Aesthetic Opportunities and the Spanish American Landscape: A Look at Alexander von Humboldt’s Aesthetic of Nature through the Lens of Seel’s *Aesthetics of Appearing*

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While in what follows, I will focus on Seel’s work, in particular his *Ästhetik der Natur* (1991) and his *Ästhetik des Erscheinens* (2000)/*Aesthetics of Appearing* (2005), I will begin by stating that I share Zuidervaart’s interest in border-crossings, having learned my strategies for avoiding the philosophical minutemen who plague our field from a group of thinkers I consider to have been the best border smugglers working in the field, the early German Romantics. I thought of Friedrich Schlegel when reading Seel’s *Aesthetics of Appearing* (though Schlegel and his romantic cohort are conspicuously missing from Seel’s tale of aesthetics’ central place in the very concept of philosophy). I don’t think it a coincidence that Walter Benjamin was drawn to the concept of art criticism in early German Romanticism – the affinities that Benjamin and Adorno share with the early German Romantics are telling – both groups are suspicious of final words and closed systems, and both groups share a concern with making philosophy a social tool.

1. **Opening Musings on the Connection between early German Romanticism and Critical Theory**

   Early in his *Aesthetics of Appearing*, Seel expresses the same sort of discomfort with closed, complete systems that became a hallmark of early German Romantic thought. Seel gives the reader this hermeneutical orientation point:

   Completeness, whatever that may be, in not my objective. All I am trying to do is build a sound bridge of sufficient tensile strength to stretch from the chosen minimalist starting point into the heartland of aesthetic consciousness. A prison constituted by a closed system is not what is to be built here, but rather a platform for a theory that is open to (and—if all goes well—is opening to) the phenomena.¹
Seel’s open literary form finds fitting company both with the form and content of Schlegel and Novalis’ fragments – in the Logological Fragments Novalis tells us that, “Only what is incomplete can be comprehended – can take us further.” In the Allegemeine Brouillon (1798/99), Novalis tells us that “an absolute drive towards perfection and completeness is an illness, as soon as it shows itself to be destructive and averse toward the imperfect, the incomplete [...].” Rüdiger Bubner stressed that the Romantics, more concerned than their idealist contemporaries with commentary, criticism, and interpretation, also developed a different model of the system. For the early German Romantics, “[t]he relevant model [...] is not a godlike creation of a system ex nihilo, as it was for the early idealists, but rather an actively sympathetic response on the part of the critic and the philologist to the significant creative works of the past.” Bubner’s reference to a “godlike system” recalls Novalis’ critique of the “absolute drive for perfection and completeness,” for certainly only a godlike creation could possible hope to satisfy such a drive. Schlegel, for his part, rejects attempts to ground philosophy “ex nihilo” in ahistorical first principles, stressing the intimate relation philosophy has to history and tradition, and searching, all too often in vain, for an active and sympathetic reception of his own work. It became a popular saying of his time that “Was man nicht versteht hat ein Schlegel geschrieben.” The openness that Novalis and Schlegel embrace is not without its hermeneutical hazards – and neither thinker attempts to dodge this danger by setting up a clear border between that which is understood and that which is incomprehensible. For both thinkers, there is a play between comprehension and incomprehension, a fluctuating movement, a fluid border between that which is understood and that which is not understood. Hovering, fluctuating, a fluid movement from one aspect of meaning to another is part of the romantic view of the work and play of the understanding. In Lyceum Fragment 20 we are told that a “classical text must never be entirely comprehensible. But those who are cultivated and who cultivate themselves must always want to learn more from it.” I approach Seel’s work with a desire to learn from it (having first encountered his Ästhetik der Natur in 1992, I have had a long time to come to an understanding of that particular work, his Aesthetics of Appearing is a more recent dialogue partner). I do not approach Seel’s
work from the position of full comprehension, but that will not stop me from probing some of the points that I find problematic. Certainly, I hope not to commit acts of poetic injustice in my wanderings through Seel’s platform for a theory opening to the phenomena of appearing. First I shall consider the letters of Seel’s account of the aesthetics of appearing, hoping to catch the spirit of his view. That journey will take me to his earlier work on the aesthetics of nature, and to his brief analysis of Alexander von Humboldt’s *Naturgemälde*. I will use Humboldt’s *Naturgemälde*, the literary/aesthetic/scientific results of his voyage to the equinoctial region of the earth, more blandly, Spanish America (1799-1804), to test some of Seel’s claims in the *Aesthetics of Appearing*. Humboldt’s depiction of the Spanish American landscape was free of the Eurocentric gaze that plagued much presentation of America during his age. While Seel claims that, “The position of art in the human world is a position in the midst of a plurality of aesthetic opportunities that are themselves not subject to any artistic choreography,” I would like to suggest that it was precisely Humboldt’s artist choreography of the Spanish American landscape that gave rise to an aesthetic opportunity that helped liberate that landscape from the Eurocentric lens.

