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BLAKE, HEGEL, AND THE SCIENCES

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In the Introduction to the *Philosophy of Nature*, Hegel calls nature “the negative of the Idea,” an alien existence where spirit does not find itself. He also describes it as a “frozen” or “petrified intelligence,” attributing the phrase to Schelling (Hegel, *Nature* 14–15). Schelling’s *Ages of the World* (1815), posthumously published only in 1861 and so unavailable to Hegel, does indeed begin with a geological unconscious that impedes any progressive narrative of cosmic or human history, as time is locked in a “rotatory movement” that blocks any “true beginning” or “veritable end” (Schelling, *Ages* 20). However, the text Hegel evokes is not Schelling’s *Ages* but his earlier *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800), and it is Hegel who adds the words “erstarrte [congealed]” and “versteinerte [petrified],” sometimes translated as “fossilized.”¹ For in the *System* Schelling had seen no resistance between matter and spirit, nonliving and living being, envisioning a seamless process that resolves “the whole of nature . . . into an intelligence” (6). Hegel invokes the Schelling of the Identity philosophy because he too wants an *Aufhebung* of “the dead and unconscious products of nature” that overcomes the resistance of the inorganic to organization, as life self-organizes towards spirit (Schelling, *System* 6). Following this program, Alison Stone, in her book of that name, sees “petrified intelligence” as figuring an unconsciously rational activity in nature, whereby, as Hegel moves up the Chain of Being from minerals to man, he forges increasingly tight concept-matter relations that bring the logics of nature and mind into identity. Stone thus sees Hegel as of-

fering a “strong *a priori* reading” of nature as determined in advance by the structures of consciousness (6, 57–59), rather than as more riskily exposing thought to its immanent entanglement in nature. In her view the *Philosophy of Nature* successfully enacts the dialectic, as each stage in the Idealist *Stufenfolge* or *Stufengrade*—the graduated stages through which nature learns to make man—resolves a contradiction in the previous stage (60–61): or as Coleridge puts it, using a similarly dialectical logic in a fragment on “The Scale of Life” (1825), “problems” exist at a “lower grade” that “find their solution . . . higher up in the scale” (2: 1194).

Yet the word “petrified” recurs in the geology section of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Nature*, retrojecting a materiality onto its initial use that impedes the sublation into metaphor necessary for this dialectic. Hegel writes of “petrified wood,” “huge forests . . . flattened down and buried under masses of debris.” Mixed up with “petrified shell-fish and huge bones” of mammoths, this “confused mass” is a ruin found across all continents, crushing any progressive history or anthropology (280). This congealed existence precedes but affectively coexists with the division of earth into sea and land, continents, Old and New Worlds (278). Returning to a time before *Europe* and *America*, Blake’s (*First*) *Book of Urizen* likewise opens with the undead, with “forests” that are a “petrific, abominable chaos” (3.23–26; E 71). Against this geo-catastrophic beginning, the Euro-American anthropology by which Blake launches history toward apocalypse in the continental prophecies, like Hegel’s equally chauvinistic *Philosophy of History*, is no more than a regional project: a project and projectile that Blake figures in *The Book of Ahania* through the fiery beam of Fuzon that Los, after five hundred years, can do no more than senselessly beat in a “mass” (2.44–48; E 85).

Hegel’s petrification of spirit in matter has two aspects. First, it “halt[s]” history, because the earth has no genesis; earth “endures” rather than “produces itself” (Hegel, *Nature* 279), like Wordsworth’s “woods decaying, never to be decayed,” which the halted traveller of *The Prelude* can sublimate only through a forced idealism (1805: 6.557). For Hegel the earth is not a “living creature,” whereas in the animal organism that is his increasingly problematic goal “each member is product and also productive” (*Nature* 278–9). This integration allows events and entities to be produced, but only as what David Krell, discussing German Idealism, calls “botched,” though necessary, “attempts at depicting the absolute” (96–97). Yet it is not that earth has no history, since it contains the sedimented strata of numerous times that have been put under erasure. It is just that the his-

tory in question is not a progressive history with a beginning, purpose, and end.

