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The Cruelty of Reading: Reading and Writing in the Works of Friedrich Schelling

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Graduate Program in Theory and Criticism

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Master of Arts

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The Cruelty of Reading: Reading and Writing in the Works of Friedrich Schelling

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by

Marc Daniel Mazur

Graduate Program in Theory and Criticism

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada

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THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies

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The thesis by

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The Cruelty of Reading: Reading and Writing in the Works of Friedrich Schelling

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Abstract

Friedrich Schelling has re-emerged recently in Anglo-Saxon philosophy as a singularly important figure in German Idealism, not as some mediate figure in between Kant, Fichte, and Hegel. Because Schelling's works resist being subsumed into a univocal or systematic articulation, they instead invite a reading, in the sense developed by Jean-Luc Nancy, that itself is transported to the writing of his texts. In order to show the auto-immune character of Schelling's writing, this thesis will turn to Schelling's *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature* (1799), the *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom* (1809), and the unfinished *The Ages of the World* (1815). These texts show that the recent resurgence of Schelling in theory and philosophy is not because of philosophy's re-discovery of Schelling, but that Schelling is representative of the crisis in which theory and philosophy currently find themselves, articulating a deconstructive writing *avant-la-lettre*.

Keywords

Schelling, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von, 1775-1854; German Idealism; Deconstruction; Writing; Philosophy of Nature; Absolute Idealism; Trauma; Repression; Derrida; Nancy; Bataille.

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The Writing of Nature: Schelling's *First Outline*

1. 1 Introduction

Reading Friedrich Schelling's *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature* is rather different than reading works from Schelling's contemporaries during the period of what is now called German Idealism. Schelling may share a historical time and space with Kant, Fichte, and Hegel, but his writings were never quite like theirs. Even Schelling admits of the *First Outline*, in terms of the text's written construction, that the "same demands cannot rightfully be made upon a treatise that has been written solely and exclusively to serve as a guide for lectures" (Schelling *First Outline* 3). It is for precisely this reason that I have chosen the *First Outline* as a text through which we enter into the more 'general text' that is Schelling's body of work. Under the assemblage of this project's focus on texts ranging from 1795 up to 1815, this chapter seeks to establish the *First Outline* as a first instance of Schelling's 'body of work' as a body that is not whole yet still alive. Like Gilles Deleuze's 'body without organs,' Schelling's texts seek to account for themselves in the process of their own writing, and, as a result, are in possession of a vitality that cannot be, or resists being, subsumed or absolutized under one determinate principle, one body, one organization, one organ. In other words, taking up the writing (*écriture*), in the sense developed by Jacques Derrida, that is specific to Schelling as the interpretive point of departure for the *First Outline*, I argue that the text is simultaneously productive and critical of its productivity as it puts under erasure–and in some cases undoes–the concepts, ideas, and organizational structures that it lays before the reader as 'finished' products.

Within the larger context of this thesis, the aim of this chapter is to establish a critical reading of Schelling's philosophical texts from the *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism* up to and including *The Ages of the World*. This reading, to borrow from Jean-Luc Nancy's reading of Hegel in *The Speculative Remark*, finds itself "transported to the writing" of the text and to "the *plasticity* of the exposition" (Nancy *Speculative Remark* 13). For reading "is a matter of grasping [*empoigner*] the proposition otherwise–and of grasping the entire philosophical writing by another end, by two ends, or still otherwise, who knows?" (Nancy *Speculative Remark* 12-13). To read Schelling is to read a philosophical work from a literary perspective in the sense developed by Derrida, in the words of Rodolphe Gasché: "'Literature's' subversion of both philosophy and literature, of both truth and the simulacrum . . . proceeds from its status as a between, forming a certain corner, a certain angle, with respect to both literature and philosophy" (Gasché *Tain of the Mirror* 260). A reading of this sort is never a clinical operation performed on the text, but works from inside the text "otherwise" in order to read closely the plasticity of speculative language. This allows for new ways of orienting oneself within the text or uncovering how the text re-orients itself. "Because to philosophize about nature means as much as to create it," writes Schelling at the beginning of the *First Outline* (Schelling *First Outline* 5), so too is the philosophy of nature a creating of nature as much as it is a writing of nature whose "analysis can not be permitted to stop at any one thing that is a *product*; it can only cease with the purely *productive*." Therefore, one is never finished reading, since the text is never finished its writing, which is a writing that invites a philosophical reading that is itself infinite.

1. 2 The Underwriting of Speculative Philosophy

The infinite or absolute character of Schelling's nature as a pure productivity has not gone unnoticed. Recently, with the publication of *Philosophies of Nature After Schelling*, Iain Hamilton Grant argues that one of Schelling's greatest contributions to philosophy was his work on *Naturphilosophie*. For Grant, "metaphysics cannot be pursued in isolation from physics" (Grant *Philosophies of Nature* vii), and it is only after Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* that one can pursue this path. Amongst others known currently as proponents of speculative realism[1], Grant's project seeks to overturn Kant's pre-eminence in philosophy in order to return to and accomplish the "greater project of metaphysics". What Grant has rightfully shown is that Schelling filled in the gap left by Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason* that excluded nature from the purview of philosophical investigation. Appropriating Kant's method in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and influenced by Fichte's subjective idealism from the *Wissenschaftslehre*, Schelling takes both these philosophers out of the realm of the subjective and inserts them into the realm of the objective by placing transcendental idealism into nature. This procedure, according to Grant, does not seek to give an idealistic explanation of nature but a physical explanation of idealism. Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* is thus taken up as a critique of Kantian and Fichtean idealism and the transcendentalist focus upon the unfolding of the

[1] Speculative realism gets its name from the event "'Speculative Realism: A One-Day Workshop' [that] took place on 27 April 2007 at Goldsmiths, University of London, under the auspices of the Centre for the Study of Invention and Social Process, co-sponsored by **Collapse**. Rather than announcing the advent of a new theoretical 'doctrine' or 'school', the event conjoined four ambitious philosophical projects–all of which boldly problematize the subjectivistic and anthropocentric foundations of much of 'continental philosophy' while differing significantly in their respective strategies for superseding them" (*Collapse III* 307). The one-day workshop included philosophers Ray Brassier, Quentin Meillassoux, Iain Hamilton Grant, and Graham Harman and is featured in *Collapse: Philosophical Research and Development* Volume III, 2007. For more on Speculative Realism, see Brassier's *Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction*, Meillassoux's *After Finitude: An Essay On The Necessity of Contingency*, Grant's *Philosophies of Nature After Schelling*, and Harman's *Guerilla Metaphysics: Phenomenology and the Carpentry of Things*.

subjective absolute. According to Grant, Schelling escapes the correlationist paradigm imposed by Kant's prohibition of thinking the thing-in-itself precisely because he turns nature into the thing-in-itself, thereby transposing metaphysics to physics, and supposedly solves the problem of the divide between subject and object. Therefore, "Schelling's hypothesis is," according to Grant, "that there is a naturalistic or physicalist ground of philosophy"; quoting from Schelling: "For what we want is not that Nature should coincide with the laws of our mind by *chance* . . . but that *she herself*, necessarily and originally, should not only express, but *realize*, the laws of our mind" (Grant *Philosophies of Nature* 2). In this sense, for Grant the product within nature is always an expression or a manifestation of absolute nature, considered as absolute productivity, in the same way as the way we think nature is itself established through, and is a part of, nature's dynamically generative project.

However, Grant's reading of Schelling limits his importance to the philosophy of nature and loses sight of Schelling's middle work, especially the *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom* and *The Ages of the World*, which he gestures to but does not really investigate. Grant's oversight arises precisely from reading the "*prius* of thinking . . . [as] necessarily nature" (Grant "Speculative Realism" 342), as well as the *prius* of Schelling's philosophy as necessarily the philosophy of nature . "[T]o consider the naturephilosophy *core* to Schellingianism, rather than just a *phase*" (Grant *Philosophies of Nature* 3) is Grant's solution for rescuing Schelling from his intermediate status between Kant, Fichte, and Hegel. But, because Grant homogenizes "nature," he risks turning Schelling into an '–ism,' and therefore stymies any critical appraisal of the distinct figurations of nature throughout Schelling's texts. Grant is correct in pointing out

that Schelling remained committed to *Naturphilosophie* even in the *Freedom* essay, insofar as Schelling argues "that nature must furnish . . . the only possible basis for a philosophy of freedom," and "[e]ven by 1830, with the *Introduction to Philosophy* . . . naturephilosophy remains the 'substrate of the entire system' of philosophy (1989a: 55)" (Grant *Philosophies of Nature* 5). In contrast, though Grant is correct in arguing that the categorical division of Schelling's works into discrete phases impairs a reading that seeks continuity in his work, so too does Grant's prioritizing of *Naturphilosophie*; this locks Schelling into one single articulation of his development, which indeed does away with reading him in phases, but also misreads Schelling as a dogmatic realist rather than a philosopher who tries to think through the problem of correlationism raised by Kant before him. As opposed to Grant's reading, Schelling absolutizes nature, not merely to get rid of the gap between subject and object, but in fact as a means to think through the divide between real and ideal as the fundamental condition of the process of thought, since, as Grant aptly notes, the philosophy of nature "entails that speculation becomes necessary, as the only means not of assessing the *access* that we have, but of the *production* of thought" (Grant "Speculative Realism" 334).

Quentin Meillassoux, another speculative realist, provides a more elaborate critique of Kantian and Fichtean idealism[2] than does Grant, and provides the critique around which all speculative realists unite: the critique of correlationism. In *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, Meillassoux's central critique of

[2] One must be prudent and add that speculative realism would only be critiquing the early Fichte and not the later works of Fichte after the Jena period. Fichte's Berlin period (1799-1814) was a period of transition in comparison to Fichte's earlier work, changing the primacy of the *ich*-form of the I as absolute to "something absolute prior to and originally independent of the I (*Seyn*, 'Being,' or Gott, 'God')" (Žižek "Fichte's Laughter" 124).

Kant revolves around Kant's development of what Meillassoux has called correlationism, "the idea according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other" (Meillassoux 5). This term, which refers to Kant's epistemological framework of the subject-object relation is, for Meillassoux as well as for Grant,[3] responsible for eliminating the possibility of thinking the absolute from any standpoint except that of the subject. Meillassoux writes,

> Critical philosophy does not prohibit all relation between thought and the absolute. It proscribes any knowledge of the thing-in-itself (any application of the categories to the supersensible), but maintains the thinkability of the in-itself. According to Kant, we know *a priori* that the thing-in-itself is non-contradictory and that it actually exists. (Meillassoux 35)

This thinkability of the in-itself as the limit to theory and philosophy, argues Meillassoux, is due to the restriction imposed upon philosophy, theory, and thought by the fallacy of correlationism. The limits of correlationism further stipulate that we cannot know anything outside of us except in relation to how we think it; in other words, "this space of exteriority is merely the space of what faces us, of what exists only as a correlate of our own existence" (Meillassoux 7). Contemporary philosophers, according to Meillassoux, have thus forgotten what it means to think the "*absolute* outside of pre-critical thinkers," that "outside which was not relative to us, and which was given as indifferent to its own givenness to be what it is, existing in itself regardless of whether we are thinking of it or not" (Meillassoux 7). The goal of speculative realism, then, is to "*uncover an absolute*

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[3] Although Grant does not use the word "correlationism" in his book, *Philosophies of Nature after Schelling*, he does critique Kant for prohibiting knowledge of the thing-in-itself. Grant thus pits Schelling's works on *Naturphilosophie* against Kant's critical philosophy and post-Kantian subjective idealism, but this in fact misreads or ignores attempts made by Kant in his *Opus Postumum* and further Hegel's work on the *Philosophy of Nature*, as texts that try to conceive of metaphysics according to physics. In reality, Grant is at his best when he reads Schelling with the philosophical and scientific evidence which informed his writings during the period of Schelling's naturephilosophy.

necessity that does not reinstate any form of absolutely necessary entity" (Meillasoux 34) such as God, an absolute organism, phlogiston, etc., all while remaining free of the limitations imposed by the correlationist paradigm that would limit philosophy's ability to think the absolute, specifically to think of the absolute as an a-subjective, factical principle.

But what is it about correlationism that actually limits thought from thinking the absolute in terms of facticity or otherwise as the subtitle of *After Finitude* indicates: thinking the absolute in terms of the necessity of contingency? According to Meillassoux, there are two kinds of correlationism, one weak and one strong. The weak version is that supported by the Kantian critical philosophy as described above, and does not concern Schelling as much as it does Kant and Fichte. For weak correlationism provides that the thing-in-itself be thought as a "principle [which] require[s] that there be a possible explanation for every worldly fact," (Meillassoux 33) and as a principle that we cannot obtain "positive knowledge of . . . through the use of a logical principle alone" (Meillassoux 32) or as something that can be intuited in the world. Therefore, Kant's weak correlationism thinks the thing-in-itself, according to Meillassoux, as *a priori*, non-contradictory, as *causa sui*, and as actually existing. The strong version, on the other hand, is more relevant to this reading of Schelling seeing that Meillassoux includes Schelling's conception of nature in the list of strong correlationist ideas that must be put to the test against the speculative realist project. Firstly, all correlationism posits the thesis "of the essential inseparability of the act of thinking from its content. All we ever engage with is what is given-to-thought, never an entity subsisting by itself" (Meillassoux *After* 36). In other words, this means that there is no way to think of anything outside of

the correlation of subject-object; to think the absolute would be illegitimate because any thinking would remain caught in what we think, therefore no one can claim legitimate knowledge of the absolute or come to know the thing-in-itself. The second tactic attached to strong correlationism, and this is more along the lines of Schelling's thought, is "*absolutizing the correlation itself*" (Meillassoux 37). The absolutization of the correlation itself, according to Meillassoux, ignores the first principle of correlationism, and thus creates a system founded upon the correlation itself under a third term, which Schelling's nature becomes in his work during the period of *Naturphilosophie*.

Meillassoux finds this most troubling, arguing that this amounts to a fideism, stating, "fideism is merely the *other* name for strong correlationism" (Meillassoux 48). What this absolutization reveals for Meillassoux is not that the thing-in-itself is known, nor that the impossible is possible for thought, but that "*it is unthinkable that the unthinkable be impossible*" (Meillassoux 41). This results, for Meillassoux, in "the most general thesis of the strong model [which] pertains to the existence of a regime of meaning that remains incommensurable with rational meaning because it does not pertain to the fact of the world, but rather to the very fact that there is a world" (Meillassoux 41). As a result, Meillassoux argues that strong correlationism has never been able to eliminate the reality of dogmatism because strong correlationism makes the same mistake, that is, that existence cannot be thought as ungrounded. In other words, correlationism is at fault because it thinks something must come from nothing; therefore it must entail that existence is capable of being thought because the impossibility of existence is itself impossible. In this sense, Meillassoux's critique challenges every correlationist philosophy to account for the absolute contingency of reality. If they

cannot, Meillassoux maintains that any philosophy that falls under the model of correlationism is responsible for the widespread religiosity of contemporary philosophy, which amounts to a tacit acceptance and subordination to theism. The radical failure of critical philosophy, according to Meillassoux, would not be that it could not account for the absolute, but that it has led to the destruction of metaphysics, because it is incapable of thinking unreason as the absolute possibility of all existence.

Yet, contrary to Meillassoux, I argue that Schelling's maintenance of strong correlationism in the *First Outline*, and by the same token the maintenance of any correlationism, is necessary for a reading that is transported to the *écriture* of the text. The critical turn, insofar as it is a critique of pure reason, is a critique of the methodology for how one approaches the absolute, which, as a result, has laid the foundation for deconstruction. The act of deconstruction as a reading, a process, or an activity that separates and critiques the opposition between text and sub-text, that reads that which removes itself from the text, and as a philosophy that occupies itself with writing, would not exist if not for the critical tradition that came after Kant and exists as a result of his efforts. Indeed, what Meillassoux fails to recognize, but what Schelling recognized early on in the *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism*, is that correlationism, or what Schelling called criticism, was always aware of its inability to disprove dogmatism, since the "*Critique of Pure Reason* has taught dogmaticism how it can become dogmatism" (Schelling *PL* 169). For criticism approaches the absolute in a similar way to dogmatism but from a different point of departure; that is, criticism recognizes, to a certain extent, that the in-itself removes itself from difference so as to constitute difference. Further, as opposed to dogmatism, criticism is critically aware of its own

systematic organization as a philosophy that begins from the point of the cognitive faculty rather than from a point of objective or subjective truth; as Schelling writes, "the *Critique of Pure Reason* started its contention from that point alone. *How did we ever come to judge synthetically*?" (Schelling, *PL* 164). If we begin from this point, then, the *Critique* provides contentions from within its own structure, inscribing at its limits the process by which those limits are themselves produced and complicated, asserted and subverted, or written and underwritten.

What distinguishes Schelling from Kant, though, is that he extends the consequences of the critical philosophy out towards the practical side of philosophy, transporting transcendental idealism into the realm of the philosophy of nature; if theoretical practices that seek the unconditioned are "unable to realize the unconditioned, it [theoretical philosophy] therefore *demands* the *act* through which it *ought* to be realized" (Schelling *PL* 167). In other words, Schelling was aware of the limitations of theoretical as well as critical philosophy, as Grant rightly argues, for he recognizes the gap between subjective idealism and the philosophy of nature as being constitutive and fundamental. Criticism was never meant to establish one philosophy that explains all of existence; instead, "from the *idea* of a system as such, the *Critique of Pure Reason* has first proved that no system, whatever its name, is, in its consummation, an object of *knowledge*, but merely an object of an *activity* [*Handlung*], a practically necessary but infinite activity" (Schelling *PL* 171). This necessary and infinite activity becomes for Schelling the opposition of subjective idealism and nature as two diametrically opposed systems that enter into a dialectical relation with each other, not as a system of knowledge but as a system that writes about the absolute in the process of its own

becoming. Criticism, in the way Schelling develops it, is evident in the works during the period in which he wrote the *First Outline* and even, yet in a more limited capacity, in the *System of Transcendental Idealism*. Finally this critical writing reaches a more complex and mature exposition in the *Freedom* essay and in the three extant versions of *The Ages of the World* as Schelling further sets nature in opposition to the subject of God as a way to think the in-itself. It is not until these later works, though, that the opposition acquires a more existential sensibility, whereas the *First Outline* and the *System* stay more within the bounds of their genre's systematic limitations, the former within the realm of nature or the object and the latter remaining more within the realm of the intelligence or the subject.

In this sense, strong correlationism turns into a creative process rather than an absolute, fixed cognitive framework as Meillassoux has argued. Because the correlationist project fails to close off the possibility of thinking the absolute, its failure leads to a writing that underwrites systematic philosophy's attempts at closure, once again opening the point that once seemed to limit, constrain, or suppress the system's activity. Schelling's sustained strong correlationism, insofar as it absolutizes the correlationist model developed by Kant by grounding nature as the in-itself, leads to a system that begins from the point of the unrestrained absolute in an attempt to maintain and close off the correlationist circle established between subject and object, intelligence and nature, ideal and real, and, most importantly in the *First Outline*, productivity and product. Yet, taking the absolute as the point of departure in order to lead to the system's closure proves to be yet another radically different means of opening and unbounding the unthinkability of the absolute by unleashing upon it those repressed things that it kept

hidden and in the dark. In this sense, Schelling's correlationism brings the unthinkable face to face with its own impossibilities, complicating the absolute by means of its own postulates.

In the *First Outline*, nature is that unrestrained absolute, that "*unconditioned,*" (Schelling *First Outline* 13) from which the system originates and from which it is produced, "insofar as it is at once productive and product" (Schelling *First Outline* 194). This figure of the absolute, contrary to Meillassoux and Grant, inaugurates an auto-deconstructive writing of nature in the *First Outline* precisely because it is a work that upsets the opposition between nature and spirit or *Naturphilosophie* and transcendental idealism as a result of its auto-genesis (auto-*poeisis*) and, by the same token, its auto-deconstruction. Schelling's theorization of the absolute, as an absolute that generates itself from out of itself, thus unworks any naïve conception of the peaceful complementarity between subject and object or nature and spirit, which reveals a violence that lay subjacent underneath the apparent and normative organization of the text. Therefore, the *First Outline*, as will be shown, represents a writing through which Schelling thinks the absolute, wherein nature is a figure of this writing rather than, as Grant argues, the core principle of Schelling's entire philosophy. We therefore read the *First Outline* in continuity with the rest of Schelling's works, not as the site of the origin or as the beginning. To do so would be to misrepresent the *First Outline* as the achievement and solution of idealist philosophy, rather than as an instance of idealism's crisis itself.

1. 3 The Incommensurable Introduction

However, a little history behind the writing of the *First Outline* is necessary before we begin any theorization of the writing of nature itself. Keith R. Peterson, the translator and editor of the most recent translation of the *First Outline*, based his translation of the text on "volume 7 (2001) of the historical-critical edition published by the Schelling Commission in affiliation with the Bayern Academy of Sciences" (Peterson xxxvii). Maintaining the "unpolished quality" of the original lecture notes and preserving "Schelling's use of emphasis and liberal employment of the em dash," (Peterson *ibid*.), Peterson has presented the reader with a text that is as close to the spirit of Schelling's lectures as when they were first presented in Jena in 1799. Unlike the original lecture notes, Peterson inserted chapter headings according to the framework provided in Schelling's "Outline of the Whole," which Peterson has also placed before the actual exposition of the *First Outline*. Peterson's insertion, however, does not stick with the writing of the text, since its function as a guiding supplement cannot subdue the unruliness of the text; indeed the Outline's brief summary does not stand a chance as it becomes radically undone through the text's fuller exposition of its ideas.

