



Philosophy of Culture

Schellingianism & Postmodernity: Towards a Materialist Naturphilosophie

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ABSTRACT: Andrew Bowie's recent *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy* claims that Schelling idealism is a critique of 'reflective reason' that can be brought to bear on the avatars of French postmodernism. Bowie is careful not to intricate Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* and *Philosophical Inquiries into the Nature of Human Freedom*, in which both nature and freedom are *fused* into a single, unconscious series of *natural drives* or 'vortex of forces.' To take Schelling at word would turn the *Naturphilosophie* and *Inquiries* into a materialist physics of mental states, the basis of which are inaccessible to reflective consciousness. Best represented by philosophers such as Paul Churchland, however, why does Bowie avoid playing up this materialist Schelling when dealing with French 'Irrationalism?' Inadvertently, Bowie rekindles the Kantian critique in order to separate two aspects of recent French philosophy: the materialist (with which Paul Churchland notes that his eliminative, connectionist neuromaterialism has much in common) and the reflective (as inherited from the German Idealism Schelling represents, and mediated via Bergson and Heidegger). While French philosophy's recent adoptions in the Anglo world have been of this latter complexion, Bowie's anxious prophylaxia exposes a materialist current in French thought that has remained more or less beyond the range of Anglophone hearing.

Andrew Bowie's recent *Schelling & Modern European Philosophy* (1993) claims Schelling, and Schellingian idealism, as a "critique of reflective reason", which, throughout that work, he brings to bear on the avatars of French post-modernism (or as his mentor Manfred Frank has it, "neo-structuralism"). In so doing, Bowie takes extreme care not to intricate Schellingian *Naturphilosophie* (which he humanizes as a "hermeneutics" of nature before dropping the subject like hot plutonium) along with his 1809 *Philosophical Inquiries into the Nature of Human Freedom*, in which both nature and freedom are fused into a single, unconscious series of natural drives or "vortex of forces". To take Schelling at word here (rather than taking his word as the Word) would turn the *Inquiries* and the *Philosophy of Nature* into a highly materialist physics of mental states, the basis of which would remain inaccessible to reflective consciousness. Best represented by philosophers such as the Churchlands, however, why does Bowie need to avoid playing up this materialist Schelling when dealing with recent French "Irrationalism", as it has been called? Inadvertently, Bowie rekindles Kantian critique in order to separate two aspects of recent French philosophy: the materialist (with which Paul Churchland notes, in *A Neurocomputational Perspective: the Nature of Mind and the Structure of Science* (1989: 130) that his own eliminative, connectionist neuromaterialism has much in common) and the reflective, in

the sense inherited from the German Idealist tradition Schelling represents, as mediated through Bergson and Heidegger. While French philosophy's recent adoptions in the Anglophone world have been hegemonically of this latter complexion, then, Bowie's anxious prophylaxis exposes a materialist current in recent French thought that has remained more or less beyond the range of Anglophone hearing.

But this current, as I have described it, stems also from the Kantianism Bowie deploys in his critical method. This is not an overly familiar Kantianism, however, but one stemming from Kant's later and posthumous works, in which he deals with themes more often associated (and dismissed) as part of the ill-fated Idealism represented by Fichte and, especially, Schelling. In brief, it is the Kantian-Schellingian philosophy of nature which Bowie is so anxious to dismiss, that informs the materialist current of Continental thought running from Schopenhauerian animism (*The Will in Nature*) and Nietzschean cosmology (*The World as Will-to-Power*) to the Freudian thermodynamics of mind (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, *Project for a Scientific Psychology*) and beyond to many of those philosophers who are currently and unhappily grouped under the rubric of postmodernism that forms the background of this paper.

In a kind of archeology of the Sokal affair, in which the physicist subjected the scientific pretensions of recent French "theory", as it has become known, if not to critical scrutiny, then certainly to parodic and deflationary *délire*, I wish above all to take up René Thom's largely unheeded call to "take up the torch from... the eighteenth century Naturphilosophen... who barely continued after Schelling" (Thom 1978: 52-3) in precisely the syntheist manner he recommends. In so doing, I would also like to refocus the attention paid to postmodernism around the axis the Sokal affair identifies in order to break what can be regarded as the stranglehold of representation under which metaphysics is stultifying, and from which technology and the sciences have long since cast adrift.