Second, the earth Hegel describes is a fossilized world that moves in the opposite direction from any awakening into spirit. The fossil-world speaks of extinction. In it, what was once alive is now (un)dead; what is yet to happen is already over, preserved only as the ruin that Walter Benjamin calls natural history: “the *facies hippocratica* of history as a petrified, primordial landscape” without “redemption” (166). Worth noting, as well, is where Hegel’s discussion of geology comes in the *Philosophy of Nature*. Though Hegel describes the earth as a “mechanical organism” because its “members” do not “contain the life-process within themselves” (*Nature* 278), he takes up geology in the last division, on “Organics.” This division follows Mechanics and Physics, and moves, in a further triad, from the terrestrial, through the plant, to the animal organism. The earth, in other words, marks a resistance to the concept of organism that is not before organism and organization but within it as its unconscious.

The *Philosophy of Nature* differs from Schelling’s *System* in two ways, both relevant to the *Urizen* books, inasmuch as *Urizen* itself constitutes Blake’s *Naturphilosophie*, while *The Book of Los* is the aesthetic this *Naturphilosophie* dis-spirits or de-generates. First, while the *System* synchronically parallels nature and spirit,² Hegel temporalizes this transition as a labor of the negative whose difficult details cast the project in doubt. For as he poignantly concludes, “Nature’s ever-increasing wealth of detail” is “refractory towards the unity of the Notion” (*Nature* 444). Second, Hegel remediates the *Stufenfolge* as a *Stufenfolge der Wissenschaften*. He provides an account not of the graduated stages of nature but of a graduated series of disciplines and fields describing these stages, thus conceding that these evolutionary stages are an intellectual construction.³ The three main divisions of this epistemic *Stufenfolge*—Mechanics, Physics, and Organics—then enfold subfields like mineralogy, meteorology, cosmology, and pathology. Some, like meteorology, recur in more than one division, as Hegel restlessly views a field of knowledge through different optics, unraveling his attempt at a rigorous succession of disciplines that will demonstrate reason in nature. The various sciences can be compared to the shapes of mind in the *Phenomenology*. Indeed Hegel borrows the narrative pathos of the *Phenomenology* in similarly configuring the raw materials of his Jena lectures on nature as a narrative when arranging them for his *Encyclopedia*, of which the *Philosophy of Nature* is the second part. Moreover, Hegel’s relation to these sciences, which he cannot arrange in an ascent (after all, he ends with pathology), autobiographically

repeats spirit's relation to nature. For the sciences, he says, are "man's non-organic nature," which he must digest and make his own (*Nature* 276). This self-thematization throws the sciences, as shapes of mind that try to grasp alien material by imposing consciousness onto dark matter, reflexively back on the metaphysical conceit of trying to make nature into "the mirror of ourselves" and thus into "a free reflex of Spirit" (*Nature* 445).

Blake cannot be said to organize the sciences in an ascent, being desperately caught in their consequences. To avoid their impact, in *Milton* he binds art and science to a conservative metaphysical binary, writing that

. . . in Eternity the Four Arts: Poetry, Painting, Music,
And Architecture which is Science: are the Four Faces of Man.
Not so in Time & Space: there Three are shut out, and only
Science remains thro Mercy: & by means of Science, the Three
Become apparent in Time & Space, in the Three Professions
Poetry in Religion: Music, Law: Painting, in Physic & Surgery.
(27.55–60; E 125)

Here art is a potentiality in eternity that is obscured in "Time & Space," while science is used in its older sense of systematized knowledge. But in this passage science is metaphysically subordinated so as to protect a transcendental idealism of art, functioning at best as a distorting vehicle for art, but not as a catalyst that might change the very nature of art. So, for example, when music passes through the analytic filter of science it degenerates into law. The case of architecture is revealing. It "is" science because of its mathematical elements, which led Kant to align system with architectonic (690). That it is also clearly an art allows "science" to be redeemed, but only by being harmonized and aestheticized, sublated into a romantic ideology of art.

In *Urizen*, however, Blake feels the trauma of the specific fields we now call sciences: geology, biology, embryology. In his (self-critical) character of the Eternals, Blake therefore demonizes Urizen to close off the metaphysical void of a naturalistic world (3.4; E 70). The poem opens with a world "shut in the deep," unseen "changes" in "desolate mountains," "seas," "thunders," an "abominable chaos." (3.10–11, 24–26, 31–4; E 70–71). "Some sa[y]" this abandoned life is Urizen (3.5; E 70), and following their lead Blake projects a tyrannical and restrictive power to contain the disruptive eco-ontological effects described in the opening through a binary of reason and imagination that does not explain these phenomena.