Alongside these, the *First Outline* is presented in the same book as the *Introduction to the Outline*, which was a piece that was written in the same year as, but issued separately from, the text in 1799. In relation to the main text, the *Introduction to the Outline* feels less like an outline or a preliminary rationale than an appendix that comes after the fact, trying to impose itself also as a guide to the *First Outline*, by trying to organize the body of the text whose organs and organization just are not there. Peterson, like the editors of the 19th-century *Sämmtliche Werke* edition of Schelling's

works–but not like the Bayern Academy of Sciences edition from 1976[4]–places the *Introduction* after rather than before the actual exposition of the *First Outline*. Because the *Introduction* was always published this way, it thus acquires an oppositional and incongruous quality that contradicts the text that it is supposed to introduce. Unable to frame a text that resists the framing it imposes, there is nothing surprising about attributing a forceful quality on the *Introduction* in relation to the *First Outline*; why else would Schelling publish them separately and not as a whole?

Furthermore, although I have chosen to use the title '*First Outline*' provided by Peterson's translation for this thesis, the German title, *Erster Entwurf*, also translates into English as 'first design,' 'first project,' or, most succinctly, as 'first draft.' The difference between the titles of 'First Outline' and 'First Draft' is that the text presents itself not as a finished product but one that is still in the process of its own production; therefore the text should be read more as a draft than as an outline. The *First Outline*'s lability, furthermore, in relationship to the univocal and unidirectional stability of the *Introduction*, complicates how one should read these texts together. Should they be read back to front or front to back? Further complications arise when one has to account for the multiplicity of footnotes and textual remarks that Peterson has included within the text in order to stay true to the "handwritten manuscript used by Schelling in the Jena lectures, [which was] unfortunately destroyed during the Second World War" (Peterson xxxvii), but was luckily appended to the *Sämmtliche Werke* edition as footnotes. Structurally, then, the *First Outline* has no proper beginning. The *First Outline* as well as the *Introduction* turn out to be drafts that attempt to begin, and anticipate in practice what

[4] Furthermore, a new edition of Schelling's collected works is currently being prepared by the Bayern Academy of Sciences.

Schelling will later say in *The Ages of the World*: the beginning is always an eternal beginning, so that any and all beginning can never truly begin or end. And yet, although Schelling acknowledges in the *Ages* the eternal quality of beginning, beginning always desires and longs for an end, so much so that a beginning must try and find a point at which to begin; having once begun, beginning searches desperately for its end. Unlike the *Ages*, the *First Outline* is a text less concerned with how it begins, opting for a beginning that comes before the text, so that it thus experiments with what it presents as something already having begun or always already beginning. Yet the separate publication of the *First Outline* and the *Introduction* shows that beginning is not as simple or uncomplicated as these texts would have one believe. Analysis of the *First Outline* forces one to choose where the reading begins, all the while accepting that beginning from either the *Introduction* or the *First Outline* always already implies a gap that is fundamental to and prior to when and where either text posits their beginning.

Yet due to this irresolvable problem of beginning–the problem that plagued Schelling for his whole life and continues to plague any approach to reading him–it does not matter which text one begins reading, because beginning is that which has already come before, insofar as it is already in the process of trying to begin again. That being said, why not begin with the *Introduction*, since it, in terms of its more generally accepted architectural position within texts, is that which wishes to be read first? But because it is that which desires to be read first, to be made the first priority over the text which it introduces, and because it presents itself in a seamless relationship or in a "most complete fusion" (Schelling *FO* 193) with the *First Outline*, the *Introduction* positions itself as the authoritative text that 'speaks' the true intentions of the author, when in fact the

Introduction exists apart and completely distinct from the *First Outline* not only in terms of its publication history but also in terms of its content and architectonic structure.

For while the *Introduction* presents itself alongside the *First Outline*, it is more aligned with texts that are more traditionally associated with transcendental idealism, which is at once clear if we look at the language Schelling uses at the very beginning of the text. Words such as "intelligence", "ideal world", "genius", "consciousness", and "identity" (Schelling *Introduction* 193) are borrowed from Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* ("[a]nalytical judgments (affirmative) are therefore those in which the connection of the predicate with the subject is conceived through *identity*," [Kant A7/B10; my emphasis] and Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, "The nature of *intelligence* consists in this *immediate* unity of being and seeing" [Fichte 17; my emphasis]). Furthermore, these words are also more appropriate to the language Schelling uses in the *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800) than to the language that is more specific to the *First Outline*. The language and rhetoric of transcendental idealism assumes a knowledge of what philosophy is, and, furthermore, assumes that the real should be subordinated to the ideal: "Since philosophy assumes the unconscious, or as it may likewise be termed, the real activity to be identical with the conscious or ideal, its tendency will be to bring back everywhere the real to the ideal–a process which gives rise to what is called transcendental philosophy" (Schelling *Introduction* 193). The immediate demand made by philosophy, which is more specifically transcendental philosophy, is to make identical that which is already separated into the real and the ideal without showing why this imperative simply assumes that there is a perfect complementarity between these opposed realms of philosophy.

The first truth of the *Introduction*, therefore, is not presented as a truth but as an assumption, and this assumption continues with regard to the "transition from a fluid to a solid state," the existence of "regular forms," and a symmetrical existence that not only connects nature to consciousness but to "external works of art, *perfect* in their kind" (Schelling *Introduction* 194; my emphasis). What becomes evident in the difference between the *Introduction* and the *First Outline* is that none of these stated truths are uncomplicated; neither are they systematically worked out as concepts as they would be in a work that actually completes and grounds the "system" of transcendental idealism. The *Introduction*, then, deserves the criticism which Hegel laid against Schelling in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* (1825-26):

> What is lacking in Schelling's philosophy is thus the fact that the point of indifference of subjectivity and objectivity, or the Notion of reason, is absolutely pre-supposed, without any attempt being made at showing that this is the truth. Schelling often uses Spinoza's form of procedure, and sets up axioms. In philosophy, when we desire to establish a position, we demand proof. But if we begin with intellectual intuition, that constitutes an oracle to which we have to give way, since the existence of intellectual intuition was made our postulate. (Hegel 525-526)

But, being so preoccupied with Schelling's deployment of the absolute as a principle by which one begins the system, Hegel cannot see the forest for the trees. Schelling, always the more enthusiastic German Idealist of the two, may seem to hastily connect the philosophy of nature with transcendental idealism, immediately "subordinat[ing] the real to the ideal" (Schelling *Introduction* 194), but makes it "the task of the philosophy of nature to explain the ideal by the real" (Schelling *ibid*.). By turning "two sciences" into "one science, differentiated only in the opposite orientation of their tasks" (Schelling *Introduction* 194), Schelling complicates the initial order of things which was previously established within the limits of transcendental philosophy. Once Schelling equates nature

with consciousness, neither nature nor consciousness can any longer account for the ground of its existence on its own terms, irrevocably transporting the grounds upon which both philosophies were founded into unknown areas of inquiry. Each, then, must be written, or re-written, by the other. If "everything in Nature is necessary merely because it is only through the medium of such a nature that self-consciousness can take place" (Schelling *Introduction* 194), self-consciousness becomes entirely dependent on the successful completion of the philosophy of nature, and vice versa. Consciousness, then, must think its body not as a limitation to thought but as crucially necessary for the possibility of thought in the first place, thereby disclosing that the possibility of thought arises as a result of thought's unthought, unconscious beginnings.

The philosophy of nature, therefore, disrupts the seamless and authoritative self-assurance of transcendental philosophy forever by tying both philosophies' outcomes together. And yet it is unclear whether this braid that Schelling begins to weave between these two separate philosophies can use transcendental philosophy as the third strand that will complete the approach towards the absolute; indeed, it is unclear whether or not the *Naturphilosophie* and transcendental idealism are even separate or identical in the same way that Schelling will later take these up in the *Ages* project. In fact, it is evident in Schelling's writing that there is always a gap between these two philosophies, and any unity that is posited is either something yet to be completed and lies in the future or is a unity that is hastily asserted in bad faith; for if transcendental philosophy has its own methods for thinking the absolute, and those methods are incommensurable with the philosophy of nature (Schelling *Introduction* 194), the philosophy of nature turns out to be distinct and not complementary to transcendental philosophy's grasp of the absolute.

If the philosophy of nature is as Schelling says, "an invasion of Nature" but also "an experiment" (Schelling *Introduction* 197), then how self-assured can transcendental philosophy be of its own scientific methods that contribute to the achievement of self-consciousness?

The science, or rather the technique, employed in both philosophies is revealed in the *First Outline* to be a science that is experimental rather than a self-evident and totalizing practice, and that only comes into being out of its own self-organization. Organization, therefore, becomes the third term by which these two philosophies are linked, as the *Introduction* and the *System* reveal their obsession with how organization organizes the parts that make up the whole. And yet organization in the *Introduction* is expressed as *a priori*, "[f]or if, in an organic whole, all things mutually bear and support each other, then this organization must have existed as a whole previous to its parts; the whole could not have arisen from the parts" (Schelling *Introduction* 198). In other words, Nature could not be *being itself*, at once both product and productivity, if it was not self-sustaining. But, in the *First Outline*, organization becomes problematized by its non-coexistence with itself, revealing that all systems are dependent upon contradiction, or upon an "asystaton, something non-coexistent" (qd. Grant *Philosophies of Nature* 1). Therefore, while Nature is rhetorically deployed as the means to organize the beings, the parts, or the organs that make up the whole of its organized body, the speculative nature of the *First Outline* is not complete as a purely empirical analysis of nature, because that would imply that the *First Outline* "regards its object in *being*, as something already prepared and accomplished" (Schelling *Introduction* 201).

The organization Schelling prefers for the *First Outline* above empiricism is science, which, as has been shown above, is an experimental practice. In opposition to empiricism, Schelling defines science as that which "views its object in *becoming*, and as something that has yet to be accomplished . . . it must set out from the unconditioned" (Schelling *Introduction* 201). However, since nature is both product and productivity, Schelling still requires a dual vision that sees nature in becoming in relation to nature in its simple products. "*Nature*," writes Schelling, "as a mere *product* (*natura naturata*) we call Nature as *object* (with this alone empiricism deals). *Nature as productivity* (*natura naturans*) we call *Nature as subject* (with this alone all theory deals)" (Schelling *Introduction* 203). Nature's organization is always split by the contradiction inherent to Schelling's speculative project of the totality of objects; since he tries to maintain a view that balances empiricism and science, objects and totality, or the multitude and the singular within the organization of nature, the *First Outline* works through empiricism not as the appearance of "mere products" but views them as ungrounded products in becoming. In this sense, the *First Outline* is not a transcendental idealist text, insofar as it maintains a relation of the transcendental to its material existence. This makes for a transcendental materialism or a "theoretical empiricism," as Rajan argues[5], which cannot extricate itself from its correlation and therefore can never rightly be called self-same.

Because the *First Outline* exposes the ungroundedness of the Idealist conception of organization by means of a transcendental empiricism, the concept of organization that is developed in *System of Transcendental Idealism* must be put under erasure. This is problematic, for in the *System* as in the *First Outline* empiricism remains suspect as that

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[5] Personal conversation.

which merely intuits "everything entering the intelligence from without, [and] in fact explains, the nature of intelligence in a purely mechanical fashion" (Schelling *System* 123). However, although the *First Outline* also sees empiricism in a similar fashion, it must still turn to empiricism in order to ground its speculations on the transcendental or theoretical productivity of nature. Therefore, if we hold up the *First Outline* to the *System* as a mirror, these mutually unground each other, insofar as the *First Outline* shows the *System* needs empiricism in order to ground itself, while the *System* shows the *First Outline* the necessity of an organizing theoretical figure without which the empirical would then become meaningless and arbitrary.

But what is absent from the *First Outline*'s conception of organization and yet is present in the *System*'s is the rhetorical manipulation of the categorical limitations assigned to empiricism, which conveys a seamless complementarity between the intelligence and the universe. However, this fearless symmetry between the universe as macrocosm and self-consciousness as microcosm is dependent upon the imposed relation that connects the general concept of organization to the particular and individual concept of the organ.

> Yet if the intelligence is organic at all, as indeed it is, it has also framed to itself outwardly from within everything that is external for it, and that which constitutes the universe for it is merely the grosser and remoter organ of self-consciousness, just as the individual organism is the finer and more immediate organ thereof. (Schelling *System* 123)

As it stands, organization is deployed as a synecdoche of the external manifestation of internal organs in order to at once affirm and conceal the gap that underwrites the radical diremption[6] between the philosophy of nature and the philosophy of transcendental

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[6] Schelling's word

idealism; organization therefore is strategically deployed to concretize the transcendental idealist project by subordinating nature to consciousness. The *System* presents organization in more transcendentally idealist terms, so that what at once organizes outside also operates upon and within the dialectical relation between the universe and the intelligence as a third principle that contains and legitimates the gradual succession of the universe towards the attainment of self-consciousness. Organization, then, is tied up with the linear discourse of history, since, as Schelling writes in the *System*, "succession must become objectified to it as organization, which is the first solution of our problem, as to how the intelligence intuits itself as productive" (Schelling *System* 123). In this way, organization is employed in order to contain the universe within the mind by internalizing that which is external, providing a rhetorical ground by which the intelligence may proclaim its productivity to be distinct from, as well as higher than, the productivity of the universe.

Gone unquestioned, organization performs the role of a vanishing mediator that slips into the text and allows for one to slip over it, supplementing the concepts of intelligence, nature, succession, and history so that each can reflect onto each other a positive and real relation.

> [A]s the succession proceeds, organization too will achieve a greater extension, and depict within itself a larger portion of the universe. This will thus provide a graduated sequence running parallel to the development of the universe. The law of this sequence is that organization constantly enlarges its scope as the intelligence constantly extends it. (Schelling *System* 123)

The extension of organization therefore means the simultaneous extension of the intelligence insofar as each mutually constructs the other, which Schelling uses to establish the narrative of a seamless progression of the universe into "one chain"

(Schelling *Introduction* 207). Only if the history of the mind and the history of the universe were perfectly reflected in each other in one perfect organization, could one really admit the completion of the idealist project. But, since the ground of organization itself turns out to be ungrounded, it becomes obvious that Schelling characterized it as *a priori* only in order to fulfill a linear and positivist completion of history that the *System* sets up as the end goal of Idealism. This is accomplished by the way that Schelling writes out this idea of organization as the figure that envelopes all of time and space; however, organization is not actual but is rather a metaphorical representation of organization as a mirror that reflects so that "the intelligence [can intuit] the evolution of the universe, so far as this falls within its intuition, in terms of an organization, [so that] it will intuit this latter as identical with its own self" (Schelling *System* 122). Organization, though, is not a static illustration, a mirror, or a tool; on the contrary, organization, like nature in the *First Outline*, exists only in the process of its own becoming, and is never at any point complete, for it is infinitely organizing itself towards a point of indifference it cannot reach. Organization as a principle cannot even guarantee the trajectory of its own organizing, since the rhetorical reliance and emphasis that Shelling's writing lays upon it in the *Introduction* and the *System* only belies its auto-immune character in the *First Outline*. While transcendental idealism tries to organize the subjective and objective realms together into a synthetic point of unity, the project of the *First* Outline, that is, that which is carried out by means of speculative physics is very much a part of the braiding of these two philosophies together in which each of these furthers and ungrounds the other, occupying itself with the ungrounded "original causes of motion in Nature" (Schelling *Introduction* 196). Even within the *Introduction*, there is a subjacent

anxiety over whether speculative philosophy can complete the chain of history, as Schelling questions the certainty of the project of speculative physics:

> Now, we may indeed be quite certain that every natural phenomenon, through whatever number of intermediate links, stands in connection with the last conditions of Nature. . . . Speculative physics has nothing to do but to show the need of these intermediate links; but since every new discovery throws us back upon a new ignorance, and while one knot is being loosed a new one is being tied, it is conceivable that the complete discovery of all the intermediate links in the chain of Nature, and therefore also our science itself, is an infinite task. (Schelling *Introduction* 199)

In this sense, the *Introduction* becomes a site of transition that tries to perform both the discourses of the *First Outline* and the *System* in one text. This results in a disfiguration of both discourses, demonstrating how the encounter between both these texts mutually ungrounds each of them and ultimately puts the organization of both texts under erasure.

1. 4 Writing Nature Otherwise

Jumping over the gap which separates the *Introduction* from the *First Outline*, we return once again to the opening lines of the "Outline of the Whole": "Because to philosophize about nature means as much as to create it, we must first of all find the point from which nature can be posited into *becoming*" (Schelling *First Outline* 5). From the outset the *First Outline* already encounters its first insurmountable obstacle, the point, or the moment, from which nature begins. This results from Nature's determinate identity. Nature, as Schelling defines it, is "BEING ITSELF" (Schelling *First Outline* 13); it is at once both the infinite production and absolute inhibition of itself. Yet how did nature as unconditioned and pure productivity ever encounter such a radical and absolute inhibition that could have resulted in the first point of *becoming*? It turns out, as David Farrell Krell notes, that "Schelling is never able to answer these questions, each of which circles about the very problem he calls "insoluble." What he learns repeatedly is that heterogeneity can

never be merely "introduced" into homogeneity" (Krell *Tragic Absolute* 50). It is precisely because of this circular rotation around this insoluble problem that Schelling's *First Outline* immediately overturns homogeneity in favour of heterogeneity, although the text still calls for the process of heterogeneity to end. For once the text has begun, its beginning is always eternally beginning, so that the text calls out for that homogeneous point to put an end to nature's endless productivity. Whereas some may point to nature as being this unified point, since Schelling represents nature as the point of identity between both productivity and product, the *First Outline* is unable to convincingly demonstrate that point at which heterogeneity transitions into absolute homogeneity. This duality inherent to nature gives way to a writing of nature in the *First Outline* that unworks the progressive history and organization that is ascribed to nature, evolution, and productivity by writing a nature that is at odds with itself and is not self-same but is in fact never-ending.

This is to say that the kind of productivity seen in the *First Outline* does not proceed according to the rationale that narrates the unfolding of nature's progress; rather, nature rejects rationality in favour of an irrational overproduction that wildly exceeds the limits which the text imposes to guide nature towards the archetype of some absolute organism. This overproduction is reflected in the writing of the text, in the excessive and profligate production of footnotes, questions, and re-formulations that intersperse the reading, which interrupts, in the words of Georges Bataille, the "restricted economy" which the text appears to write and reveals the more "general economy" that the text's architectonic actually presents[7]. These footnotes are, in the words of Jean-Luc Nancy,

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[7]In Georges Bataille's *The Accursed Share*, he writes of the difference between general and restricted economies: "There can be anguish only from a personal, *particular* point of view that is radically opposed

"expressions" or Remarks that are not merely summed up as appendices to the text. Instead, Nancy writes,

> [a]n economy of Remarks seems to double up the economy of logical discourse: an economy of remarks, that is, a subordinated "detached" dispersed economy that does not obey the strict progression of the concept but rather chance encounters between the text and the good or (ill) fortunes of the writer" (Nancy *Speculative Remark* 48).

These footnotes also serve a second purpose, insofar as they are a manifestation of the text's *écriture* that reflects the volatile and ever-shifting trajectory of nature's wildly deranged production. Though Schelling may have failed to answer the question from whence did nature begin, the way nature is philosophically written and developed unworks and dislodges it from the discourse of transcendental idealism that limits its auto-genesis, inviting the reader to read nature otherwise and discover the limitless potential that once lay subjacent, dark, and hidden within it.

1. 5 *Natural* History

The *First Outline*'s architectonic is spread out among three divisions: the first deals with a discussion of nature as the absolute, the second with the elucidation of three possible systems of anorganic nature, and the third explains John Brown's theory of excitability. Through these, Schelling presents nature as an activity that can be deduced as a "dynamic graduated series of stages" (Schelling *First Outline* 54) and hence be given to thought as a "natural history" (Schelling *First Outline* 44). But, as the divisions within the text itself show, Schelling is incapable of writing out this natural history systematically, for the *First Outline* is rather an assemblage of disparate articulations

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to the *general* point of view based on the exuberance of living matter as a whole. Anguish is meaningless for someone who overflows with life, and for life as a whole, which is an overflowing by its very nature" (Bataille *The Accursed Share* 39).

about nature than it is a coherent history of successive stages of development. Nevertheless, as opposed to Kant, who imagines natural history as a history of objects that places them within a certain time and place in nature, Schelling figures the concept of natural history in terms later developed by Joseph Henry Green, a British Idealist thinker, who introduces the idea of thinking nature through "physiogony." Physiogony, according to Green, is,

> the history of nature, which studies this history as "preface and portion of the history of man," so as to make the "knowledge of Nature" a "branch of self-knowledge" (103). . . . For Green physiogony becomes anthropology, as he subsumes the history of nature into a temporalized Chain of Being in which nature works her way up from "the *polypi* to the *mammalia,"* "labour[ing] in birth with man" (101–6). (Rajan "Excitability" 315-316)

This approach to natural history, on the other hand, remains tied up with the project of transcendental idealism developed in the *System*, which views nature as a "primordial original" that is at once both free in the actions of the products it produces and necessary "through the confinement and conformity to law inherent in her" (Schelling *System* 199). Yet, as opposed to the *System*, Tilottama Rajan writes, "[n]ot only is this text hardly a system so much as an assemblage, and thus a dissension or 'strife' of systems" (Rajan "Excitability" 317); the *First Outline*'s attempts to "fit" or "sublate" history, empiricism and various sciences–such as those developed by John Brown, J. H. Green, and Johann Christian Reil–into a writing of spirit through nature, results in Schelling finding these sciences writing spirit (Rajan "Excitability 317). The text, therefore, offers the reader an instance of what Hegel had said of Schelling, that he "worked out his philosophy in view of the public" (Hegel *Lectures* 513), since the text boldly and visibly divulges its experimental style, allowing the public to view nature's very real struggle with its own becoming. Reading nature in the *First Outline* in a straightforward manner becomes

nearly impossible, for reading is led through a series of dissensions, inner conflicts, and contradictions that end up dissolving any progression that would amount to an end. This results in the dissolution of the architectonic of a "dynamic graduated series of stages," set up by Schelling to guide the text, into the indifferent fluid and luxurious development that is written out in the philosophy of nature.

