

MAIN SECTION

Penetrating Planets: Schelling and the Anthrobscene

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I will analyze the early recurrences of the concept of Anthrobscene, as proposed in media studies by Jussi Parikka, in the aesthetics of Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, as advanced especially in "On the Relationship of the Plastic Arts to Nature" of 1807. This work is established within the broader debate on the concept of Anthropocene, which, as known, identifies the human being as the main cause of impact on the Earth system in the era we are living. In the first part, I will introduce this concept in a critical way, to then compare it, in the second part, to the elements of Schellingian thought relevant to this debate. Finally, in the last part, after briefly explaining the new conceptual elements embedded in the term 'Anthrobscene', I will analyze Schelling's *Rede* of 1807, in order to reclaim his aesthetics as properly anthrobscenic.

KEYWORDS

Schelling, Anthropocene, Anthrobscene, Aesthetics, Media

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1. Since the term ‘Anthropocene’ was first proposed by Paul J. Crutzen in a conference in Cuernavaca (Mexico) in 2000 and reiterated in several articles in the following years,¹ the expression has opened a debate that after more than twenty years does not seem to be extinguished. The definition is now well-known: the Anthropocene is “the present, in many ways human-dominated, geological epoch, supplementing the Holocene—the warm period of the past 10–12 millennia”. An indicative beginning of this new era was suggested to be “the latter part of the eighteenth century, when analyses of air trapped in polar ice showed the beginning of growing global concentrations of carbon dioxide and methane”. This date also happens “to coincide with James Watt’s design of the steam engine in 1784”.² It is therefore a new era in which the human presence has begun—and continues to be—so impactful on the Earth system that it has become the main subject of its modification. The impact is such that, if hypothetical geologists of the future were to analyze the stratigraphy of the planet, they could not help but take notice of the singularity of the traces of its history.

This definition, however, has not met unanimous consent by critics, who have questioned at least two points. Firstly, one could ask: what is the instance of enunciation of these traces? Is it necessary to attribute blame and responsibility to the *anthropos* to which the name Anthropocene refers to? And if so, what extension does this term have? Questioning this alleged primacy and displacing this authorship has progressively produced a countless series of counter-proposition to name this new geological era. Secondly, but still related to the first aspect, the threshold determining the historical breaking point and the actual beginning of this new age has been questioned. Considering these misconceptions, Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz have decided to consider the Anthropocene as a historical event and to enhance the political scope of the onomasiological debate of the term, i.e., on the different pertinentization by recent environmental History studies. It is in the various editions of their *L’Événement Anthropocène* that the two historians analyze the various oligarchocene, thermocene, tanatocene, phagocene, fronocene, agnotocene, capitalocene, polemocene.³ But the list is much more extensive, and it does not show signs of slowing down.⁴ And with each name comes the proposal of a new date, of a new duration, of a new cause for this epoch, thus transforming the Anthropocene into a true “battlefield”.⁵

1 Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer, “The ‘Anthropocene,’” *IGBP Newsletter*, no. 41 (2000), 17-8; Paul J. Crutzen, “Geology of Mankind,” *Nature* no. 415 (2002), 23.

2 *Ibid.*, 23a.

3 Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz, *The Shock of the Anthropocene: The Earth, History and us*, trans. David Fernbach (London and New York: Verso, 2016).

4 80 of them are analyzed, for example, by Franciszek Chwałczyk, “Around the Anthropocene in Eighty Names—Considering the Urbanocene Proposition,” *sustainability* 12, no. 4458, (2020): 1-33. For a critical introduction to Anthropocene theory, see Paolo Missiroli, *Teoria critica dell’antropocene: Vivere dopo la Terra, vivere nella Terra* (Milano and Udine: Mimesis, 2022).

5 *Azimuth* no. 9 (2017): *The Battlefield of the Anthropocene: Limits, Responsibilities, and the Duty of Flight/Antropocene: un campo di battaglia: Limiti, responsabilità e dovere di fuga*, ed. Sara Baranzoni and Paolo Vignola.

At the same time, there are those who see in the 'Anthropocene' just a linguistic device to feed a merely academic debate, whose confirmation is to be found precisely in the nominal superfetation.⁶

In this paper I would like to underline that the discussion around the Anthropocene certainly implies a certain vagueness and that the definition of the term faces scholars with something of a challenge, but also that, correlatively, it can offer plenty of ethical-political solutions. The last two decades of discussion on the Anthropocene have only extended what was already being discussed—and fought for—for several years in relation to ecological issues. The Anthropocene wants to rethink in new terms what was intended to be a new ethics, a new attitude of human beings towards the environment and, more broadly, towards nature. Considering that ecology is, overall, the reciprocal and retroactive relationships between individuals and environments, the awareness of the changes that the actions of humans have on Earth as a system should lead to a reassessment of these actions themselves and, correlatively, of the political dimension they co-implicate.

