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Dieter Schulz, *Emerson and Thoreau: or Steps Beyond Ourselves: Studies in Transcendentalism* (Heidelberg: Mattes Verlag, 2012), 307pp.

According to the Transcendentalists, at the heart of nature is ecstasy—not in the sense of joy or delirium (though that, too, may be involved in some cases), but in the sense of ek-stasis: stepping outside oneself. In his new collection, *Emerson and Thoreau, or Steps Beyond Ourselves* (2012), Dieter Schulz suggests that much Transcendentalist work amounts to a series of sermons on this version of ek-stasis/ecstasy. This is rhetoric not to be admired or valued in itself, but instead rhetoric as a means for setting the will on a course of virtuous action. The purpose of the texts Schulz examines is to make them actual in the world by means of method, to construct a Transcendentalist Way.

Emerson and Thoreau is a collection of essays culled from various journals, collections, conferences, and seminars over the course of fifteen years or so of Schulz's scholarly career in the United States and Germany. Some have been revised, others edited, and others translated from German. Schulz, the author of *Suche und Abenteuer* (1981) and *Amerikanischer Transzendentalismus: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Margaret Fuller* (1997), warns his readers that the pieces are in "various stages of revision." However, these essays are polished and fully realized.

Despite their miscellaneous topics and their different times of composition, the works cohere around a few central themes: the centrality of ekstasis to human experience as described by the Transcendentalists (Emerson and Thoreau in particular), the revival of method or "way" as the means for generating knowledge of self and world, and the ongoing creative dialogue between human and nonhuman nature. Though the central subjects of these essays may vary, they never stray far from these concerns.

In approaching Emerson and Thoreau's concept of nature, Schulz relies heavily on the apprehension of nature as *physis*, rather than as something fixed and unchanging that does not include the human. It is reality conceived as, in Emerson's words, "ever-flowing metamorphosis" (3). The interplay of the human and the nonhuman, of object or world, and language is at the heart of Transcendentalist practice, as Schulz reads it. He approaches the texts with a notion shared with Giambattista Vico: that metaphor resides at the core of language, and that it in turn relies on lived experience. Schulz is at his best in his exploration of "correspondence": "the idea that matter and mind shed light on each other because they are pervaded by an all-embracing, unifying principle" (5). This connection between word and object is not a suggestion that such a connection is static, unchanging, or somehow based in either word or object's essence. Rather, both elements shift and transform, stepping outside of themselves to become something else. This is

the connection in Transcendentalist thought between walking and reading—what Schulz calls “the ancient topos of the Book of Nature” (6).

As noted above, the starting point for Schulz is the concept of ecstasy, which he defines in part as the state “of being outside oneself: the endless process of creation and decay, the constant movement of life beyond the individual object” (136). This “stepping beyond” the self, as Schulz explains it, is inherent not only in the human, but in nonhuman entities, too. In considering nature in the Spinozist sense of *natura naturans*, or in the Aristotelian mode as efficient cause, Schulz suggests a Transcendentalism whose practitioners held that natural objects are in a constant state of transformation, of stepping out of themselves (ek-stasis). As Schulz reads the Transcendentalists, all things are subject to constant change. The process of transformation is implicit in the status quo, one of the qualities inherent in nature.

This ek-stasis at the heart of things is key to understanding the correspondence the Transcendentalists perceive between words and things. Metaphor, or metonymy, as Emerson liked to call it, becomes a means not of establishing reference to some fixed, reified, essence, but of highlighting the ways forms transform themselves into new things. That is, Schulz sees Transcendentalism in some ways as “a large-scale effort to revitalize the metaphor of the way in an attempt to counter the insidious tendency toward reification and fossilization inherent in the sciences, economics, politics and the Church of the time” (4). This transformation involves both the human and the non-human. The core importance of ecstasy comes to the fore in particular in Schulz’s discussion of the motif of “walking” in the work of Emerson and Thoreau. The practice of walking becomes at once a metaphor for nature’s inherent tendency toward transformation, and “the making of ecstasy [into] a method” (138).

Reading and walking, in this sense, become analogues, linking Emerson’s scholar and Thoreau’s walker in pursuit of knowledge. This is not knowledge in a Cartesian sense, in which the knower is abstracted from the object known, but rather the kind of knowledge that is produced when the knower has an interest in the known. Schulz’s study of his connection unfolds in the thematic (if not exactly physical) center of this collection: “‘Walking’ and the Method of Nature: Thoreau, Emerson, Gadamer.”

In this piece, Schulz relies heavily on Hans-Georg Gadamer’s work to revisit what he calls “the question of knowing,” and posits that “mind and reality belong together.” Gadamer’s work, Schulz writes, reminds us that “the methodos of the early Greek philosophers takes for granted the unity of mind and being” (134). This perspective counters the idea that method implies objectivity: the legacy of Bacon and Descartes. In their approach, the world can be known only to the extent that the knowing subject abstracts itself from the object of its knowledge—that is, from the world. One bridge across these two modes of knowledge, the humanities and the sciences, in Schulz’s view, is the Transcendentalists’ version of walking. Instead of Cartesian or Baconian striving for objectivity, what Schulz calls “wild walking” or “wild thinking” requires a dialogue, “a methodos in the sense of going along, allowing the self to take its occasion from nature” (148).

The Transcendentalist *methodos* translates into what Schulz calls a “Way”—a revitalization of the concept of a practice of knowledge. The Way comprises both reading and walking. “Nature needs to be interpreted” Schulz writes, “hence the walker’s job coincides with that of a reader studying the language of nature” (6). One of the things this collection does very well is illustrate this “Way” not only as practice but as metaphor—embracing, among other narratives, that of the “American Way.” Schulz notes in particular the contest between Roger Williams and John Cotton as a clash between the “wandering” of the native tribes and the “New England Way.” This tension, Schulz, contends, becomes “a sensibility that will come into its own in the writings of the Transcendentalists” (7). Later, both Emerson and Thoreau saw themselves as contributing to the formation of a new American Way—the building of a new society. As Schulz notes, compellingly, this American Way has its roots in the sermons of the Puritans, makes its way through the essays and speeches of the Transcendentalists, only to reappear in the work of U.S. Modernists like William Carlos Williams, and in political speeches such as Barack Obama’s First Inaugural Address, so replete with references to the “American Way” or “American Journey” (7).

Schulz’s exploration of knowledge as method and his efforts to reconsider the Transcendentalists with a view toward bridging the gap between the sciences and the humanities draw him into conversation with other writers who are reconsidering the relation between the human and the sphere of nature. In this attempt, Schulz acknowledges similar efforts in philosophy, cognitive linguistics, and biosemiotics. “The world, including our body, predates consciousness; our very organs of perception, the senses, antedate consciousness. Being always precedes and exceeds knowing,” he writes in “Thoreau’s Excursions, Science and Hermeneutics” (225). It would be interesting and valuable to see more explicit engagement between Schulz’s method and recent works by Jane Bennett and Timothy Morton, for example—or with the work of scholars focused on affect theory. After all, it is the simple act of walking across the bare common that pitches Emerson into his ek-static “transparent eyeball” reverie.

As a collection, these essays form a very worthy, very useful, volume. It contributes to contemporary debates about the texts themselves, participates in ongoing discussions about human and nonhuman nature, and situates some aspects of Transcendentalism in a historical continuum including the near present. In assembling them into one volume, Schulz has offered us an example of the kind of knowledge by method he tracks so carefully in his essays.