled confusion of poorly posed problems. This is the initial condition of the philosopher after the end of philosophy, when the history of

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<sup>215</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 21-22.

<sup>216</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Nature*, 40.

<sup>217</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Nature*, 40.

<sup>218</sup> Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, trans. by Leroy E. Loemker (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989), 325.

philosophy, with all its truth and good sense, no longer claims authority over thinking. The history of philosophy no longer provides today's thinkers with a steady stairway to the heaven of eternal ideas. Though it is true, as Whitehead suggests, that "philosophy is dominated by its past literature to a greater extent than any other science,"<sup>219</sup> my attempt to philosophize anew must find a way to allow this history to function as *collage* does in painting: like a palette of personalities available for dramatizing concepts in response to the problems that matter today.<sup>220</sup>

"Method," writes Deleuze, "is the means of that knowledge which regulates the collaboration of all the faculties. It is therefore the manifestation of a common sense or the realization of a *Cogitatio natura*, and presupposes a good will as though this were a 'premeditated decision' of the thinker."<sup>221</sup> Contrary to the pretense of a scientific method seeking certain knowledge, a pedagogical method is attentive to the fact that "learning is, after all, an infinite task." For Deleuze, "it is from 'learning,' not from knowledge, that the transcendental conditions of thought must be drawn."<sup>222</sup> This pedagogical transcendental is not based on Kant's fixed table of logical categories, the *a priori* conditions for all possible knowledge of objects, but rather on an experimental set of aesthetic categories, the *genetic conditions* for new becomings-with objects. Deleuze mentions Whitehead's categorial scheme as an example of the new transcendental aesthetic, where unlike representational categories, it is not only *possible* experience that is conditioned, but *actual* experience. He calls Whitehead's categories "phantastical," in that they represent novel creations of the imagination never before encountered by philosophers.<sup>223</sup> For

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<sup>219</sup> Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 229.

<sup>220</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, xxi.

<sup>221</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 165.

<sup>222</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 166.

<sup>223</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 284-285

Whitehead, because each experient is a perspective on the world *and* an element in the world, the categories of an experientially adequate philosophical scheme must elucidate the “paradox of the connectedness of things:—the many things, the one world without and within.”<sup>224</sup> In other words, while Whitehead accepts modern philosophy’s focus on the self-created perspective of the subject—that, in some sense, *the world is within the subject* (as in Kantian transcendental idealism)—he holds this insight in imaginative polar unity with the common sense presupposition that *the subject is within the world*. This refusal to remove subjective experience from the world of actual entities brings Whitehead’s panexperientialism very close to Deleuze’s *transcendental empiricism*.

The mind is not the only problem solver; it is not the intelligent observer and manipulator of a stupid and passive nature. The etheric formative forces driving nature’s evolutionary “education of the senses” are just as creative and problematically arrayed as are the imaginative forces shaping the historical education of the human mind. As Deleuze argues, “problematic Ideas are precisely the ultimate elements of nature and the subliminal objects of little perceptions. As a result, ‘learning’ always takes place in and through the unconscious, thereby establishing the bond of a profound complicity between nature and mind.”<sup>225</sup> Mind is simply a more complexly folded nature. The proper maintenance of their conscious complicity depends upon what Deleuze calls the “education of the senses,” by which he means the raising of each of the soul’s powers to its limit so that through their mutual intra-action the whole of our imaginal organism is quickened into creating novel perceptions of difference in itself. The path of the learner is “amorous” (we learn by heart), but also potentially fatal,<sup>226</sup> since the creation of

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<sup>224</sup> Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 228.

<sup>225</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 165.

<sup>226</sup> Deleuze, *Difference & Repetition*, 23.

difference—though free from the anxieties of method, free of having to know with certainty—for precisely this reason always risks the creation of nonsense, or worse, the descent into madness. But in the end, the researcher must take these risks, since “to what are we dedicated if not to those problems which demand the very transformation of our body and our language?”<sup>227</sup> Deleuze’s transcendental empiricism does not privilege the faculty of thought, as does Kant’s transcendental idealism. While thought concerns itself with the domains or levels of virtuality (what Whitehead refers to as the hierarchy of eternal objects, or definite possibilities), it is the faculty of imagination that “[grasps] the process of actualization,” that “crosses domains, orders, and levels, knocking down the partitions coextensive with the world, guiding our bodies and inspiring our souls, grasping the unity of mind and nature.”<sup>228</sup> Imagination, continues Deleuze, is “a larval consciousness which moves endlessly from science to dream and back again.”<sup>229</sup> Deleuze’s faculty of imagination is no mere conveyer belt, transporting fixed categories back and forth along the schematic supply line between thought and sensation. By bringing the imagination face to face with the wilderness of existence, Deleuze forces it to rediscover the wildness within itself. Faced with what Schelling called “the unprethinkable” (*das Unvordenkliche*)<sup>230</sup> sublimity of the elemental forces of the universe, the imagination becomes unable to perform its domesticated role in service to the *a priori*s of the understanding. “That which just exists,” writes Schelling, “is precisely that which crushes everything that may derive from thought, before which

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<sup>227</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 192.