As far as its philosophy of nature is concerned, the Anthropocene inherits from ecology a basic ambiguity, which can be schematized through two antithetical and opposite positions: on the one hand there is the awareness of the exceeding of the natural instance as a dynamic force in comparison to the alleged centrality of the human. From a philosophical point of view, this implies the consideration of other or different forms of agentic subjectivity. Certainly widespread, these reasonings start from the pre-logical, that is, for instance, animality, in order to extend it to the whole living if not, even, to the inorganic. On the other hand, a concept such as the Anthropocene should emphasize the assumption of the lead role of men in the impact on the planet, with the consequent need to reduce it or take arms in defense of nature. In this system of belief, nature itself is however to be understood as a weak or powerless instance, something to be preserved.⁷ This is a double evaluation of the role of the human being that has been considered paradoxical, and rightly so.⁸

2. Given the variation of the concept and its underlying ambiguity, it is not surprising that Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling's philosophy has been reconsidered through the lenses of the Anthropocene and vice versa. The plurivocity is such that any thematization of the concept of nature can offer the possibility of grafting onto the rootstock of the

6 Jamie Lorimer, "The Anthro-scene: A guide for the perplexed," *Social Studies of Science* 47, no. 1 (2017): 117–42. On the *différance* of the term, we will return.

7 For a schematization of the possible declinations of the concept of nature, see Table 1 in Frédéric Ducarme, "Qu'est-ce que la nature qu'on cherche à conserver? Une approche sémiologique de l'action écologique," *npss* 14, no. 2 (2019): 38.

8 Christopher Lauer, "Confronting the Anthropocene: Schelling and Lucretius on receiving nature's gift," *Comparative and Continental Philosophy* 8, no. 2 (2016): 1.

'Anthropocene', regardless of future rooting. Schelling, as known, is a prominent figure of the German *Naturphilosophie* at the turn of the XVIII century. The coincidence with some periodization of the Anthropocene that indicate its beginning in the invention of the steam engine by James Watts and, in general, with the first industrial revolution, offer more of a justification than a confirmation.

The problematization of the Anthropocene has led to the rediscovery of the Romantic philosophy of nature, in the hope that it will rebalance the relationship of nature and culture.⁹ Indeed, German- and English-speaking 'Anthropocene' readings have emphasized the importance of the philosophy of nature of Schelling and his contemporaries, such as Novalis, Arthur Schopenhauer, Alexander von Humboldt, and Henrich Steffens.¹⁰ For example, Berbeli Wanning recalls how, while Schelling anticipates the insights of material ecology in his conception of matter's agentivity, Novalis is a forerunner of contemporary ecological criticism because he claims poetic imagination in synthesizing the alienated and split fragments of a rationalist civilization.¹¹ Similarly, Philippe Höfele and Lore Hühn praise the importance of Schopenhauer and Schelling beyond the mere history of philosophy. Precisely in a debate such as the one on the Anthropocene, in which the human is found to be the overriding factor within the biosphere of our planet, both authors propose a metaphysic in which the concept of subjectivity is extended to the whole being: the human is only one of the many concretizations of the will (*Wille*), albeit the highest.¹² Christina Pinsdorf emphasizes the value of geographer von Humboldt, and *Naturphilosophie* "first Schelling". Summarizing, they both critique the epistemological paradigm of subject-object and the ontological mechanicism—but in general of every dualism—according to which *natura naturata* is reduced to material calculation and exploitation.¹³ They

9 Robert Schimelpfenig, "The Drama of the Anthropocene: Can Deep Ecology, Romanticism, and Renaissance Science Rebalance Nature and Culture?" *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 76, no. 4 (2017): 821-1081. See nonetheless Rosa Maria Martelo, "Algunas notas para a salvação do mundo," *Libreto* 26, no. 6 (2021): 31, and 33, and, although surprisingly lacking in references to Schelling, *Readings in the Anthropocene: The Environmental Humanities, German Studies, and Beyond*, ed. Japhet Johnstone and Sabine Wilke (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2017).

10 It must be underlined how the emergence of the interest of philosophy towards nature must be put in relation with the foundation of contemporary universities at the beginning of the XIX century and the birth of human sciences at the same time. Therefore, the Anthropocene has been, since its origin, an effect of sense of the university discourse. Regarding Schelling, see specifically his lectures *On University Studies*, trans. E. S. Morgan, ed. N. Guterman (Athens, Ohio: Ohio UP, 1966). See Sverre Raffnsøe, *Philosophy of the Anthropocene: The Human Turn* (London: palgrave macmillan, 2016), 46-53.

11 Berbeli Wanning, "Poet and Philosopher: Novalis and Schelling on Nature and Matter," in *Ecological Thought in German Literature and Culture*, ed. Gabriele Dürbeck, Urte Stobbe, Hubert Zapf and Evi Zemanek (Lanham, Boulder, New York and London: Lexington, 2017), 43-62.

12 Philipp Höfele and Lore Hühn, "Vorwort," in *Schopenhauer liest Schelling: Freiheits- und Naturphilosophie im Ausgang der klassischen deutschen Philosophie*, mit einer Edition von Schopenhauers handschriftlichen Kommentaren zu Schellings ›*Freiheitsschrift*‹, hrgs. Ead. (Stuttgart and Bad Cannstatt: frommann-holzboog, 2021), 1-3.