The natural history which the text intends to write out is therefore undermined by the formless and infinite productivity of nature, which Schelling wrote in order to circumvent the traditional analysis of nature according to empiricism in favour of a construction of nature that metaphysically encapsulates it as both product and productivity. It is impossible to "know *nature as product*," Schelling writes, for nature is known "only as *active*"; since "being itself is = to activity, then the individual being cannot be an absolute *negation* of activity" (Schelling *First Outline* 14). This perspective on nature is afforded by the intuition of it as an infinite product, since no finite product can provide actual knowledge of nature as both pure product and pure productivity. If nature cannot be empirically determined except through an "empirically infinite series," then it can only be "presented by *infinite becoming*" (Schelling *First Outline* 15). Nature, as that which straddles the line between being and nothing, as a principle of being, that itself is not, and yet "manifests itself in each natural object" (Schelling *First Outline* 13) is therefore neither merely being nor nothing, but slips imperceptibly into becoming as that which has already been. The reason for this is that Schelling cannot pinpoint when nature began in the same way that Nancy describes Hegel as not being able to pinpoint when it is that the *Aufehbung* begins, since "[i]t has always been too early or too late for determining. . . . [T]he whole logic of *sublation* has occurred in the sliding of a word and

in the slipping of the text on this word" (Nancy *Speculative Remark* 40). Speculative philosophy can only assume that the book of nature is and has always presently been in the process of its own becoming, and, henceforth, ascribes to nature the quality of infinite becoming, as it could not be otherwise thought or unthought.

In the same way that Nature can only ever imperceptibly enter into becoming, so too does philosophy only enter into nature by means of a free "invasion," for, as Schelling writes, "it would certainly be impossible to get a glimpse of the internal construction of Nature if an invasion of Nature were not possible through freedom" (Schelling *First Outline* 196). That is, philosophy enters freely into its theorization of the absolute as nature by means of the freedom of speculative philosophy. Through speculative philosophy, as an experimental writing, Schelling writes that nature is at once infinite productivity and the absolute product. Yet if we consider this creation of nature as at once a theorization as well as a writing of nature, an analogous question emerges between the two: how does one account for the permanence of objects in nature considered as absolute productivity or how does one account for the emergence of a text from the infinite process of writing? Schelling's tenuous answer lies in the relation between the encounter of two opposed operations, processes, or what Schelling calls "tendencies" in nature,

> Let one force be thought, originally infinite in itself, streaming out in all directions from one central point; then this force will not linger in any point of space for a moment (thus leaving space empty), unless an energetic activity opposing (retarding) its expansion did not give it a finite velocity). . . . [It] must be assumed that no product in nature can be the product in which those opposed activities absolutely coincide, i.e., in which Nature itself attained rest. One must, in a word, simply *deny* all *permanence* in Nature itself. (Schelling *First Outline* 17).

The appearance of products in nature, according to Schelling, simulates an apparent

permanence that conceals the productivity that lies behind it. The object, then, becomes for nature the limit of nature as subject (for nature as subject is always taken to mean nature as productivity, activity, becoming). The object, "the *resting*, *permanent*," therefore, becomes the "chief problem of the philosophy of nature" (Schelling *First Outline* 17), as it is that which inconceivably inhibits nature as productivity. This opposition is not at all peaceful but is rather highly antagonistic and violent. Nature is "impetuous" in its retardation, and infinitely struggles against the products that appear in opposition to it. Therefore, nature attempts to "fill anew" each determinate product in an incessant "gush[ing]" of its force, but is forever traumatized by its encounter with its resistance, and is unable to overcome the dissenting voice that opposes it.

The traumatic character of this opposition is more clearly expressed in one of the footnotes appended to the text, where Schelling conceives of nature as a stream that "flows in a straight line forward as long as it encounters no resistance"; yet "[w]here there is resistance–a whirlpool forms," wherein every "original product of nature is such a whirlpool, every organism" (Schelling *First Outline* 18). The whirlpool, like the organism, is never immobile or permanent, but is something "constantly transforming" and is said to be constantly reproduced at each moment by the vivifying force of nature. However, the whirlpool does not reflect the discourse of the main text. Instead, these whirlpools that are in constant transformation demonstrate that the main text is itself not a restricted economy but is rather more general; although the footnotes appear separate and distinct from the main text, they interact with and still belong to the economy of the text by doubling it. In the same way as when the activity of nature encounters a whirlpool and leaves that "stream of Nature's activity . . . broken" or, even more traumatically,

"annihilated" (Schelling *First Outline* 18), the footnotes unwork the operation of nature as "pure identity" by redirecting its production and reciprocally derange it. This footnote, like many others in the text, involutes the stream downwards inside the unfathomable depths of its resistance against the text and then sends the stream back outwards, not as it was before, but transformed and changed. In this way, the footnotes pose a threat to the "organic totality" of the main text, putting the authority–as both the government and author of the text–of nature under erasure. Instead of clarifying the main text, the footnotes frustrate the trajectory of the text, and demonstrate that, like the whirlpools, the text is not a composite organization but a "whole of articulated singularities." Moreover, as Nancy would say, "[a]rticulation does not mean organization," since "by itself" it is rather "a juncture, or more exactly the play of the juncture" (Nancy *Inoperative Community* 76). In this way, every product is a singularity that is articulated by something that does not actually participate or guarantee the organization of products, but merely assumes, plays with, or slides these distinct and incommensurable pieces of nature's puzzle–product versus productivity–together in an experiment hoping for good results.

The figure that Schelling introduces in order to inhibit and guide the text's overproduction is the figure of the originary actants. Within the hierarchy of principles presented within the text the actants appear lower than the higher principle of nature; they too do not exist in space and, like nature, are originary productivities as well; however, actants cannot amount to nature even if all of them were amassed together, since they are at once originary productivities that are "truly *singular*"; each is "in itself whole and sealed-off, and represents, as it were, a *natural monad*" (Schelling *First Outline* 21).

Schelling's naturalization of the Leibnizian monad is here used to construct a multiplicity of singularities that are both individual and "*inconstructible*" because they are the "limit of all construction by virtue of which every construction is a determinate one" (Schelling *First Outline* 22). As such, actants provide the simple originary principle by which nature as infinite productivity can transfer its absolute force into restricted forces, determinate articulations, or propositions that are the substrate of all material products, much like the Higgs-Boson in quantum physics that provides the field that gives matter its mass. Actants, therefore, are not the originary force but are the mediate principles that transmit this force as "alterations" (Schelling *First Outline* 22) of that force, "alterations–of cohesive force, of density, of specific gravity" (Schelling *First Outline* 23). These alterations, however, only exist because they have previously formed into one unified inhibition that resists the originary force of nature, opposing to it a collective activity to "*strive toward one and the same product*" (Schelling *First Outline* 24) and modify the originary force of nature into something different. The actants, then, present the natural inhibition required for nature to enter into becoming, so that the indifferent activity of productive nature encounters the necessary difference of multiple and individual productivities that complete nature as the most original duality. In this sense, the actants' relationship to nature as the inhibitive concept that sets nature into becoming is much like the notion of the "violence" of writing in Derrida and Paul de Man's sense of deconstruction, insofar as writing is always an activity or a force that moves towards the creation of something out of nothing; writing is that which excludes that which comes before it as a force that does not merely negate it but makes it the possibility for production. Nature's productivity can never *actually* be since it requires the actants to

recover productivity from its fundamental excessiveness and then direct these into formations, into words, or what are also known as the apparent products of nature.

Actants, in this sense, perform a second function by organizing and dispensing the infinite productivity of nature into restricted and yet mutual channels that Schelling can later use in order to initiate the economy of the graduated stages of nature, "[f]or two different actants, there must be one common point in which they unite–(this point will be named–at a much lower level to be sure–the chemical product)" (Schelling *First Outline* 24). And yet, as soon as the concept of the actant is articulated, it is undone by yet another footnote. The spectral nature of the actant as an inhibitive and productive point in the system is revealed once Schelling further questions the possibility of investigating the reality of the actants: "but the question is by what means these alterations have been produced, and this has not been answered by any previous research; and that question lies far higher–and yet deeper, and ultimately in the construction of matter" (Schelling *First Outline* 23). Insofar as the actants are the principle that explains how matter can come to occupy space, as the writing that writes the words of the book of nature, it is ironic that the remark makes the origin of the actants dependent upon the answer to the paradox of materiality. In the same way as writing only exists insofar as it is in the process, in the activity of writing, the actants can only be insofar as we consider them in tandem with the construction of matter. The actants and matter then are mutually constructive and deconstructive, as the footnote unworks the trajectory of the text and tangles any distinct determination of firstness and secondness between productivity and product, since the question of materiality presses in upon the text too early for the text to process or digest it. While the main text is still in the midst of articulating itself, the articulation of the

actant is seized by the voice of the footnote, which interrupts the temporal progression that would see nature exit out of the realm of pure productivity into the specific productivities of the actants that sustain the creation of the products or the matter of nature.

1. 6 The Paradox of the Product

As it turns out, when Schelling had said that the chief problem of the philosophy of nature was the problem of "rest" or "permanence," he did not mean that since nature is already known to be active, we must account for where the idea of permanence originates. Definitely not. Rather, permanence, rest, and the heterogeneity of matter become the chief problem for the philosophy of nature since they are that which interrupts, eludes, and complicates the exposition of nature as simultaneously that which is absolute productivity and product. Whenever nature must account for the existence of matter, it is shown to be in dis-union with itself, throwing the concept of a totalizable organization into dissolution. The only option left for the philosopher of nature is to repress the gap that separates nature from its product, evidenced by yet another footnote that addresses the question of how to "*find the point in which this infinite multiplicity of diverse actants can be unified in Nature*" (Schelling *First Outline* 24). It is revealed that the "dynamical philosophy cannot even arrive at this problem" since it is not concerned with the "*constituents*" that make up the product of nature, because it assumes "the constituents are given through the product. The dynamist, therefore, does not ask how the product originates from these constituents; for the product *precedes* the constituents" (Schelling *First Outline* 24). But, as the footnote demonstrates, the articulation of precedence does not reflect the reality of the unfolding of nature, nor does it authorize the

sovereignty of nature over its product. Thus, the remark, like matter, slips into the temporal and hierarchical organization of the text where it rhetorically should not belong but unquestionably exists.

Suspending for a moment the voice of the footnotes that consistently point to the unexplained "*cause* of the force of cohesion" (Schelling *First Outline* 26) that unites the actants into one absolute inhibition of nature's productivity, let us turn to the way that Schelling writes out the combination of actants as providing once again another derangement of the whole organization of the text. In a remark Schelling describes the cohesive force of nature as a "composite force" that is itself distinct from the "attractive force" that attracts the actants towards each other. Cohesion "strives against the universality of the attractive force, for it constantly *individualizes* and leaves the space outside the sphere within which it alone works *empty*" (Schelling *First Outline* 26). Granted that the force of cohesion cannot be accounted for, Schelling experiments with the idea that the totality of actants are organizable into a single unified action but remain individually distinct and free from each other. This, however, is maintained in order to sustain a rhetoric of regulative formation that imposes upon nature "a continual determination of figure from the crystal to the leaf, from the leaf to the human form" (Schelling *First Outline* 26), which follows the physiogonic history that establishes a typological continuity between nature as that which prefigures the fulfilled figure of man as the apex of creation. Yet, typology goes unfulfilled as each actant "deranges" the other in the same way that the footnotes derange nature's approach towards the "production of the originary figure" (Schelling *First Outline* 26-27). The result of this mutual derangement in

> the most original and most absolute combination of opposed actions in Nature [is] the *most original fluidity*, which. . . presents itself as a universally extended entity that simply works against nonfluidity (solidity), and continually endeavors to liquefy everything in Nature. (Schelling *First Outline* 27)

It is, therefore, that nature has finally produced its first, its most original product, the fluid, insofar as it is that "which comes nearest to pure productivity," since, as Schelling writes, "[the] nearer Nature is to pure productivity the more formless, the nearer to the product, the more formed" (Schelling *First Outline* 27). Fluidity negates all individuation, having no desire or need to form into anything determinate, and hence must be the first product since it is the furthest distance from the absolute product. As such, the fluid is opposed to the actants, which remain individual and completely sealed off, and the opposition between the two furnishes "the drama of a struggle *between form and formless*" (Schelling *First Outline* 28). Pitted against each other in eternal opposition, actant and fluid dialectically provide the ground for the becoming of nature, since nature can never fall into absolute fluidity nor can it collapse into an absolute solidity. This endless struggle is the theatrical performance of the history of the "*various stages of development of one and the same absolute organism*," which Schelling aptly calls an "ever-changing Proteus" (Schelling *First Outline* 28). The philosophy of nature therefore posits a positive sea change in the future, hoping that the absolute organism will at one point resolve its duality and put itself to rest. Yet, as is known in Greek mythology, Proteus, the god of the sea change, changes his shape in order to avoid telling the future, not so that he may reveal it.

Therefore, it is appropriate that Schelling attributes the title of "ever-changing Proteus" to nature, for it expresses the unpredictability and instability of the absolute organism as a body without organs. Like the whirlpool and the fluid, Proteus represents

the unruliness of metaphorical language that Schelling experimentally uses to organize the disparate elements of the text and articulate nature as a process in infinite becoming. Yet the writing of these figures is caught in the same infinite transmutations that characterize nature in the same way as the whirlpools are in constant transformation. Each represents another instance of the eternal beginning that tries to collect and present an order of things but lacks the rule and order of history, since the text delays its moment of unification for a time posited well into the future but which the text itself cannot presently resolve. In this sense, the constant transformation and unrest of nature as pure productivity as well as pure product resembles the writing of the text itself, a writing of nature that cannot find its end once it begins, unleashing upon Schelling, as the writer, a boundless object that repeatedly rejects the limits or directions which he tries to carefully inscribe and re-inscribe. As nature reveals itself to be non-coexistent with itself, so too does the text reveal to us the readers its own incommensurable and split identity.

This split, therefore, becomes the problem that Schelling encounters with the guiding structure of the stages of development, which posits a future at rest that is united in the completion of itself as absolute product. Each stage of development is written as contained within the gamut of development from the lowest to the highest stage, providing a proportion of the determinate permutations of each organism that leads up to the production of the absolute product. But because Nature, as has been noted above, detests the individual, viewing each as "*misbegotten attempts*" (Schelling *First Outline* 35) towards the final evolved product, nature as pure productivity constantly strives to eliminate the products which it produces. However, this antagonism against the individual arises only in the context of Nature's commitment to the project of the stages

of nature, which is not necessarily an anthropology, but is rather characteristic of the indifference and frigidity of a totalitarian history. While it is true that Nature struggles against each product and must tarry with the necessary process of formation that grounds the generation of individuals, once the individual reaches the stage of sexual, and hence reproductive, formation, Schelling writes that "[t]he development of the sexes is merely the highest zenith of the process of formation, for it occurs by means of the same mechanism through which progressive growth actually takes place" (Schelling *First Outline* 37). The life of the individual, therefore, may mean very little from a cosmic point of view, as it is reducible to merely a transition of forces that intensify within it and then dissipate out into nature. And yet, once the individual reaches the point of sexual maturity, it has, in that moment, reached the apex of its own formation as the highest expression of Nature and from then on assumes the destiny of its own reproduction. The individual, therefore, represents yet again the infinite work of writing, insofar as "[e]ach product of nature can split again into new products," since "Nature organizes, where it organizes, to infinity" (Schelling *First Outline* 44). The autonomy of the individual represents, in this sense, the autonomy of the text as an unfixed product whose split identity divides and is reproduced infinitely in a reading that is never at once finished but forever reproduces into ever-narrowing spheres of interpretation.

What Schelling's writing thus points to is the impossibility of any point from which one can write the beginning or the end of the history of nature. The *First Outline* expresses a translinear rather than a unilinear direction towards the absolute product that completely undoes the writing of the reproductive potential of the absolute organism. The *First Outline* thus provides a completely different process as opposed to the one imposed

upon it by the *Introduction*, a process of dissent that elicits new forms and new individuals which inhibit the process of nature's self-organization. If to philosophize about nature, then, amounts to creating it, the *First Outline*, written as it was in the midst of the *Introduction* and the *System*, emerges as a singular and idiosyncratic writing that is auto-deconstructive of its legislative position, demanding a submission of nature to its own profligate exchange between economies of restriction and excess, and which at no point will see nature as productivity dominate over its eternally reproducing products.

At the end of our reading of this text, Schelling's representation of Nature as a linear stream with a beginning, a middle, and an end becomes insupportable. The figure of nature as an absolute product or absolute organism turns out to be the absolute expression of the overproduction and agglomeration of its whirlpooling products that are forever transforming, deranging, and evolving out into nothingness or infinitude. If one would, at this point, interpret the *pathos* of this writing of nature, it would be a nature that wishes its book to end, a writing that seeks the respite of death in order to escape the at once eternal but also bottomless suffering imposed upon it by its entrance into life. This reading is as kind as it is cruel, for it seeks to take care of the text by letting itself be transported to the writing, only in order to find the writing helpless as to the direction it is taking itself. It is cruel on account of the reader's helplessness to guide the text towards its own avowed desire for its euthanasia, since to bestow the gift of death upon it would be impossible; for there is not one unified organism for one to administer the hemlock that would bring its wild thrashing, its twisted and agonized breathing, its deranged howls to an end. Unable to point to its beginning, nature cannot find its end. As a result, repression becomes the only means to carry on reading the history of nature as a history

of the absolute organism. Yet repression was always at work in the writing of the text, repressing the anarchy that resists and abstains from the work of order and history, which simultaneously sustains the writing of any absolute organism. The duality at the core of nature lies in writing, in language, and in the voice that speaks and philosophizes too, and is necessarily repressed so as to write in the first place. The *First Outline*, then, as an experimental and speculative draft unleashes this duality upon the text's repressive superstructure laid out in the *Introduction*, opening up for Schelling new possibilities which he will write out in the *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom* and later in *The Ages of the World*.

Keeping The World Within Bounds: Schelling's *Philosophical Investigations Into the Essence of Human Freedom*

2. 1 Introduction

"The only possible system of reason is pantheism" (Schelling *Freedom* 11), writes Schelling at the beginning of the *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*. Yet up until the writing of the *Freedom* essay in 1809, Schelling admits to never having written a "complete, finished system. . . . but rather" to having "shown only individual facets of such a system. . . . declar[ing] his works fragments of a whole" (Schelling *Freedom* 5). Therefore, in 1809, Schelling seems to mark the *Freedom* essay with the authority of a new beginning. Though as the last chapter showed, beginning for Schelling is a troublesome moment that always appears to have begun, and is a point which philosophy and writing always enter into *in media res*. This problem applies for the beginning of the absolute in the *Freedom* essay as well. Slavoj Žižek writes that, on the problem of beginning in both the *Freedom* essay and *The Ages of the World*, "with regard to the mode of presentation of the Absolute, logical deduction has to give way to mythical *narrative*" (Žižek *The Indivisible Remainder* 39). Here, Žižek's point is that beginning for Schelling and for German Idealism is always tied up with a mythologization of the absolute, and that any beginning is always subject to the narrative which the philosopher arbitrarily constructs. In order to begin, then, Schelling writes the *Freedom* essay by means of the mythical narrative of the self-revelation of God, not in a traditional or orthodox retelling, but in a radical re-conceptualization of the narrative and *écriture* of theodicy and pantheism. Schelling meshes theodicy with pantheism, making

all things immanent in and co-dependent with the existence of God, but he also re-figures theodicy by turning evil into a necessary and actual force that is essential to God's coming-into-existence. In this sense, the world, the universe, and "man," writes Schelling, "[are] not outside of, but rather in, God and . . . [their] activity itself belongs to the life of God" (Schelling *Freedom* 12).

Whereas theodicy is an important word for the *Freedom* essay, "pantheism" is really the site or the word upon which the text and Schelling speculate, in the sense developed by Jean-Luc Nancy in *The Speculative Remark*. Pantheism, for Schelling, is one of those speculative words that surprises and has in itself a speculative meaning that had not been understood until he had read it otherwise. Thus, pantheism becomes a means of writing and thinking through the problem of the idea of God or of God as beginning. Yet, pantheism is also used by Schelling in order to write over those gaps and pockmarks of God's self-revelation by writing pantheism side by side with theodicy and God as figural seals, which function as ways of repressing the text's aporetic and abyssal narrative. The *Freedom* essay, thus, illustrates a different kind of writing than the speculative and experimental writing of the *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature* or *The Ages of the World*. The *Freedom* essay represents a site of anxiety over the contingency of its own writing, and therefore represses the luxurious fluidity and ungrounded speculative style of Schelling's experimental writings. Instead, the writing of the *Freedom* essay tries to impose continuity and linearity by using the figures of pantheism, theodicy, and God; yet, in so doing, these also open the *Freedom* essay up to a deconstructive reading. These figures do not provide the solution to the problem of

writing, but rather unleash upon the *Freedom* essay problems which further complicate its writing by initiating a return of the text's repressed.