<sup>228</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 220.

<sup>229</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 220.

<sup>230</sup> “Das Unvordenklichkeit” is, according to Dale Snow, “one of the most difficult German expressions to translate.” He suggests it might be “somewhat clumsily...rendered as ‘the unpreconceivability of Being,’ implying that there is always that in reality which will remain beyond thought” (Snow, *Schelling and the End of Idealism* (New York: SUNY, 1996), 235n8. My translation of “das Unvordenkliche” derives from Bruce Matthews, who renders it as “that before which nothing can be thought” (Matthews, *Schelling’s Organic Form of Philosophy: Life as the Schema of Freedom* (New York: SUNY, 2011), 28.

thought becomes silent...and reason itself bows down.”<sup>231</sup> It is upon confronting the unprethinkability of these elemental forces that “imagination finds itself blocked before its own limit: the immense ocean, the infinite heavens, all that overturns it, it discovers its own impotence, it starts to stutter.”<sup>232</sup> But, continues Deleuze, imagination’s sublime wounding is not without consolation: “At the moment that imagination finds that it is impotent, no longer able to serve the understanding, it makes us discover in ourselves a still more beautiful faculty which is like the faculty of the infinite. So much so that at the moment we feel our imagination and suffer with it, since it has become impotent, a new faculty is awakened in us, the faculty of the supersensible.”<sup>233</sup>

Whitehead wrote in *The Concept of Nature* that “the recourse to metaphysics is like throwing a match into the powder magazine. It blows up the whole arena.”<sup>234</sup> Similarly, Deleuze’s pedagogical metaphysics quickens the philosophical imagination’s powers into “a harmony such that each transmits its violence to the other by powder fuse.”<sup>235</sup> Rather than converging on a common sense, Deleuze’s education of the senses approaches the point of “para-sense,” where “thinking, speaking, imagining, feeling, etc.” overcome themselves to create new forms of perception responsive to encounters with paradoxical Ideas and capable of incarnating them as meaningful symbols through a process of learning.<sup>236</sup> Deleuze would here seem to

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<sup>231</sup> Schelling, *Schellings sämtliche Werke*, trans. Matthews, II/3, 161.

<sup>232</sup> Deleuze, Kant seminar (4/4/1978); <http://www.webdeleuze.com/php/texte.php?cle=65&groupe=Kant&langue=2> [accessed 4/26/2013].

<sup>233</sup> Deleuze, Kant seminar (4/4/1978); <http://www.webdeleuze.com/php/texte.php?cle=65&groupe=Kant&langue=2> [accessed 4/26/2013]. Instead of an entirely new faculty awakening, we could say that imagination itself comes to operate in reverse, as Barfield suggests.

<sup>234</sup> Whitehead, *The Concept of Nature*, 29.

<sup>235</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 193.

<sup>236</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 194.

approach Steiner's spiritual science, where it is thought that "there slumber within every human being faculties by means of which individuals can acquire for themselves knowledge of higher worlds."<sup>237</sup> Like Steiner, Schelling's understanding of the Idea's gradual incarnation in the course of an evolutionary cosmogenesis leads him to argue that "the time has come for a new species, equipped with new organs of thought, to arise."<sup>238</sup>

Deleuze's pedagogy of the concept and problematic method of enduring within the symbolic fields constellated by encounters with Ideas is especially relevant to my research on the process philosophical tradition, since, according to Deleuze, "problems are of the order of events—not only because cases of solution emerge like real events, but because the conditions of a problem themselves imply events."<sup>239</sup> For Whitehead, as for Deleuze, "the ultimate realities are the events in their process of origination."<sup>240</sup> Whitehead calls this process of origination *concrecence*. Concrecence refers to the process of "growing together" whereby "the many become one and are increased by one."<sup>241</sup> Each individual concrecing event, according to Whitehead, "is a passage between two...termini, namely, its components in their ideal disjunctive diversity passing into these same components in their [real] concrete togetherness."<sup>242</sup> Similarly, Deleuze describes the incarnation of a problematic Idea as an event that unfolds in two directions at once, along a *real* and an *ideal* axis: "At the intersection of these lines," writes Deleuze, "—where a powder fuse forms the link between the Idea and the actual—the 'temporally eternal' is

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<sup>237</sup> Steiner, *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds*, ch. 1 [[http://wn.rsarchive.org/Books/GA010/English/RSPC1947/GA010\\_c01.html](http://wn.rsarchive.org/Books/GA010/English/RSPC1947/GA010_c01.html)]).