2. **The Letter (or Words) of Seel’s *Rough History of Modern Aesthetics***

Seel begins his *Aesthetics of Appearing* with a *Rough History of Modern Aesthetics* – eight short stories which take us through the aesthetic insights of Baumgarten, Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Valéry (who we are told, offered the “first unambiguous apology of appearing”), Heidegger, and Adorno. At the end of his rough history, readers are given a moral of the story that Seel has told, namely, that there are good reasons for the strong position of aesthetics within the concept of philosophy, a justification that is linked to the main theme of Seel’s book, that is, the phenomena of appearing. What follows are several claims that help us to understand the central role of appearing in aesthetic perception. We are told that: “To apprehend something in the process of its appearing for the sake of its appearing is a focal point of all aesthetic perception.” Further, we are told that aesthetic consciousness is central to self-consciousness, for “[n]o consciousness of one’s present is possible without aesthetic consciousness.” Seel claims that aesthetic attentiveness “in the middle of a city; at the edge of civilization; in the perception, production,
and performance of art—would thus be an essential feature of human self-consciousness.”  

In Seel’s story of aesthetics, not only is aesthetic consciousness central to consciousness itself, but aesthetics emerges as a sovereign branch of philosophy: “Aesthetics is an independent part of philosophy because it is concerned with a relation to the world that cannot be traced back to theoretical or ethical approaches.”

Finally, we learn that aesthetics is absolutely necessary for philosophical thinking and singular in what it offers: “Aesthetics is indispensable for other philosophical disciplines—and therefore for philosophical thinking itself—because it is concerned with irreducible aspects of world and life. Neither the reality accessible to aesthetic consciousness nor the presence attainable in this consciousness can be treated properly within the framework of other disciplines.”

In tracing the letters of Seel’s opening act of the Aesthetics of Appearing, we are left with the clear and distinct perception, almost a certainty, that aesthetics is necessary for the task of philosophy, and that a crucial element for understanding the pivotal role played by aesthetics is the phenomena of appearing and the unfolding of aesthetic consciousness.

As we shall see, despite this clear and compelling case for the necessity of aesthetics for all philosophical disciplines, Seel will end with a rather modest message concerning the status of aesthetics. Before turning to Seel’s modest message, a few words about freedom, mastery, art, and the connection to Alexander von Humboldt. Adorno, or at least Seel’s reading of Adorno, will serve as my bridge to this constellation of themes.