This chapter, then, begins by revisiting Schelling's meditations on pantheism in the *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism*. There Schelling provides a reading of criticism and dogmatism that writes and rethinks the relation between the two philosophies in a way that he will once again take up in the *Freedom* essay's figuration of pantheism, theodicy, and God; however, I argue, the *Philosophical Letters* are themselves a site of rupture and auto-immunity that will infect rather than seal off the *Freedom* essay from its own contingent writing. The next section will seek to uncover the differences between Spinoza and Schelling's expositions of pantheism. Schelling's adoption of pantheism also impacts the writing of Schelling's system, for, while the *Freedom* essay represents a new beginning and a new way of thinking the question of the origin of existence, pantheism and theodicy introduce problems that make both the figure of "God" as writer as well as his author, Schelling, subject to their own deconstructive writing. The writing of the *Freedom* essay uses the figures of theodicy and pantheism as a means to evade the infinite task of writing that was at issue in the *First Outline* by means of the text's articulation of the authority of God; however, in order to write out a narrative of theodicy, Schelling must inscribe within God a contradiction that must be resolved, that is, the conflict between good and evil. This writing of the conflict of good and evil within God opens a new rupture within the text, as the conflict of revelation subjects God to the contingency and suffering of his ground, and radically disfigures a united and perfect authority. For evil and good must equally be written since evil provides the necessary means by which God's self-revelation can come to be, and yet evil is always potentially

capable of annihilating that revelation. This relationship between God as he is in Himself and God as ground will thus occupy the third section of this chapter. God, I argue, is not some transcendental signifier that authorizes the text, but a figure that the *Freedom* essay constructs and deconstructs, since God is subject to the radical exposure of his own writing and to the writing of the text. Schelling's introduction of pantheism and theodicy into his writing thus have the effect of opening the *Freedom* essay to the problems that lay hidden within this new figuration of God, making God the figure by which the text unbinds itself when it was supposed to be that which kept this world within bounds.

2. 2 *The Philosophical Letters*

The fact that the *Freedom* essay returns to pantheism and idealism is significant if we consider its initial publication history. The essay, according to the editors of its most recent publication, Jeff Love and Johannes Schmidt, was published in 1809 alongside a selection of Schelling's other more idealist texts in Volume 1 "of what was to be a collected edition of Schelling's writings published by Phillip Krüll in Landshut"; however no "further volumes were published" (Love and Schmidt *Freedom* 135). In the recent 2006 printing of the essay, the editors have provided the preface to the collection from 1809. There, because Schelling places these earlier idealist texts–which include the *Philosophical Letters*–in continuity with the *Freedom* essay, the preface is, in a sense, a site of self-reflexivity. This is to say that we can read the preface in a way that sees Schelling insisting on a continuity between his texts, figuring each earlier work as an instance that is part of his development towards the writing of the *Freedom* essay, the text that "is the first which the author puts forth his concept of the ideal part of philosophy with complete determinateness" (Schelling *Freedom* 4). The editors, on the other hand,

state that Schelling's "self-interpretation may seem somewhat disingenuous to those who emphasize "Protean" discontinuity in Schelling's work" (Love and Schmidt *Freedom* 136), but also that Schelling's plea for continuity in his works should not be taken lightly. Our reading chooses to posit itself somewhere in between these two interpretations by placing the *Philosophical Letters* in continuity with the *Freedom* essay, but in a way that emphasizes a continuity that itself is problematic as it opens both of these texts to their own deconstruction. In this sense, this reading does not focus on the fact that Schelling himself was protean, but that his writing was.

The *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism*, published in 1795, consist of a series of ten letters addressed to a fictional and unnamed interlocutor who serves as the audience of Schelling's epistolary polemic. We have noted in the previous chapter that Schelling elaborates in the *Letters* a nuanced and critical reading of Kant's critical philosophy and Spinoza's enthusiastic dogmatism, positioning dogmatism as criticism's foil. The *Letters* also introduce a focus on pantheism that will continue in the *Freedom* essay, making the *Letters* a methodological guide for reading the *Freedom* essay as an ongoing dialogue between dogmatism (as enthusiasm) and criticism (as absolute idealism). During the period of German Idealism, dogmatism and criticism were important terms that were polemically charged for Kant, Fichte, Hegel, and Schelling and meant different things for each of them. Generally for Fichte, and in a similar and yet contrasting way for Kant[8], dogmatism was equated with transcendental realism, pantheism, and Spinoza, since dogmatism accounted for experience "from some

[8] While Schelling uses the words pantheism, idealism, dogmatism, and criticism, in the *Freedom* essay he does not provide an elaborate or systematic definition of idealism in the same way as would Kant or Fichte. For more information on the development of Idealism according to the main figures of German Idealism, see Frederick Beiser's *German Idealism: The Struggle Against Subjectivism 1781-1801*.

transcendent principle beyond consciousness, the thing in itself (*Ding an sich*)"; on the other hand, criticism or idealism, for Ficthe, was something associated with consciousness and the capacity of the subject's freedom to actualize its own existence, positing experience "from some *immanent* principle within consciousness, the self, the ego, or I in itself" (Beiser 261). However, Schelling does not see dogmatism or criticism in the same way as did Kant or Fichte. He uses these terms speculatively, expressing them as an opposing binary which he tries to dialectically work through rather than establishing them as exclusive philosophical activities. Unlike Kant and Fichte, for whom the argument of criticism becomes just as univocal as their opponent's arguments for dogmatism, Schelling establishes dogmatism and criticism in the *Letters* as figures which are representative of the two philosophies of Spinoza and Kant that supplement each other in the same way as pantheism and idealism do in the *Freedom* essay. While it was traditional in German Idealism to equate pantheism with the words *dogmatism* and *realism* or *criticism* with idealism and freedom, between the *Letters* and the *Freedom* eassy we can read Schelling as trying to speculate on how to articulate these words in radical new directions that unravel their more generally accepted meaning.

In the *Letters*, then, Schelling's analysis focuses on the one point where dogmatism and criticism must meet, which for each of them is the "same problem": "the riddle of the world, the question of how the absolute could come out of itself and oppose to itself a world" (Schelling *Letters* 173-174). According to Schelling, God is not what is in question, for God is an idea that cannot be forgotten and that must be approached by theoretical reason, regardless of the timorous nature of Schelling's interlocutor, to whom Schelling responds critically: "You say that theoretical reason is not able to comprehend

a God. So be it; but call it what you will–*assumption*, *knowledge*, *belief*–you cannot get rid of the *idea* of God" (Schelling *Letters* 158). Rather, the question is how is it that God reveals himself or what exactly the realm of the absolute is where both criticism and dogmatism must meet; the question is what does it mean if "the principle which they have so far presupposed, was nothing but a *prolepsis*" (Schelling *Letters* 175), or what Schelling, loosely quoting Jacobi, also calls systematic philosophy's "*original insuperable prejudices* [Vorurteile]" (Schelling 176)? The Greek word *prolepsis* and the German word *Vorurteile* both have the same meaning of a preconception, a prejudice, or a prejudgment, which, for Schelling, means that the absolute is rather a site of prejudgment or decision from which "all the propositions which they [criticism and dogmatism] had put forth, thus far were propositions asserted absolutely, that is, without ground" (Schelling *Letters* 175-176). The *Letters* is, therefore, a speculative text that analyzes philosophy's construction and deconstruction of the absolute, showing that the absolute is not a fixed principle but rather, as the highest principle of a system of criticism or dogmatism, has "only a subjective value as a basis of his [the philosopher's] system, that is, . . . [it is] valid for him only inasmuch as he anticipated his own practical decision" (Schelling *Letters* 176). Therefore, the difference between dogmatism and criticism lies only in their approach towards the absolute, not in the concept of the absolute as such, which again emphasizes the mythologization that is required in order to articulate the narrative of the absolute as beginning.

Schelling thus begins his analysis of the absolute by taking up Kant's elaboration of the subject's relation to the thing-in-itself in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Criticism seeks the thing-in-itself not in an object but out of the freedom of the activity of the

subject. According to Schelling, the "subject is compelled to rise (through pro-syllogisms) from conditional to *unconditional* judgments" (Schelling *Letters* 166), which means that, for criticism, there is in fact an "original absolute unity which precedes every synthesis"; criticism, therefore, "seeks what is not conditioned, and that the very striving which produces a synthesis demands an absolute *thesis* as goal of all philosophy" (Schelling *Letters* 166; my emphasis). This conception of the thing-in-itself, as the absolute synthesis without condition–that is a synthesis that ends in a thesis–leads Schelling to conceive of the *Critique of Pure Reason* as a system of systems. In other words, because the *Critique* begins from the point of the subject and not from some object that can come to be known empirically, the subject must show the process by which he or she has achieved an absolute thesis, providing a self-critical and self-aware method of grasping the absolute. Criticism, then, is more of an interpretive method that seeks out the absolute in the most consummate way; it "applies to both . . . the system of criticism as well as to that of dogmatism," since Kant's *Critique* favours "*no* system exclusively, but instead . . . [establishes] truly . . . a canon for *all*" systems, so that criticism does not disprove dogmatism but rather "has taught dogmatism how it can become dogmatism" in the first place (Schelling *Letters* 168-169). According to Schelling, systematic philosophy dies once it is confined to repeat itself over and over again in articulating itself in one particular system. The philosopher of criticism, however, does not feel this, for the philosopher of criticism is

> [t]he genuine philosopher [who] has never felt himself to be greater than when he has beheld an infinity of knowledge. The whole sublimity of his science has consisted in just this, that it would never be complete. He would become unbearable to himself the moment he came to believe that he had completed his system. That very moment he would cease to be *creator* and would be degraded to an instrument of his own creature. How much more unbearable he would find

> the thought if somebody else should want to force such fetters on him!" (Schelling *Letters* 172)

This is to say that criticism, for Schelling, is a system that must be able to explain all systems insofar as it shows how it becomes philosophy itself out of its own creation, not from something outside of it. The only thing that is posited for criticism is the subject in terms of the freedom of its activity to create in a similar way to how Schelling thinks Nature in the *First Outline*. Yet, because the subject, like nature, must be at once both the productivity and product, this conception of the subject also exposes the subject to its thinking and creating to the radical fact of the infinity of thinking itself, and not merely an "infinity of knowledge," which ungrounds rather than unites the subject as a figure of philosophy.

But, what about the position of dogmatism? What is it that philosophers feel in relation to the "creature" which they have created? The philosophy of dogmatism, especially the passages which focus on Spinoza, supplies the other side of Schelling's approach to systematic philosophy. In the *Letters*, Schelling does not privilege criticism over dogmatism, stating that they actually supplement each other, and "should necessarily exist side by side" (Schelling *Letters* 172). Schelling's appreciation of criticism stems mostly from its function in inhibiting dogmatism's unrestrained enthusiasm (*Schwärmerei*) for thought (Schelling *Letters* 179). Spinoza occupies Schelling's interest precisely for this reason, not because "his concern in philosophy was only with the analytical propositions" (Schelling *Letters* 174), but because philosophy for Spinoza as a representative of "dogmatism" was nothing if not the realm of creative reason, of the imagination, and enthusiastic speculation. Dogmatism thus thinks absolutely, in the sense that the enthusiasm of its thought carries itself beyond its own

bounds, beyond the counsel of society that sought to impose limitations upon what must necessarily be unbound, unlimited, and unconditioned. However, because dogmatism shows that it is capable of creating synthetic figures merely by fiat, because it can state that God must be "*because* he is," because "His existence and his essence [Wesen] must be identical," it is

> [f]or that very reason every proof given by dogmatism is no proof in the proper sense, and the proposition *there is a God* is the most unproved, the most unprovable, the most groundless proposition–just as groundless as the supreme principle of criticism, *I am!*" (Schelling *Letters* 174)

While criticism may teach dogmatism how it came to be, dogmatism shows criticism that its absolute principle is itself just as groundless, so that criticism "can be spared the reproach of fantastication [*Schwärmerei*] just as little as can dogmatism" (Schelling *Letters* 186). But, whereas Kant's prejudgment decides that no actual knowledge of the absolute is possible, Spinoza is capable of this unbearable thought because he places "everything in existence [as] merely a modification of the same infinite. . . . [Where] there was no transition, no conflict, but only the demand that the finite strive to become identical with the infinite and to merge in the infinity of the absolute object" (Schelling *Letters* 178). While this ontological system may have seemed abhorrent to most of Spinoza's contemporaries, Schelling describes Spinoza as someone who gave himself up to the happy "delusion" of this absolute state, for it represented the only means by which he could put an end to the contradiction of life, eliminating from existence the struggle to think of the subject's external relation to the world outside of it. Spinoza spoke of this absolute state not only "cheerfully, but even with ecstasy" (Schelling *Letters* 183). It is this state of being infinitely within the absolute that Schelling will adopt for the *Freedom* essay, yet in a way that does not imitate Spinoza's "quiet abandonment" (Schelling

Letters 157), for Schelling distinguishes himself from Spinoza by making contradiction immanent within God as a vital and real principle of the *Freedom* essay.

However, while the *Philosophical Letters* provides insight into how Schelling will take up dogmatism and criticism as binaries that supplement rather than exclude each other, the tenth and final letter's analysis of Greek tragedy puts both of these philosophies under erasure and unravels their instrumentalization in the *Freedom* essay. Schelling writes in the opening of the tenth letter "that there is an objective power which threatens our freedom with annihilation," and that we must "*know*" that we must "fight *against* it" by "exerting our whole freedom, and thus to go down" (Schelling *Letters* 192). For Schelling, Greek tragedy was the highest expression of the fated conflict between necessity and freedom. According to Schelling, Greek tragedy, since it figures a "mortal, destined by fate to become a malefactor," shows the ultimate failure of human freedom:

> the malefactor who succumbed under the power of fate was punished, this tragic fact was the recognition of human freedom; it was the *honor* due to freedom. Greek tragedy honored human freedom, letting its hero *fight* against the superior power of fate. . . . As long as he is still *free*, he holds out against the power of destiny. As soon as he succumbs he ceases to be free. (Schelling *Letters* 192-193)

The fact that the *Letters* ends with the knowledge that even "Greek tragedy," as that which philosophy holds up as the highest expression in art, "could not reconcile freedom and failure" (Schelling *Letters* 193) must put the project of the *Freedom* essay into question. Because Schelling does not return to thinking human freedom as a failure that "*fights against*" fate, we can read the *Freedom* essay as simultaneously repressing and salvaging what was written in the *Philosophical Letters*. If human freedom is a fundamental failure, that the *Freedom* essay then awkwardly begins "with the correction of [the] essential concepts" of pantheism and idealism before the "genuine investigation"

into the essence of human freedom (Schelling *Freedom* 26), the obliqueness of the *Freedom* essay's "Introduction" points towards the text's anxiety over its own subject matter. Schelling, therefore, must repress the *Philosophical Letters*'s discovery of the failure of freedom in order to argue against those who say "the concept of system opposes the concept of freedom generally and in itself" in order to prove that "some kind of system must be present, at least in the divine understanding, with which freedom coexists" (Schelling *Freedom* 9). However, the writing of criticism and dogmatism is imbued with the freedom of failure essentially, and, as a result, the fate of the *Freedom* essay had always already been decided in the same way that any writing of human freedom is always decided "outside it and above all time" (Schelling *Freedom* 49).

2. 3 The Pantheism Controversy

The *Freedom* essay, rather than beginning with a clear and systematic investigation into the essence of human freedom, opens with a discussion of the pantheism controversy. As a result, the introduction begins in a rather oblique way: a detour we mean to probe further in this section. Because if we consider the *Freedom* essay alongside the *Philosophical Letters*, the investigation's opening section on pantheism can be read in a way that sees Schelling returning to speculate upon dogmatism as a creative and passionate philosophical project that is complementary to criticism; for "it would be an error to think," writes Schelling in the *Freedom* essay, "that pantheism has been abolished and destroyed by idealism" (Schelling *Freedom* 22-23). Rather pantheism, for Schelling, is not the Spinozistic pantheism that offended the intellectual sensibilities of most German Idealists, because the word *pantheism* opens up

for Schelling a space to re-configure and re-orient the philosophies of dogmatism and criticism that he worked out in the *Letters*.

While Schelling's prefatory evaluation of the pantheism controversy has been largely ignored, and relegated to something of local and particular historical concern, I argue that he uses the controversy over pantheism as a rhetorical space that allows him to introduce God as the guiding figure of the *Freedom* essay. However, this introduction of God, not as the God of theism but of pantheism, introduces problems into the system of freedom because God, as the essence of freedom, is now elaborated through existence rather than kept separate from it as a transcendental figure. As in the *Philosophical Letters*, Schelling remains critical of dogmatism and Spinoza's surrender to the absolute, yet his enduring interest in pantheism[9] also reveals it to be a necessary counterpoint to theorize a system of freedom. For Schelling, pantheism becomes a speculative word in the sense developed by Nancy, because through the word *pantheism* "thought 'finds' *its* meaning," its "speculative meaning" "right at the level" of the word" (Nancy *Speculative Remark* 55). Schelling's writing of the word pantheism is an attempt at re-appropriating it from its common usage, for when Schelling wrote the *Freedom* essay, *pantheism* was still a word that signified an "entire [viewpoint]" which could be "described all at once" (Schelling *Freedom* 11). Pantheism had become forever separated from criticism, because Friedrich Jacobi, as a result of the pantheism controversy that emerged between him and Moses Mendelssohn in 1789, had laid out a "general attack on all forms of

[9] Work on Schelling's relationship to pantheism and especially to Spinoza and Leibniz remains few and far in between. For an account of the Pantheism controversy other than Schelling's see Dale E. Snow's *Schelling and the End of Idealism*, Andrew Bowie's *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy: An Introduction*, as well as Dieter Henrich's excellent *Between Kant and Hegel: Lectures on German Idealism*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press (2008).

rationalism . . . [that] produced the extremely influential notion that all philosophical systems could be classified as one of two diametrically opposed types: realistic or idealistic" (Snow 15). As a result, pantheism had been negatively portrayed as a blind realism and had also become more of a label than a system, which Schelling criticizes: "[if] one has found the right label for a system, the rest falls into place for itself, and one is spared the effort of examining what is characteristic about it more meticulously" (Schelling *Freedom* 11). Pantheism had fallen victim to the dangers of philosophical language, "namely," to quote Nancy, "the danger of enclosing speculativity within the univocal, within the unilaterality of a word" (Nancy *Speculative Remark* 69). For pantheism, as it was commonly understood, was synonymous with fatalism; however, Schelling writes that the fatalism attributed to pantheism is a "sense," a feeling, or implication that is not essentially connected with it; for another sense can be attributed to it, one that "denotes nothing more than the doctrine of the immanence of things in God, [to which] every rational viewpoint in some sense must be drawn" (Schelling *Freedom* 11). Pantheism, then, is rather a system that views the All as identical with the One or the universe as identical with God rather than a system where God determines the fate and being of those things contained within it.

In this way, pantheism answers one half of the question that Schelling pointed to in the *Philosophical Letters*, that problem shared by dogmatism and criticism: why is there something rather than nothing? However, what separates the *Freedom* essay's conception of pantheism from Spinoza's is Schelling's re-figuration of Jacobi's opposing philosophical systems, conceiving them as necessary binaries that are thought through the

figure of the pantheist God by means of the narrative of theodicy. In what is one of Schelling's most famous lines from the *Freedom* essay, he writes,

> Idealism, if it does not have as its basis a living realism, becomes just as empty and abstract a system as that of Leibniz, Spinoza, or any dogmatist. The entire new European philosophy since its beginning (with Descartes) has the common defect that nature is not available for it and that it lacks a living ground . . . . Idealism is the soul of philosophy; realism is the body; only both together can constitute a living whole. (Schelling *Freedom* 26)

Here, Schelling conceives of a living realism as opposed to Spinoza, Leibniz, or Jacobi's conception of a mechanistic realism, and therefore does not equate realism with dogmatism, but rather with criticism or nature in terms of the incessant production of itself from out of itself. Idealism, on the other hand, turns out to be dogmatic as it becomes an untouchable principle that makes the real "the ground and medium in which the former [idealism] makes itself real and takes on flesh and blood" (Schelling *Freedom* 26). In the *Freedom* essay, then, it is the figure of the pantheistic God that is supposed to unify idealism and realism into a coherent systematic philosophy. However, while Spinoza makes use of the God of pantheism as a way to end the contradiction between subject and object, Schelling's pantheism is written side by side with idealism in a similar way to the binary developed in the *Philosophical Letters* in order to form a contradiction that breathes life into the system of freedom. God "is in itself as based in itself, will, freedom" (Schelling *Freedom* 18), but he must also enter into existence with the real in order to realize himself as a synthetic unity rather than as he first finds himself in that initial contradiction that splits his identity into himself and his other, the ground of his existence.

However, that initial contradiction cannot be unified simply by using the figure of the pantheist God because it requires a narrative supplement, that is, the figure of

theodicy. Theodicy is introduced as a narrative to explain the ideal's emergence into existence with the real, and supplements the realist half of the *Freedom* essay, since theodicy is itself a narrative of God's self-revelation that–so as to posit a beginning, a middle and an end–focuses on the problem of evil as what motivates God towards his unification. Rather than posit freedom in human terms as the failure of the struggle against the absolute, Schelling places freedom in the figural covenant between God and man as "the capacity for good and evil" (Schelling *Freedom* 23). In this sense, Schelling makes God into a real, existential being that is not wholly self-same because he is the possibility for good and evil and therefore the possibility for the narrative of theodicy. According to Schelling, Spinoza's pantheist God was already complete, and "serves merely to determine the relationship of things to God but not what they [things, beings, man] may be, considered for themselves" (*Freedom* 16), whereas Schelling's pantheism erases the fatalistic sense from the word "pantheism," by writing the figure of the pantheist God as a subject in the process of its own becoming. Schelling thus redirects all of European philosophy back towards the God of pantheism and uses the figures of pantheism and theodicy or realism and idealism as a means of writing this new system of freedom.

However, because Schelling turns God into a real and personal figure as opposed to a merely abstract principle, God is no longer a transcendent being and becomes a figure within the text's economy of writing. Because he is personal, he is opened up to the problems of the finite world that must be worked out in order to close off the narrative of theodicy. The development of personality as a philosophical principle marks a turning point in Schelling's works by investing the absolute into the singular parts of

the absolute system, linking its survival to the existence and progress of those individual articulations that support it. While it is true that Schelling had already expressed such a continuity between the whole and its products in the *First Outline*, he formulates the concept of personality together with the concept of pantheism and theodicy in the *Freedom* essay not only as a way of tying God to nature but as a way of further connecting God's self-revelation to a covenant formed with man. A personal God, then, intensifies the interrelation between the absolute and the individuals that constitute it by exposing the more general system of pantheism to the problems God must face through the writing of his own self-revelation within the narrative of theodicy.