<sup>238</sup> Schelling, *Einleitung in die Philosophie* (1830), trans. Grant, *Philosophies*, 55.

<sup>239</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 188.

<sup>240</sup> Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 236.

<sup>241</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 21.

<sup>242</sup> Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 236.

formed.”<sup>243</sup> Whitehead’s evental ontology, wherein eternal objects intersect with actual occasions in the process of concrescence, can be read in terms of Deleuze’s account of the incarnation of Ideas, whereby concrescence becomes a temporary solution achieved through the condensation of the fragmentary multiplicity of past actualities and future possibilities into a precipitated drop of unified experience. The problematically condensed occasion of experience cannot endure in its unity long since it is perpetually perishing into objective immortality, leading “the solution to explode like something abrupt, brutal and revolutionary,”<sup>244</sup> becoming experiential debris to be gathered up again by the occasions that follow it.

Deleuze also describes incarnating Ideas as a two-faced expression of both the power of *love* (the ideal principle which seeks to progressively harmonize the fragmented times of past and future to form a unified “temporally eternal” solution) and the power of *wrath* (the real principle which angrily condenses these solutions until they explode, creatively issuing in revolutionary new problems). He argues that the most important aspect of Schelling’s process theology is his consideration of these divine powers of love and wrath, where love relates to God’s *existence* and wrath to God’s *ground*.<sup>245</sup> Schelling conceives of both love and wrath as *positive* powers which therefore do not simply negate one another as opposed concepts in a Hegelian dialectic of contradiction, where wrath would struggle with love before both were sublated in some higher Identity. Rather, the eternal encounter between divine love and divine wrath leads to their mutual potentialization into a dynamic succession of evolutionary stages in nature (*Stufenfolge*). “These two forces [infinitely expanding love and infinitely retarding wrath], clashing or represented in

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<sup>243</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 189.

<sup>244</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 190.

<sup>245</sup> Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom* (1809).

conflict, leads to the Idea of an *organizing*, self-systematizing *principle*. Perhaps this is what the ancients wanted to hint at by the *soul of the world*,” writes Schelling.<sup>246</sup>

For Deleuze, “Ideas no more than Problems do not exist only in our heads but occur here and there in the production of an actual historical world.”<sup>247</sup> Ideas are not *simply located* inside the head. Nor can Ideas be entirely captured inside the grammatical form of a logical syllogism, even if that syllogism is dialectically swallowed up and digested in the course of history by an Absolute Spirit. Even though the primary instrument of speculative philosophy is language, Ideas should never be reduced to propositions, nor should philosophy be reduced to the labor of “mere dialectic.”<sup>248</sup> Dialectical discussion “is a tool,” writes Whitehead, “but should never be a master.”<sup>249</sup> According to Schelling, the age old view that “philosophy can be finally transformed into actual knowledge through the dialectic...betrays more than a little narrowness.”<sup>250</sup> That which gets called from the outside “dialectic” and becomes formalized as syllogistic logic is a mere copy, “an empty semblance and shadow” of the authentic mystery of the philosopher, which, for Schelling, is *freedom*. Freedom is the original principle underlying both mind and nature, the archetypal scission generative of all Ideas through the “secret circulation” between the knowledge-seeking soul and its unconsciously knowing Other.<sup>251</sup> The authenticity of the philosopher’s “inner art of conversation” depends upon this doubling of the soul into I and Other through an act of imagination. Without this imaginal doubling, the original scission of

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<sup>246</sup> Schelling, *On the World Soul*, transl. by Iain Hamilton Grant, *Philosophies of Nature After Schelling*, 145.

<sup>247</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 190.

<sup>248</sup> Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 228.

<sup>249</sup> Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 228.

<sup>250</sup> Schelling, *Ages of the World*, xxxvii.