3. Freedom and Mastery: the Connection with Humboldt

Seel emphasizes the fact that the indeterminable is not only of great theoretical, but also of great ethical importance for Adorno. “It opens a ‘freedom to the object’ which is a condition of real freedom among subjects.” Because the work of art reveals to the viewer “a reality richer than all of the appearances we can fix in the language of conceptual knowledge,” it unfolds the “difference between determinable appearance and indeterminable appearing,” and so, concludes Seel:
For Adorno, art thus becomes the hallmark indicating that the world has not been comprehended if it is known only conceptually; that the world has not been appropriated if it is appropriated only technically; that individual and social freedom have not been attained if they are guaranteed merely as a license to make profit; in a word, that we do not really encounter the reality of our lives if we encounter it merely in a spirit of mastery.\textsuperscript{15}

The social freedom of which Seel speaks here in reference to Adorno’s view of art and indeterminable appearing was operative in the work of Alexander von Humboldt as he attempted to present the Spanish American landscape to the European public. Seel, in an earlier work, \textit{Eine Ästhetik der Natur}, explores Humboldt’s \textit{Naturgemälde}, and he rescues Humboldt’s views of nature from some misunderstandings generated by Joachim Ritter.\textsuperscript{16} In particular, Seel emphasizes that Humboldt understands the unity of concrete landscapes from a simultaneous grasping of its diverse forms, so there is no generalizing, reductionist sweep in Humboldt’s view of nature – as Seel reminds readers, Humboldt’s \textit{Naturgemälde} are programmatically carried by an individualizing and differentiating intuition [programmatisch von einer individualisierenden und differenenzierenden Anschauung getragen].\textsuperscript{17} Humboldt does not suffer from a disinterest for the phenomenal particularity of the objects of nature, a disinterest that Seel convincingly demonstrates to be the consequence of Ritter’s metaphysical nostalgia and his ensuing landscape consciousness [\textit{landschaftliches Bewusstsein}]. Seel’s analysis of Humboldt’s approach to landscape sheds much needed light on how Humboldt’s aesthetic approach to nature (or to speak with Seel, the way in which the phenomena of nature appear to Humboldt) helped liberate him and then his readers from the Eurocentric gaze which held the landscape and culture of Spanish America imprisoned for far too long.

For Humboldt nature is a realm in which law and freedom blend. Nature for Humboldt is “the realm of freedom” [das Reich der Freiheit].\textsuperscript{18} Nature is “that which is conceived as eternally growing,
eternally developing and unfolding.” How is the scientist to present “the realm of freedom” or something that is eternally growing, developing, and unfolding without abandoning insistence on empirical evidence and demonstration? Humboldt saw a common challenge facing all of those who wanted to present nature, be the presenter an artist or a scientist: “In scientific circles as in the circles of landscape poetry and painting, the presentation gains clarity and objective liveliness when the parts are determined and limited.” The landscape artist and the scientist need to use empirical methods, Humboldt never tires of reminding his readers that, “Humans cannot have any effect on nature or get close to any of her powers, if they do not have knowledge of the laws of nature according to relations of measurements and data.” So Humboldt, the Naturforscher, is after a domination of nature. But his aesthetic turn seems the result of an acknowledgment that nature cannot be mastered, that it is something more than what the charts and graphs of the empirical scientist can give us. Following Humboldt, when nature is considered rationally, we get to its unity:

Nature considered rationally, that is to say, submitted to the process of thought, is a unity in diversity of phenomena.

This unity, this living whole, Humboldt indicates, almost as if Adorno had been whispering in his ear, cannot be enslaved by the scientist’s empirical methods. There is no mastery of nature, for nature is the realm of freedom. The theme of freedom is central to Humboldt’s Darstellung of nature and to his Naturgemälde. Humboldt strives to combine the empirical or measurable elements of nature with those elements that are measureless to man. Hartmut Böhme describes, “On Steppes and Deserts” from Views of Nature (1807) as a text that,