To begin, then, it will be necessary to return to Kant, and the problem he wrestled with towards the end of his philosophical career: the relation between his productivist cognitive apparatus and the recalcitrant nature to which it is applied. Kant's final solution is to appeal to an industrialism that would rise, as Weber claimed, from the conjunction of protestantism (the productivist ethic) and capitalism. Thus, in the recently translated *Opus postumum*, Kant writes:

He who would know the world must first manufacture it (Kant 1993: 240)

We can also see in this the traces of a productive unconscious that provides the possibility of the active, industrial cognition that we find in Schelling's *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800), which we will briefly discuss below.

On the other side of the problematic, Kant's formulated the problem of representation, turning the latter from an unlimited and direct intuition of a real and apparent phenomenon into a indirect and limited production of the real as phenomenon, he bequeathed a legacy that has found its ultimate legatee in the avatars of postmodernism, understood in its widest possible extension.

Rather than discussing the intricate nuancing of postmodernism (which I have done elsewhere (Grant 1998)); rather than attempting, as Jean-François Lyotard, recalling Kant, puts it, to "answer the question: what is postmodernism?" (1992: 25ff), I wish to make an anathemically broad-brush characterisation of the phenomena grouped under this name. Broadly, then — and simplifying to the extreme — I will define postmodernism as a condition of problematically ontogenic representationalism. "Problematic" not only because its avatars (Lyotard aside, it should be said) ritually avoid the assertoric mode, just as its detractors insist on it, but also because the condition "itself" urges the problematic.

"Ontogenic" because the stakes of the problem have precisely to do with the interminable question "standing in" for being, a metaphoricity shrouding the century-long "crisis" of metaphysics; and, rather than entailing metaphysics' oft-touted "abandonment", pursuing the problem as the only mode in which metaphysics seems capable of perpetuation. "Representationalism", finally, because underlying — or more accurately, underwriting — this perpetuation of metaphysics is the insistence of Kantian criticism. Put bluntly, the ontogenic problematic concerns the agent of ontogenesis — being or language — not its object, which the late twentieth century seems committed to maintaining, in company with Kant, is representation, whether in writing (Derrida's neo-criticist architect of writing as the conditioning impossibility), the sign (Peirce's stand-in and post-Saussurian semiosis) or the image (as in Foucault's accounts of Velasquez and Magritte); finally, this sense of representation covers both its generic and its specific uses. In other words, the question around which the postmodernist problematic is centred is: does representation produce reality? Although this may seem grossly reductive and certainly is oversimplified, the purchase of the problematic allows postmodernism to be conceived broader philosophical-historical terms than is usually the case.

Since, however, the question is both generic — as above — and specific, it further admits of an unstable shift in its field. Just as Heidegger located what he called the "ontological difference" between capital and tortuously ineffable 'Being' and lower case, paradigmatically effable 'beings', so postmodernism is given to the elision of the generic into the specific, replacing the above question, insofar as it is posed, with the following: do representations produce reality?

It is from adopting this latter as a basically constructivist premise that the "politics of language" emerge: if, as Heidegger cites Stephan Georg in a phrase which has assumed almost hymnic proportions with regard to postmodernism, "where word breaks off, no thing may be", then equally, which word accompanies the being of things ("things" strictly in Kant's sense of *realitas phaenomenon*; CPR A/B — representations) fixes their reality in nominalist turn, since the question of naming is simultaneously a question of problematical ontogenesis.

It is not this weel trodden path, however, that I wish to pursue, but rather the implications of illicitly fixing the generic question as the focus of my interrogation: does representation produce reality? Of course, the form of this question gives cause for some concern: if the problem accepts as a given, as I am claiming here, the constitutive status of representation, then the question, strictly speaking, talks of "reality" at the cost of redundancy, and does not therefore pose a question at all.

However, it is also part of my claim (again elaborated elsewhere) that postmodernism rehearses Kantian critical metaphysics. In this sense, "reality" might perhaps rename the Kantian noumenal, reiterating therefore the transcendental gesture giving the critical architectonic Kant planned but only partially executed its purchase. It is my crassly modernist aim, in other words, to drive an initial wedge between reality and representation in order to pose questions not only to postmodernism but, by extension, to the Kantianism at its root. To do this it is necessary, as, one might say with just a little irony, Heidegger used endlessly to say, to "step back".

In the text from which I quoted at the beginning of this paper, recently translated into English for the first time, Kant augments many of the tenets of the critical philosophy with what we might call a post-critical constructivism, providing the bridge between his work and that of his immediate successors, Fichte and Schelling. Thus, reopening the question as to "what is transcendental philosophy", Kant rehearses the following steps:

- (1) Transition from the metaphysical foundations of natural science to physics;
- (2) Transition from physics to transcendental philosophy.