To ground this phantasmology of knowledge, Blake constructs a pantheon that he populates with uncouth names by which he tries to digest the non-organic and make it his own, hysterically piling on more names in further texts. But the human may be only an episode in a pre- and post-human world. So to anthropomorphize this world and locate a power we can fight, Blake attributes this world and its “armies” to Urizen (5.16; E 73), though at this point the part-subject Urizen has yet to emerge. Since Urizen’s genesis comes *after* what is described as “his” “world,” it is unclear if the subject precedes and commands the predicate, if Urizen is a substance with attributes, or if attributes produce the substantive Urizen as compensation and explanation. And indeed before these changes in which he is hypostatized and disastrously metastasizes, Urizen is described only in negatives, as “unknown,” a “vacuum,” a congealed effect more than a cause: an “obscure separation” (*Urizen* 3.2, 5–6, 5.40; E 70, 73).

Yet in the passage from *Milton*, Blake does allow science a half-life “thro Mercy.” Even more intriguing, he locates the debased form of painting in “Physic & Surgery.” It is as if he senses in science a potential obscured by his own equation of the sciences with system. Is it possible that science, instead of being the enemy of imagination, might be the condition of possibility for a less transcendental aesthetic, wherein “Physic & Surgery,” rather than being reduced forms of “Painting,” open up new forms of art? Blake did scientific engraving for Basire, and his own engravings bear the impression of medical and scientific illustration (Connolly 34–60). Might his visual plates, particularly in *Urizen*, be part of a genealogy in which medical and scientific illustration open pathways to new forms of art such as surrealism?

The Eternals in *Urizen* resist such metaphysical and aesthetic climate change with “fury” and “intense indignation” (4.44; E 72). Thereafter they abscond from the world of generation and stand “wide apart” (5.41; E 73). Returning after seven ages of witness protection, they ask that a “tent” be “spread,” which seems also to be a temple with “pillars” (19.2–7; E 78). They weave a “woof” and “call it Science” (19.2–9; E 78). But it is profoundly unclear here what “science” means. Moreover as the figures mutate (from tent, to curtains and pillars, to woof), the referent of “it” is also loosened. Does “it” refer to the tent/woof or to science? The two seem to inhabit the copula of a (non)identity. And does “science” refer to the life sciences that thwart a Hegelian narrative of spirit, which the Eternals must therefore cordon off with a tent? Or is “it” the systematized knowledge that the Eternals impose on this mess to “bind in the Void” opened by these new

sciences (19.3; E 78), which tent they “call” science in the older sense of an architectonic system, as they confess through this paleonym the more modern sciences they repress? After all the Eternals are said to weave “curtains of darkness,” aligning them with superstition (19.5; E 78), and the woof they weave may be science as a web of errors or the web of errors they weave in calling “it” science.

Equally unclear is the text’s chronology, since the Eternals exile Urizen to the north before they themselves can logically exist (2.3; E 70), given that in eternity there are no entities with defined agency. Thus rather than read the poem as an explanatory history whose diagnosis of things as they are removes our mind-forged manacles, I suggest that it opens in several windows that look onto an impasse: geology in chapter 1, physics in chapter 2, biology and embryology thereafter, and lastly anthropology as the ant-like scattering of the peoples into tribes. Indeed the Lambeth books as a whole can be read nonsequentially, as opening various windows onto this impasse: history and myth in the Continental prophecies, art in *The Book of Los*, the sciences in *Urizen*—all paths on which Blake stalls.

Both Blake and Hegel want to see matter as self-assembling into organized life, though Blake is far closer to grasping the disaster of an immanence without transcendent guarantees. Hegel’s norm is a body whose essence is expressed in and fully determines its members, an ideal that returns and is also problematized in his *Aesthetics* and even more brutally disfigured in Blake’s *Urizen* books, including *The Book of Ahania* and *The Book of Los*. Crucial for Hegel is his distinction of “parts” (*Teile*), which come together only as aggregates, from “members” (*Glieder*), which contribute to a whole that determines them. Thus the plant cannot “hold its members” together as it spreads and divides, “fall[ing] apart into a number of individuals,” while the animal is a “subjective unity of members” (*Nature* 276–77, 303). The body that has made its parts and qualities its properties and taken possession of itself is also a model for the integrity of knowledge. Kant had used this body as the co-inherence of parts and whole to figure science architectonically as a system from which there can be no subtractions or contingent additions, no mutilations or transplants (690). Immersing Kant’s figure in the actual materiality of bodies—where an animal, unlike a polypus, cannot lose a limb without suffering—Hegel writes proactively that the sciences must become a particular kind of body: an “organism,” not an “aggregate” (*Nature* 6, 444). Yet not only does the *Philosophy of Nature* not hold its members together. For it grew