13 On mechanicism as a philosophy on the grounds of climate change and Schelling's critique, see Virgilio Rivas, "The Anthropogenic Takeover of Dual External World," *Cosmos and History* 16, no. 1 (2020): 317-48.

were both sensible, just at the dawn of the first great industrialization, towards the impact of human beings on the various spheres that stratify the planet system (atmo-, hydro-, lith-, cryo-, bio-sphere, and so on) as well as to the problem of the massive extinction of species, both directly on animal environments and retroactively on human ones.¹⁴ Schelling, in the sixth and eleventh lectures of his *On Academic Study* of 1802, published one year later, literally denounces the consequences of Cartesian atomism and mechanicism to be an annihilation of nature.¹⁵ Therefore, their romantic empiricism was aimed at the re-enchantment of the world and, if read retroactively in the light of contemporary ecological crises, it proposes itself as an alternative in which the alliance between natural sciences and human sciences, or in general between nature and culture, could rethink the Cartesian subject-object paradigm.¹⁶ The two already expressed the core “of the fundamental structure of all ecological thoughts, which is expressed in the polarity between potentially infinite connection and potentially infinite diversity (*potenziell unendlicher Verbundenheit und potenziell unendlicher Verschiedenheit*)”, thus clashing as the “ungovernable connectivity of all natural phenomena and their irreducible diversity, the unity connected in and with everything (*in und mit allem verbundene Einheit*) in combination with the infinitely multiple singularity of things”. This is a new epistemology proposal that can grasp nature in its “totality and unity (*Ganzheit und Einheit*)”.¹⁷ Precisely on the mereological comingling of organic and inorganic Schelling was the main influence of his pupil Henrich Steffens, as Jakob Stougaard-Nielsen recalls.¹⁸

But if these readings indicate the richness of the Schellingian philosophical proposal in the dismissal of the primacy of human subjectivity and place the emphasis on the productivity of nature, there is no lack of contributions, such as those of Sean McGrath¹⁹ and Vincent Lê,²⁰ who emphasize the central role of *ánthrōpos*, of its responsibility, and of its goal of protecting the rest of nature. Since Schellingian philosophical anthropology proposes a human that is not self-founded, but on the contrary receives

14 Christina Pinsdorf, “Romantischer Empirismus im Anthropozän: A. v. Humboldts und F. W. J. Schellings: Ideen für die *Environmental Humanities*,” *HiN* 21, no. 40 (2020): 60, and 71-2.

15 Schelling literally speaks of “*Annihilation der Natur*” (F.W.J. Schelling, “Vorlesungen über die Methode des akademischen Studiums” (1803), in *Sämtliche Werke* (abbr. = *SW*), Ab. I, Bd. 5, 275) and of “*Vernichtung der Natur*” (Ibid., 275, and 319).

16 Pinsdorf, “Romantischer Empirismus im Anthropozän,” 84, and 91. On this point, see also the reprise of Goethe and Schelling *contra* Fichte by Markus Moling, “Kritische Reflexionen zu einem fehlgeleiteten Anthropozentrismus im Angesicht der Umweltkrise,” *Brixner Theologisches Jahrbuch* no. 10 (2019): 164.

17 Pinsdorf, “Romantischer Empirismus im Anthropozän,” 66, and 73 ss. Similarly, see Jason M. Wirth, “Dōgen and the Unknown Knowns: The Practice of the Wild after the End of Nature,” *Environmental Philosophy* 10, no. 1 (2013): 39–62.

18 Jakob Stougaard-Nielsen, “Nordic Nature: From Romantic Nationalism to the Anthropocene,” in *Introduction to Nordic Cultures*, ed. Id. and Annika Lindskog (London: UCLPress, 2020), 168.

19 Sean J. McGrath, “In Defense of the Human Difference,” *Environmental Philosophy* 15, no. 1 (2018): 1-15.

20 Vincent Lê, “Schelling and the Sixth Extinction: The Environmental Ethics Behind Schelling’s Anthropomorphization of Nature,” *Cosmos and History* 13, no. 3 (2017): 107-29.

its material basis externally,²¹ the German philosopher can lay the groundwork for the redefinition of the human as a responsible animal.²² Bruce Matthews, by mutual consent, referring to Schelling's "system of freedom", considers the human as a *Mitwissenschaft* of the whole creation,²³ as an "organ of nature" through which nature itself assumes self-awareness. Schelling, in the age of the Anthropocene, proves to be the mean for a new mythology that unites nature and history.²⁴

Finally, there is a third position that should be emphasized not only for its originality, but in relation to its intrinsic value beyond the mere Schellingian cue. Frédéric Neyrat, in his *La Part inconstructible de la Terre*, considers that the greatest contribution that Schelling can offer to the debate on the Anthropocene is precisely the concept of "denatured nature", *natura denaturata*, a third option compared to the traditional ones of *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*.²⁵ The neologism of the French philosopher—the term is not to be found in Schelling's works—proposes this nature to be an instance that, although not translated into the naturalized one, does not belong to the productive principle but, on the contrary stands as an anti-production: "Nature is not simply natured nature (an object to be shaped or that is manipulable), natured nature (a producing subject), but also a denaturing nature—a movement of withdrawal, an antiproduction preceding all production".²⁶ The proposal of Neyrat would be therefore to find in the split between the *naturans* cause and the *naturati* products an umpteenth dualism. As much as romanticism has tried to connect them together, putting in this way an organicist model opposite to the mechanistic one, the only way to think of an exceeding Nature is to explicitly consider an external or not referable part of it, as to the process of production.