Offers everything that a Naturgemälde (canvas of nature) is: that is, moments of a traveler’s account, with traces of concrete intuitions, properties of a descriptive/analytic treatise, but also symbolic generalizations, with elements of the cosmos-idea, aesthetic elements of the sublime, and philosophical reflection, but at the same time that they offer a cultural-historical treatment of nature, they also present nature scientifically.
In Humboldt’s *Naturgemälde*, ideas, which cannot be measured, blend with those aspects of nature that can be measured. As Böhme indicates, there is a fusion of science with the aesthetic elements of experience. With his *Naturgemälde*, Humboldt acknowledges that nature has not been comprehended if it is known only conceptually – empirical methods gives us half the story – we need to understand nature as the realm of freedom, indeed, as a work of art, to approximate a fuller understanding (never, of course, is a full understanding possible or even desirable). In Humboldt’s presentation of nature, especially in his favorite work, *Ansichten der Natur*, we find abundant examples of the balancing act between making present determinable appearing and presenting the indeterminable appearing of nature. For example, Humboldt quantifies the steppes described in “On Steppes and Deserts,” that is, he gives measurements and data on them, but he also observes that they fill his spirit with the “sense of the infinite.”

Obviously, the infinite cannot be measured. This sense of the infinite is not part of what can be measured by the natural scientist’s tools – it belongs to the realm of the aesthetic, to the realm of that which can be appreciated, but not measured. In the seven chapters of Humboldt’s *Ansichten*, aesthetic terms of beauty, of the sublime, of enjoyment, of movement of the spirit, are presented alongside empirical accounts of the objects presented in his portraits of nature. The term, *Naturgenuss* (enjoyment of nature), is central in *Views of Nature*. The neglect of this pleasure and all of the aesthetic elements involved in experiencing nature is the result of the one-dimensional science that Humboldt critiques:

> The mere accumulation of unconnected observations of details, devoid of generalization of ideas, may doubtlessly have tended to create and foster the deeply-rooted prejudice, that the study of the exact sciences must necessarily chill the feelings, and diminish the nobler enjoyments attendant upon a contemplation of nature.\(^2\)

Humboldt shares Seel’s view that there is a reality accessible to aesthetic consciousness that cannot be treated within the framework of other disciplines. Humboldt, in his turn to the aesthetic, does open freedom to the object he brings into appearance, in his case, the landscape of Spanish America. And in
opening this freedom, he also opens the possibility for freedom among the people of Spanish America. In liberating science from the “old prejudice” of approximating its objects in a purely empirical way, Humboldt also opened the European mind to all that the so-called New World had to offer, thus freeing those European minds from some new prejudices about America and its inhabitants. In the connection Humboldt makes between his aesthetic approach to nature and freedom, we return to the point in Adorno that Seel highlights, namely, that the indeterminable appearing is of great theoretical and ethical importance because it opens a freedom to the object which is a condition of real freedom among subjects.

We can illustrate the freedom opening instances in Humboldt’s depictions of nature by looking at some of the scenes of nature or Naturgemälde Humboldt presents in Ansichten der Natur, scenes the create a portrait of nature with the same sort of detail one would expect from a landscape painter.¹ In his Naturgemälde, Humboldt is offering a canvas (written, not painted) of the American landscape. He not only describes the scenes he is presenting to his reading public but he also discusses the impact any given scene has upon the viewer, describing the impact of the steppes thus:

Like a limitless expanse of waters, the Steppe fills the mind with a sense of the infinite, and the soul, freed from the sensuous impressions of space, expands with spiritual emotions of a higher order. But the aspect of the ocean, its bright surface diversified with rippling or gently swelling waves, is productive of pleasurable sensations—while the

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¹ And here in the safe confines of a footnote, I will drop a question that grows from my particular approach to the Aesthetics of Appearing: I read it under the shadow of the Eine Ästhetik der Natur and under the influence of Humboldt’s Naturgemälde. In thinking through Chapter IV, Thirteen Statements on the Picture, I wondered what Seel would do with something like Humboldt’s Naturgemälde – clearly, the Naturgemälde are a special kind of sign, but it seemed that for Seel, a picture [Bild] had to be a kind of painting, so written narrative accounts that serve as pictures would not count as pictures of the sort explored in the Aesthetics of Appearing. But I think they should – as Novalis indicates in his thoughts, Über Goethe, “True art is situated in the intellect, which creates according to a characteristic concept: only fantasy, wit and good judgment are required of it. Thus, Wilhelm Meister is entirely a product of art, a work of the intellect. From this point of view, we see that many mediocre works of art are exhibited in the halls of art, while on the other hand many writings regarded as excellent are excluded” (in Classical and Romantic German Aesthetics, edited by J.M. Bernstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 228). We don’t have to accept Novalis’ more radical notion of the work of art (though I think there is much that speaks in its favor), but I would like to hear more about what elevates a painted picture [Bild] above the written [Bild] or something like Humboldt’s Naturgemälde.
Steppe lies stretched before us, cold and monotonous, like the naked stony crust of some distant planet.  