over twenty-six years through additions that exceeded Hegel's constant attempts at schematizing and reschematizing it. Moreover, in the middle of this process, when Hegel absorbed his earlier Jena material into the *Encyclopedia* and organized it as a *Stufenfolge der Wissenschaften*, he also narrativized the *Philosophy of Nature* as a phenomenology of spirit that struggles with the labor of the negative—something he did not do with the other two parts of the *Encyclopedia*.⁴ So not only does the *Philosophy of Nature*, like Hegel's larger corpus, not hold its members together, failing to self-organize as it experiences the “accident[s]”⁵ of its additions and the pathos of its narrative alongside the logic of its schema(s). Its various sciences, though organized in what seems an ascending pattern, also present a series of mirror-stages in which spirit repeatedly fails to find itself, as sciences are transferred into and recur in one another, troubling any clear ascent.

In theory the progression through the major stages, or Divisions, has as its goal the living, self-determining body as the *telos* of nature and confirmation of Hegel's system. As Hegel's early follower Karl Rosenkranz (1805–79) explains it, Mechanics is the science of “matter in general,” Physics deals with matter's “specialization . . . through its specific force,” and Organics with “the individualizing of matter through Life” (133; trans. mine). Physics is thus the connecting link between dead and living, embodied matter,⁶ but in the second Division on “Physics,” forces like light, heat, and sound are diffused and have not yet taken form in a self-determining body. These forces, like Shelley's “shape all light” in *The Triumph of Life*, annihilate their matter rather than reveal themselves in their parts. By the end of the Physics we reach an example of matter spontaneously organizing and arranging itself in the planets (Hegel, *Nature* 104). Yet the planets fall short in being a plurality of merely external relationships. “It is only in *life*,” Hegel says, “that we meet with subjectivity and the counter to” this “externality” (18). But as we move inside life in the Division on Organics, it does not necessarily yield the shape or teleology Hegel wants for the organic (275). The earth's members are internally connected, but inertly; the earth is only an “implicit organism” (278), a practico-inert of the unconscious. Then, in the next section the plant ramifies into individuals; but relapsing from the planets in the previous Division, they are parts, not wholes, as the scale of disciplines fails to support the notion of progression.

The animal is indeed an integrity. But curiously in the third subsection of “Organics,” on the animal organism, having staked his claim to

the unity of the animal body against the rhizomatic vegetable body, Hegel gives considerable prominence to disease and death. Disease is the member's withdrawal into a resistant negativity (428), but since the animal body is a unity, its very integration means that a disintegration that was superficial in the plant "derange[s]" the whole animal organism, as "one wheel . . . ma[kes] itself the centre" (433). Moreover, it is in this subsection that Hegel takes up physiology in onto-psychic ways, though in his immediately preceding account of the functions of the animal organism, the assimilation of food, rather than being approached pragmatically and descriptively, had already seemed a site of disease.⁷

In the further journey into the interior of physiology that Hegel then undertakes, the tangled structures abjected onto the plant resurface in the networks of the body's internal systems of ganglia and nerve-threads (364–65). Nor can Hegel cleanly separate inorganic from organic sciences, so as to leave lower sciences behind. Anatomy is a struggle with mechanics; bones are wood, he says (361), trying to allegorize them in terms of consciousness, but conceding thereby a resistance of matter to spirit at the heart of the body. And physiology is full of chemistry in the accounts of the digestive and nervous systems and the phenomena of sensibility and irritability. For Hegel chemistry is the death of the organism's very Concept: it "applies only to what is lifeless," and "animal processes," as living, "always sublimate the chemical" (394). But if life is thoroughly chemical, as Hegel also says (269), sublimation may have to mean not that we overcome the chemical but that we find organic significance in it, for instance as the psychosomatic. The psychosomatic is an interzone that is throughout this section in the body's irritable-sensible chemistry, which unlike the chemical process in minerals, is imbued with affect. This animalization or vitalization of chemistry also inflects Blake's texts, whose characters respond through affect rather than intellection. That the human is only a subset of the animal for both writers, that it is studied by science under the animal, is a further problem, making it as difficult to move from nature to spirit as from the nonliving to the living.