<sup>251</sup> Schelling, *Ages of the World*, xxxvi.

freedom is repressed and philosophy devolves into the formulaic dialectical refinement of the customary sayings and conceptual peculiarities of contemporary commonsense.<sup>252</sup>

As Whitehead describes it, “the very purpose of philosophy is to delve below the apparent clarity of common speech”<sup>253</sup> by creatively imagining “linguistic expressions for meanings as yet unexpressed.”<sup>254</sup> Whitehead’s adventure of Ideas, like Schelling’s and Deleuze’s, is not a search for some original opinion, or for the “complete speech” (*teleis logos*) of encyclopedic knowledge.<sup>2</sup> Ideas are not merely represented inside an individual conscious mind, they are detonated in the imaginal depths of the world itself. Exploding Ideas seed symbolic vibrations that reverberate along the cosmic membrane (or “plane of immanence”) and unfold at the level of representational consciousness as a profound complicity between mind and nature: Ideas generate *synchronicities*.

It follows that Ideas, for Whitehead as for Deleuze, “are by no means essences,” but rather “belong on the side of events, affections, or accidents.”<sup>256</sup> As Steven Shaviro writes of Whitehead’s “eternal objects,” they ingress into events as “alternatives, contingencies, situations that could have been otherwise.”<sup>257</sup> Ideas, that is, are tied “to the evaluation of what is important and what is not, to the distribution of singular and regular, distinctive and ordinary.”<sup>258</sup> “The sense of importance,” writes Whitehead, “is embedded in the very being of animal experience.

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<sup>252</sup> Schelling, *Ages of the World*, xxxvii.

<sup>253</sup> Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 222.

<sup>254</sup> Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 227.

<sup>255</sup> Glenn Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 12.

<sup>256</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Reptition*, 187.

<sup>257</sup> Shaviro, *Without Criteria: Kant, Whitehead, Deleuze, and Aesthetics*, 40.

<sup>258</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Reptition*, 189.

As it sinks in dominance, experience trivializes and verges toward nothingness.”<sup>259</sup> The Western philosophical tradition’s obsession with pinning down general essences instead of open-endedly investigating particular experiences—its emphasis on asking “what is...?” instead of “how much?,” “how?,” “in what cases?” in its pursuit of Ideas—has fostered only stupidity, erroneousness, and confusion.<sup>260</sup> “Ideas emanate from imperatives of adventure,” writes Deleuze, not from the banality of encyclopedic classification.<sup>261</sup> The mistaken identification of Ideas with dead essences has led to the inability of modern philosophy to grasp the utter dependence of rationality on “the goings-on of nature,” and to the forgetfulness of “the thought of ourselves as process immersed in process beyond ourselves.”<sup>262</sup>

Despite the shared conceptual emphasis of much of Deleuze’s, Schelling’s, and Whitehead’s philosophical work, Deleuze’s dismissive attitude toward methodological knowledge in favor of a culture of learning may at times fall prey to Whitehead’s “fallacy of discarding method.” Though Whitehead was critical of tradition-bound and narrow-minded methodologies as well (as is evidenced by his corresponding “dogmatic fallacy”), he distances himself from philosophers like Nietzsche and Bergson (perhaps Deleuze’s two most important influences) because they tend to assume that intellectual analysis is “intrinsically tied to erroneous fictions” in that it can only proceed according to some one discarded dogmatic method.<sup>263</sup> “Philosopher’s boast that they uphold no system,” writes Whitehead. “They are then prey to the delusive

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<sup>259</sup> Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*, 9.

<sup>260</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 188-190.

<sup>261</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 197.

<sup>262</sup> Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*, 8.

<sup>263</sup> Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 222.

clarities of detached expressions which it is the very purpose of their science to surmount.”<sup>264</sup>  
“We must be systematic,” continues Whitehead, “but we should keep our systems open [and remain] sensitive to their limitations.”<sup>265</sup>

#### **Appendix D: John Sallis’ Logic of Imagination and Marcus Gabriel’s Logic of Mythpoeia**

John Sallis begins his *Force of Imagination: The Sense of the Elemental* (2000) by regretting the Husserlian phenomenological tradition’s tendency to subordinate imagination to pure perception in an effort to “[protect] the bodily presence of the perceived from imaginal contamination.”<sup>266</sup> Sallis argues that the force of imagination cannot be reduced without remainder to the “image-consciousness” studied by phenomenology, since it is primarily deployed at the generative roots of conscious experience where the intentional ego finds itself ecstatically undone by the powers of the World-Soul and the sublime depths of the elemental cosmos. For Sallis, there is “a more anterior operation of imagination” than mere fancy or superficial imagining, an operation beyond the horizontal limits of consciousness and so “constitutive even for perception”: “If such a deployment of the force of imagination should prove already in effect in the very event in which things come to show themselves,” writes Sallis, “then perhaps one could begin to understand how, at another level, imagination could issue in a disclosure pertinent to things themselves.”<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>264</sup> Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 222.

<sup>265</sup> Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*, 6.

<sup>266</sup> Sallis, *Force of Imagination*, 14.

