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## **Idealism and the Endgame of Theory**

*Three Essays by F. W. J. Schelling*

Translated and Edited, with a  
Critical Introduction  
by  
Thomas Pfau

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*Für meine Eltern*

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## Preface

In a profession whose numerous and diverse institutions and forums of criticism tend to demarcate intellectual identities in bipolar terms (say, critic vs. scholar, historical vs. theoretical inquiry, contextual vs. formalist analysis, or in philosophy, the seemingly never-ending tug of war between continental vs. analytical temperaments), introducing Schelling's philosophy to a wider audience would seem to place one squarely on the side commonly, if only by allusion, identified as the "conservative" sector of scholarly politics. Schelling's relative obscurity, being known, at best, to specialists in Idealism, continental philosophy, and to a handful of Romanticists whose proclivity for what Coleridge termed "abtruse research" rivals that of their likely conduit to Schelling, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, certainly would consign him to the expertise of that tactfully reticent species known as *scholars*. His unabashedly speculative and, at times, even mystical inclinations—often reinforced by shrill invectives against the plodding and hopeless work of historical and empirical research—would seem to identify him as the Idealist "theorist" par excellence. Finally, his terse, apodictic, and increasingly self-reliant style, gradually sculpting a systematic edifice of tightly interrelated and interdependent propositions, would seem to identify Schelling as a consummate formalist, one whose paradigm of truth is strictly homologous with that of propositional and, ultimately, grammatical form.

Far from wishing to repudiate these basic coordinates, whose critical limitations are sufficiently self-evident as it is, we ought indeed to accept all of these characterizations as *appropriate*. Yet at no point do they prove *sufficient*. For Schelling's entire career, itself so solicitous of, as well as resistant to, interpretation, shows his thinking persistently uncovering the hiatus that prevents such esoteric, speculative, and formalist knowledge from ever becoming *our* or *my* knowledge. What disintegrates in the progression of Schelling's philosophical writings—possibly for the first time in modern philosophy and certainly to an unprecedented degree—is the conception of a private, autonomous, reflective, egological, and anthropomorphic subjectivity as the *paradigmatic and principled foundation for critical knowledge*. It is, in fact, Schelling's insistent (deceptively traditionalist or conservative) pursuit of a formalist, "purely" theoretical, and speculative concept of identity—

indisputably the heart of all his thinking—that comes to expose the idea of “transcendence,” of a “trancendentalism,” transhistorical and transcultural mode of critical reflection as a metaphysical *symptom* rather than as a *principled* theoretical foundation. The discourses of knowledge, specifically those that Schelling inherited from his most proximate predecessors, Kant and Fichte, thus become the subject of a distinctly a-Hegelian philosophical narrative, one that is less eager to totalize by assimilating than to explore the metaphysical void that begets the totalizing desires with which we tend to identify German Idealism to this very day.

The following three essays by Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, then, are meant to offer both a philosophical profile of the arguably most complex figure of German Idealism and a challenge to contemporary criticism—in the ever more connecting “fields” of literary theory, Romantic studies, religious studies, and the study of continental philosophy. The task is to rethink that one notion to which any theory whatsoever is always already indebted and that consequently is also the most likely to unsettle the “ground” of all theory: *the concept of Identity*. With its ambitious beginnings, its fitful and erratic trajectory of relocations (both in a geographical and, in the eyes of many, intellectual sense), Schelling’s career and its corresponding, textual profile will, undeniably, strain and possibly exhaust our forbearance. Yet the three texts here assembled should, in the final analysis, also each stand on its own, offering, as the case may be, bits or rather large chunks of intellectual nourishment to Romanticists (particularly the 1797 *Treatise*), to students of epistemology and logic (most likely the 1804 System), or to students of the extensive, post-Enlightenment revival of religious, metaphysical, and mystical tendencies in Germany and elsewhere.