In short, the organism, in the metaphysical sense Hegel wants, eludes him as he grapples with science's ever-increasing "wealth of detail" (*Nature* 444). Blake's *Urizen*, as we have said, opens in several windows that face inward into the darkness of this detail, as it too is concerned with the making of a body/corpus.⁸ Chapter 1 stalls in the petrified world of geology that, though outside human life, intersects with the human when Los in *The Book of Los* attacks a "vast solid without fluctuation" that seems

both inside and outside him, by madly unleashing flames on marble or rock (4.3–9; E 91). The same phrase had been used in *Urizen* (4.11; E 71), intermingling the two texts. Chapter 2 of *Urizen*, on the Eternals, unfolds in Physics: what Hegel sees as a Dynamic physics, rather than the mechanics- and mathematics-based physics of Newton, about whom Hegel, like Blake, is deeply critical (Hegel, “De Orbis” 2–4, 8). Thus in *Urizen* “Earth [is] not” and bodies fuse into each other (3.36; E 71). Here there is light, heat, and sound but no gravity, and thus no cohesion or shape; qualities exist, unattached, as affects without subjectivity. Blake idealizes this condition, but in *Ahania* the fiery beam of Fuzon never consolidates into anything. And in *Urizen*, when the Eternals as pure, shapeless force unleash their flames, Eternity opens back into the geoscape of chapter 1, thwarting their prophetic fury as fires, oceans, and mountains are all “ruinously” mixed up (4.44–5.12; E 72–73). Thereafter *Urizen* emerges over seven ages as a body in bits and pieces that frustrates any evolutionary reading of epigenesis: a spine in the first age, freezing over the nerves; then, in the second age, what may be a heart “shooting out ten thousand branches,” in a zone between plant and animal that allows psychiatry to leak into anatomy; then, in the third age, the brain, a “nervous brain,” not a mind, which again “shoots branches / Round the branches of [the] heart” as veins and plants are confused; still in the third age, eyes “fixed in two little caves”; and then in the remaining four ages, ears, nostrils, throat, arms and feet in the seventh age, but no head or other body parts (10.37–13.19; E 75–76). Not only does this body not hold its members together; the process of animalization, as the science of Blake’s time calls it, is mixed up with vegetable structures, thwarting any progression up the chain of being. Before this long attempt at evolution, the so-called *Urizen* had framed a “roof” that was also a “womb” in which he himself is born, in a metaphysical prolapsis of cause and effect (5.28–29; E 73). After *Urizen*’s emergence through seven ages, as Los tries to hammer him into shape with “bellows and hammer,” we again revert to the globule/embryo that is the globe or world: a “round globe of blood,” “Wand’ring wide on the bosom of night” and “Trembling upon the void” (13.37, 57–60; E 77). In *Urizen*’s last two chapters we leave this convolution of embryology and evolutionary biology for a more linear anthropology that includes the emergence of continents and races and the formation of cities. But if this is an anthropology in the sense of an account of man, it is in no sense humanistic, as *Urizen* “in darkness clos’d, view[s] all his race” (23.22; E 81).