<sup>267</sup> Sallis, *Force of Imagination*, 15.

The phenomenological tradition's theoretical image of imagination as "no more than the self-entertainment of conjuring up images of the purely possible" is derived, according to Sallis, from the modern age's largely instrumentalist commonsense, whereby important decisions concerning the future are made "based merely on calculation and prediction" without concern for their aesthetic or ethical implications.<sup>268</sup> Imagination, reduced to its merely recreative function, is deemed to work only with one's personal memories and fantasies without any deeper participation in the sub-sensory history or super-sensory destiny of the evolving universe. For today's materialistic commonsense, "the very relation of imagination to time comes to border on the inconceivable."<sup>269</sup> Sallis' sense for the constitutive role of imagination in synthesizing the experience of past and future in a living present allies him with the process tradition. Joined to Sallis' critique of traditional phenomenology, Whitehead's process ontology can provide a coherent account of the interplay of both final causality (lure of the future) and efficient causality (pressure of the past) in nature, thereby making the relation of human imagination to evolutionary time conceivable once again.

After critically situating his inquiry into imagination in relation to the phenomenological tradition, Sallis cautiously lauds the legacy of Romanticism. "Cautiously" because he notes the tendency of contemporary culture to waver indecisively between dismissiveness and empty valorization of the "almost unprecedented inceptiveness and intensity" of Romantic thought and poetry.<sup>270</sup> It is as if the accomplishments of this era, though almost universally appreciated, are *too beautiful to be true*, and so the Romantic vision of the world persists today only as a fantastic

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<sup>268</sup> Sallis, *Force of Imagination*, 15.

<sup>269</sup> Sallis, *Force of Imagination*, 16.

<sup>270</sup> Sallis, *Force of Imagination*, 16.

dream. Sallis calls upon his contemporaries to look again at the “almost singular texts” of the Romantics, to reread them slowly and carefully so as to allow “their provocative force to come into play.”<sup>271</sup> The continued relevance of the process tradition to which Schelling and Whitehead belong (as well as the esoteric tradition I aim to cross-fertilize with them) is closely bound up with the fate of the Romantic tradition. The success of Sallis’ attempt to retrieve the radical implications of the Romantic imagination is therefore essential to my project.

Is the Romantic vision of the world too beautiful to be true? Sallis turns to the poet John Keats to get a handle on the way that imagination is said to possess “a privileged comportment...to truth.” “What the imagination seizes as Beauty,” writes Keats, “must be truth—whether it existed before or not.”<sup>272</sup> Imagination’s comportment to the truth of beauty is then twofold, establishing itself in both the beauty of what already is, and the beauty of what is not yet but might be made so. “The truth may have existed before the establishing,” writes Sallis, “in which case the establishing would consist in...remembering it; or the truth may not have existed before the establishing, in which case the establishing would consist in...originating the truth, or, in Keats’ idiom, creating it.”<sup>273</sup> Sallis reads Keats’ statement as an expression of the paradoxical nature of imagination, enabling it to seize beauty as truth in a simultaneously “originary” and “memorial” way, as a kind of *creative discovery*. The logic of imagination in this sense is not bound by the law of non-contradiction, but oscillates between opposed moments allowing contradiction to be sustained.<sup>274</sup> “Schelling expresses it most succinctly,” according to Sallis, when he writes in

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<sup>271</sup> Sallis, *Force of Imagination*, 16.

<sup>272</sup> *The Letters of John Keats 1814-1821*, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958), 1:183-87.

<sup>273</sup> Sallis, *Force of Imagination*, 17-18.

<sup>274</sup> Sallis, *Logic of Imagination*, 161.

his *System of Transcendental Idealism* that it is only through imagination that “we are capable of thinking and holding together even what is contradictory.”<sup>275</sup>

Like Sallis’s logic of imagination, Markus Gabriel’s Schellingian ungrounding of classical logic also breaks the law of non-contradiction. Gabriel points to Schelling’s startling claim (startling in the context of German Idealism) that the logical realm of necessity is itself contingently realized in an unprethinkable theogonic event.<sup>276</sup> Logic, for Schelling, is itself a species of mythopoeia. In other words, the space of logical reflection emerges only after the “union of form and content” typical of mythological consciousness has been severed.<sup>277</sup> Instead of restricting language to expression of logical propositions, Gabriel argues that Schelling sought to recover a “sub-semantical (a-semantic) dimension preceding discourse.”<sup>278</sup> From Schelling’s perspective, the logical language of reflection is itself made possible by the “tautogorical” imagery of mythopoeia, as “language itself is only faded mythology.”<sup>279</sup> As is unpacked below, Gabriel’s reading of Schelling is paralleled by Sallis’ attempt to articulate a logos rooted in elemental sensory experience, rather than reflective of some necessary order hidden in an intelligible realm.