Schelling’s 1797 review article, eventually republished with some slight alterations in the 1809 edition of his *Philosophische Schriften*, shows the only 22-year old Schelling establish himself as a major figure on the then bristling and contentious scene of German intellectual life. Notwithstanding its sometimes shrill invectives, *ad hominem* attacks, and its frequently impatient and adversarial tone, the essay offers one of the more incisive interpretations of Kant’s first and second *Critiques* to date. In particular, the analysis of the concept of transcendental apperception and its problematic ground in and as a synthetic relation at times comes close to anticipating some of the arguments that Martin Heidegger was to advance, some 130 years later, in his landmark study of *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*.

If Schelling’s earlier essay may seem uneven—inducing most readers to opt for the largely cognate, though more magisterial exposition of his ideas in the 1800 *System of Transcendental Idealism*—it nevertheless already establishes a tendency that would persist throughout Schelling’s later philosophical writings including the *Stuttgart Seminars*. Namely, Schelling immediately and aggressively tackles a philosophical issue in such a way as to let it simulta-

neously illuminate the general nature and practice of philosophy as a unique form of reflection. Thus the 1804 lectures, presented during Schelling’s brief stay at the University of Würzburg, offset their manifest concentration on the concept of identity with repeated excursions into Idealist, Rationalist, Empiricist, and Materialist systems, as exemplified by Plato, Spinoza, Leibniz, Locke, and LaMettrie.

The *Stuttgart Seminars*, though often viewed as marking the beginning of Schelling’s later philosophy (and his decline), still ought to be approached also as the work of a man barely 35 years old. Presented (and correspondingly simplified) to a lay audience of politicians, lawyers, and government administrators, Schelling’s lectures appear to intone mystical and arguably abstruse concerns precisely when his private and scholarly existence seems most imperiled. And yet, notwithstanding the often hasty and overly generalized correlations and formulaic propositions advanced on that occasion, the seminars suggest that mysticism may prove a persistent and possibly inescapable issue for what we now refer to as *Theory*; indeed, its persistence may mark philosophical theory in ways more serious and inevitable than acknowledged by those who have dismissed Schelling’s later preoccupation with mysticism as but an instance of bourgeois retreat in times of professional and personal adversity.

In sum, then, it is my hope that the three essays will make some contribution, however modest, to a renewed interest in the exploration of German Idealism, particularly insofar as its influential and ambitious arguments have a bearing on the equally specialized and highly variegated idioms of contemporary critique in the fields of literary criticism, critical theory, philosophy, and religious studies.

Even though working on this manuscript struck me often as a form of monastic withdrawal, its creation is revealed, in retrospect, to be no less heteronomous than according to Schelling all creation inevitably must be. Among those whose counsel, advice, and encouragement has been of much assistance are Rodolphe Gasché (SUNY Buffalo), Alberto Moreiras (Duke University), Bob Baker (University of Wisconsin—Madison), and David Clark (McMaster University). Assembling the philological apparatus, recovering countless primary texts and translations, tracing often obscure references, and most onerous, seeking to purge an earlier version of the manuscript of all errors other than my own has been the great contribution of Kirsten Jamson at the University of Wisconsin—Madison, and, especially, of Johannes von Moltke at Duke University. My thanks go to all of the preceding and to those whose help I sense on reviewing the manuscript, even if I fail to recall them at this instance. My most complex and long-standing debt, however, is to my parents whose steady support and quiet appreciation has so continually sustained me. I dedicate this book to them with love.

## Glossary\*

das Absolute	the absolute
affirmierend, affirmiert	affirming, affirmed
das Affirmierende, Affirmierte	the affirming, the affirmed
das All	the universe
Anschauung	intuition
Anstoss	check
das Bedingte, Unbedingte	the conditional, unconditional
das Bewusstlose	the pre-conscious
Contraktion (Gottes)	Concentration
Daseyn	existence
das Ideale, Reale	the Ideal, the Real
Inner(es), Äusser(es),	inner, outer,
innerlich, äusserlich	inward, external
Handlung	activity
Seyn	Being
Seyendes	being
Nicht-Seyendes	nonbeing
Potenzen	Powers
das Reelle	the concrete
das Wirkliche	reality, the actual
das Wollen, Wille	volition, will
Willkür	spontaneity

\*A number of these terms are defined and contextualized in my notes to the individual translations; see the Index.