But, because Schelling refuses the peaceful correlation between the absolute and man which Spinoza had theorized, and instead inserts the conflict between good and evil within God, man becomes that by which God's revelation is assured or forfeited, and Schelling therefore re-inserts the problem of human freedom as failure into the *Freedom* essay. The figure of theodicy makes God dependent on man by turning man into the site of the conflict between good and evil, thus passing on the conflict that is within God on to man. This results in turning man into the figure by which the story is to be decided. The conflict can only take place in man, because God cannot be associated with evil except through his relationship to the realm of the ground and man, because what is "inseverable in God must therefore be severable in man–and this is the possibility of good and evil" (Schelling *Freedom* 33). Theodicy, therefore, functions in the same way as criticism, as it sets up a dialectic, or one of Schelling's favorite words, a *contradiction*, for "without the contradiction of necessity and freedom," writes Schelling, "not only philosophy but each higher willing of the spirit would sink into the death that is proper to

those sciences in which this contradiction has no application" (Schelling *Freedom* 10). However, while theodicy furnishes the contradiction by which the system of freedom may proceed, the pantheist God of dogmatism becomes no longer separate from this conflict. God, in the *Freedom* essay, as a result of the concept of personality, now has a personal stake in the conflict between good and evil in the ground of his existence. In other words, by making the conflict between good and evil a real conflict that must be resolved by man, Schelling has made the God of pantheism's salvation dependent upon the fulfilled idea of a theodicean history; if the narrative of theodicy is not fulfilled, this reveals a fundamental gap in God's own being since God is unable to authorize his own existence without the supplement of an other such as the figure of theodicy or the figure of man. This is to say that God's authority is only real insofar as he imposes upon existence the responsibility to eliminate evil from his ground. However, since the ground is separate and distinct from God and yet contained within him as the essential realm of revelation, God becomes subject to the freedom of man to do either good or evil, which could mean the success or the failure of God's revelation.

This relationship raises the question, if God is absolutely free, should God also grant freedom to those things of creation? This anxiety was present even in the *Philosophical Letters*, since it was asked: would a higher being interfere with individual freedom or would the immanence of things in God be both a failure and a saving of freedom? However, this is only a superficial articulation of this anxiety; underneath, the conflict between good and evil raises the question: can God actually claim authorship over the history which he writes for himself and of which he is a part? Can God keep his creation within bounds and not become an instrument of his own creature? For, if we read

against the grain, what the *Freedom* essay demonstrates is the illusion of the authority gained through positing God and the ground within a theodicy. What results, to borrow from Žižek's work on Schelling, is not unlike

> [t]he gap exemplified by the ancient Aztec priest who organizes human sacrifices to ensure the rising of the sun, who is alarmed by the seemingly "irrational" prospect that the most obvious thing will not happen[.] And is not the same gesture of freely asserting the inevitable constitutive of the position of a Master? By means of his "Yes!" a Master merely "dots the i's," attests the unavoidable–he acts as if he has a choice where effectively there is none. (For that reason, there is unavoidably something inherently *asinine* involved in the position of a Master: a Master's main role is to *state the obvious*). (Žižek"Abyss of Freedom" 70)

Existence is already apparent, and what Žižek points out is the meaningless abyss that stands behind the concept of authority. God may realize existence in the text, but obviously existence must necessarily come to pass. The sublime power of the Word that ushers in creation in an opening of the limitless reaches of existence turns out to be nothing but God gesturing at what passes before him and quite possibly beyond him.

2. 4 The Evil that Lies Beneath

What makes Schelling such an interesting thinker is specifically the auto-deconstructive personality of his texts, for the authority of the *Freedom* essay and *The Ages* is undermined specifically by the figures of God and the ground that, here in the *Freedom* essay, the text deploys in order to establish God's authority over his revelation. In the *Freedom* essay, in order to avoid the abyss of the past, Schelling theorizes, by means of what he calls the law of identity and the law of the ground, a God who is able to contain within himself the ground for his own self-manifestation. Yet, according to the law of identity and the meaning of the copula, the identity of God is split into two opposing and different beings: God as he Himself and God as ground of his own existence. In this sense, saying, 'God is ground,' is like saying 'the body is blue.' To say

that one is the other does not mean that they are the same according to Schelling's logic, for the statement differentiates "subject and object as what precedes and what follows (*antecedens et consequens*)" (Schelling *Freedom* 14). From this, Schelling draws upon a second law titled the law of the ground (*Gesetz des Grundes*): "Therefore, the eternal must also be a ground immediately and as it is in itself. That of which the eternal is a ground through its being is in this respect *dependent* and, from the point of view of immanence, also something contained within the eternal" (*Freedom* 17; my emphasis). And although Schelling qualifies the word 'dependent' so that we do not misconstrue it to mean that something dependent is determined, we as readers are confronted with the impossible paradox of God's self-dependence–because independence does not appropriately convey the split in God's identity–on something that is at once contained within him but "is not *He Himself*" (Schelling *Freedom* 28).

The figures of God and the ground thus bring up the question of firstness and secondness, since the ground of God's existence must in fact exist in a sense before God so that God may come to be. This problem of whether God succeeds the ground or whether it is the other way around had also been a problem for Schelling when he wrote the *System of Transcendental Idealism*. There, while in the process of the development of absolute identity, Schelling necessarily had to admit a past that preceded consciousness and which ultimately permits its realization. In his introduction to the *System*, Michael Vater argues that the past of the objective world–the unconscious that opposes the conscious–problematizes the primacy and authority of absolute consciousness, insofar as the objective world must in some way precede the subject. Absolute consciousness, although it includes the unconscious in the realm of the subjective as what is intuitively

objective, always encounters something that resists consciousness as a fact that precedes and is always beyond the powers of the conscious understanding. Although the unconscious in the *System* does not assume the same kind of psychological affect that comes up in the *Freedom* essay and the 1815 version of *The Ages of the World*, the past does always appear to complicate any understanding of temporality, firstness and secondness, and hence complicates the place of authority in each text in which it is articulated.

It is this traumatic affect of the past that leads to the concept of the ground, not as something that can be subsumed under the authority of God, but in terms of an ungrounded figure that deconstructs God from within. Schelling writes that the ground "is *nature*–in God, a being indeed inseparable, yet still distinct from him" (Schelling *Freedom* 27) that does in fact "[precede] him in existence" (Schelling *Freedom* 28). Another distinguishing factor that separates Schelling's pantheism from Spinoza's is Spinoza's "mechanistic view of nature" (Schelling *Freedom* 20). Drawing largely from the *First Outline*, Schelling attributes to the ground the "dynamic notion of nature" (Schelling *Freedom* 20), and therefore places within it the dynamism and productivity that escapes the bounds imposed by God's authority, making the ground as nature a deconstructive rather than constructive figure.

> Such an identity of the product and the productivity in the *original* conception of Nature is expressed by the ordinary view of Nature as a whole, which is at once the cause and effect of itself, and is in its duplicity (which runs through all phenomena) again identical. (*First Outline* 202)

But here Schelling inverts and suppresses the primacy of the ground in favor of the primacy of God "in so far as the ground, even as such, could not exist if God did not exist *actu*" (Schelling Freedom *28*). The difference, then, between nature in the *First Outline*

compared to the *Freedom* essay is clearly expressed in the way Schelling figures nature as dependent on something outside of it, namely God; for in the 1809 *Freedom* essay, the authority of God limits nature:

> The first effect of the understanding in nature is the division of forces, since only thus can understanding unfold the unity that is unconsciously but necessarily immanent in nature as in a seed, just as in man the light enters into the dark yearning to create something so that in the chaotic jumble of thoughts, all hanging together, but each hindering the other from emerging, thoughts divide themselves from each other, and now the unity hidden in the ground and containing all raises itself up . . . . Because, namely, this being (of primordial nature) is nothing else than the eternal ground for the existence of God. (Schelling *Freedom* 30)

In the *Freedom* essay, Schelling tries to write nature in relation to God as merely the "yearning the eternal One feels to give birth to itself" (Schelling *Freedom* 28); however because nature is divested of the unconditioned and absolute force attributed to it in the *First Outline*, this articulation of nature as merely a yearning rather than as a site of its own productivity must be put under erasure. Nature's sudden abandonment to the authority of God seems out of place, and is rather a means to answer a question that is carried over from the *First Outline*: how does nature inhibit its absolute productivity? David Farrell Krell notes that this problem plagued not only Schelling but the entire generation of philosophers after Kant; "[t]he bedeviling problem for Schelling… is how infinite activity could ever have submitted to such compulsion to reproduction or to a condition or determination of any kind–above all, the compulsion of inhibition (*Hemmung*)" (Krell *Tragic Absolute* 48).

But, while to Krell nature's inhibition in the *First Outline* appears arbitrary, Schelling accounts for nature's inhibition in the *Freedom* essay by subordinating it to the primacy of God, turning nature into the voice of God's "effeminate lamentations" (Schelling *Freedom* 29). And yet this insoluble problem of inhibition takes on staggering

new dimensions in the *Freedom* essay, for while gender was not really at issue in the philosophy of nature, nature in the *Freedom* essay is defined clearly as the feminine half of God that must suffer under a male authority. Schelling refers to God as 'himself' and as both 'father' and 'son,' but it is only by means of a male dominion over the dark, feminine ground that God can write his own revelation. Schelling inverts and suppresses the primacy of the ground in exchange for the primacy of God, and therefore makes the feminine into that which cannot exist without its masculine authority. But, if darkness is the bearer of light, and "[a]ll birth is birth from darkness into light" (Schelling *Freedom* 29), how is it that nature is subordinate to God? Is it because, as Krell notes, philosophy "is here made to suffer emasculation" (Krell *Tragic Absolute* 76)? There is an uncanny interdependence that connects God to the ground in the *Freedom* essay because it is not as if God can simply extricate itself from and transcend above the ground; without it, as was made clear above, idealism cannot become the true philosophy since it needs its living ground. But the subordination of the feminine to the masculine is a false relation imposed upon nature by the narrative of theodicy. For if the ground is separate and if "[man] is formed in the maternal body" (Schelling *Freedom* 29), then the feminine body also becomes representative of a dissent and an anxiety for the male figure of God, as Krell has pointed out,

> When idealism fails to take on flesh and blood in the womb of realism, its high spirits and presumed high-mindedness culminate in a *Selbstzer*fleisch*ung* [self-mutilation or self-destruction] that the idealist wanted to rule out in the first place–as though there were already in idealism, quite in spite of its conception of itself, a *Fleisch* susceptible to mutilation. (Krell *Tragic Absolute* 77)

The ground, then, is made into God's 'foot-stool' "because God perceived the will of the ground as the will for his revelation and . . . recognized that a ground independent from

him (as spirit) would have to be the ground for his existence" (Schelling *Freedom* 45). But, this is in fact not a benevolent relation, for when God enters into relation with the ground of his existence, to borrow from Lord Byron's *Cain*, God "Sit[s] on his vast and solitary throne–/ Creating worlds, to make eternity/ Less burdensome to his immense existence/ And unparticipated solitude" (Byron 1. 1. 148-151). This is the dark reality that taints the love that God holds towards his own creation, and is the madness behind the self's splitting itself in two in order to grasp its own self-sameness that is in reality not there.

Indeed, insofar as Schelling writes the ground in order to serve the figure of theodicy as the possibility for the revelation of God, this same writing is complicated in its instrumentalization of the ground for the egotistical purposes of God's self-revelation. Because Schelling assigns the ground its own particular freedom that resists the 'benevolent guidance' of eternal freedom, the ground is a deconstructive figure rather than subordinate figure within the regulative and linear narrative of theodicy and revelation. The eternal will of the ground differs from the eternal will of God in its ability to change course and to realize and reveal itself according to its own will by actively and naturally resisting God's will. Just as God becomes the eternal principle of freedom by means of the law of identity and the law of the ground, so too does the ground's particular freedom. Interestingly, the original purpose of these two laws was to keep God separate from the ground and yet also to incorporate it into God as the means by which God writes out the history of his own revelation. Yet the writing of theodicy, which presents God as the authority by which the text smoothly progresses, is not able to contain its dis-ease with what erupts in the metaphorical language of the ground.

Theodicy represents, therefore, an instance of the text's attempt at repressing the auto-immunity of its writing. In other words, the benevolence of God is an anxious articulation that tries to repress the willful anarchy of the ground of God's existence; what was supposed to legitimate the authority of God as the writer of history ends up putting the concept of authority under erasure, which shows the arbitrariness of authority as merely an articulation rather than a grounded principle to which God has recourse. In a passage that is primarily meant to buttress Schelling's law of the ground, Schelling furthermore uses a lurid figure, that of the eye, which deconstructs the desired authority that the law of the ground is meant to re-inscribe.

> An individual body part, like the eye is only possible within the whole of an organism; nonetheless, it has its own life for itself, indeed, its own kind of freedom, which it obviously proves through the disease of which it is capable. Were that which is contained in another not itself alive, then there would be containment without some thing being contained, that is, nothing would be contained…. God is not a god of the dead but of the living. (Schelling *Freedom* 18)

In this sense, the ground, as that which is contained within the concept of God, is absolutely alive in two ways: firstly for God, and secondly for itself. Thus, on the one hand, the ground is already subjugated under God's eternal will and cannot decide how to actualize its freedom, while, on the other, it is capable of resisting its instrumentalization by virtue of falling sick. The metaphors of life and organicism perform the same kind of resistance that the eye performs in relation to the body which is representative of the particular will's resistance, its fight, against the universal will that seeks to exploit it in order to write the history of theodicy.

In the section on the deduction of the possibility of evil, Schelling writes the triumph of good as the figure of light in order to subordinate and repress evil as the figure

of darkness, but this in fact also opens up new possibilities of dissent within the ground. The evil principle is figured as the self-will of the ground that is obsessed with its own particular selfhood. Opposed to the ground's pure egoity is the figure of good or of light, that is, the universal will of the understanding. The only possible way these opposing figures can come into existence is through man as articulated within an eschatological and typological rhetoric that figures man as the means by which theodicy can be written out and completed. It is in man that the conflict of good and evil meet in their most real opposition and will eventually, according to Schelling, transform into what is called the principle of spirit. Yet, because this principle emerges out of the opposition between light and dark that are themselves figures within the theodicean narrative, so too is spirit itself a figure through which the text can write the narrative of theodicy.

Spirit, therefore, is deployed in order to bring about the final unity of "light and darkness (vowel and consonant)" (Schelling *Freedom* 32). However, this final unity, or what Schelling calls 'consonance,' is always a becoming spirit, for "[s]elfhood *as* such is spirit"; but because "man is spirit as a selfish [*selbstsich*], particular being (separated from God)," the spirit of man can potentially become a figure of dissonance as well as consonance (Schelling *Freedom* 33). The gap that separates the particular human from God does not negate a particular personality that is itself different from God, because, according to the logic of the eschatology, this particular personality is a becoming spirit; in other words, the particular spirits are what make up God's self-revelation into the unified principle of spirit. Spirit is thus figured as "raised from the creaturely into what is above the creaturely" and what is "rather above and outside of all nature" (Schelling *Freedom* 33). But, as is the case with the eye that falls sick, the selfish figure of the

ground does not necessarily need to follow the guidance and understanding of the figure of light; indeed, selfhood can choose its own vectors of possibility "if it is in fact not the spirit of eternal love–selfhood can separate itself from the light; or self-will can strive to be as a particular will that which it only is, in so far as it remains in the *centrum*" of the ground (Schelling *Freedom* 33). The personality of the particular self-will, then, is capable of dissent and dissolution, and can potentially overturn the direction and magnitude of the particular in relation to the universal.

The narrative of theodicy is therefore opposed to the marginalized narrative of the ground, a narrative characterized by a persistence of "an indignant host of desires and appetites" as well as a "life… which, though individual, is, however, false, a life of mendacity, a growth of restlessness and decay"; however, the life of the ground actually becomes a speculative and experimental articulation within the regulative and linear narrative of the text's theodicy, insofar as the ground's "most fitting comparison here is offered by disease which, as the disorder having arisen in nature through the misuse of freedom, is the true counterpart of evil or sin" (Schelling *Freedom* 34). But because disease itself is a freedom that allows for the individual part 'such as the eye' to be independent of the body and therefore to be for itself, the life of the ground as a disease, decay, and restlessness becomes a being within God that asserts a particular freedom in opposition to the freedom of God. In this sense, as William Blake said of John Milton, Schelling has perhaps unknowingly become part 'of the devil's party,' for, as Schelling writes of the devil, "according to the Christian point of view, [the devil] was not the most limited creature, but rather the least limited one" (Schelling *Freedom* 36). In this sense, the metaphorical language used to describe evil, disease, and the life of the ground

figures them as potentially too unruly for the language of theodicy, since the metaphorical inscription of theodicy within the text presents an unlimited and an unbounded life that is not God's. Instead, these metaphors open a speculative reading of evil as a voice of dissent against God's arbitrary authority; evil is a subtext, or a marginalized point of view, that was unjustly exploited in order to run the economy of theodicy. Consequently, theodicy appears as a deceptive narration that cannot integrate or express God's relationship with its ground except in the language of a conflict. Instead of instilling faith in the figure of God as a redemptive transcendental signifier, the figuration of the ground must put the authority of God under erasure, begging more questions than it answers.

The concept of ground, therefore, paradoxically becomes fundamental to establishing the existence of God, but, at the same time, has the undeniable potential to unground and unravel God's authorial position. As Schelling writes,

> This concept arises from the relation of the whole to the individual, from unity to multiplicity, or however one wants to express it. The positive is always the whole or unity; that which opposes unity is severing of the whole, disharmony, ataxia of forces. The same elements are in the severed whole that were in the cohesive whole; that which is material in both is the same (from this perspective, evil is not more limited or worse than the good), but the formal aspect of the two is totally different, though this formal aspect still comes precisely from the essence or the positive itself. (Schelling *Freedom* 38)

What is most unsettling about God's relationship to its ground is not simply that the ground deconstructs God's authority, but that the elements which are in the whole that is disrupted are the same as those in the whole that tries to maintain the semblance of cohesion. What distinguishes the two is their formal aspect, that is, how both take from the same source but distort the source into different forms, alienating God from his own manifestations, and showing exactly what it was that scared Spinoza so much about the

objective world that opposed and disfigured the integrity of the figure of God. In this sense, God actually provides the means of its own deconstruction. Is it not this absurd notion of God's own construction/deconstruction that Schelling seems to imply by the concept of the indivisible remainder, "the incomprehensible base of reality in things… that which with the greatest exertion cannot be resolved in understanding but rather remains eternally in the ground" (Schelling *Freedom* 29)? For God cannot come into existence without the ground coming into existence equally for itself, as "[g]ood without active selfhood is inactive good…. Only selfhood that has been overcome, thus brought back from activity to potentiality, is the good" (Schelling *Freedom* 63). On the other hand, since "in God there is an independent ground of reality and, hence, two equally eternal beginnings of self-revelation" (Schelling *Freedom* 59), it becomes not so much a matter of good overcoming selfhood, since revelation "must be considered in regard to his [God's] freedom in relation to both [good and evil]" (Schelling *ibid*.). God is not selfsame but is split in the same way the text is actually writing out two eternally different narratives, the narrative of the ground, which is "the yearning of the One to give birth to itself," but also the figure of the deconstruction of God's benevolence and arbitrary authority and existence; the second narrative is the narrative of theodicy, of God, as the will of understanding, "whereby the word is spoken out into nature and through which God first makes himself personal" (Schelling *ibid*.).

To read the *Freedom* essay against the grain is to disclose the text as already at work consuming and entangling its principles from the beginning. Although the irreducible remainder is what runs underneath existence as the roiling darkness that thrives on its forsaken condition, it is equally what gives birth to light, and indeed, the

claim that the ground submits to God's authority appears untenable and must be put under erasure. For the ground does not appear to submit to God but rather God submits to the ground, therefore becoming an instrument of his own creature. Theodicy, thus, is used to repress the deconstructive potential of the *Freedom* essay through the writing and rhetoric it uses to ascribe a beginning, middle, and end to a text that is fundamentally obsessed with explaining how temporality ever comes to be in the first place. The repression, however, is a secondary repression, insofar as it is a conscious and specific psychical act that tries to occlude something from the text's narrative, and yet remains ultimately unsuccessful. By using revelation and theodicy as metaphors for time, in the words of Carol Jacobs, to "[generate] out of a series of repetitions… the illusion of sequence or linear temporal order" (Jacobs 107), Schelling tries to use God's history in order to achieve the notion of a fully actualized God and hence a completely realized system of freedom. Consequently, Schelling falls victim to his own precautions, prioritizing univocality above the plurality of speculative language. Yet, while the text may avoid the "quiet abandonment" of Spinoza's surrender to the absolute, the *Freedom* essay discloses a God whose whole body is not selfsame and is always anxious about its own bodily (de)composition and (dys)functionality by trying to repress the productive and creative ground of its existence. What Schelling's writing of theodicy as the history of God shows is not a composite, linear, or unified God but rather a figure that is subject to a history that splits apart, which opens up an abyssal gap that separates the ideal from its real other, and puts in to question the continuity which Schelling had initially pleaded for in the preface to the *Freedom* essay. Therefore, regardless of the figures that Schelling resorts to–be it God, pantheism, or theodicy–in order to legitimate and seal this continuity

and linear development of freedom away from the possibility of its own deconstruction, a system of freedom is always subject to the auto-immunity of its writing, to its own ungroundedness, and to its failure.