Perhaps the most important consequence of imagination’s ability to generate polarity by hovering between contraries rather than allowing them to degenerate into dualistic opposition is that the all too familiar subordination of the sensible to the intelligible world must be radically

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<sup>275</sup> Sallis, *Logic of Imagination*, 4.

<sup>276</sup> Gabriel and Zizek, *Mythology, Madness, and Laughter: Subjectivity in German Idealism* (London: Continuum, 2009), 52-54.

<sup>277</sup> Gabriel and Zizek, *Mythology, Madness, and Laughter: Subjectivity in German Idealism* (London: Continuum, 2009), 56.

<sup>278</sup> Gabriel and Zizek, *Mythology, Madness, and Laughter: Subjectivity in German Idealism* (London: Continuum, 2009), 57.

<sup>279</sup> Schelling, *Historical-critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology*, transl. M. Richey and M. Zisselberger (Albany: State University of New York, 2008), 40.

reformulated. Again, Sallis draws on Keats, who calls us to look upon the sensory world with an imaginal passion or creative love whose reflected light, “thrown in our eyes, genders a novel sense.”<sup>280</sup> The truth of Beauty is not perceived abstractly as by an intellect seeking “a fellowship with essence,”<sup>281</sup> but rather by an *etheric* sense which wreathes “a flowery band to bind us to the earth.”<sup>282</sup> The true world is not to be found in “the clear religion of heaven,”<sup>283</sup> but in the “green world”<sup>284</sup> of earth.

Like Keats’ “novel sense” engendered when imagination is lovingly seized by the true light of Beauty, Whitehead speaks of the “basic Eros which endows with agency all ideal possibilities.”<sup>285</sup> In Whitehead’s philosophical scheme, intelligible essences become the ideal possibilities or conceptual feelings evaluated by the mental pole of a concreting occasion. No longer distant unmoved movers, these Ideas erotically yearn for immanent realization, for incarnation in an actual occasion of experience. Ideas act as lures for feeling generative of “novel senses,” thereby creatively shaping the purposes of individual actual occasions. The creative advance of the universe is driven forward by the integration of the real feelings of the physical pole (prehensions of past actualities) with the ideal feelings of the mental pole (ingressions of future possibilities): Novelty, in other words, “results from the fusion of the ideal with the actual:—The light that never was, on sea or land.”<sup>286</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> John Keats, *Endymion Book I*, line 808.

<sup>281</sup> John Keats, *Endymion Book I*, line 779.

<sup>282</sup> John Keats, *Endymion Book I*, line 7.

<sup>283</sup> John Keats, *Endymion Book I*, line 781.

<sup>284</sup> John Keats, *Endymion Book I*, line 16.

<sup>285</sup> Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 210.

<sup>286</sup> Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 211.

The light Keats and Whitehead speak of is perceivable only with the power of etheric imagination, the novel sense that, if it becomes common, can heal the bifurcation of nature instituted by modern scientific materialism. “Nature knows not by means of science,” writes Schelling, “but...in a magical way. There will come a time when the sciences will gradually disappear and be replaced by immediate knowledge. All sciences as such have been invented only because of the absence of such knowledge. Thus, for instance, the whole labyrinth of astronomical calculations exists because it has not been given to humanity immediately to perceive the necessity of the heavenly movements, or spiritually to share in the real life of the universe. There have existed and there will exist humans who do not need science, through whom nature herself perceives, and who in their vision have become nature. These are the true clairvoyants, the genuine empiricists, and the men who now describe themselves by that name stand to them in the same relation as pretentious demagogues stand to prophets sent from God.”<sup>287</sup>

Sallis connects Keats’ reversal of the typical philosophical evaluation of intelligible originals as truer than sensible images to Nietzsche’s “revaluation of all values” in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. “I beseech you, my brothers,” Nietzsche has Zarathustra say, “*remain true to the earth!*”<sup>288</sup> In his account of “How the ‘True World’ Finally Became a Fable,” Nietzsche traces the historical development of the dualism between the True and the apparent world from Plato, through Christianity, to Kant. Finally, in Nietzsche’s day, the subordination of appearance to Truth had come to be refuted: “The true world—we have done away with it: what world was left? the

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<sup>287</sup> Schelling, *Gesam. Werke*, Abt. I. Bd. vii. “Kritische Fragmente,” p. 246; quoted in *The Intuitive Basis of Knowledge: An Epistemological Inquiry* by Nikolaï Onufrievich Losskiï, transl. by Nathalie A. Duddington (London: Macmillan, 1919), 170.