This depiction of the steppes, filled as it is with references to the infinite (something measureless to man), the freedom of the soul, and emotions of a higher order – is not guilty of being “a mere accumulation of unconnected details” that chills our feelings for an enjoyment of nature. Indeed, in this passage, a poetic presencing or appearing of nature is what Humboldt accomplishes with his references to the indeterminable appearing of nature. After a brief excurse on the plains of Central Asia, Humboldt returns to the plain of South America. Despite the devotion he had to empirical observations and so to a kind of mastery over nature, he emphasizes the appeal of that which will never be mastered or tamed, writing:

The interest yielded by the contemplation of such a picture [Gemälde] must arise from a pure love of nature [Naturinteresse]. No Oasis here reminds the traveler of former inhabitants, no hewn stone, no fruit-tree once cultivated and now growing wild, bears witness to the industry of past races. As if a stranger to the destinies of mankind, and bound to the present alone, this region of the earth presents a wild domain [ein wilder Schauplatz] to the free manifestations of animal and vegetable life.

Even when Humboldt seems steeped in a purely empirical account of a given aspect of nature, he always connects that account back to something larger, to a context that allows the meaning of the scene described to emerge more fully and for nature to emerge as a work of art. To speak with Seel (invoking Adorno), Humboldt combines the determinable appearance of nature (in the spirit of mastery) with nature’s indeterminable appearing (in the spirit of art). For example, in the essay on “Steppes and Deserts,” we learn that “[a] number of causes, many of them still but little understood, diminish the dryness and heat of the New World. Among these are: the narrowsness of this extensively indented continent in the northern part of the tropics, where the fluid basis on which the atmosphere rests, occasion the ascent of a less warm current of air.” Humboldt’s attention to empirical detail is then immediately used to take the presentation to a different level, in this case, to dispel some of the myths that contributed
to the anti-Americanism of the period. After a long, detailed, empirical account of the causes of dryness and heat in the New World, Humboldt concludes:

If, therefore, the atmosphere on one side of our planet be more humid than on the other, a consideration of the actual condition of things will be sufficient to solve the problems of this inequality. The natural philosopher need not shroud the explanation of such phenomena in the garb of geological myths. It is not necessary to assume that the destructive conflict of the elements raged at different epochs in the eastern and western hemispheres, during the early condition of our planet; or that America emerged subsequently to the other quarters of the world from the chaotic covering of waters as a swampy island, the abode of crocodiles and serpents.\(^{30}\)

Humboldt’s approach to nature in general, and his detailed, inspiring, and accurate depictions of the Spanish American landscape in particular, helped to break-down the misleading accounts of America given by too many scholars of his generation, accounts that depicted America as nothing more than the dwelling place of beasts, a place far inferior, both culturally and naturally to Europe. Humboldt’s *Naturgemälde* allow the Spanish American landscape to appear without the distorting prejudices that plagued most accounts of the period.\(^{31}\) In his *Nautgemälde*, Humboldt not only depicts nature, but also gives clear analyses of some of the ways in which the landscape affected the culture of the people of the region he is presenting. In the case of the “Steppes and Deserts” account, Humboldt lingers on the significance that the absence of pastoral life in the pampas had upon the culture of the region:

If a pastoral life—that beneficent intermediate stage which binds nomadic bands of hunters to fruitful pasture lands, and at the same time promotes agriculture—was unknown to the primitive races of America, it is to the very ignorance of such a mode of life that we must attribute the scantiness of population in the South American Steppes.\(^{32}\)

A typical Eurocentric reaction to the scantiness of population in the South American Steppes would be to use the low population levels as evidence for the inferiority of the land and, in an unfavorable
comparative move, for the superiority of European culture and indeed, even of European nature—the country with the richer natural resources would be the country with greater concentrations of thriving populations. Humboldt draws quite another conclusion, writing:

But this circumstance [the lack of the transitional pastoral life] allowed freer scope for the forces of nature to develop themselves in the most varied forms of animal life; a freedom only circumscribed by themselves, like vegetable life in the forests of the Orinoco, where the Hymenaea and the giant laurel, exempt from the ravages of man, are only in danger of a too luxuriant embrace of the plants which surround them.\(^{33}\)

Humboldt presents the American landscape as a realm of freedom and of natural luxury. As I have mentioned, Humboldt defines nature as the “realm of freedom.” Nicolaas Rupke reminds us in the Introduction to the 1997 edition of *Cosmos* that given Humboldt’s focus on the relation between nature and freedom, “the proper study of nature would lead to liberty, away from religious and political absolutism and oppression. Thus, *Cosmos* could become a metonymy of the politics of liberalization.”\(^{34}\) I would add that only with the addition of the aesthetic depiction of nature does the line from nature to freedom really take shape, taking us once again to Adorno’s insight. If *Cosmos* could become a metonymy of the politics of liberalization, then *Views of Nature* can also be read as views of freedom from the prejudices that kept Europeans from fully appreciating the landscape of Spanish America.\(^{35}\) The steppes and deserts of Spanish America are unlike anything to be found in Europe, but, as Humboldt is careful to show, the unfamiliar is by no means to be associated with the inferior. Indeed, the description cited above leads the viewer (reader) to appreciate the unpopulated landscape of Spanish America as a realm of freedom and purity. The absence of human population is no disadvantage to the beauty and majesty of the landscape, quite the contrary, according to Humboldt, without the interference of humans, nature can develop greater forms.
What Humboldt accomplished with his *Naturgemälde* was path-breaking and evidence, I think, for the central role aesthetics plays in presenting the world, for letting freedom appear. So, here I depart from Seel’s modest message, one articulated at the beginning of his *Aesthetics of Appearing*:

> [T]here is no reason to elevate aesthetics to the status of the regal discipline of philosophy. Nor is there any reason to declare aesthetic conduct to be the pinnacle of human possibilities. Acts of aesthetic perception can enrich the possibilities of human perception in almost all areas—*and that’s all*. Such acts make possible an affirmation of the momentary present, however fleeting it may be. The fissures they generate can neither outdo nor replace the potential of conceptual knowledge and intervening action, just as this mode of knowledge and action cannot replace or outdo openness to appearing. Encounter with the particular—with the uniqueness of the world, as Adorno and Horkheimer say at one point in their otherwise sober *Dialectic of the Enlightenment*—has its meaning in itself. This has been the modest message of aesthetics since the days of Baumgarten and Kant.  

Humboldt transformed his acts of aesthetic perception of the Spanish American landscape into *Naturgemälde* which, in turn enriched the perception of his reading public, bringing into a focus a fair portrait or picture (*Bild*) of the Spanish American landscape. That’s all, but, in my estimation, that is also enough to elevate aesthetics to the status of the regal discipline of philosophy – the close connection between aesthetics and freedom is the root, I think, and perhaps I am summoning Schiller here (but I could as well summon the Peruvian philosopher, Alejandro Octavio Deústua (1849-1945)), of our very openness to appearing, our very encounter with the uniqueness of the world, and our very ability to appreciate the world.