The Book of Los is a further window onto this disaster, involving art. Taking up the contemporary life sciences' pervasive concern with organization, a term central to Blake, and paralleling Idealism's desire to see nature as self-organizing into spirit, *Urizen* traces the emergence of organized life from matter, but as a question about whether the process can even occur. When matter fails to immanently self-organize into spirit, *The Book of Los* then becomes a supplement that turns to art to impose form on matter. The poems share a disastrous narrative about geo-biological organization, and disorganize the sequence Hegel will try to build in his *Encyclopedia*, which is based on Herder's model of natural history leading to the history of man. For in *Urizen*, unlike the *Philosophy of Nature*, we jump from the formation of the earth to the animal, with the vegetable being a lacuna covered over and returning inside the animal. Going back to *Urizen* and *The Book of Los*, the visual plates that frontally assault us in the former with "dark visions of torment" (2.7; E 70) likewise serve as accompaniment to the much barer *Book of Los*, which elaborates on many of these plates.⁹ The texts, in other words, are conjoined twins, like Los himself and Urizen, who is rent from Los's side. But in *The Book of Los*, Blake develops Los into an artist, a role that was less foregrounded in *Urizen*. At the same time Los's art is hardly Hegel's classical art as the "adequate embodiment of the idea" (*Aesthetics* 1.77), which parallels Hegel's concept of a body that is fully expressed in and determines its members. Los's manic and tortured struggle with recalcitrant material comes closer to what Hegel calls "symbolic" art: an art that is pre-art, premature, but which, if we take it seriously, calls in question the whole notion of aesthetics as what Baumgarten calls the art of thinking beautifully (167). While Hegel feels bound to dismiss such art, he is also clearly drawn to it, referring to its "sublime preliminary experiments" (*Aesthetics* 1.317). In symbolic art, the idea is still "indeterminate," and not yet "inwardly clear to itself" (1.76, 352). Hence the artist "staggers around," "adapting to the meaning sought the shapes that forever remain alien," as his art "distorts and stretches" "natural shapes," positing itself "as the inherently deficient" (1.76–77, 317–19). Any binding of this chaos only results in a "bad and untrue determinacy" (1.76).

Foretelling his role as artist, the earlier *Song of Los* ends with an image of Los as blacksmith hammering into shape a globe or orb of fire, an orb that, in *Urizen*, luridly degenerates into a globe of blood and a womb. In the final visual plate of the *Song*, Los stands above this globe of matter and forces, though the actual poem's attempt to organize itself falls into bits

and pieces. But in the surreal, internal cinematography of the *Book of Los*, it is not clear with what material Los works, and whether he is inside or outside it. Los wrestles with marble at the outset (4.4–10, 22; E 91–92). But at the same time he seems to be a blacksmith working in furnaces and with bellows that become his own lungs, as Urizen, whom he beats into shape, takes form inside him, in a collapsing boundary between masculine labor and female, embryological labor. As such, the text deranges aesthetics as the discipline of either the beautiful or sublime, as Los, as much a victim as Urizen of Blake's knowledge of embryology, sinks into the amniotic fluid of the sciences, a "stifling black fluid," that he struggles to get out of only to sink back again (4.54–70; E 93).

In chapter 1 Los works at his furnace, but the fires yield no "light" or "heat," only "Coldness, darkness, obstruction, a Solid / Without fluctuation" that is "Black as marble of Egypt; impenetrable" (3.49, 4.46; E 91). Working on this petrified intelligence as unprocessed psychic material, Los's art consists less in sculpting matter into form, than in battering forms of inorganic, resistant matter that break into pieces, revealing the psychic void at the heart of imagination. For when the solid breaks into "numberless fragments," it is not clear whether this solid, "crumbling with bursting sobs," is the material with which Los is struggling or Los himself as his psychic defenses and internal barriers collapse (4:19–21; E 92). Given the enjambed syntax in which participles lack a clear subject and may refer backward or forward, it is impossible to separate Los and what he works on. Nor can we distinguish Los and the disastrous environment in, through, and as which he emerges, struggling upon the "Spawn of waters," as his lungs, which are also the lungs of his bellows, "heave incessant" in the drowning waters (4:70, 54–55; E 93).

The first two chapters of *Los* replay those of *Urizen*: the marble, object of aesthetic work, becomes primal rock, bringing back the earlier text's geological unconscious. And the waste land opened up when the myth of Eternity in *Urizen* "roll[s] wide apart" (5.5; E 73) similarly appears in *The Book of Los* when this rock "crack[s] across into numberless fragments" under Los's fury, creating a "vacuum" that becomes "element": a "vast world of waters," winds, "furious torrents." (4:18–25, 51, 66–67; E 92–93). Simultaneously Los falls back in time, and through "Many ages of groans" a body emerges in "Branchy forms," its organs "like roots / Shooting out from the seed" (4:27–33, 43–44, 64–65; E 92–93). And given the suppression of proper names we also struggle to distinguish Los and Urizen, the artist and his object, the process and product. For not only is

Los “born” in chapter 2, after already existing in chapter 1; while Urizen emerges as an outgrowth of Los and is abortively organized, Los’s falling mind also “labour[s] / Organizing itself,” being born from inside himself, as the bellows of the furnace become his own lungs, and the unseparated cosmic ocean becomes the fluid inside the body through which “the unform’d part” struggles up as a polypus, a plant-vegetable and it seems a sea creature as well, which, from the perspective of spirit, is the traumatic site of a failure in individuation.¹⁰

After this psychotic crisis, over a further nine (not seven) ages, Los succeeds in shaping an immense orb of fire into the sun, which stands “self-balanc’d.”