<sup>288</sup> Nietzsche, *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, in vol. VI 1 of *Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1968), 9. Transl. by John Sallis.

apparent one perhaps?...But no! *with the true world we have also done away with the apparent one!*"<sup>289</sup>

The return to the sensible called for by Sallis, Keats, and Nietzsche, and Whitehead and Schelling in their own way, is then not a simple reversal that would place appearances above intelligibles. Such an inversion would be nonsensical. Rather, the very dichotomy must itself be overcome so as to provide an entirely new interpretation of the sense of the sensible.<sup>290</sup> Sallis suggests that this new orientation to the sensory world will require also a new orientation to *logos*, to speech. His work toward a "logic of imagination" is largely an attempt to reconstruct the sense of speech so that it is no longer "subordinated...to an order of signification absolutely anterior to it."<sup>291</sup> In other words, rather than the meaning of speech being thought of as a derivative of some preconstituted intelligible order, this meaning is to be brought forth out of the sense of the sensible itself. "What is now required," writes Sallis, "is a discourse that would double the sensible—interpret it, as it were—without recourse to the intelligible."<sup>292</sup> Instead of the old dichotomy between the intelligible and the sensible, Sallis turns to elemental forces like earth and sky for philosophical orientation: "Distinct both from intelligible ἀρχαί [archetypes] and from sensible things, the elementals constitute a third kind that is such as to disrupt the otherwise exclusive operation of the distinction between intelligible and sensible. At the limit where, in a certain self-abandonment, philosophy turns back to the sensible, this third kind, the elemental...serves to expose and restore the locus of the primal sense of vertical directionality, on which was founded the sense of philosophical ascendancy, indeed the very metaphors of philosophy itself. One recognizes the Platonic image of the cave is not one image among others; rather, in the depiction

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<sup>289</sup> *Twilight of the Idols: Or, How to Philosophize with a Hammer* (1888), in *The Nietzsche Reader*, ed. Keith Ansell Pearson and Duncan Large (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), p. 465.

<sup>290</sup> Sallis, *Force of Imagination*, 33.

<sup>291</sup> Sallis, *Force of Imagination*, 23.

<sup>292</sup> Sallis, *Force of Imagination*, 33.

of the ascent from within the earth to its surface where it becomes possible to cast one's vision upward to the heaven, the very translation is enacted that generates the philosophical metaphors.<sup>293</sup>

Sallis admits that such a logic of imagination, in that it “[disturbs] the very order of fundamentality and [withdraws] from every would-be absolute its privileging absolutism,”<sup>294</sup> places philosophy in a somewhat unsettled, even *ungrounded*, position. Indeed, Nietzsche's call to return to our senses by being true to the earth is not an attempt to erect a new foundation for philosophy on more solid ground. Nietzsche sought a new beginning for philosophy in the groundless world of becoming—the world of “death, change, age, as well as procreation and growth.”<sup>295</sup> Even the earth is made groundless by the geological forces slowly turning it inside out. Nietzsche subjected all prior philosophers to the earthquakes of his hammer, showing mercy only to Heraclitus, perhaps the first process philosopher, for challenging Parmenides' emphasis on static Being. Heraclitus declared instead that *all things flow*.

Although Sallis articulates his logic of imagination largely in the context of Nietzsche's anti-foundationalism, Schelling and Whitehead's aesthetically-oriented process ontology may provide a more constructive example of how to philosophize after the “True world” has become a fable. In Contrast to Nietzsche's more demolitional approach, you might say Whitehead and Schelling philosophize with a paint brush. For Whitehead, the dichotomy between appearance and reality is not as metaphysically fundamental as has been assumed from ancient Greek

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<sup>293</sup> Sallis, *Force of Imagination*, 173.

<sup>294</sup> Sallis, *Force of Imagination*, 21.

<sup>295</sup> *Twilight of the Idols: Or, How to Philosophize with a Hammer* (1888), in *The Nietzsche Reader*, ed. Keith Ansell Pearson and Duncan Large (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 462.

philosophy onwards.<sup>296</sup> The over-emphasis of this dichotomy is based upon the misleading notion that perception in the mode of “presentational immediacy” is the basis of experience, when in fact, perception in the mode of “causal efficacy” is more primordial. Instead of understanding consciousness to be the highly refined end product of a complex process of experiential formation rooted in the vague feelings of the body and the emotional vectors of its environment, philosophers have made the clear and distinct ideas of conscious attention their starting point. “Consciousness,” writes Whitehead, “raises the importance of the final Appearance [presentational immediacy] relatively to that of the initial Reality [causal efficacy]. Thus it is Appearance which in consciousness is clear and distinct, and it is Reality which lies dimly in the background with its details hardly to be distinguished in consciousness. What leaps into conscious attention is a mass of presuppositions about Reality rather than the intuitions of Reality itself. It is here that the liability to error arises.”<sup>297</sup>