The Disfigured God

3. 1 Introduction

This third chapter begins our analysis of Schelling's unpublished *magnum opus*, *The Ages of the World*. While this chapter will focus on Schelling's relationship to Jacob Boehme and how this lends itself to a reading of the *Ages* as a writing of Gnosticism (i.e. as the writing of knowledge as esotericism), the fourth and final chapter will continue this investigation into the 1815 version of *The Ages of The World* with a deconstructive reading of the Godhead as the figure which brings about the traumatic writing of the text, a site that represents the necessary relationship between writing and repression. For now, this chapter's focus on Schelling's relationship to Boehme, as a representative of the diversity and heretical nature of Gnostic writing and not as a visionary mystic of monotheism, serves as a lens to read Schelling's text as a writing of madness as well as a writing of knowledge. As the introduction to each version of the *Ages* opens with a conception of temporality as representable and knowable, wherein the "past is known, the present is discerned, the future is intimated" (Schelling *Ages* xxxv), this knowledge signals to us, as readers, that the project of the *Ages* can be read as a *mythopoeic* writing of God's self-revelation towards the achievement of absolute knowledge. I argue that the *Ages*, in its projected narrative of God in the three ages of past, present, and future, takes part in "[one] of the chief characteristics of Gnosticism . . . [that is,] in the construction of elaborate myths through which revealed gnosis is transmitted" (Pearson 14); but because this *mythopoeic* writing can never overcome the writing of the book of the past, the *Ages* puts the activity of mythologization under erasure.

If we turn to the writings of Jacob Boehme, it becomes evident that Schelling

metaleptically transposes Boehme's Gnostic writing and theosophical figures into the realm of idealist philosophy. The writings of Boehme, despite their theological devotion, represent a "hinge," a term borrowed from Derrida in *Resistances of Psychoanalysis*[10], through which Schelling can work through the problems of German Idealism and Romanticism, taking up Gnosticism as a way to think more dangerously and write more experimentally. In this sense, Boehme's gnostic writings represent a site of intellectual ferment, or a heresy in the true sense of the word as the "choice" to oppose authority, a heresy that challenges orthodox Christian writings as representative of the order of established reason. By reading Boehme along with the writings of Georges Bataille, I also argue that Gnostic writing or the writing of knowledge tries to impose a "silence," in the words of Derrida, upon the writing of madness; Gnostic writing writes itself in order to evade the problems of darkness and evil. The writing of knowledge, to quote from Derrida, as a "discourse of command . . . insists upon being sheltered, and . . . also insists upon providing itself with protective barriers against madness" (Derrida "Cogito" 38). However, in order to write the history of knowledge, Gnosticism, as will be shown, must also write its discordant counterpoint. While the *Freedom* essay represents a first instance of Schelling's writing of Gnosticism insofar as it also puts up barriers to write a more linear and composed progression towards knowledge, the *Ages* disfigures this writing as it deconstructs the narrative's progress towards gnosis through its simultaneous writing of

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[10] "Why a *charnière*? This word can be taken in the technical or anatomical sense of a central or cardinal articulation, a hinge pin (cardo) or pivot. A *charnière* or hinge is an axial device that enables the circuit, the trope, or the movement, of rotation. ... This double articulation, this double movement or alternation between opening and closing that is assured by the workings of a hinge, this coming and going, indeed this *fort/da* of a pendulum (pendule) or balance (balancier) – that is what Freud means to Foucault. ... There will always be this interminable, alternating movement that successively opens and closes, draws near and distances, rejects and accepts, excludes and includes, disqualifies and legitimates, masters and liberates. ... Freud as the doorman of the today, the holder of the keys, of those that open as well as those that close the door, ... stands guard and ushers in. Alternatively or simultaneously, he closes one epoch and opens another" (Derrida *Resistances* 78-9).

the history of madness. Gnosticism, then, cannot silence its other; rather Boehme's and Schelling's texts open up a way of reading Gnosticism not as a blind and naïve activity that surrenders to God's omniscience and omnipotence, but as an unresolved and infinite writing of knowledge that fundamentally cannot be written without its heretical Other: the writing of madness.

Yet while Schelling's writing of Gnosticism does adopt figures and narratives from Boehme's texts, his texts are distinct insofar as he pathologizes the history of knowledge by also writing out the history of madness as knowledge's complementary antithesis. Since "nothing great can be accomplished," writes Schelling in the 1815 version of the *Ages*, "without a constant solicitation of madness, which should always be overcome, but should never be utterly lacking" (Schelling *Ages* 103), this writing presents a radical reinterpretation of Gnosticism's deployment of the opposition between reason and madness. The traditional Gnostic opposition is "expressed in terms of a tragic split in the divine world that results in the genesis of the lower beings responsible for the cosmos" (Pearson 13), which arises, in the words of David Brakke, from the "downward movement of the divine" (often called Wisdom) into the realm of fate" in order "to recover [God's] lost divine energy" (Brakke 20). This downward movement of the divine into materiality, this split between a higher and a lower realm of existence, also provides Gnosticism with a rationale for God's entrance into history, turning it into the means by which God and man can resolve this tragic split. The main difference between Boehme and Schelling, then, is that Boehme successfully represses–insofar as it is successful in name only–God's dark ground and the anarchy of evil contained within it in order to fulfill a theological history, making Boehme much more traditionally Gnostic than

Schelling. It is worth noting that Boehme's opposition between reason and madness, good and evil, the will of God and the craving of his dark non-ground represents a crude model of dialectical thought, insofar as it prefigures the way Schelling makes use of contradiction, using it as fundamental principle that supplies the vital animation of his systematic philosophy and thought in general. However, Schelling's writing of madness does not rely upon Boehme's dialectical articulation between reason and madness in the same way. Rather, it shows that madness is not something that can be so easily overcome, as the order of madness not only resists but contains within it the potential to absolutely disrupt the order of knowledge that the *Ages* tries to write.

3. 2 Gnosticism and the Choice of Heretical Writing

Although Boehme's Gnosticism is more traditional, if we read his writing against the grain, his texts all write of a figure of the dark non-ground, which will be taken up by Schelling, first in the *Freedom* essay and then in the *Ages*, as the ungrounded figure of the first nature. Gnosticism, in the potential and dormant expression of its discordant ground, thus appears as a profoundly radical activity, insofar as its writing is always potentially dangerous to its own integrity as well as to orthodox Christian writing as an authoritative or dogmatic system of belief. In other words, Gnosticism takes on the position of the order of madness which opposes the authority of orthodox Christianity's order of knowledge. Indeed, Gnosticism has for a long time been considered a deranged or "parasitic discourse" (O'Regan 18) that "[turns] Christianity on its head," as Brakke writes, not because of its apostasy but because of its radical faith in a privileged insight into the nature of God; "they [the Gnostics]," Brakke continues, "thought they were teaching true Christianity, and they severely criticized other Christians as hopelessly

deceived" (Brakke 2). Gnosticism, as a heretical writing of the divine, provides an internal unworking of orthodox writing as it is at once enthusiastic and critical, in the words of Schelling, since its approach towards the absolute shows how it can deconstruct from within dogmatism's quiet surrender to God. In this way, Gnosticism is the concealed, hidden writing that lies subjacent under the writing of orthodox Christianity, whose belief in salvation is put under erasure by the heretical history that sees the divine not as something complete in itself, but as something in the process of its own becoming, and something that constantly works towards unifying the contradiction brought forth from the creation of his dual existence.

But before we turn to Boehme's writing, Boehme the man provides us with plenty of evidence of Gnosticism as a disruptive and intellectually varied practice that stands in opposition to the singular and unified discourse of orthodox Christianity. Until the middle of the twentieth century, Jacob Boehme (also written as Jakob Böhme or Jakob Behmen) had been read as a visionary mystic whose writings were directly the result of a miracle of illumination that occurred in 1600, which, according to his biographers, supposedly granted Boehme a prophetic insight. The way that Boehme's writings were characterized according to a privileged insight into the nature of God rather than in terms of the range of his reading had a significant effect on the readings of Boehme up until the 20th century; according to Robert F. Brown, whose book *The Later Philosophy of Schelling* investigates the relationship between Boehme and Schelling, "no genuinely critical biography was published until 1924" (Brown 33), and thus his visionary power was either vehemently defended by his biographers or was left unquestioned. More recently, dispelling the myth surrounding Boehme's moment of illumination, Andrew Weeks

writes

> Boehme's illumination, though surely a singularly transforming and inspiring experience, should not be thought of as fundamentally distinct from other processes of inspiration. The notion that his writings were records of ecstatic visions not only contributes almost nothing to their interpretation, it is detrimental to our understanding of the writer in the cultural context of his times. (Weeks 30)

Along with Robert F. Brown, works by Andrew Weeks and Cyril O'Regan have all tried to rehabilitate Boehme by critically reading him as a writer who was a representative of the intellectual environment of pansophism–a pedagogical and educational movement that promoted the achievement of a universal wisdom of man and the world–during the seventeenth-century, rather than as a singular figure whose writings magically appeared out of the vacuum of divine inspiration. However, Boehme's pansophism is different insofar as his pansophistic wisdom is rather an omniscience stemming from an enveloping knowledge of nature and Scripture. O'Regan writes: "Pansophism suggests more than an inclusive aggregate of particulars. . . . For Boehme, the systematic character of reality is guaranteed by a narrative suggested by Scripture, but completed only in a pneumatic or sophiological state that transcends Scripture" (O'Regan 107). Therefore, those readings which emphasize the illuminative aspect of Boehme's biographical life and its influence on his writings have also had repercussions on the way that Boehme may be read as a precursor to figures in German Idealism such as Schelling. This simplified representation of Boehme belies the diversity and interdisciplinarity of his thought, which also conceals the more gnostic and pansophistic tendencies that appear in his writing. In this way, Boehme, like Schelling, in fact read widely in a variety of different fields, combining them, like his contemporaries, in order to achieve a pansophic vision of the world.

Boehme was indeed representative of a much more daring intellectual age, to quote from Andrew Weeks, since "[around] 1600, the search for synthesis was [also] pursued above all by the loose convention of pansophic researchers at the court of Rudolph II in Prague" (Weeks 49). In a certain way, this convention represented an early attempt at interdisciplinary studies, drawing on "men of various disciplines, of differing confessions and nationalities," all in the pursuit "of construing the orders of the world" (Weeks 49). Weeks continues, "[t]hey did so by researching nature and Scripture. Their efforts encompassed religion, science, law, and the arts" (Weeks 49). It appears that previous readings of Boehme, which generally saw him alongside his forerunner Paracelsus, did not consider other attempts at pansophism which were taking place at that time such as those undertaken by Giordano Bruno in Prague, Robert Fludd, Galileo, and the astronomer Johannes Kepler, which indicate that all of these thinkers "were in reality part of a broader current, with more distant sources" than earlier biographers recognized (Weeks 49). Weeks states that there are clear indications that Boehme's writings adapt or make use of a number of different influences besides those of Paracelsus, including references to Platonic Ideas, Hermetic magic, as well as evidence of the "Renaissance syncretism of Ficino and Pico [that] also blended elements of Jewish Kabbalah with Christian currents of speculation" (Weeks 49). The blindness of Boehme's earlier biographers had led readers to believe that he was uneducated in these matters, and attributed to him a more orthodox writing which fails to grasp the diversity of Gnostic writing; but, Robert F. Brown states, "[a]lthough lacking the classical and formal training of a professional philosopher, he [Boehme] nevertheless read widely in the alchemical, mystical, and religious literature of his day" (Brown 33-34). Contrary to previous

readings, Boehme in fact "came to embrace the belief that ancient knowledge was resurfacing," and, therefore, blended ancient with modern conceptions of the universe "in order to reinforce and clarify the Christian articles of faith" (Weeks 50). It is thus that Boehme, according to Andrew Weeks, was led to ask questions that were not traditionally theological, but, in the words of Cyril O'Regan, metaleptically transformed numerous areas of thought and disciplines in order to express his thoughts in opposition to traditional theology on what exactly was the unfathomable "*locus* of the world." For

> [t]he doctrinal either/or was the shibboleth of partisan divisiveness and bitter polarization. But what if the sun were not in an upper heaven, but rather at the very center of the created world? What if the solar or stellar forces were themselves both material and divine? And what if the dualism which knew no middle ground between matter and spirit (between the element or body, and the spirit, sign, meaning, or thought) rested on a false dichotomy, false because external nature and human nature were in either case triadically structured as aspects of the ubiquitous Triune God? (Weeks 50-51)

All of the above questions position Boehme thus as representative of "a privileged site of the return of a Gnostic modality of thought in modernity" (O'Regan 2). Gnosticism, in the way that we are reading it, comes from the Greek adjective *gnostikos*, which applies "to capacities, intellectual activities, or mental operations" wherein a "gnostic activity or capacity was one that led to or supplied *gnosis*, that is knowledge that was not merely practical but theoretical, immediate, and intuitive" (Brakke 30). As an activity that was equally dependent on its writing, Gnosticism was criticized early on by Irenaeus of Lyons in 160 CE as being "extremely diverse and yet somehow all the same" (Brakke 29). Irenaeus's criticism, as a defense coming from an orthodox Christian perspective, ironically shows the lack of diversity and rigidity of orthodox Christianity, and, in a sense, puts its authority under erasure; when held up to the wildly speculative potential of Gnosticism as a writing that continuously questions its own history, the

orthodox narrative of Christianity becomes disfigured by Gnosticism's re-figuration of itself through not one but multiply divergent narratives. It is this metaleptical quality, a term borrowed from Cyril O'Regan, of Gnosticism as a "phenomenon of a complex disfiguration-refiguration of biblical narrative" (O'Regan 17) that makes Boehme's work a hinge that allows one to think and unthink the concept of God, not merely in traditional theology, but also for philosophy. Gnosticism, as a writing, can never become an orthodoxy for it eternally writes itself as the Other of orthodox Christianity; it always threatens traditional theology due to its belief in, to quote Georges Bataille,

> matter as an *active* principle having its own eternal autonomous existence as darkness (which would not be simply the absence of light, but the monstrous *archontes* revealed by this absence), and as evil (which would not be the absence of good, but a creative action). This conception was perfectly incompatible with the very principle of the profoundly Hellenistic spirit, whose dominant tendency saw matter and evil as degradations of superior principles. Attributing the creation of the earth, where our repugnant and derisory agitation takes place, to a horrible and *perfectly illegitimate* principle evidently implies, from the point of view of the Greek intellectual construction, a nauseating, inadmissible pessimism, the exact opposite of what had to be established at all costs and made universally manifest. In fact the opposed existence of an excellent divinity, worthy of the absolute confidence of the human spirit, matters little if the baneful and odious divinity of this dualism is under no circumstances reducible to it, without any possibility of hope. (Bataille "Base Materialism and Gnosticism" 47)

Yet, insofar as Boehme shares traditional theology's anxiety over the unruliness of the figures of darkness and evil that are introduced into his system, he remains committed to a theological writing that does not fully disfigure the God which he writes. However, it is by means of Boehme's instrumentalization of the figures of darkness and evil in the service of the unquestionable authority of the good and God that his writing opens up for us a reading that shows that they are in fact capable of questioning that authority, "since," to quote Bataille, "it does not appear that [the non-ground] has deeply desired the

submission of things that belong to a higher authority, to an authority the *archontes* [of discordant existence] stun with an eternal bestiality" (Bataille 48-49).

3. 3 Discordance and the Disfigured God

Therefore, let us turn to the way that Boehme writes out his metaleptical refiguration of God in the *Mysterium Pansophicum Or Thorough Report on the Earthly and Heavenly Mysterium* (1620). Like Schelling after him, Boehme writes of two beings–God and nature–that take residence "in one united, eternal, and unfathomable original condition" (Boehme *Mysterium* 88). Nature, before it enters into relation with God, is the "non-ground" which "is an eternal nothing but forms an eternal beginning as a craving" (Boehme *Mysterium* 85). Nature, as a craving and a nothing, cannot produce anything from out of itself. Therefore, Boehme opposes to nature the will, since the nothingness of nature "makes the will into something for itself" (Boehme *Mysterium* 85), and in return, the "will rules over the craving" (Boehme *Mysterium* 86). As it is for Schelling, the ground of craving, in spite of its possession of a "life" as well as its ability to incite "an arousal of attraction or desire" (Boehme *Mysterium* 86), is written as something insubstantial and dying; without the spirit of the will, without God, the non-ground is merely a nothing that "has also has no place where it could find rest" (Boehme *Mysterium* 85). This negative characterization of the non-ground is what opens up the space for Boehme to inscribe knowledge into the essence of God, writing "the spirit of the will is an eternal knowledge of the non-ground, and the life of the craving an eternal being of the will" (Boehme *Mysterium* 87). Nature's subservient life, then, pathetically exists in order to inspire the desire of the spirit to take on its identity. This erotic relationship between nature and spirit is what initiates the search for God's

understanding, setting in motion, in a figure that Schelling will later adopt from Boehme, the dialectical movement metaphorically described as "a round sphere-wheel that moves on all sides as the wheel in Ezekiel indicates" (Boehme *Mysterium* 89).

Yet it is not until spirit and nature enter into their separate lives, the life of nature "toward the fire" and that of spirit "toward the light of *gloria* and magnificence" (Boehme *Mysterium* 89), that Boehme's writing starts to set up barriers to protect spirit from nature, which, at the same time, forecloses the cruelty of–in an almost Artaudian sense–Gnostic writing in its exploitation of the ground's life. For instance, Boehme writes that the craving nature "finds that it [itself] is not part of its [own] life," and, as a result, turns in upon itself in revulsion towards its alienated and divided self. In this sense, nature is that which must undergo a life of self-revulsion so that the life of the spirit can evade the *turba* (disruption or discordance) of the life of nature and those beings and creatures within it. Yet, if the *turba* is also the fertile "*imagination* of the eternal nature," it is also what allows nature to give birth to the "creation of the world," making it a productive process despite its violent mode of being. Boehme's writing protects spirit and knowledge from the cruelty of existence, since "violence was not called for," writes Boehme, "or ordered by the highest good" (Boehme *Mysterium* 91). However, spirit cannot completely wash its hands of being's bloody "*monarchia*" or "empire." God must stand witness to the discordance of nature's life because he was "the first revealer," and, although he "did not command malice into the regime" (Boehme *Mysterium* 92), he is still as such to blame for setting this violent wheel in motion. God is not exempt from this horror for he is also in the ground, as Boehme writes,

> the essence of the Deity is everywhere in the deep of the unground, like as a wheel or an eye, where the beginning has always the end…. For it is an eye in

> itself, as Ezekiel the prophet saw this in a figure at the introduction of the spirit of his will into God, when his spiritual figure was introduced into the wisdom of God by the Spirit of God, where he attained vision. (*Sex Puncta Theosophica* qd. in O'Regan 106)

Boehme's writing of the "evil, poisonous, and furious *mysterium*" of nature represents nature as hermetically sealed off from spirit, concealing God's ruthless exploitation of the *turba* so that God may see himself as distinct from the fiery image of nature. Boehme's writing refuses to allow the darkness to simply be dark and subordinates desire to understanding, darkness to light, evil to good, because evil is said to loathe its existence,"desir[ing] a purity" (Boehme *Mysterium* 91) outside the life of the *turba*.

God's subordination of nature takes on new and more deranged dimensions as Boehme writes that the non-ground of God is actually the mother of will–something Schelling will also adopt in the *Freedom* essay and the *Ages*–"for the will finds its mother as its craving"; and yet Boehme also writes that "the will is the master in the mother, and the mother is recognized as silent and the will as a life without origin" (Boehme *Mysterium* 86). How is it that the will can be a master of its mother if the mother is what gives birth to the will? Regardless of the impossibility of this genealogical reversal, the will abuses the privilege of its purity by eternally subordinating nature, its mother, so as to bring about the fulfillment of its essence, demonstrating the violence that arises from the will's arbitrary rule. God is an omnipresence whose sight is not limited to before or after its birth, whose power to be pregnant with itself and the vision of itself illustrates the anxiety Boehme's writing experiences as a result of the darkness it writes into its whole. In the same way that God divests the non-ground of its creative capacity by subordinating it to himself, Boehme's Gnostic writing, in its repression of the dark

origins of imagination and creation, also fears the diversity and multiplicity it introduces through its own creative and heretical figure of the non-ground, fearing itself for the same reasons as its orthodox critics. Boehme's writing reveals that it is itself split, inscribing into each text orthodox writing's repression of Gnosticism in the figure of God, while simultaneously giving voice to Gnosticism's rejection of its subordinate position to orthodoxy in the figure of the non-ground. This allows us to read Boehme, then, not as a visionary mystic but as an influential hinge figure whose work is pregnant with an intellectual ferment, containing within itself a writing that is in conflict with its own direction, revealing and writing two allegiances: one to the madness of nature and the other to the reason of God. This writing that is not self-same and constantly represses the wellspring of its own creative process will erupt in Schelling's *Ages of the World*, breaking open the barriers which protected God from the discordance of his nature in Boehme, and disclosing the deconstructive potential that had always been inherent within Gnosticism itself.