Then again, these interpretations are not new: Schelling and the Anthropocene was the subject of a conference given in August 2014: "Schelling in the Anthropocene: Thinking beyond the Annihilation of

21 Thomas Schwarz Wentzer, "Rethinking Transcendence: Heidegger, Plessner and the Problem of Anthropology," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 25, no. 3 (2017): 348-62.

22 Id., "Approaching Philosophical Anthropology: Human, the Responsive Being," in *Finite but Unbounded: New Approaches in Philosophical Anthropology*, ed. Id., Kevin M. Cahill, and Martin Gustafsson (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2017), 25-45.

23 Schelling speaks of "*Mitwissenschaft*" (Schelling, *Die Weltalter: Fragmente*, in den Urfassungen von 1811 und 1813, hrsg. Manfred Schröter (Munich: Biederstein, 1946), 4; trans. Joseph P. Lawrence, *The Ages of the World: Book One: The Past (Original Version, 1811)* (New York: SUNY, 2019), 57; Id., "Die Weltalter" (1811-1817), in *SW, Ab. I, Bd. 8*: 200; trans. Jason M. Wirth, *The Ages of the World: (Fragment)*, from the handwritten remains, Third Version (c. 1815) (New York: SUNY, 2000), XXXVI), of "*Mitt-wissenschaft*" (Id., *Die Weltalter*, 112; trans. Judith Normann, "Ages of the World", in Id. and Slavoj Žižek, *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 114) and of "*Mitwissenschaft, conscientia*" ("Erlanger Vorträge: (Aus dem handschriftlichen Nachlaß)," in *SW, Ab. I, Bd. 9*: 221).

24 Bruce Matthews, "Schelling in the Anthropocene: A New Mythology of Nature", *Symposium* 19, no. 1 (2015): 94–105, <https://doi.org/10.5840/symposium20151918>.

25 On this conceptual paradigm, see Olga Weijters, "Contribution à l'histoire des termes '*natura naturans*' et '*natura naturata*' jusqu'à Spinoza," *Vivarium* 16, no. 1 (1978): 70-80.

26 Frédéric Neyrat, *The Unconstructable Earth: An Ecology of Separation*, trans. Drew S. Burk (Fordham: Fordham UP, 2018), 134. See also Id., "Returning from Afar: Returns in slight delay on *La Part inconstructible de la Terre*," trans. Jean-Sébastien Laberge, *La Deleuziana* no. 4 (2016): 11-8.

Nature” at the Bard Graduate Center in New York, which goes on to corroborate the many ecological readings of Schellingian thought, whether through recent speculative realism²⁷ or Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s reading in his course on *The Concept of Nature*.²⁸

There is, however, a further reason that links Schelling to the Anthropocene and to its debate: as it is well known, Schelling’s path of thought presents such an evolution and rethinking throughout his career that he deserves the epithet of “Proteus of philosophy” and his philosophy that of a “*philosophie en devenir*”.²⁹ The most pedantic historians have even pointed out seven phases of his thought, in some of which it is possible to mark radical rethinking points, therefore moments of his thought contradict one another. In this way it is not difficult to find within his philosophy an element that can best suit one’s research or position. If these are the textual conditions that can explain Schelling’s versatility towards the ecological debate, it is possible, however, to reverse the question and ask ourselves, if anything, how the concept of Anthropocene can help us to read Schelling. The aim would not only be to illuminate a specific interpretation of the philosopher himself, but to fully appreciate what this author has to offer when recontextualized in the modern discourse. The already mentioned “Confronting the Anthropocene”, by Christopher Lauer, proposes the concept of nature as a *gift*: in fact, it is given; it is offered; it comes from outside; it does not necessarily require the receiver to respond to those who offered it, insofar as the gift is to be understood as absolute (otherwise it would be an *exchange*). The reaction towards the nature-gift is therefore, on one hand, a field of possibility of new horizons, on the other, it is proposed as an instance of responsibility towards which we are destined. Lauer, therefore, rethinks nature also as a *pharmakon* since the paradox of too much or too less responsibility must be reread through an intensive type of relationship between humans and nature.³⁰ For this reason, Lauer, as well as Mattias Martinson,³¹ proposes to take up the concept of “positive philosophy” of the last Schelling in which the hypostatization of

27 Ben Woodard, “Schellingian Thought for Ecological Politics,” *Anarchist Developments in Cultural Studies* no. 2 (2013): 86-108, which is based on Iain Hamilton Grant, *Philosophies of Nature After Schelling* (London and New York: Continuum, 2006).

28 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Nature: Course Notes from the Collège de France*, ed. Dominique Ségler, trans. Robert Vallier (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern UP, 2003), 36-51. It has been taken up later by Manlio Iofrida, “Per una rifondazione filosofica dell’ecologia,” in *Per un paradigma del corpo: Una rifondazione filosofica dell’ecologia* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2019), 45-56, and Gianluca De Fazio, “Il chiasma tra Natura e trascendentale: ‘Un’originaria duplicità’: L’ecologia filosofica tra il sistema di Schelling e l’ontologia di M. Merleau-Ponty,” *Lo Sguardo* 30, no. 1 (2020): 323-42. Merleau-Ponty’s Schelling is finally irreconcilable with that advanced by speculative realism, since “the chiasm between subject and world, while placing the subject in a sphere of fundamental passivity, does not annul it as such and makes it impossible, by virtue of its situated partiality, to grasp the real Absolute, which is instead the theoretical goal of these currents of thought” (P. Missiroli, “Natura e istituzione: Note in vista di un’ecologia politica,” in *Res publica: La forma del conflitto*, ed. Id. and Andrea Di Gesù (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2021), 203 note 37).