Sallis’ attempt to articulate a “logic of imagination” that brings logos down to earth, returning it to its senses, can further assist my reading of Schelling by making the challenges of translation explicit. I am not a fluent reader of the German language, which may be an important reason not to write on Schelling. However, even if I cannot claim expertise in German, I believe I have been able to familiarize myself with what is at stake philosophically in the translation of certain key words, not the least of which are *Einbildungskraft* (which Sallis translates as “force of imagination”) and Schelling’s neologism *Ineinsbildung* (which Coleridge translates as “esemplastic power”). For Sallis, translation is not simply the problem of carrying meaning from one language over to another; it is a problem internal to each language, the problem of

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<sup>296</sup> Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 209.

<sup>297</sup> Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 270.

*signification* itself. That is to say, even if I were to draw upon only English-speaking authors, the problem of the translation of their “true meaning” would remain. When there are no longer any pre-constituted intelligible signifieds for the sense of a language to signify, logos can no longer be grounded in Reason but must instead find its footing in “the sense of the sensible.”<sup>298</sup> The classical sense of translation, where two different languages are said to signify the same transcendent signified, is no longer credible.<sup>299</sup> A logic of imagination thus calls for the creation of a novel philosophical style, a new linguistic idiom or rhetorical flowering that “[lets] the discourse engender sense in and through the very movement in which it comes to double the sensible.”<sup>300</sup> Rather than approaching the problem of translation, then, as that of carrying over the original meaning of Schelling’s German texts, I will approach the sense of Schelling’s (and the other German authors in his milieu’s) work not just in an attempt to “to teach philosophy to speak English,”<sup>301</sup> but also to irreversibly disrupt any sense of a presupposed purity or simple identity to “the English language.” As the English translator of Schelling’s early essays on transcendental philosophy, Fritz Marti, has written, “Philosophy is not a matter of denominational schools, nor does it have one sacred language. Whatever is philosophically true ought to appeal to man as man. Therefore every philosophical formulation demands translation and retranslation. This is why philosophy has a genuine history. Religious words seem timeless. Philosophy demands perpetual *aggiornamento*. It must be up-to-date. Its truths are reborn by

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<sup>298</sup> Sallis, *Force of Imagination*, 32.

<sup>299</sup> Sallis, *Force of Imagination*, 36.

<sup>300</sup> Sallis, *Force of Imagination*, 34.

<sup>301</sup> Sallis, *Force of Imagination*, 35.

translation.”<sup>302</sup> Philosophy, that is, requires constant updating. It remains always unfinished, always lacking the logical completeness of a definitive translation, not because it is pointless or would then come to contradict itself, but because *its task is infinite*. The *telos* of philosophy is *not* wisdom, the goal is not *to be* wise; rather, the philosopher’s *telos* is *eros*, the *love* of wisdom, *becoming-with* her instead of replacing her with himself. If the generative form of all philosophy is the absolute I, then the living content of philosophy must be “an infinity of actions whose total enumeration forms the content of an infinite task.”<sup>303</sup>

I will not encounter Schelling’s German texts as a fluent reader of his language, and so must depend largely upon the sensitivities of certain translators. Even so, in proceeding by way of a logic of imagination, I’ve learned that the problem of translation was already internal to my own language. For this reason, my reading of German (as well as French, Latin, Greek, ...) texts is part of an attempt to take English to the very limits of its sense, to philosophize in a style rooted in a logic of imagination, rather than a logic of designation.<sup>304</sup> “The truly universal philosophy,” writes Schelling, “cannot possibly be the property of a single nation, and as long as any philosophy does not go beyond the borders of a single people one can be safe in assuming that it is not yet the true philosophy.”<sup>305</sup>

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<sup>302</sup> Schelling, *The Unconditional in Human Knowledge: Four Early Essays (1794-1796)*, transl. and comm. by Fritz Marti (London: Bucknell University Press, 17-18).

<sup>303</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800), 50.

<sup>304</sup> For more on how the images of imagination withdraw from simple designation by words, see Sallis, *Force of Imagination*, 122. A logic of designation assumes an original meaning exists that might be successfully indicated in the lingo of another language, while a logic of imagination endlessly blurs the distinction between an original and its copies.

<sup>305</sup> Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, 190.

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