When we turn to Schelling's *The Ages of the World*, Boehme's influence on Schelling becomes much more evident insofar as Schelling begins his narration of the past by figuring the first nature, like Boehme's non-ground, as "an unremitting wheel, a rotatory movement that never comes to a stand-still and in which there is no differentiation," wherein "the concept of the beginning, as well as the concept of the end, again sublimates itself in this circulation" (Schelling *Ages* 20). The first nature circulates in this infinite movement during a primordial time before time as we know it, for nature, Schelling writes, "is an abyss of the past" (Schelling *Ages* 31). Comprised of three equipollent figures that each have the right to be for themselves, the first nature remains

caught in what Schelling calls an unremitting "self-laceration," because none of these figures are able to rise above the other "since each also has fully the same claim to be the being, to be that which has being" (Schelling *Ages* 11). This equipollence condemns these figures to suffer their interdependence as a negating, affirming, and unifying potency within the dialectical movement of the first nature. Boehme's influence on Schelling becomes even more obvious, then, through Schelling's first nature in the way that he represents it as

> [t]he antithesis [that] eternally produces itself, in order always again to be consumed by the unity . . . [so that] the antithesis is eternally consumed by the unity in order always to revive itself anew. This is the sanctuary… the hearth of life that continually incinerates itself and again rejuvenates itself from the ash. This is the tireless fire through whose quenching, as Heraclitus claimed, the cosmos was created . . . . This is the object of the ancient Magi teachings and of that doctrine of fire as a consequence of which the Jewish lawgiver left behind to his people: "The Lord your God is a devouring fire," that is, not in God's inner and authentic being [*Wesen*], but certainly in accordance with God's nature. (Schelling *Ages* 20-21)

As the above makes clear, the unremitting wheel of the first nature is described in the same terms as Boehme's non-ground, as Schelling thinks it in terms of a "wheel," "fire," "nature," and especially as a "magic," a metaphor Boehme repeatedly resorts to in his writings. Schelling's writing would therefore seem almost indistinct from Boehme's, as he represents the first nature in this way in order to subordinate it to God so that it can act as the medium by which God can enter into Being. "God," writes Schelling once again echoing Boehme, "cannot anywhere in itself be that which has being or becomes (in an eternal way)," for it "can do so only relationally with respect to an Other" (Schelling *Ages* 40). Schelling, therefore, repeats Boehme's writing of the real as that which must sacrifice itself in service of the ideal's demands.

And yet, Schelling distinguishes himself from Boehme in the way that he writes the first nature in its original condition, that is, before it enters into relation with God. Whereas Boehme wrote that nature was creative only after its encounter with the spirit and was nothing before this relation, Schelling essentializes contradiction into the being of the first nature in an eternal way, for "[w]ere the first nature in harmony with itself," writes Schelling, "it would remain so. It would be constantly One and would never become Two" (Schelling *Ages* 12). Since the being of nature is somehow inseparable from contradiction, God must be that which does not have being but also as what must have being; God, then, in order to become a God that "acts" (Schelling *Ages* 26) and yet remain separate from being, must make nature his "eternal past" so that it "must also be dealt with as the first and actual precedent of God" (Schelling *Ages* 39). Nature, then, takes on an unprethinkable but necessary position that precedes the "actual, living God," and consequently interrupts Schelling's writing of the Triune Godhdead as eternally consisting of the figures of necessity, freedom, and finally as the unity of both insofar as it is beyond necessity and freedom as the "eternal freedom, pure conation itself" (Schelling *Ages* 27). How is it, then, that Schelling's writing of the Godhead, another Boehmian term, must eternally contain the principles of nature and the conscious God within itself, if nature is the eternal past of God which he must pass through in order to be fully conscious of himself?

In order for Schelling to resolve this paradox that positions nature's existence before God's, he continues to make use of Boehme's narrative, which writes the first nature as a being that wishes to subordinate itself to the authority and eternal freedom of God, since "in that eternally commencing life [of the first nature] there lies the wish to

escape from the involuntary movement and from the distress of pining" (Schelling *Ages* 27). However, Schelling cannot write out the first nature's surrender to eternal freedom with the same religious abandon as Boehme. Instead, he writes about "that moment in which the earthly and the heavenly first divided," not in terms of a theological or tragic split, but in terms of a crisis that, in the words of Tilottama Rajan, "may not be resolved so much as opened up" (Rajan "Abyss" 20). Because, notes Rajan, the highest potency of the first nature pushes the lowest down in order to enter into relation with the higher principle of God, we can then read the opening of the crisis as something that is actually brought on by the way Schelling writes the crisis. Rajan continues,

> For in describing the *transference* of the lower into the higher that constitutes guidance, he admits to a "potency [and] potentiality" of the lower that has been "excessively weakened and oppressed by the higher principle." If the higher is oppressive, then the higher must itself be part, even a cause, of the crisis. Put differently, since each principle has an equal right to be that which has being, any principle that constitutes itself as higher so as to limit what Schelling in 1809 had called freedom risks being oppressive. But this is, if not to negate, at least to put any form of guidance under erasure. (Rajan "Abyss" 20)

Indeed, any guidance that Schelling writes into the *Ages* is unable successfully to direct its narrative, since the *Ages* as a project which aimed at encapsulating the three ages of the world–past, present, and future–was never able to write itself out of the past, returning "twelve times" (Rajan Abyss 20) to the writing of the first book. So, "[a]s Schelling is swept back to the beginnings," to quote David Farrell Krell, "to the distant elevated past, suffering and fatality become ever more central to his own narrative. It is as though the way up were the way down," (Krell *Tragic Absolute* 130) though the way down, as we have already seen, means returning to the unprethinkability of the eternally past, that is, to a beginning that can only be approached from within the order of madness. The way that Schelling's repetition of the beginning mirrors the madness of the

unremitting wheel of the first nature discloses to us that this crisis at the origin had been inherent yet concealed in Boehme's mythopoeic narrative all along. Schelling's transposition of the Gnostic narrative of God's self-revelation into a philosophical writing merely brings to light this crisis insofar as the *Ages* illustrates that the return to the beginning of existence reveals an original trauma that cannot be resolved, since it resulted from the eternal splitting of knowledge from the madness that is its creative centre.

3. 4 Sacrifice, Creation, and the Lacerated Nature

This crisis which, Schelling writes, initiates the split between nature and the divine thus also opens up a way of reading Schelling alongside Boehme and Bataille, insofar as we can read nature as a site of creation as well as a site of madness, and therefore, in the words of Bataille, "no longer as a moment of a homogeneous process–of a necessary and pitiful process–but as a new laceration within a lacerated nature" (Bataille "The Pineal Eye" 80). What Boehme and Schelling demonstrate in their writing of the opposition of nature to the divine is what Bataille will later note about the violence that is inherent to the dialectical relationship between the real and the ideal. Once the real enters into relation with the ideal, argues Bataille, it is immediately subordinate to it and tears, mutilates, and sacrifices itself in order to fulfill the ideal's commands. Madness, mutilation, sacrifice, and creation are therefore all intertwined, as the sacrifice or mutilation of the body assures the survival of the sacrificer and represents a renewal of the creative act of the real. Madness does not write its own history; if it could, it would not need the ideal to articulate this self-laceration. This is made clear in how Bataille demonstrates that madness can only be written through the language of knowledge, science, or medicine. For his account of madness, as his essay "Sacrificial Mutilation"

makes clear, comes in the form of a psychological testimony from the clinical journals of the *Annales medico-psychologiques*.

> On the morning of December 11, he [Gaston F] was walking on the Boulevard de Ménilmontant, and having arrived at the Père-Lachaise cemetery, *he stared at the sun*, *and, receiving from its rays the imperative order to tear off his finger*, without hesitation, without feeling any pain, he seized between his teeth his left index finger, successively broke through the skin, the flexor and extensor tendons, and the articular ligaments at the level of the phalangeal articulation; using his right hand, he then twisted the extremity of the dilacerated left index finger, severing it completely. (Bataille "Sacrificial Mutilation" 61)

The reason for Gaston F.'s mutilation becomes clearer once Batailles relates that he was inspired by Van Gogh's own mutilation of his ear, possibly getting the idea to mutilate himself after having read a biography on Van Gogh. But Gaston F's act cannot merely be explained by reading this biography, as Bataille's reading of this act of auto-mutilation points toward the significance of the sun for both Van Gogh and Gaston F as the abstract ideal that commands the madness of self-mutilation. The relation between the sun as the ideal and the act of self-mutilation as the gory and bestial real is significant, for it was only after the episode when Van Gogh sent his ear to a girl in a prostitution house in December 1888, as Bataille aptly points out, that the main theme of Van Gogh's paintings became the sun and the sunflower. "This double bond uniting the sun-star," writes Bataille, "the sun-flower, and Van Gogh can… be reduced to a normal psychological theme in which the star is opposed to the withered flower, as are the ideal term and the real term of the ego" (Bataille "Sacrificial Mutilation" 63). Sacrifice, as Bataille notes, is always a creative act, insofar as it represents the real's "desire to resemble perfectly an ideal term" (Bataille "Sacrificial Mutilation" 66) and is, therefore not merely an uninterpretable and meaningless act; instead, sacrifice is the act by which the general economy between the real and the ideal is recommenced, indeed making

madness that figure, in Schelling's terms, of "the hearth of the life that continually incinerates itself and again rejuvenates itself from the ash" (Schelling *Ages* 20). Without the real, the ideal will remain unwritten, and, as Derrida notes, "through a single act, [a decision] links and separates reason and madness . . . as the original act of an order, a fiat, a decree, and as a schism, a casesura, a separation, a dissection" (Derrida "Cogito" 38).

As we return from Bataille back towards Boehme and Schelling, self-mutilation must be added to the list of qualities of creation and madness that characterize the writing of nature. While Boehme writes a hermetical seal around nature and protects spirit from the pain of existence, Schelling writes a God that "leads human nature down no other path than that down which God Himself must pass. Participating in everything blind, dark, and suffering of God's nature is necessary in order to elevate God to the highest consciousness" (Schelling *Ages* 101). To be, for man and God alike, is thus to suffer in conflict and contradiction. Yet, it is not the external conflict between God and nature that gives consciousness its character, because, in a proto-typically psychoanalytic turn, Schelling writes, only nature as "the blind force is capable of inspiration. All conscious creation presupposes an unconscious creating. Conscious creating is just the unfolding and setting into opposition of unconscious creating" (Schelling *Ages* 102). If conscious creating must have recourse to a constant solicitation of madness as the reserve of consciousness's creative acts, Schelling's writing of madness shows that it has its own reserve in the form of a base materialism that threatens the economy of exchange between the ideal and the real. In one of his most metaphorical passages, Schelling writes of this inborn potential of an ancient discord lying at the bottom of nature:

> The ancients did not speak in vain of a divine and holy madness. We even see nature, in the process of its free unfolding, becoming, in proportion to its

> approach to spirit, ever more, so to speak, frenzied…. Panthers or tigers do not pull the carriage of Dionysus in vain. For this wild frenzy of inspiration in which nature found itself when it was in view of the being was celebrated in the nature worship of prescient ancient peoples by the drunken festivals of Bacchic orgies. Furthermore, that inner self-laceration of nature, that wheel of initial birth spinning about itself as if mad, and the terrible forces of the annular drive operating within this wheel, are depicted in other frightful splendors of the primeval customs of polytheistic worship by acts of self-flaying rage. One such act was auto-castration (which was done in order to express either the unbearable quality of the *oppressive force* or its *cessation* as a procreative potency). (Schelling *Ages* 102-103)

This passage echoes another passage from Schelling's *Freedom* essay, wherein Schelling compares the loss of balance and control to the generation of things in nature as "a bleak and wild enthusiasm that breaks out into self-mutilation or, like the priests of the Phrygian goddess, self-castration which is achieved in philosophy through the renunciation of reason and science" (Schelling *Freedom* 26). However, Schelling's tone in the *Ages* changes dramatically from the *Freedom* essay, as Schelling writes the relationship between madness, mutilation, and the ceremonies of inspiration as necessary to the life of the Gods: "panthers or tigers do not pull the carriage of Dionysus in vain." Schelling connects the third act, which returns to the *Freedom* essay's anxiety over its inability to control its own narrative, of auto-castration, which can be read in one of two ways: as a performance expressing the unbearable quality of nature's "*oppression*," or a cessation of this higher oppression's procreative potential in favor of a dark, bestial, and base cessation of procreation. In the restricted economy between the real and the ideal, the orgiastic festivals carry on as rituals that guarantee the return of the Gods, characterizing the eternal beginning of this economy as representative of Schelling's infinite writing of the creation of nature in the *First Outline*. On the other hand, auto-castration may also bring about the cessation of this eternally recommencing relation of

the real to the ideal in the removal of nature's procreative organs. Who is to say, then, that nature's madness is held in reserve for the creation of God's consciousness, if, as Schelling writes, these festivals may also end with "the carrying about of the dismembered parts of a lacerated God" (Schelling *Ages* 103)?

Taken this way, Schelling's revelation–which remains simultaneously the revelation that he inherited from Boehme, Christianity, and Gnosticism–brings about its own metaleptical disfiguration-refiguration of the heretical nature of Gnostic narrative. Schelling's disfiguration, in its tone and through the wide-ranging allusions to philosophy, mysticism, theology, biblical exegesis, and science is perhaps so violent that the redemptive and loving character ascribed to God becomes forever disfigured by the base materialism of madness, which could at any moment dissolve the dialectical relation between the real and the ideal, sending everything back into nothingness. It is in the subtleties of Schelling's text and not in any explicit articulation that we are able to see that Schelling's text contains within itself the awareness of the absolute contingency of its existence. Although Boehme and Schelling ask how something can come from nothing, it cannot avoid the horrifying realization that arises from asking this question from the progression of its narrative, that is, the realization that there is always the possibility that there could have been nothing.

Boehme never seems to realize that existence is not guaranteed, whereas Schelling in some passages seems to insist that the other possibility would be in fact psychologically indigestible, declaring "uncontainment is everywhere also imperfection" and only "[c]ontainment is the real consummation of every work" (Schelling *Ages* 93). Schelling's *Ages*, though, *is* uncontainable as it suffers from its auto-immunity, for every

form of guidance that he constructs to try to contain the impossible excessiveness of this narrative of God's self-revelation is merely a barrier to conceal the fear and dread that is inherent to the abyssal nature of Schelling's writing. As madness is at once the hearth of life and the unremitting wheel that miserably rotates and produces itself, it does so not merely because it is subordinate to the life of the ideal; in the way that Schelling writes this "life of loathing and anxiety" (Schelling *Ages* 46), we see that its anxiety comes not only from above, but also from below, from the abyss that threatens to engulf the first nature's activity at any second. The madness of the incessant movement of the first nature shows an awareness of the absolute contingency of its existence; because it is terrified of being thrown back at any moment into non-existence, it eternally sacrifices itself, pulling the carriage of God towards a point that is infinitely and eternally out of reach. In this sense, if Schelling inherits a writing that is influenced by or comes from Boehme's Gnosticism, it also shows that Schelling's Gnosticism is truly the heretical other of orthodox Christianity, since its writing eternally narrates the history of its knowledge as well as the history of its madness.

Writing, Repression, and the Impossibility of Forgetting

4. 1 Introduction

Up until now, this thesis has read Schelling's texts 'otherwise,' in the words of Nancy, by finding points in the *First Outline*, the *Freedom* essay, and *The Ages of the World* that open up these texts to their own deconstruction. Each text we have read is never complete, and, as such, none of them amount to a dead thing, but rather are somewhere in between fixed and evolving. Each text legitimates itself in the process of its own work, in the sense that each is in the process of writing its own mythology, as "*[m]ythology*," as Nancy quotes Schelling's later *Philosophy of Revelation*, "is therefore figuration proper" (Nancy *The Inoperative Community* 54). The writing of Schelling's texts has revealed to us that each text has failed to conceive of one systematic philosophy, not because of an inadequacy on the part of Schelling, but precisely because the essence of writing itself is doomed to fail the demands of idealism. Schelling's failure is not truly a failure nor is it truly a success; "failure does not put an end to writing" (Blanchot "From Dread"14). Schelling's writing is above all an honest writing in the sense developed by Blanchot, for he has not imposed upon it a law that it should follow and has always allowed his writing to be when he could very well have stopped writing and therefore ceased to be a writer.

But in the context of the works that we have read, *The Ages of The World* makes available to us as readers a writing that is unlike the other works we have seen. While its system is similar to the one Schelling writes in the *Freedom* essay, insofar as it shares much of the same terminology, and focuses on the writing of the self-revelation of God,

the narrative structure that allows the *Freedom* essay to be read in a linear and straightforward manner has been disfigured and unravelled in the *Ages*. The project of *The Ages of the World* is also different because it went unpublished during Schelling's lifetime. It remained hidden from the public; it was a draft in the truest sense of the word as that which was never meant for the public eye. Schelling, whose writing had always been so daring and speculative, and who was criticized by Hegel precisely for "work[ing] out his philosophy in view of the public" (Hegel 513), had suddenly become incapable of presenting any of the extant versions he had written. While the third chapter showed one way of reading the *Ages* otherwise by reading it as Schelling's writing of heresy rather than his quiet abandonment to theology, this final chapter seeks to show the *Ages* as a text that most properly gives itself over to the cruelty of a reading that reveals the nothingness behind writing, the dread of the writer, and the abyss of language. Focusing once again on the 1815 version of *The Ages of the World*, I argue that the *Ages* can be read as a reflection on writing itself as it puts into question the very act of writing, insofar as the *Ages* asks what makes writing possible in the first place. The figure of the Godhead reflects the nothingness of the writer and shows a radical questioning of the idea of writing, since the Godhead, the writer, and writing as arche-writing, it will be argued, can be read as the transcendental signifiers of the text. In this sense, Schelling's figure of the Godhead, like Derrida's conception of différance, opens up a deconstructive reading of the text. Rather than grounding the text, the Godhead exposes the text to the crisis of its writing that results from the radical contingency of its abyssal origin.

4. 2 From Philosophy to Literature

The *Ages*, in this sense, becomes no longer merely a philosophical work, for it has discovered the very essence of its being literature! It is literature in the deconstructive sense, as expressed by Blanchot in "Literature And the Right to Death:" "literature begins at the moment when literature becomes a question" (Blanchot "Literature" 21). Further, the *Ages* can be read as literature, to quote from Michel Foucault, since

> there is nothing for it do but to curve back in a perpetual return upon itself, as if its discourse could have no other content than the expression of its own form; it addresses itself to itself as a writing subjectivity, or seeks to re-apprehend the essence of all literature in the movement that brought it into being; and thus all its threads converge upon the finest of points – singular, instantaneous, and yet absolutely universal – upon the simple act of writing. (Foucault 300)

However, this discovery, I will argue, also necessitated of Schelling the act of a repression in his subsequent work. The *Ages* did not merely represent the failure to write the manifestation of God, for, within the context of Schelling's body of work, it also represented the abyssal element of nothingness that traumatizes the act of writing itself, representing the necessity that makes writing possible and the necessity of the impossiblity of writing.

Because writing, here, is in a sense always a writing about itself in a perpetual return upon itself, we can read Schelling's Godhead as the figure, to quote Jacques Derrida, of "arche-writing" insofar as arche-writing opens up the possibility for the activity of writing. In the same way that the Godhead brings about the conscious God and the first nature in an unprethinkable and impossible decision, so too does it function as arche-writing functions, as the idea that allows for a writing of difference to be. Arche-writing, according to Derrida, is that which eludes the "vulgar concept of writing"; it is a "movement of difference, irreducible arche-synthesis, opening in one and the same

possibility, temporalization as well as relationship with the other and language" that is at once "the condition of all linguistic systems," and yet it cannot "form a part of the linguistic system itself and be situated as an object in its field" (Derrida *Of Grammatology* 60). Whereas many readings of the *Ages* point to the ungrounding and deconstructive quality of the first nature, the first nature is, in a sense, the *Ungrund* of the text insofar as it functions as an ungrounding principle within the economy of the text. Despite the first nature being the site of creation, it thus requires the Godhead as the original beginning that cannot be economized, as something beyond and above it, as what is absolute and pre-figures both the first nature and the actual God. Consequently, the first nature, though it ungrounds itself as it ungrounds God's authority over it, remains mutually dependent on the figure of God and "is [therefore] more written than said, it is *economized*" (Derrida "Cogito" 62).

In contrast to the unconditioned Nature Schelling writes of in the *First Outline* as Being itself, the Godhead is constructed as the synthetic point that precedes and "is exclusively above all Being" (Schelling *Ages* 23), since "it cannot be that which has being [*seyend seyn*] with regard to itself" (Schelling *Ages* 6). The Godhead, a term borrowed once again from Jacob Boehme, is a nothingness, what Derrida calls the originary trace that is dislocated from "the appearance and functioning of [the] difference" that actually arises in the opposition of God with nature, and therefore is "an originary synthesis not preceded by any absolute simplicity" (Derrida *Of Grammatology* 62). The Godhead, the first nature, and God as figures of the eternal "past beginning in dark night" (Schelling *Ages* 3), allow Schelling to write speculatively of these not as they actually appear in time, but as they relate to each other in an eternal way abstracted from

historical time in the book of the eternal past. While they remain suspended in the eternity that precedes time, Schelling discursively conflates the Godhead with the duality that will arise after the crisis that brings about existence, so that God is at once the Godhead, the Godhead is at once God, and what "is necessary in God [is called] the nature of God" (Schelling *Ages* 5). He does this using a logical explanation, positing

> [o]nly an identity of the being, of the link (of the copula). The true meaning of every judgment, for instance, A is B, can only be this: *that which* is A is *that which* is B, or *that which* is A and *that which* is B are one and the same. . . . the "x that is A" and "the x that is B" is one and the same, that is the, the same x. There are actually three propositions contained in the above cited proposition. The first, "A=x," the second, "B=x," and, following from this, the third, "A and B are one and the same," that is, "both are x." (Schelling *Ages* 8)

And yet, during this primordial time, the Triune Godhead is more precisely nothing since it has not distinguished anything in itself. In the same way Blanchot says that "before his work exists," the writer "not only does . . . not know who he is, but he is nothing. He only exists as a function of the work . . . . it has value, truth and reality only through the words which unfold it in time and inscribe it in space" (Blanchot "Literature" 24). The Godhead, as the original beginning (*Urgrund*) of the *Ages*, is therefore never fully something that exists, but can only be articulated in between the two figures of God and the first nature, as an abyss that gives birth, that acts, envelopes, and imperceptibly embodies and yet withdraws from difference. The only apparent distinction that can be said of the Godhead in this primordial time is that it is "the Supreme Being" which "for itself is groundless and borne by nothing," and is furthermore "in itself the antithesis of personality" (Schelling *Ages* 6). Schelling does not define what the Godhead's place or movement within the text is, because the Godhead functions as a juncture of strategic

ambiguity that opens up the articulation or the construction of the Triune nature of necessity, freedom, and the unity contained within the Godhead's eternal freedom.