Nine ages completed their circles
 When Los heated the glowing mass, casting
 It down into the Deeps; the Deeps fled
 Away in redounding smoke; the Sun
 Stood self-balanc’d; and Los smild with joy
 He the vast spine of Urizen siez’d
 And bound down to the glowing illusion.

But no light, for the Deep fled away
 On all sides, and left an unform’d
 Dark vacuity: here Urizen lay
 In fierce torments on his glowing bed

Till his Brain in a rock, & his Heart
 In a fleshy slough formed four rivers
 Obscuring the immense Orb of fire
 Flowing down into the night: till a Form

Was completed, a Human Illusion
 In darkness and deep clouds involvd.

(5.41–57; E 94)

As Los shapes the “all bright mass” into a “Globe,” “quench[ing] it beneath in the Deeps,” then heating it again, something is achieved (5.35–38): a “form” is completed, the sun stands “self-balanc’d.” Los seems to have progressed to a more articulated shape than in *The Book of Ahania*, where he had only been able to “beat” Fuzon’s fiery beam “in a mass / With the body

of the sun,” whose shape therefore annihilates itself (2.44–48; E 85). But this sun, like Los’s fires at the beginning, yields no “light” (*Book of Los* 3.49; E 91 and 5.48; E 94). Instead, as “the Deep” retreats on all sides, it reveals “an unformed dark vacuity,” where Urizen lies “in fierce torments,” till the “orb of fire” is obscured in petrified and viscous forms, the “brain in a rock,” and a “fleshy slough” that forms “four rivers.” It is as if, once the mass is extracted from the process of being heated and quenched in the inner depths, the end product loses something, of which Los is unaware, as he “smil[es],” binding down “fierce torments” so as to reach a conclusion, a bad and untrue determinacy. The mass, removed from the depths, is an illusion, even as the material on which Los has worked, called “Urizen,” is forced into a bad and untrue determinacy, a hard shape that is viscous within.

These final verses are settled yet deeply unsettling. They combine a Sartrean nausea in the last verse with an enigmatic beauty in the penultimate verse on the retreat of the Deep, which echoes but further denudes the *Kabala Denudata* where God self-contracts to leave a space for creatures to emerge. The passage leaves us with both a sense of closure and a half-cicatrized wound. In these lines the poem withdraws from Los’s paranoid-schizoid anger at the implosion of totalizing frameworks, into a depression that intimates an aesthetics of “decompletion.” Kenneth Reinhard describes “decompletion” as occurring in an ontological space where there is no prior imaginary fullness, like that of the Eternals, for which we must compensate, and he evokes Lacan to describe creation, like “the potter’s fashioning of a thing around a void,” as occurring around “a gap or a hole in the real” (54, 58). In Blake’s poem the sun momentarily stands self-balanced only on condition of the deeps withdrawing, and so as an illusion fashioned around a vacuity. When the sun, in turn, withdraws, we are left with “the empty shell” that makes the poem’s “existence evident” to its readers (Foucault 156). The withdrawn sun will return in more modern texts: in Gerard de Nerval’s “soleil noir de la mélancolie” in “El Desdichado,” in Kristeva’s *Black Sun* that evokes Nerval, and in the “enclosed sun” and “solar void” on which Foucault writes in his early book on the queer modernist writer Raymond Roussel (162–66). Blake’s solar eclipse, or even solar death, in *The Book of Los* is at the beginning of this aesthetics of decompletion, but as a breakdown and breakthrough of which neither Blake nor Los (who by the end seems almost marginal to the text) takes ownership. It is simply there, on the

threshold of a profound metaphysical and aesthetic climate change, opening inward to no future.