29 The reference is to Xavier Tilliette, *Schelling: Une philosophie en devenir*, tt. I-II (Paris: Vrin, 1970, 1992²).

30 Lauer, “Confronting the Anthropocene.”

31 Mattias Martinson, “A Truth That Can Save Us? On Critical Theory, Revelation, and Climate Change,” *Toronto Journal of Theology* 35, no. 2 (2019): 134-49.

an indeterminate positive instance, external to thought, is advanced and which is its presupposition.³² Nature, this way, turns out to be an exceeding remainder that can never be pertinentized in an exhaustive way, that stands as an *a priori* of reason and therefore a limit, both internal and external, to human rationality.

This reading offers us the hitch perhaps for an over-interpretation, or, if nothing else, for a trace of it. Insofar as Schelling's philosophy, that of nature, is formed precisely at the same time as the event of the Anthropocene and its development of thought, although it implies elements of continuity, is, as anticipated, punctuated by rethinking. It is therefore possible to draw a parallel between the evolution of his philosophy and the progressive intensification of human impact on the planet in the first half of the XIX century. A hyper-constructivist view would not hesitate to point to Schelling's parable as a reaction to the epochal rupture due to the awareness of the finiteness of nature and the corruptibility of the planet, giving an explanation for the passage from a first philosophy, that posited a single principle permeating nature as *anima mundi*, then retraced and summarized it in the human being, to one that instead feels the need to hypostatize an external *quid* that can never be subsumed.

3. Among the paronyms of 'Anthropocene' that have followed, I would now like to take up one, namely that of 'Anthrobscene' proposed by Jussi Parikka in his research on media archaeology.³³ Unlike other proposals of pertinentization, that of the Finnish scholar makes explicit the aesthetic character of the Anthropocene from the beginning. 'Anthrobscene', in fact—and this is a point that Parikka seems not to have emphasized—, being a homophone of 'Anthropocene', stands as its *differance*: only by seeing and reading the two terms in writing is it possible to distinguish one from the other, in the same way only the reading of the stratigraphic analysis of the planet allows one to distinguish between epochs. Indeed, it is precisely the *segnatura* of the world and its reading that allow the distinction.³⁴

But what is the Anthrobscene? The term shares the same periodization of Crutzen, pointing out how already for Antonio Stoppani, Italian geographer also recalled by the Dutch engineer, the stratigraphic representation of the planet included not only the remains of prehistoric eras, but already showed the signs of human technological inventions and their remains

32 Schelling, "Philosophie der Offenbarung" (1841-2), in *SW*, Ab. II, Bd. 3-4; trans. Bruce Matthews, *The Grounding of Positive Philosophy: The Berlin Lectures* (Albany: SUNY, 2007).

33 Cfr. Jussi Parikka, *The Anthrobscene* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014). See also *Urban Political Ecology in the Anthro-obsene: Interruptions and Possibilities*, ed. Henrik Ernstson and Erik Swyngedouw (London: Routledge, 2019).

34 The limit of what might be called as *Lesbarkeit der Welt ohne Lesern* in reference to the Anthropocene can be found in Claire Colebrook, "Archivolithic: The Anthropocene and the Hetero-Archive," *Derrida Today* 7, no. 1 (2014): 21-43.

and ruins. Simply put, Anthrobscene shows how “the earth as media” was already being thought about in the XIX century.³⁵ The planet, in fact, is “part of media both as a resource and as transmission. The earth conducts, also, literally, forming a special part of the media and sound artistic circuitry”.³⁶ In a nutshell, the Anthropocene is first and foremost a geological writing practice and effect, which has caused the planet to pose itself as media, not only as a source and place of media waste, but also as media itself.

4. It is therefore possible to reread the places in which Schelling expresses his aesthetics in a more systematic way, underlining how there emerges a progressive awareness of the transfiguration of the planet, accompanied by a modification of the image of the same. First, the *Akademie-Rede* of 1807 opens precisely on the crisis of the mimetic paradigm in the works of figurative art of his time. The purpose of art has always been, according to tradition, the *mimesis* of nature, and, as they are both characterized by a productive process, they are in a relationship of analogy.³⁷ However, according to Schelling, the concept of nature exhibits ambiguities which are the cause for misunderstanding of his contemporary visual artists contemporary on the matter to be emulated. In fact, the German philosopher recalls that “[s]ome think nature is nothing more than the dead aggregate of an indeterminate amount of objects, or space into which objects are put as in a container. For others it is just the land from which they draw their food and sustenance”. This led to a disorientation of the visual art of the early XIX century, considering that the conception of these painters and sculptors proposes a nature as a mere juxtaposition of bodies, understanding these latter as simple elements extending in space. On the contrary, “[o]nly to the inspired researcher is it the holy and eternally creative primordial force of the world, which generates and actively produces all things out of itself. This principle would be highly meaningful if it taught art to emulate this productive force”.³⁸ Only nature in its productive making, and not in the mere intellectual semblance of the parts of its creation, is and should therefore be the true object of imitation of art. From this point of view, the concept of “mimesis” as proposed in Schelling’s *Rede* is not so much to be understood as an imitation of a given object, as commonsensically understood. It is, instead, a performative act through which it takes on properties analogous to the object in question, as now shared

35 Parikka, *The Anthrobscene*, 7.

36 *Ibid.*, 12.