## Editorial Apparatus and Standard Abbreviations\*

< >	Text of the first edition of the respective essay and deleted in any subsequent edition.
[]	Insertion by the translator.
{ }	Text added for the second edition of the respective essay.
[1,400]	Pagination referring to the <i>Sämtliche Werke</i> , ed. K. F. A. Schelling (1856–61) and retained in most subsequent German editions of Schelling's writings.
a, b, c	Footnotes by Schelling.
1, 2, 3	Notes by translator.
3,595/204	Schelling's <i>Sämtliche Werke</i> , K. F. A. Schelling. This pagination is retained by most other editions; once again page numbers after the / refer to the corresponding English translation (see Bibliography to this volume, Section 2).
A 107/135	Immanuel Kant, <i>Werkausgabe</i> ; works are cited by Roman volume and Arabic page number; A or B refers to the respective first or second edition of a given text; page numbers following the / refer to the corresponding English translation.
WL/SK	J. G. Fichte, <i>Wissenschaftslehre/Science of Knowledge</i> , each according to the 1795 version. The German text is to be found in volume 4 (second division) of the <i>Gesamtausgabe</i> (see Bibliography to this volume, Section 3). The English translation also covers the texts of the First and Second Introduction to the <i>Science of Knowledge</i> .

\*References to standard editions and their English translations, indexed below, can be found in the bibliography below. Where translations are available, the German text is cited first and the page reference to the corresponding English translation follows after a slash.

- II,3:355 Citation of the *Gesamtausgabe* (second division) of the works of Johann Gottlieb Fichte, not previously translated into English; all translations will be mine.
- 172<sup>ENG</sup> Superscript ENG identifies a citation as referring to an English translation of a critical text by someone other than Schelling.

## **CRITICAL INTRODUCTION**

Thomas Pfau

**Identity as the Provocation and Crisis for Theory:  
[Re]Introducing F. W. J. Schelling**

If we postulate a God whom we are to imagine as a living, personal being, we are forced to consider Him altogether human; we must assume that His life bears the strictest analogy to that of the human being, and that alongside the eternal Being there prevails in Him an eternal becoming; in short, [we must assume] that He has everything in common with man *except for man's dependency* . . .

Schelling (7,432)

God is not debased to the level of man, but on the contrary, man is experienced in what drives him beyond himself in terms of those necessities by which he is established as that other. The "normal man" of all ages will never recognize what it is to be that other because it means to him the absolute disruption of existence. Man—that other—he alone must be the one through whom the God can reveal himself at all, if he reveals himself.

Heidegger

Within the itinerary of German post-Kantian philosophy, which has traditionally elicited very mixed responses within its small Anglo-Saxon audience, Schelling still seems the most problematic philosophical figure to place. Unlike Kant, Fichte, and Hegel, Schelling appears to offer neither the distinctive *Propedeutic* or "groundwork" of Kant's critical philosophy, nor is he known as the author of one ground-breaking book, such as Fichte's *Science of Knowledge* or Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Instead, his seemingly discontinuous intellectual profile and his emphatically mystical and speculative overtones, beginning, perhaps, as early as his *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, have prompted an earlier generation of his readers to dismiss him as being largely of transitional significance, a mediator between the early, critical Idealism of Kant and Fichte and the highly distinctive, systematic qualities of Hegel's thought. Such a functional approach has also prompted the division of Schelling's