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Alexander von Humboldt, Cosmos: A Sketch of the Physical Description of the Universe (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press 1997). All references to Cosmos are to this edition. I have often altered the translation significantly. References to the German are to, Alexander von Humboldt, Kosmos, ed. by Hanno Beck. Stuttgart: Brockhaus 1978.


My translation. “Aber in dem wissenschaftlichen Kreis wie in den heiteren Kreisen der Landschaftsdichtung und Landschaftsmalerei, gewinnt die Darstellung um so mehr an Klarheit und objektiver Lebendigkeit als das einzelne bestimmmt aufgefaßt und begrenzt ist” (Humboldt, Kosmos, p. 9).

“Der Mensch kann auf die Natur nicht einwirken, sich keine ihrer Kräfte aneigen, wenn er nicht die Naturgesetze nach Maß- und Zahlenverhältnissen kennt” (Humboldt, Kosmos, p. 25).


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6 Seel, op. cit., xii.
7 Ibid., p. 9
8 Ibid., p. 15.
9 Ibid., p. 16.
10 Ibid., pp. 16-17.
11 Ibid., p. 17
12 Ibid., p. 17.
13 Ibid., p. 15
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid., p. 15.
17 Seel, Eine Ästhetik der Natur, op. cit., p. 229
18 Alexander von Humboldt, Cosmos: A Sketch of the Physical Description of the Universe (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press 1997). All references to Cosmos are to this edition. I have often altered the translation significantly. References to the German are to, Alexander von Humboldt, Kosmos, ed. by Hanno Beck. Stuttgart: Brockhaus 1978.
21 “Der Mensch kann auf die Natur nicht einwirken, sich keine ihrer Kräfte aneigen, wenn er nicht die Naturgesetze nach Maß- und Zahlenverhältnissen kennt” (Humboldt, Kosmos, p. 25).
symbolischen Verallgemeinerung, mithin Elemente der Kosmos-Idee, Züge der Ästhetik des Erhabenen und der philosophischen Reflexion, aber auch einer kulturhistorischen wie naturwissenschlichen Abhandlung” (p. 23), the English above is my translation.


26 Humboldt makes connections between the plains of Central Asia and the spread of “misery and devastation over the earth.” He tells us early in his essay that, “Some of the pastoral tribes inhabiting this Steppe,—the Mongols, Getae, Alani, and the Usüni—have convulsed the world. If in the course of earlier ages, the dawn of civilization spread like the vivifying light of the sun from east to west; so in subsequent ages and from the same quarter, have barbarism and rudeness threatened to overcloud Europe” (Views of Nature, p. 5).


30 Hegel’s account of America springs immediately to mind in this connection. He for example stated: “The main character of the native Americans is a placidity, a lassitude, a humble and cringing submissiveness toward a Creole, and even more toward a European—and it will take a long time for the Europeans to produce any feeling of self-confidence in them. The inferiority of these individuals in every respect, even in regard to size, is very apparent. Only the extremely southern tribes, in Patagonia, are stronger by nature, but they are still in the natural condition of barbarism and savagery” G.W.F. Hegel, Introduction to The Philosophy of History, translated by Leo Rauch (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1988), p. 85. “Sanftmut und Trieblosigkeit, Demut und kriechende Unterwürfigkeit gegen einen Kreolen und mehr noch gegen einen Europäer sind dort der Hauptcharakter der Amerikaner, und es wird noch lange dauern, bis die Europäer dahin kommen, einiges Selbstgefühl in sie zu bringen. Die Inferiörität dieser Individuen in jeder Rücksicht, selbst in Hinsicht der Größe gibt sich in allem zu erkennen; nur die ganz südlichen Stämme in Patagonien sind kräftigere Naturen, aber noch ganz in dem natürlichen Zustande der Roheit und Wildheit” (G.W.F. Hegel, Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte, mit einer Einführung von Theodor Litt (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1961, p. 140).


33 Emphasis added, Seel, Aesthetics of Appearing, p. 18.