37 On this point, see Hans Blumenberg, “Imitation of Nature: Toward a Prehistory of the Idea of the Creative Being” (1957), trans. Anne Wertz, rev. Hannes Bajohr, in *History, Metaphors, Fables: A Hans Blumenberg Reader*, ed. H. Bajohr, Florian Fuchs and Joe Paul Kroll (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 2020), 316-57.

38 Schelling, “Über das Verhältnis der bildenden Künste zu der Natur” (1807), in *SW*, Ab. I, Bd. 7: 293; trans. Jason M. Wirth, “On the Relationship of the Plastic Arts to Nature,” *kabiri* no. 3 (2021): 135.

by contemporary aesthetics studies. In Schelling the act of creation turns out to be specifically *mimetic* in that, just as occurs in nature, there is not so much a problematization of similarity to the object represented as of its *presentation*, its *Darstellung*. Just as nature produces itself and presents its own forms, so art leads to reflect on the unconscious production of its own.

Here Schelling revises the symptoms on the poietic level of what he was denouncing a few years earlier on what we could call geo-economic level. If we take up the section dedicated "Von den Unterschieden der Qualität im Universum" of the "Aphorisms as an introduction to *Naturphilosophie*" of 1805 we can read in fact as "[o]nly in so far as the things appear as corporeal, i.e., as affections of unity and infinity, only in so far also all of things, nature itself, appears as corporeal, but it is affectionless substance. We may, of course, penetrate into the planet empirically as deeply as we want [*in den Weltkörper empirisch so tief eindringen, als wir wollen*], so we find soils, metals, and other similar things, but these, as such, are by no means the eternally existing being, the substance, which as the apriori of all corporeal things is necessarily not corporeal itself".³⁹ The following aphorism emphasizes: "By virtue of the same way of looking at things, through which the infinite nature appears corporeally (as a planet [*Weltkörper*]), it happens that we oppose the Idea looked at in relation (abstracted from infinity) with another one, which again is only a relative (central body), not the absolute unity, and so onto the infinite". Schelling demonstrates how this is "only a consequence of the confused way of looking at things, by which the universe is transformed for us into a system of bodies, but truly it is the infinite and immortal God, who lives in the world system, and who is not body, not matter, but general affectionless substance".⁴⁰ Nature here is already that original living being, *das Urlebendige*, on which *Weltalter* will open. It is the living being indifferent to its individual and extended material articulations, and of which the attempted work of the years 1811-1817 is nothing but the problematization of its historical translation in the form of the world.⁴¹ Lastly, "where all qualities of nature meet, the periphery (as in the world body) becomes equal to the center [*dem Centro*], and the unity with infinity exists not only simultaneously, but in absolute equality: there all potency disappears, and the divine itself emerges and shines through in the qualityless and dimensionless reason, which is the face of God resting on creation".⁴² Planetary penetration is nothing but the practical translation of the Cartesian mechanistic model whose dangers, as we have

39 Id., "Aphorismen zur Einleitung in die Naturphilosophie" (1805), § 201, in *SW*, Ab. I, Bd. 7: 181. There is only a partial English translation of the "Aphorismen", limited to the first 80. See Schelling, "Aphorisms as an introduction to *Naturphilosophie*," in "Schelling's Aphorisms of 1805," edited by Fritz Marti, *Idealistic Studies* no. 14 (1984): 244-258.

40 Id., "Aphorismen," §202, in *SW*, Ab. I, Bd. 7: 181-2.

41 On this point, see Gianni Carchia, "La nascita della forma: L'estetica cosmica de *Le età del mondo*," in *Interpretazione ed emancipazione: Studi in onore di Gianni Vattimo*, ed. G. Carchia and Maurizio Ferraris (Milano: Cortina, 1995), 181-205.

42 Schelling, "Aphorismen," §204, in *SW*, Ab. I, Bd. 7: 182.

seen, Schelling denounced already in his *On Academic Study* of 1802. The planet here is taken as tautegory of the whole of nature⁴³, that stands as the instance of nature, prior to any division by *nomos*.⁴⁴ To confirm this, in the *Statement on the True Relationship of the Philosophy of Nature to the Revised Fichtean Doctrine*, again in 1806, Schelling uses the planet, literally the “body of the world”, as an example and paradigm in talking about the concept of togetherness of the unity and multiplicity of nature: “[i]t is the same with the earth [...] [whose] true essence can be known only in the bond which gives it: the power to posit its unity eternally as the multiplicity of its things, and on the other hand also this multiplicity as its unity. [T]his necessary and indissoluble oneness of unity and multiplicity is what you call [earth’s] existence”.⁴⁵