Which is all familiar, critical philosophy. However:

- (3) Transition from transcendental philosophy to the system of nature and freedom. (4) Conclusion. Of the universal connection of the living forces of all things in reciprocal relation: God and the world. (Kant 1993: 224)

The "system of nature and freedom" and the "universal connection of the living forces of all things" are unfamiliar from the critical, even alien to it. Thus, while Kant critically maintains that the "cosmotheological proposition: 'there is a God'" remains a "practically-determining principle of reason" (227), he simultaneously recovers one of the wilder concerns of the Critique of Practical Reason and the Critique of Judgement, wherein he insists, despite reproach, that the "power of desire [is] the power of being the cause, through one's presentations, of the actuality of the objects of these presentations" (CJ Ak.V 177n; cf. CPrR, *ibid.*, 9n). This wilder and, so to speak, post-critical concern, recurs in the Opus postumum when Kant writes, having insisted on the physical or dynamical underpinnings of the "system of nature and freedom", of the...

sublime quality of freedom, to be itself an original cause: a property and capacity whose possibility cannot be directly either proved or explained, but which conclusively validates its reality indirectly, through the incontrovertible dictates of reason in the categorical imperative. (226)

Thus the categorical imperative is explained, under the system of nature and freedom, as the rule reason gives to freedom to be an original cause of reality. Here the aforementioned Weberian overtones come out more clearly as we remember the essentially moral, supersensible destiny for which the sublime prepares man in the Critique of Aesthetic Judgement, but at the same time, the divergence of freedom and nature, diagnosed, as Thom puts it, following the "great successes of nineteenth century biology and physics", as "ruinous for every attempt at a philosophy of nature" (1978: 53), becomes a rational compulsion. Glossing hideously for present purposes, the system of nature and freedom binds the former to the latter in the service of the production of representations to "manufacture... reality".

This horrible, industrial paradox can be avoided in two ways. Firstly, as Schelling does, to insert nature and freedom into a chiasmic relation in which their systemic interrelation remains naturally unconscious (just as Kant reports the schematism does in the first Critique) and resists every attempt at conscious recovery. Secondly, as exemplified most clearly perhaps by such an academically wayward figure as Jean Baudrillard, reality itself is exposed as being the product not of a conscious manufacture on the part of either a human or a divine agency, but of the a-conscious, so to speak — neither conscious nor unconscious, but radically impersonal — hyperinflation of the referential function of signs. And here we come closest to the paradoxes of the representationalist paradigm exemplified by postmodernism: reality is produced through representations as its own irrecoverable deficit.

This is, of course, a slender parody of Baudrillard, whose strategies, tactics and semiotic economy are far richer than I have suggested. For the moment, however, it is Schelling's solution I wish to pursue. Having followed this route, we will be in a position to outline an alternative version of postmodernity, one that effectively rearticulates the exclusive disjunction between nature and culture which has conditioned representation since Kant and has facilitated the deferral of its consideration through the stockpiling of representations in cultural humanist research.