philosophy into a series of successive stages, with the logic of such a division often straddling the fence between the embarrassment of philosophical irresolution and a slightly more redeeming assessment of Schelling as the "Protean" thinker whose "phases" bear a complementary relation to one another.<sup>1</sup> Already a reaffirmation of the anagogical narrative of German philosophy "From Kant to Hegel," such a reading of Schelling receives additional corroboration by a secondary, binary opposition in Schelling's career; for Schelling's intellectual biography can also be broken down into that of the young, brilliant, and highly visible figurehead of post-Kantian Idealism whose works were published vigorously between 1794 and 1809 and the later Schelling, brooding over private misfortune and a seemingly elusive "melancholy" of Being, who virtually ceased to publish after 1809. This silence, it is true, coincides almost precisely with the widespread recognition of Hegel's intellectual powers on publication of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* in 1807. However, as Martin Heidegger suggests, Schelling's virtually uninterrupted silence subsequent to the publication of his 1809 essay *On the Essence of Human Freedom*, "means neither a resting on his previous achievements nor an extinction of the power of thought. If the shaping of his actual work was never completed, this was due to the manner of questioning which Schelling grew into after his treatise on freedom."<sup>2</sup>

On the one hand, then, we face a traditional reading of Schelling as a mere "link" in the genealogy of German Idealism, maintained by the cognate historical narratives of Wilhelm Windelband, Nikolai Hartman, Richard Kroner, and Emil Fackenheim, among others; this is a reading in which Schelling's philosophical shortcomings are explained as a temperamental issue, with readers pointing to the well-known impatient, nervous, and somewhat formalistic gestures of a thinker who seems continuously in pursuit of an adequate conception of philosophy itself.<sup>3</sup> Fortunately, beginning with Walter Schulz's and Horst Fuhrmans's work, the last three decades have largely witnessed the replacement of this often complacent and indifferent portrayal of Schelling with far more subtle and incisive interpretations of his work.<sup>4</sup> Yet even here the reassessment of Schelling's work as internally cohesive still follows the cues of his earlier detractors, thus continuing to be organized by modes of inquiry common to intellectual biography. Accordingly even Xavier Tilliette's magisterial two-volume study of Schelling receives its organizational cues from Schelling's personality and his philosophical development, thereby preempting any inquiry into the arguably more significant question of what issue Schelling's ostensibly erratic intellect might have been pursuing, an issue as apparently fascinating as it remained elusive.

In short, how are we to rephrase the overriding question or concern to which Schelling's philosophy seeks to respond without once again fragmenting his thought into distinct and disparate phases? How, that is, can we pose the question concerning the "subject" of Schelling's philosophy without once

again being alternatively distracted by, or oblivious of, the highly variegated diction and the kaleidoscopic array of intellectual motifs in Schelling's oeuvre? Although the scope of the following remarks will not be sufficiently wide to do justice to all the issues that any reassessment of Schelling's philosophical significance will necessarily imply, I do hope to identify this "subject" at least in a preliminary and twofold way.

First, the subject of Schelling's philosophy is, to some extent, the philosophy of the subject bequeathed to him by Kant and Fichte; it is their critical Idealism from which, must earlier than is often assumed, Schelling seeks to disengage himself to recover a more encompassing conception of Being. Preliminarily speaking, then, we can state that Schelling's philosophy does not desire to *determine, name, and totalize a principled presence and origin*, such as would reiterate the idiom of Kant's and Fichte's transcendentalism by seeking to systematize Being under the aegis of a *self-present individuality*. There is, fundamentally, no subjectivity in Schelling that would correspond to Kant's "transcendental unity of apperception," to Fichte's "primordial act" of self-positing, or for that matter, to Hegel's reflexive determination of "spirit" (*Geist*) as the cumulative integration of subject-positions within the "absolute concept."

However, to grasp Schelling's fundamentally different philosophical orientation in *positive terms*—with the eventual end of defining its appeal to audiences then and its relevance to audiences now—requires that we first retrace his sustained, incisive, and relentless critique of transcendental models of subjectivity (and the anthropomorphic Idealisms sponsored by it) in his earlier years (1794–1800). Precisely this *critique* of a self-present, autonomous, and totalized philosophical subjectivity (which Schelling persistently challenges in the writings of Johann Gottlieb Fichte) has proven to be a pivotal factor in the (re)formation of twentieth century philosophy as "Theory" particularly in the work of Nietzsche, Heidegger, Levinas, and Derrida, among others.