It is therefore not surprising that Schelling feels the need for a new aesthetic epistemology. The aim is to make visual art a means of knowing nature, not in its mere articulation of simple forms, but to be able, as such, to show the strength and the process that underlies the genesis of itself and that ultimately unifies and shows them in their own identity.⁴⁶

We would therefore like to bring attention to a specific passage in the so-called *Akademie-Rede*. Schelling, in his lecture, defines grace as a “being [Wesen], which [...] is ungraspable yet perceptible to everyone”.⁴⁷ It is a living, transcendent essence that runs through the artwork. It is content with terminative aspectualization that manifests the agreement of body and soul in nature. It emerges at the conclusion of the process of individuation of the forms that, just from an initial imbalance and a liminal stage, allows for the full unfolding of the essence. It is, after all, the ultimate result of the fundamental contrast that lies at the origin of creation and assumes rigorousness of form as the genesis of development. Grace on the one hand is the perfectly elaborated form; while on the other hand is a constant “δαίμων [daimōn]” of the development itself, which stands as a sign of the opening of the finite form to the infinite essence to which it refers.⁴⁸

43 With the concept of tautegory, so defined only by the late Schelling in reference to mythology, the German philosopher attempts to indicate figures indistinguishable from their meaning. They are their content. In other words, these, however finite, refer to an infinite content, from which they can be distinguished only formally. It seems to us for this reason that the concept of planet as indicated in the “Aphorismen” can be a tautegorical symbol of the whole of nature. In this regard, see Daniel Whistler, *Schelling’s Theory of Symbolic Language: Forming the System of Identity* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), 192-8.

44 See Joseph Albernaz, “Earth Unbounded: Division and Inseparability in Hölderlin and Günderrode,” in *Nothing Absolute: German Idealism and the Question of Political Theology*, ed. Kirill Chepurin and Alex Dubilet (New York: Fordham UP, 2021), 128-9, and 140-1 note 20.

45 Schelling, “Darlegung des wahren Verhältnisses der Naturphilosophie zur verbesserten Fichteschen Lehre: Eine Erläuterungsschrift der Ersten” (1806), in *SW*, Ab. I, Bd. 7: 56; trans. Dale E. Snow, *Statement on the True Relationship of the Philosophy of Nature to the Revised Fichtean Doctrine: An Elucidation of the Former* (Albany: SUNY, 2018), 51.

46 Pinsdorf, “Romantischer Empirismus im Anthropozän,” 80.

47 Schelling, “Über das Verhältnis...,” 311; trans.: 150. On grace, see Daniele Campesi, “Natura, arte, bellezza: Il tema della grazia nella *Akademie-Rede* di Schelling,” *SpazioFilosofico* (2016): 327-36.

48 Schelling, “Über das Verhältnis...,” 313; trans., 150.

In doing so, natural forms take on the purpose of being like the soul, which can grasp the infinite essence, which can manifest itself. Within the *Rede*, in fact, one can precisely witness this reversal: “[h]ere art [...] goes through and beyond itself, and again makes itself a medium [*macht sich selber wieder zum Mittel*]. From this peak, sensuous grace again becomes the mere husk and body of a higher life. What was earlier whole is treated as part, and the supreme relationship of art to nature is thereby reached. Nature is made the medium within which the soul becomes visible [*daß sie diese zum Medium macht, die Seele in ihr zu versichtbaren*]”.⁴⁹ There is in this passage, in that inversion we have revealed, a symptom of the chiasmatic structure of the Schellingian system: from an art that has the imitation of nature as its aims, we come to one in which it is nature that becomes the medium of manifestation of the soul.⁵⁰

The Schellingian *Akademie-Rede*—this is my thesis—can offer the basis for an anthropocenic aesthetics, specifically anthrobscenic. The dismembering of the “body of the world” of the planet-nature assumes its own tragic connotation if the very representation of the creative process at the basis of the same allows for a denounce of the limits of mechanism and thus to come to grasp the underlying soul of nature. At the same time, this approach could be short-circuited if the fetishization of the geological writing process is achieved. Here grace, of which nature is the medium, can only be achieved starting from an initial imbalance and the closure of a form, a moment that many contemporary works explicitly dedicated to the Anthropocene seem to stop at. We believe that this possibility is still due to the ineluctable ambiguity of the concept of nature, present both in Schelling and in our contemporary times, and nothing prevents us from slipping from one conception to another, misunderstanding the proposal of the German philosopher.⁵¹

These remarks are established in a reading of Schelling as an “organological” philosopher, insofar as his proposal of an advanced organic form as a counter-model to the mechanical one makes the Schellingian cosmos a cosmotechnics.⁵² As each part is a function of the whole, morphogenesis

49 Ibid., 316; trans., 150.

50 On this point, see Tilliette, “La philosophie de l’art” (1975), in *L’Absolu et la Philosophie: Essais sur Schelling* (Paris: puf, 1987), 90.

51 In this respect we do not feel like contradicting Slavoj Žižek, *The Indivisible Remainder: Essays on Schelling and Related Matters* (London and New York: Verso, 1996, 2007²), 80-1 note 17.