As a shorthand for his synthetic programme, as opposed to the Hegelian system as to mechanical reduction, Schelling offers, in his *Philosophical Inquiries* "potentiated", "intensified" or "vitalised Spinozism", from which, he goes on, "there developed a Philosophy of Nature" (1989: 22-3). Schelling "intensifies" Spinozist nature by dynamizing it, introducing dark, unconscious forces into its production that extend even to mind's self-production as a natural product. Just as Spinoza's *Deus sive natura*, 'God and/or nature', constitutes an inclusive disjunctive synthesis, so the intensified Spinozism of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* is "merely one of [philosophy's] parts", a part which must be conjoined with the "philosophy of the idea" as laid out in the *System of Transcendental Idealism*. The crucial difference between this conjunction and Hegel's global misconstrual of Kantian local synthesis is that Hegel will view the philosophy of nature as a teleological step towards the absolution of mere objecthood in mind's self-recognition, whereas Schelling's local and dynamic synthesis deploys the conjunction at the point of the loss of the idea's conscious production as mind. In other words, if for Hegel, the identity of production and product is mind, for Schelling, the recognition of nature as product entails the isolation of the production of conscious mind, appearing to mind as the cessation of its own production. In Kantian terms, we might say that the recognition of the final form of the categorical imperative in the power of desire to manufacture the world confronts in nature the limitations of reason's industrial jurisdiction. At the same time, however, natural production remains continuous and unconscious, so that the antinomy is one for consciousness alone. This break with phenomenological adequation, coterminous with the noumenal positing of nature as unconscious production (extending, it should be said, from the point of view of the philosophy of nature, even to the production of mind itself, so that in producing itself as mind, the mind is unconscious of itself as production; from these two senses of, we may derive the Freudian distinction between the dynamic and the descriptive, as the appendices to *The Ego and the Id* [Standard Edition XIX] call them), amounts simultaneously to the materialisation of this unconscious production as the dynamics of nature. Named by turns *das Regellose* (the unruly), evil, the basis, the primal chaos or ataxia of forces, this "irreducible remainder that cannot be resolved into reason" (1989: 34), this point marks the synthesis between mind and nature as antinomy (to be resolved, in concert with Kant, through the practical effort of will) and rulelessness, respectively. To take the materialist route cannot therefore be a metaphysical error, but can only be a practical one, an error which Schelling calls the "exalt[ation] of the basis over the cause" (1989: 41). But the price of maintaining what, for ease of exposition if too swiftly to be remotely accurate, we may call the Idealist route, is the perpetuation of the unresolvably antimonic chiasmus between nature and mind in unconsciousness. Schellingian idealism, then, does not entail the annihilation of materialism (on which the preface to the *Critique of Pure Reason* insists), but the regionalisation of mind with respect to matter, and the simultaneous explanation of the former in terms of the latter. For Schelling, mind does not represent nature, it confronts it as a product that antinomically cuts mind off from its own production.

Now, to turn at last to the inaptly named postmodernists whose trajectory we have here been seeking to track as the nuclear night within the dawning lights of idealism, we confront precisely this antinomic, dynamized nature as the chaos of forces in the various cosmographies (and the role of this cosmography, while we must overlook it here, is of crucial importance) of Nietzsche, Bataille, Lyotard and Deleuze, just as Kant confronts it in his post-critical "cosmotheology". We also confront it, to end with the iconic triumph of panrepresentation in Baudrillard's theoretical fictions by which we oriented our final approach, and specifically in the latter's adoption of Bataille's understudied accounts of the *Accursed Share* (3 vols, MIT, 1991-3). The accursed share is, to all intents and purposes, a natural philosophy of the effects upon culture of the unruly excess of energy that cannot be disposed of by those societies. The problem of social engineering thus becomes one of managing expenditure, an energetic or libidinal economics — a core theme of recent French materialisms from Irigaray to Deleuze and Lyotard. Thus we find a widespread

concern with the energetics of representation, as in, for example, Lyotard's works between 1969-74 (from *Dérive à partir de Marx et Freud* and *Des dispositifs pulsionnels* to *Discours, figure and Economie libidinale*). Representation, in such works, is precisely an economic question, just as it is in Derrida, but with this difference (Literally, not metaphorically!): the economic question is at once a question of physical energetics and its figuration, rather than an account of the "essential" metaphoricity of the economic, or the economics of metaphor, to perform the almost obligatory inversion of the genitive that marks Derrida's Hegelianism. In other words, such accounts expose the regional purchase of representation taken generically, facilitating the generation of extra-representational problems in confronting generic or specific representation(s).

Nor do such approaches therefore sacrifice the Schellingian antinomy between conscious and unconscious production, or between production and product, to a facile reductivist gloss. Since this antinomy is fuelled by nature as unconscious production, and does not arise without it, it necessitates the maintenance of the inclusive disjunctive synthesis at all points on the chiasmus: mind thinking itself — mind thinking nature — nature producing itself — nature producing mind.

Finally, the question I would like to end this paper with concerns the role Kant ascribed to manufacture, to industry and its technologies. The question concerning technology has been making inroads into cultural and philosophical research well before Hubert Dreyfus lost his innocent, hominid superiority in a bet with a machine. It also recurs as the always-overlooked basis of Lyotard's examination of the Postmodern Condition, where he follows Daniel Bell's 1960 analysis of the emergence of a postindustrial society. Perhaps, my question runs, Kant was onto something when he invoked manufacture as a prosthetic of desire in new ways of worldmaking, or making the world anew. Neither logos nor nature can be ascribed responsibility for the progressive artificializations of the earth; all of a sudden, perhaps technology enters the chiasmus between nature and culture, conscious and unconscious production, the extraphenomenologically ruleless and the phenomenal-rational ruledbound, as the primary engine of Kant's defiantly local, transformative and productivist syntheses?

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