Schelling's critique meanwhile, is but the opening gambit in a philosophical career and a corresponding trajectory of writings and lectures that eventually leads us to an entirely different approach to philosophy. If we conceive of philosophy in a highly general sense, as a discourse aimed "determining" and "grounding" the principle of discursive *authority* per se, then the difference of Schelling's approach manifests itself specifically in that one notion on which all of philosophy comes to rely: *identity*. It is here, that Schelling's appeal to extraordinarily diverse audiences—both during his own, later years and within today's highly diverse network of critical languages—is to be found. Indeed, although it could be argued that the current complexity of discourses in contemporary theory and the rapidity with which issues are defined, recontextualized, and superseded bears conspicuous resemblance to Schelling's purportedly erratic philosophical profile, some concept of "identity"

seems to endure as a term that, if not always theoretically scrutinized, nevertheless continues to assert the “value” of whichever theoretical concept it has been made to espouse.

Schelling’s likely appeal to religious studies, to debates in continental philosophy, or to contemporary critiques of the subject (a field of seemingly inexhaustible fertility), rests most likely with his radically speculative critique of a principled model of subjectivity as a fetish, so to speak, that proves inherently incompatible with theoretical rigor.<sup>5</sup> Alternately, the diverse sociopolitical critical discourses concerned with “identity” (a concept frequently applied with haste or colonized by facile oppositions, e.g., essentialism vs. constructivism) might benefit from Schelling’s theoretical probing of identity as *the one* paradigm that enables us to *think* difference while, at the same time and for the same reason, its sole purpose lies once again strictly in thinking *difference* (and not in establishing itself as an autonomous form of closure to the practice of philosophy/theory, e.g., as a “principle,” “foundation,” “origin”). Here identity proves central to the multiple critical discourses and post-Freudian debates on gender theory and “sexual identity,” as well as on questions of racial and ethnic identity and the often concomitant inquiries into the constitution of cultural or historical identity of modern collectives.<sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile, in the often strained exchanges between continental and analytic schools of language-philosophy, it is once again the concept of “identity” that turns out to define the debates, such as in Jacques Derrida’s and John Searle’s “improbable” dispute regarding the work of John L. Austin, specifically the question of “semantic identity.” Here the dispute converged on the principal question of whether it is a self-present subjectivity (an “intentionality”) or an agency already prestructured by ultimately intractable and inherently citational (“iterable”) discursive contexts and practices that accounts for or renders impossible the semantic self-identity (“meaning”) of verbal utterances.<sup>7</sup>

On the face of it, Schelling may seem an unlikely figure to advance our thinking in such fields, given the ostensibly speculative, ontotheological orientation of his later writings. And yet, it may be worthwhile reconsidering the relative proximity of Schelling’s speculative (and, after 1809, overtly mystical) conception of theory and the often hypnotic power that “theory” continues to exercise within the humanities at the end of the twentieth century.<sup>8</sup> For both Schelling’s reconception of theory and the contemporary discursive profile of theory obtain their force and thrust from a paradigmatic critique of the subjectivity that, for Fichte, was to be thought as (genea)logically “determinable” and as occupying an ontological rather than pragmatic position. Schelling’s speculative and mystical conceptions of identity, however, define a unique moment in what we call theory because for the first time subjectivity

is no longer a self-transparent origin or (as Hegel still maintains) a telos; instead, it is thought (“speculatively,” to be sure) as a *symptom* in a process whose “quantitative differences” obey no fixed, metahistorical hierarchy of values. Any shifts in this process—though they may be constantly suggestive of a not-yet-revealed identity (much like the notion of the Messianic in the early Walter Benjamin)—continue to resist, and thus controvert the very possibility of, *authoritative theorization*. Notwithstanding their often conspicuous affinities, Schelling and Hegel appear irreconcilably opposed on precisely the question of how to “ground” the practice of theory itself or, rather, whether such a grounding is possible at all.<sup>9</sup>