52 Yuk Hui, “De la forme organique de Schelling: La philosophie de la nature à l’époque de l’Anthropocène” (2015), https://www.academia.edu/15244123/De_la_forme_organique_de_Schelling. The presentation of this paper can be listened to at the URL = <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q2TIEaLesDE>. See also his “The Parallax of Individuation: Simondon and Schelling”, *angelaki* 21, no. 4 (2016): 77-89. The Chinese philosopher specifies how “Schelling doit être considéré comme le premier penseur de l’organologie générale au lieu de Bergson” *contra* Georges Canguilhem who “propose [...] l’Évolution créatrice [...] comme un traité sur l’organologie générale” (Hui, “De la forme organique,” 12). Wanting to corroborate historiographically the proposal of Yuk Hui, it should be remembered that there is a closeness between Bergson and Schelling filtered by Félix Ravaisson, master of the first and student of the second. Bergson will reject the philosophical legacy of the German philosopher only for anti-Germanic spirit.

stands as a transformative process and form as a technical device. In other terms, taking up the specific object of our examination, the “body of the world” in Schelling stands as a true aesthetic device. Precisely from this point of view, the concept of *Organon* proposed in the sixth chapter of the *System of Transcendental Idealism* takes on its literal meaning: art is an instrument that allows the expression of the forces of nature and its unconscious and technical character:⁵³ “[w]hereas the unconscious (blind) activity is reflected out of the organic product as a conscious one, the conscious activity will conversely be reflected out of the product here under consideration as an unconscious (objective) one; whereas the organic product reflects its unconscious activity to me as determined by conscious activity, the product here being derived will conversely reflect conscious activity as determined by unconscious”. More briefly, “nature begins as unconscious and ends as conscious; the process of production is not purposive, but the product is so”.⁵⁴ If we take up what has been developed previously, in the light of the conception of the planet as a medium, we seem to be able to advance the thesis that Schelling not only has laid the foundations of a productive unconscious, as so much criticism has shown, but also the first form of both technological and planetary unconscious: “[i]f aesthetics intuition is merely [intellectual] intuition become objective, it is self-evident that art is at once the only and true and eternal organ and document of philosophy, which ever and again continues to speak to us of what philosophy cannot depict in external form, namely the unconscious element in acting and producing, and its original identity with the conscious”.⁵⁵

In conclusion, after having shown how the debate of the Anthropocene inherits richness and ambiguity of perspective from the ecological debate, we have underlined how Schelling stands up for its specificity, both for what concerns a doubling of the concept of Anthropocene itself in his *Denkweg*, and for the availability of problematizations and solutions that the German philosopher advances. In the specifics of my contribution in this debate, it seems to me that one of the most interesting perspectives moved by Schelling can be found precisely in his aesthetic proposal. On one hand, his organicism makes his philosophy propose itself as a philosophy of technique and nature, as he describes it: a ‘cosmotechnics’. Art therefore proves to be the *Organon* of philosophy in the literal meaning of the term. Planet Earth, of which Schelling denounces exploitation and abuse, implicit in a mechanistic conception of nature of Cartesian matrix, is shown in three ways: first of all as the “body of the world”, that

53 I am grateful—and this paper is certainly indebted to him—to Giacomo Croci who allowed me to read a preview of the drafts of his “The Aesthetic Intelligibility of Artefacts: Schelling’s Concept of Art in the *System of Transcendental Idealism*” in which the entire *System* of 1800 is reread as a treatise on the concept of the artefact.

54 Schelling, “System des Transscendentalen Idealismus” (1800), in *SW*, Ab. I, Bd. 3: 612-3; trans. by Peter Heath, *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800) (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1978), 219.

55 *Ibid.*, 623-8; trans., 231.

is, the object of reality to be preserved and defended; secondly, it reaffirms the dynamism of the natural principle that cannot be reduced to the mere planet Earth, its concretion; third, the planet as the medium that art can exploit for the reflection of grace. This last aspect reiterates how, if Schellingian philosophy of nature is a philosophy of technique, then its planetary aesthetics is exquisitely mediological and ultimately anthrobscenic.

To summarize, we reassert how the German philosopher's path stands in direct relation to the problematic of the Anthropocene. This has been highlighted by a reading of the more specifically aesthetic components of Schellingian texts, with a focus on the production of the first decade of the 19th century, from the *System* of 1800 to the *Rede* of 1807, with a look at the later production. Specifically, the analogical and mimetic connection established between nature and human poietic production, on the one hand, shows the relevance of Schellingian aesthetics and, on the other hand, allows us to emphasize a traditional trait of the most recent media studies, here reprised from the concept of Anthrobscene and, in general, media archaeology. At the same time, the ambiguity of the Anthropocene concept, as indicated, allows us an unprecedented reading of the German philosopher, whose evolution of thought is the result of the emergence of such a philosophy of nature rethinking the relationship between human and environment from an ethical point of view. Indeed, this ambiguity is reflected in the evolutions of the Schellingian conception of nature. In particular, it is found in the conception of nature as the medium of grace, which, precisely in the reversal indicated in the concluding section of the *Rede*, is nothing but a repetition of the ambiguity mentioned earlier. Grace can in fact be an index of beauty as well as yet another mode of exploitation of the planet, indicating perhaps an inseparability of the two. In Schelling himself, however, some lines of flight can be found, such as the concept of *natura de-naturans*, which some authors, as quickly mentioned above, seem to discover in his later production. In any case, nature remains a space of conflict, and Schelling's aesthetics shows all its relevance to analyze it.

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