If, as Schelling writes, "[everyone] agrees that the Godhead is the Supreme Being, the purest Love, infinite communicativity and emanation" (Schelling *Ages* 5), yet if it is also at the same time an indifference, or the unconditioned, a problem arises in attributing to the Godhead these seemingly contradictory affects. In truth, from where does this concept of Godhead as pure love, communicativity and emanation originate? Interestingly, there is evidence to support that Schelling may have in fact stumbled upon the concept of the Godhead at the end of the *Freedom* essay, and it is there that we see the beginning of this problem of attributing conditions to the unconditioned. Having reached the end of the investigation in the *Freedom* essay, Schelling writes of a "being *before* all ground and before all that exists, thus generally before any duality," what he calls "the original ground or the *non-ground* [*Ungrund*]" (Schelling *Freedom* 68). This original ground–or non-ground, maintaining the concept's essential ambiguity even in the *Freedom* essay–is described as "the absolute *indifference* [*Indifferenz*]" of duality, and is described not in terms of being a product of opposites but rather "is its own being separate from all opposition, a being against which all opposites ruin themselves, that is nothing else than their very not-Being [*Nichtsein*]" (Schelling *Freedom* 68-69). The origin of the original ground remains mysterious to readers, since its description comes rather late in the exposition of the *Freedom* essay's argument; however, what becomes evident to readers of the 1815 version of the *Ages* is the similarity between the non-ground and the Godhead as the unity as well as the figure which "instead of abolishing the distinction [of duality] . . . rather posits and confirms it" (Schelling *Freedom* 69).

And yet Schelling in the *Ages* makes the Godhead the origin as well as the highest figure of God's self-revelation, whereas the non-ground's appearance in the *Freedom* essay is motivated more by Schelling's desire to close off the narrative than anything else. Turning to it only at the end of the text as a rhetorical *coup de grâce* that eliminates the anarchy of the eternal ground (Schelling *Freedom* 70), Schelling transforms the non-ground from its original articulation into the highest expression of love in order to discursively legitimate the text's theodicean rhetoric. Schelling writes,

> this is the secret of love, that it links such things of which each could exist for itself, yet does not and cannot exist without the other. For this reason as duality comes to be in the non-ground, love comes to be as well, linking that which exists (that which is ideal) with the ground for existence. . . . Then everything is subordinate to spirit. . . . [But above] spirit, however, is the initial non-ground that is no longer indifference (neutrality) and yet not the identity of both principles, but rather a general unity that is the same for all and yet gripped by nothing that is free from all and yet a beneficence acting in all, in a word, love, which is all in all. (Schelling *Freedom* 70)

In this sense, the non-ground prefigures the Godhead and takes on the function of Derrida's pure trace, since "[i]t is not the question of a constituted difference . . . but rather, [is] before all determination of the content, of the *pure* movement which produces difference. *The (pure) trace is différance*" (Derrida *Of Grammatology* 62). However, in the *Freedom* essay, Schelling instrumentalizes the non-ground by turning it into the culminating point of history; to quote from Blanchot, it therefore "freezes in the form of an artifice whose exterior complexity is constantly being reduced by the intention that has brought it into being" (Blanchot "From Dread" 12). This false unity is therefore a repression of its antithesis in bad faith, since the non-ground, as a being that is above God and eternally prior to it, is meant to ground the personality of God and bring about the duality of his existence. The artificiality of its expression becomes more evident, since it

comes at the end of the text rather than at the beginning, insofar as the introduction of the non-ground in fact disfigures the narrative of freedom and personality that came before it, and therefore negates what it was meant to organize. As Schelling states,

> the whole is distorted, and it also follows then that this system abolishes the personality of the highest being. We have been hitherto silent about this frequently heard accusation as about many others, but believe that we have established the first clear concept of personality in this treatise. In the non-ground or indifference there is admittedly no personality. But is the beginning point really the whole? (Schelling *Freedom* 73)

Schelling's question to the reader as to whether the beginning is really commensurate with the whole is a question which he cannot answer himself. If the non-ground disrupts the end by opening up new problems for Schelling while it tries to close off others, it is for this reason that Schelling transposes the non-ground into the figure of the Godhead at the beginning of the *Ages* in order to ensure that the beginning point really does amount to the whole which it produces.

In between the writing of the *Freedom* essay and the 1815 version of the *Ages*, Schelling loses faith in the redemptive potential of the non-ground. Instead, he effects a necessary "distancing" or repression of the beginning, excluding this beginning from the one in which God is eternally caught. This exclusion prefigures the articulation of primary repression in psychoanalysis, not in the sense developed by Freud, but more appropriately that developed by Lacan. For Lacan, primary repression is not a psychical act, but "a structural feature of language itself – namely, its necessary incompleteness, the impossibility of ever saying 'the truth about the truth' (Ec, 868)" (Evans 165). For "God," writes Schelling, "has no beginning insofar as it has no beginning of its beginning. The beginning in it is an eternal beginning, that is, a beginning that was, as such, from all eternity and still always is one that never ceases to be a beginning"

(Schelling *Ages* 17). Consequently, if God's beginning is always alienated from its beginning, actual beginning, the inscription of God as the pronouncement of the word, is merely one that is *in media res*, it is "[t]he beginning that a being has outside of itself," writes Schelling, that is opposed to "the beginning that a being has within itself. . . . A beginning from which it can be alienated and from which it can distance itself is different than a beginning in which it eternally remains" (Schelling *Ages* 17). It is here that we begin to see a difference between the Godhead and the difference which precipitates from the emergence of the actual God and the first nature. God is eternally beginning, which echoes the *Freedom* essay's formulation of the non-ground's division "into two equally eternal beginnings" (Schelling *Freedom* 70); but in 1815 Schelling articulates two beginnings, one that is appropriate to God, and one that a being has outside of itself and which it must exclude from itself in order to be. If we were to conceive this alienated beginning to be the beginning of the Godhead, how is it that we would be able to represent this transcendental origin of the actual God as a beginning that is itself, as God's eternal freedom, the condition for eternity and yet outside of eternity? If the beginning in which God finds himself necessitates a primary repression which excludes the alienated beginning, has God found himself in a space of representation out of which he can never escape and to which he is irrevocably exposed, or, quoting Blanchot, has the Godhead entered "into the workings of a vital contingency which he cannot control or even observe" (Blanchot "Literature" 28)? God is thus exposed to the radical contingency of his own revelation, since he is excluded from his writing of history in the same way as "the origin," as Jason Wirth puts it, or "the author of philosophy cannot become an object of philosophy" (Wirth *Ages* xv). The decision for God had always already been, since the

moment God exists is the decision for existence, the decision of eternal freedom and of the Godhead; but since the decision does not know itself as a decision, it is not necessary but is radically free in its originary implausibility. Because the Godhead does not decide anything for itself, it is rather an unprethinkable and impossible decision for God as it is for writing, because it is, to quote from Nancy, "the decision *for* philosophy, the decision that delivers and will deliver philosophy to its destiny" (Nancy *The Experience of Freedom* 7).

While Schelling may write "that unity in duality and duality in unity . . . is what is essential in divine individuality" (Schelling *Ages* 51), this ambiguity is Schelling's attempt at merging the emergence of God with the figure of the Godhead, writing two names for God in order to write over the abyss that separates the alienated beginning of the Godhead with God's eternally beginning life. As the Godhead is the antithesis of personality, personality, writes Schelling, "is the principle by dint of which God is He Himself as He Himself" and is the "ultimate act or the ultimate potency by which an intelligent being exists in an incommunicable fashion" (Schelling *Ages* 107). God is destined to be as the higher that draws out the lower, but in order to be that personality that writes itself into nature, God must in a certain sense be outside of itself, and is thus never connected to the force, the proper name, the transcendental signifier that is simultaneously the condition of its existence as what puts its indelible personality at risk of erasure. Elohim, writes Schelling, is the name "whose true pronunciation is unknown," and is the expression of the Godhead as "pure breath, pure spirit" (Schelling *Ages* 52). Elohim "occupies," in the words of Nancy, "with the text, the very place of a name that flees and yet returns, finding itself alternately . . . firmly distanced, then evoked in its

very distance as the site or as the index of a form of intrigue of the absenting of sense" (Nancy *Dis-Enclosure* 86).

Jehovah, on the other hand, is God's other name as that which is expressed, the aspect of God that acts and communicates and answers the world when the world asks what is God, as Schelling illustrates in Moses's conversation with God, for "Jehovah answered, "hence, you should say, 'Jehovah, the Elohim of your fathers, sends me to you. *That is my name* for eternity'" (Schelling *Ages* 52). Schelling's meditation on the Old Testament's names for God shows that indeed there is the God of personality but also the plurality of names of the "*tetragrammaton*," Elohim, the true God, which inscribes a nominalization of ambiguity in the connection between Godhead and the God of duality, inscribing an absence in the actuality of God that is somehow above and beyond the God that is expressed in the world. The question of God's self-revelation, therefore, must always return to this question of the plural Elohim which acts in a "verb in the singular, where the meaning, for example, of *bara Elohim* is, "the one who created is Elohim," (Schelling *Ages* 52) functioning like Derrida's pure trace as that which is written as the absence of life, not as writing's solution, and as the origin that cannot explain why anything is written. For the Godhead remains above being as an absence, fleeing from the order of the world which it creates as the alienated condition that inscribes God into existence. In this sense, as Schelling writes in the *Philosophical Letters* we "cannot get rid of the *idea* of God" (Schelling *Letters* 158), because God is forever caught in the same movement as we are, he is forever an idea as he is forever the *word*, Jehovah, that arises from the transcendental signified of the Godhead that initiates and yet is outside the order of language. God is therefore not "in question," to quote from Nancy, for the "name

God must, then, represent something other than a concept here, more precisely, it must bear and bring to a head a trait common to names as such: to be at the extremity and the extenuation of sense" (Nancy *Dis-Enclosure* 87).

4. 3 Philosophy as Auto-Deconstruction or Auto-Biography?

In this sense, the *Ages* is a *mise en abyme* of the writer's relationship to his or her work, and more importantly represents Schelling's relationship to the *Ages* itself, for once writing begins the writer is forever cut off from the work in the same way as Schelling writes that "the Godhead sits enthroned over a world of terrors" (Schelling *Ages* 49). While one could take God to be the subject of its own history in the way Schelling writes that one "who could write completely the history of their own life would also have, in a small epitome, concurrently grasped the history of the cosmos" (Schelling *Ages* 3), we can read the *Ages* itself as undertaking this tragic and impossible destiny to attempt to achieve self-sameness across the irreducible necessity of its doubling. Taking Schelling's Introduction to the *Ages* as a serious statement on the narrative quality of philosophy, the book of the Past represents a self-reflexive position on the writing of the project of the *Ages*. The eternally ancient knowledge discussed in the introduction anticipates the unfolding of this non-coexistent knowledge in the writing of the *Ages*, not as something that can be pointed to in one concept or be contained within a moment, but rather as an auto-generative process, a narrative, or a fiction that takes on meaning only within the mythology, philosophy's *autopoeisis*, which philosophy always finds itself in the process of figuring. Schelling already understood that writing is itself subject to this same freedom, by the fact that what is known is always "narrated" and that "that knowledge [that is narrated] is the simple consequence and development of its own

concepts. . . . Its true representation is that it is the development of a living, actual being [*Wesen*] which presents itself in it" (Schelling *Ages* xxxv). But the living, actual "being," that Schelling writes can be more appropriately translated as "essence," as even Jason Wirth notes. "*Das Wesen*," Wirth writes, "presents one of the most difficult translation challenges in most any work by Schelling," for, "*Das Wesen* is not a present essence, a being present in its integrity" (Wirth 136). Instead, essence is that something which escapes and makes its presence known through its absence from the process of knowledge, of being, of writing, etc. The *Ages* distinguishes itself from Schelling's other texts since it finally writes of that present/absent essence in its articulation of the Godhead, as the God which created the world, but always remains beyond or above it as eternal freedom. The Godhead's eternal freedom is that freedom, in the sense developed by Nancy and Bataille, that

> prevents itself from being founded. The existence of God was to be free in the sense that the freedom that sustained his existence *could not become one of its predicates or properties*. Theology and philosophy had certainly recognized this limit, or this dilemma. Conceived of as freedom's necessary being, God risked (if one did not elaborate subtle *ad hoc* arguments) ruining both himself and freedom. ("Is not freedom the power God lacks, or which he only has verbally, since he cannot disobey the command that *he is*, the command of which he is the guarantor?" Georges Bataille, *Literature and Evil*). The freedom of the gods (if one must speak of gods…), like every freedom, makes them susceptible to existence or nonexistence (they can die): it is not their attribute, but their destiny. (Nancy *The Experience of Freedom* 12)

The figure of the Godhead may allow Schelling to begin writing, but it is also what eludes the bounds and limits of representation as it is itself that boundless freedom that submits God–and furthermore the text–to the realization of the absolute horror of its contradictory and contingent existence.

In this sense, the tone Schelling adopts to describe the contradiction between the negative and affirmative principle in the *Ages* becomes representative of the trauma his own writing undergoes in writing the process of contradiction. Therefore, contradiction for Schelling is no longer something merely vital but is tragically absurd, cruel, and ultimately "is insufferable to everything and everything that finds itself in it" (Schelling *Ages* 12). This is especially true in Schelling's expression of the systole and diastole that expands and contracts, first as the system's "living concept," "the wheel of birth," as its "universal ebb and flow" (Schelling *Ages* 20-21). In the process of this alternatingly expanding and contracting movement that "seeks rest, but does not find it," a nagging anxiety overtakes the contradiction's "[ever]commencing inefficacy"; although the wheel turns, it does not do so because of its own self-confidence, but is "scared and fears that it would lose existence and hence, contracts anew" (Schelling *Ages* 90). The ground of all creation, the "beating heart of the Godhead," the "fountain of eternal life," the first nature which had initially been that boundless and powerful figure of Nature in the *First Outline*, in 1815 comes to express its horror and abjection over the abyss of its freedom. Therefore, if the project of *The Ages of the World* in its first two versions could still be rightfully labeled a pursuit of absolute knowledge, as were the projects the *System of Transcendental Idealism* and the *Freedom* essay, the third version reveals this pursuit not only to be interminable and unachievable but a doomed pursuit that is absolutely horrifying to the philosopher.

As a result of Schelling's insistence on the potency of contradiction as the vitality of philosophy, contradiction arises as the only way of writing, not only dialectically, but also narratively. But this process in the *Ages* from 1815 provides a

different sense regarding contradiction from the way contradiction functions in the first two versions of the *Ages*, characterizing it in terms of a dreaded resignation to the horror and madness that cannot be redeemed by God, knowledge, or love. Instead, contradiction is what dooms the philosopher and the poet to eternally retell the tragedy of the *Ages*, for, in the words of Schelling,

> The contradiction that we have here conceived is the fountain of eternal life. The construction of this contradiction is the highest task of science. Hence, the objection of the philosopher would start science with a contradiction means just as much to the philosopher as it would to remind the tragic poet, after hearing the introduction of the work, that, after such a beginning, the work could only come to a horrible ending, and to cruel deeds and bloody events. This was precisely the poet's intent when they set out. (Schelling *Ages* 90)

And it is because there was never a decision to set out otherwise. If every beginning only ends in tragedy, if the path that is set before the writer again and again by the eternal beginning must be covered in its own blood, only to be again bloodied in yet another ill-fated attempt, the only question left for us to ask Schelling is, "why?" The right answer would appear to be simply, "why not"; however, this answer is too simple, and merely re-inserts itself into the "cision," "the doubling of ourselves . . . in which there are two beings, a questioning being and an answering being" (Schelling *Ages* xxxvi). While the introduction figures this doubling of the self as a positive dialectical method towards the achievement of knowledge, through the writing of the *Ages*, dialectics becomes disfigured, and Schelling ultimately loses faith in dialectics as a viable process that would lead to a synthetic end. Rather, every point in the dialectic becomes yet another instance of the "unremitting wheel" upon which all answers and questions ruin themselves.

> Rather, insofar as there should be unity, there should also be antithesis. Or unity and antithesis should themselves again be in antithesis. But the antithesis is in and for itself no contradiction. It could be no more contradictory that there could be A as well as B, than that just as there is unity, there is antithesis. Again, these are,

> between themselves, equivalent. The antithesis can as little surrender to unity as unity can surrender to the antithesis. (Schelling *Ages* 10)

Whereas dialectics, for Schelling, had been a method of working through the idea of progress by means of the dynamism he attributed to nature in the *First Outline* and the *Freedom* essay, and also as a means to posit a final synthesis somewhere in the future, in the *Ages*, there is no possibility of escaping the past except through something unprethinkable and unrepresentable. Therefore, dialectics cannot provide the explanation for the emergence of the Godhead into existence as God and the first nature, neither can it posit a final unity, for the positing of unity in the *Ages* is thus nothing else but a repression of unity's antithesis.

And if dialectics have failed, the *Ages* also signals the failure of the imagination. For the eternal past is itself something that must be imagined in order for Schelling to conceive of the idea of an eternal present, as he writes, "if one cannot imagine a present that is not founded on a past, then there can be no eternal present that is not based on an eternal past" (Schelling *Ages* 43). As has been shown above, the eternal past was imagined in order to posit a time when the Godhead, as "the purest knowledge" that does not yet know itself as such, must posit something as opposed to and outside of itself to exit this realm of the eternally past: "Only in relation to something else that is Being to it can the highest Being comport itself as what has being and can pure knowledge comport itself as what knows and hence, be raised to *actus*" (Schelling *Ages* 44). And yet, the *Ages* is never able to write itself out of the past, except without the use of what Schelling calls "a universal magic" (Schelling *Ages* 66). Therefore, the imagination too must resort to deception and illusions as the means to overcome the representation of the eternally past and posit the possibility of entering into the mythical

age of the eternally present. As the imagination cannot be the solution to the cruel ambiguity of existence, the imagination instead shows itself to be the sleep of reason that produces monsters.

By the end of the 1815 version of the *Ages*, Schelling assumes the identity of Maurice Blanchot's writer, who "is called upon by his dread to perform a genuine sacrifice of himself . . . . [for he] must be destroyed, in an act that really puts him at stake" (Blanchot "From Dread to Language" 7-8). Schelling was in a sense destroyed by this text, which is to say that Schelling's repeated attempts at *the text*, since each extant version is representative of this repeated attempt at beginning, are thus expressions of the trauma of Schelling's writing; it is this traumatic writing that at last takes hold of Schelling in the writing of the 1815 version of the text. In a sense, the *Ages* is representative of this repeated trauma as it could be read not only as Schelling's attempt at a magnum opus but also as what put an end to Schelling's radically speculative style of writing that was present in the *Ages* as well as the *Freedom* essay. Since the *Freedom* essay was one of Schelling's last published works that theorizes the narrative of God's self-revelation in this radical re-figuration, the *Ages*, as the unpublished and unfulfilled follow-up to the *Freedom* essay, puts an end to thinking by means of this genre of the writing of an absolute and living pantheism. The *Ages* discloses, therefore, that its writing, Schelling's writing, is itself traumatized in the same way that the first nature is traumatized by the process of its creation in the "violent revulsion" (Schelling *Ages* 91) of its miserable existence. Since, "as an old book says, all deeds under the sun are full of trouble and everything languishes in toil" (Schelling *Ages* 90), the dread of writing may also be hidden away, concealed out of the fear and anxiety it had caused the writer. The

dread of writing, in the sense developed by Blanchot, does not negate writing just as the Godhead does not negate God or the first nature; it is the feeling that gives itself over to the unbearable quality of writing, as the *Ages* clearly indicates. It must be asked, then, was this trauma of writing that emerged from the nothingness of writing not in fact the reason for the unpublished nature of Schelling's *The Ages of the World*? If it was, perhaps this was because Schelling had taken the project of the *Freedom* essay, that project of developing a real and living pantheism as opposed to Spinoza's mechanistic pantheism, and theorized it to its absolute limits in the *Ages*; in the process the God of pantheism was not only exposed to the horrors of the world but also to the arbitrariness and absurdity of its own existence. Was it that Schelling, then, realized that this real pantheism, which he writes through the Godhead's unprethinkable decision for existence, could never end "in the harmony and wonderfully blessed unity of the cosmos" as he might have believed in 1809, but that he found "real pantheism to be horrifying" (Schelling *Ages* 104)? Or is it because Schelling does "away with these limits," that he makes the Godhead into an "object . . . no longer representable," so that, "he himself [has] strayed beyond the limits of representation, . . . [and found] himself lost" (Schelling *PL* 193)?

All of these questions can only guess at Schelling's feelings towards the writing of *The Ages of the World*, but they are, in a certain way, legitimated because Schelling never brought the text to publication. And since the text ends by demanding its own repression, the writing clamors for its own forgetting and for a negation of its trauma. As Schelling writes, "this pantheistic system of primeval times, this primordial state of universal unity and universal closure, is precisely what is ever more to be repressed and posited as past by the following time" (Schelling *Ages* 108). And yet, as we know, the

writer no longer has control over the text once it has been written, and is forever, like the Godhead, cut off from its creation; its only position is to stand witness over the world of terrors for which it was the condition. While this reading has indeed been cruel in disclosing the repression covering over the *Ages*, we must do Schelling a final kindness, by giving him the last word, giving him a chance to explain why he never published the *Ages*. Although "[h]e can no longer give distinct form to the boundless object[,] [i]t is indistinctly present to his mind. Where shall he bind it, where seize it, where [or how could he have] put limits to its excessive power" (Schelling *PL* 193)?

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