The “subject” of Schelling’s philosophy may thus be characterized as a rethinking of philosophy once the latter has encountered the unreliability of the subject and—in a reflexive doubling back on that recognition itself—has come face to face, so to speak, with the crisis of its own, discursive authority. The subject, as the traditional, ethically motivated agent of rationality and reflexivity, and thus as the origin and telos of philosophical cognition, can nevertheless reflect philosophically on this crisis of its own position. Schelling’s philosophy, I propose, seeks to rethink the traditional inventory of philosophical motifs (logic, ethics, aesthetics, history, religion, mythology) from a position that no longer posits the subject as an origin or end but as an indispensable conceptual illusion or, at most, as a “medium” that in contradiction from “nothingness” (*Nichts*), Schelling refers to as the “non-Being” (*Nicht-Seyendes*)—an absence which he interprets as the determining ground for a speculative turn in philosophy. Such, then, are the ways in which philosophy becomes theory, a slow and sustained attempt (as Nietzsche was to comment later) “to assassinate the traditional concept of soul . . . which is, to assassinate the fundamental premise of the Christian doctrine”; such an ambition, even where it hides its ultimate agenda from itself, inexorably leads to the self-erosion of any philosophical, extradiscursive authority, a consequence obviously welcomed by Nietzsche.<sup>10</sup> To state, as Schelling did in 1800, that “history and theory are totally opposed” (3,589), is also, if only by implication, to deny the practice of theory any genealogical, narratable or representable authority.

However, Schelling’s philosophy not only *builds* on the collapse of an autonomous, philosophical subjectivity by merely referring, every now and then, to the limitations inherent in traditional theories of self-consciousness and reflection (a fact that is relatively well known and can hardly escape any serious reader of his texts). Far beyond incidental misgivings, Schelling’s critique of the subject *actively structures* his entire philosophical thinking as an absent principle (or, perhaps, as the absence of *principium* from philosophy). As early as in his 1797 *Treatise*, Schelling can be seen stressing the processual nature of “construction” and the primacy of “postulates” over principles, thus

insisting on the irremediable priority of “practice” over “accountability” in all of philosophy. Speculative reflection, for Schelling, thus can at most reveal how the transcendent or absolute might bear “an analogy with us” (7,425); hence the failure of a critical theory of the subject compels Schelling, after 1801, to reflect on the metaphysical implications of this impasse itself. In pondering what purpose the phenomenon of an irreducibly deficient subjectivity might serve, Schelling not only recognizes the *metaphysical* “ground” that critical theories of the subject at once seek to elide and, in the moment of crisis, reinstate; he also begins to think that the staging of finitude in its various powers (inorganic and organic nature or the various qualities of subjective self-presence) implies, at an ultimate remove, a corresponding failure of autonomy on the part of God or the Absolute itself. Reaffirming a striking analogy between God and the realm of finite being (*Seyendes*), Schelling comes to understand metaphysics as an inherently heteronomous practice, one whose “ground” can be found only in a relatively independent and finite differential play of “being” (*Seyendes*). That is, to think God is to imply a *twofold beginning* that continues to manifest itself in the endless play (albeit within a restricted economy) of the difference between “ground” and “existence,” *Being* and *being*, unity and plurality. This development of a mystical, profoundly arational notion of the traditional philosophical reflection constitutes both the dominant and most “modern” aspect of Schelling’s philosophy of identity and freedom between 1801 and 1811.