NOTES

1. In the *Philosophy of Nature* Hegel writes that nature “is only implicitly the Idea, and Schelling therefore called her a petrified (*versteinerte*) intelligence, others even a frozen (*gefrorene*) intelligence” (14–15; *Werke* 10.425). However, Hegel does actually quote the passage from Schelling that he has in mind in his *History of Philosophy*, where it is clear that the adjectives are Hegel’s: “The perfect theory of nature would be that by which the whole of nature should be resolved into an intelligence. The dead and unconscious products of nature are only abortive attempts on the part of nature to reflect itself, but the so-called dead nature is really an ‘immature,’ torpid, fossilized ‘intelligence’; it is implicit only and thus remains in externality” (3.517; *Werke* 20.425). It is noteworthy that Schelling describes dead or anorganic nature as “immature” and so still open to future development, whereas Hegel glosses this description with the word “fossilized.”

2. Summing up his Identity Philosophy in an (1803) addition to *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* (1797), Schelling writes that in nature “the whole absolute is knowable, although in appearing Nature produces only successively, and in (for us) endless development, what in true Nature exists all at once and in an eternal fashion” (272).

3. Hegel himself makes the point that the graduated stages are purely notional. As against proto-Darwinian ideas of evolution that were already emerging in his time, he argues that one stage “is not generated *naturally*” out of the previous one “but only in the inner Idea which constitutes the ground of Nature” (*Nature* 20). Or as Schelling also puts it, the *Stufenfolge* does not claim that “different organisms have really formed themselves from one another through gradual development,” but is an “idea” that lies “in Reason” (*Outline* 49). Hegel’s construction of the *Philosophy of Nature* as a graduated series of disciplines formally recognizes that it is about mind trying to grasp its subject matter (which is also to say that I disagree with Stone’s claim that the text is an a priori reading of nature itself). But beyond this, I am also suggesting that this constructivism inevitably lays itself open to the failure of the project.

4. The *Encyclopedia* consists of extensive outlines (*Grundrisse*) of its three parts: *Logic*, *Philosophy of Nature*, and *Philosophy of Mind (Geist)*. We possess a more ample version of the *Philosophy of Nature*, but like many of Hegel’s texts, it is actually based on notes from his lectures, edited after his death by K. L. Michelet (1842/1845), who combined material from the “outlines” in the three editions of the *Encyclopedia* that Hegel published (1817, 1827, 1830) with elaborations in his actual lectures for which Hegel left notes and which Michelet attended. Hegel gave those lectures eight times from 1804 to 1830, in Jena, Heidelberg, and Berlin.

5. In the *Phenomenology* Hegel writes that the “circle that remains self-enclosed . . . holds its moments together,” but that “an accident as such, detached from what circumscribes it” can “attain an existence of its own and a separate freedom,” which “is the tremendous power of the negative” (18–19).

6. Hegel wavers between placing the material he has in the second Division of the *Philosophy of Nature* on the side of the inorganic or the organic. In general (though not in the 1805/6 Jena lectures), Hegel's outlines, including the bare-bones *Propaedeutic* (1808–11) and *Nürnberg Encyclopedia* (1812), have *Mathematik* (by which he means time and space) as the first Division. In these arrangements *Mechanik* is the first part of *Physik* (which at the time meant natural science). It is not until the 1827 *Encyclopedia* that Hegel makes *Mechanik* the first Division, stops using the phrase *Physik des Unorganischen* in contrast to *Physik des Organischen*, and renames the third Division *Organik*. In other words he reconstitutes *Physik* as a bridge between the inorganic and organic, which it had always been for Schelling.

7. On these sections of the *Philosophy of Nature*, see my article "Indigestible Material," which deals with digestion and disease.

8. For Blake as for Hegel, the body is an autoreferential figure for his system; see my article "Blake's Body without Organs."

9. For instance, the plate in *Urizen* showing a figure struggling upward in the waters (Plate 5 in Copy C, 11 in Copy D, and 6 in Copy G) is described in detail in chapter 3 of *The Book of Los* (4.54–5.5; E 93).

10. Interestingly, Charles Bonnet, who wants to see the gradation of being as having no gaps, may be unique in viewing the polypus positively, as he argues that it proves the continuity between the vegetable and animal, though he concedes an absolute discontinuity between mineral and vegetable, the "gradation" here being "interrupted" (1.220). Coleridge in his *Theory of Life* protects individuation by seeing "vegetation" and "animalization" as going in different directions, but the polypi and corals form a disturbing exception to the cleanness of this separation (2.538–39).

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