The following remarks thus pursue an argument about the “subject” of Schelling’s thought in a sequence of three steps. First, we need to reconsider the conditions of the crisis that vitiated Kant’s and Fichte’s paradigmatic constructs of subjectivity; for nowhere does the crisis of theory coincide as apparently with the crisis of the subject as in their discourse, and no other philosopher can be said to have shaped Schelling’s thinking as intensely and consequentially as Kant and Fichte between 1794 and 1800. Second, it is necessary to understand how subjectivity—rather than serving as a ground for an inquiry into the subjective conditions of possibility for the experience of Being—emerges as the salient symptom of a “metaphysical affliction” that a detotalized critical subject can neither definitively understand nor afford to dismiss as a merely incidental, idiosyncratic, and quasi-religious faith. Rather, the inherently finite and therefore heteronomous disposition of finite being and knowledge foreshadows a mystic dependency of the absolute, God, or of Reason on the otherness, the relative nonbeing, and on difference in general. The crisis of the anthropocentric model of subjectivity in Kant and Fichte thus is offered as the central piece of speculative evidence for the thesis that the self-presence of subjectivity (finite or transcendent) equally resists being posited or being negated as an ontological, autonomous, and principled “truth.” Moreover, as my closing remarks wish to suggest, Schelling’s thinking

in the essays presented in this book evinces that any discussion of the concept of identity inevitably brings into play a set of metaphysically charged paradigms about the nature of difference, relations, and an indelible desire that underlies all theories of unity, regardless of whether they are proposed in the fields of epistemology, metaphysics, politics, culture, or history.<sup>11</sup>

## 2

### Conditioning the Transcendental Subject: Synthesis, Imagination, and Time in Kant's *Critique*

The field of philosophy . . . may be reduced to the following questions:

1. What can I know?
2. What ought I to do?
3. What may I hope?
4. What is Man?

The first question is answered by *Metaphysics*, the second my *Morals*, the third by *Religion*, and the fourth by *Anthropology*. In reality, however, all these might be reckoned under anthropology, since the first three questions refer to the last.

Kant<sup>12</sup>

Kant's apodictic notation of one overarching issue as capable of reconciling the diverse and precariously isolated discourses of philosophy firmly prescribes the question of the unity of the human subject as the sole, truly significant issue to philosophy. Moreover, at least by implication, Kant's insistence on the eventual convergence of multiple philosophical discourses in one fundamental inquiry, that of a critical anthropology engaged in formulating an authoritative and universal concept of "man"—that is, a transcendental notion of the subject—also demands that this unity itself become something *known*, that it become *recognizable* unto itself, that it *reflect* itself. Yet to postulate a *reflected* unity of the subject, Kant realized, invariably opens the question concerning identity, the moment where the formal construction of a philosophical subject and its "ground" of legitimacy are to coalesce as one. Philosophical "grounds" or foundations, that is, must ultimately converge with that which renders them socially, culturally authoritative, efficient, or in Kant's words, "transcendental." Much of the theoretical drama and crisis in Kant's *Critique*—and certainly that part which most engaged his successors—lies precisely in its attempt of subverting the condition of the subject's unity

into the domain of the knowable, of philosophical accountability, and by extension, of cultural authority.

As is well known, Kant's exploration of the conditions of possibility of synthetic judgments, that is, of experience in general, proceeds from two distinct "roots," those of intuition and understanding. The synthesis of such intuitions and categories, which alone constitutes proper knowledge of phenomena, is identified with the order of consciousness: "The unity which the object makes necessary can be nothing else than the formal unity of consciousness in the synthesis of the manifold of representations."<sup>13</sup> As Kant stresses, it is important that this transcendental unity of consciousness not be conflated with a "consciousness of self," because the latter "is merely empirical and always changing" (A 107/136). Indeed, self-awareness can never occur without our taking recourse to the already presupposed, transcendental *unity* of consciousness, which alone can establish the necessary, synthetic relation between the forms of *pure* intuition (space and time) and the pure concepts of understanding (known as the *notiones* or categories).<sup>14</sup> Consequently, Kant observes,

there can be in us no modes of knowledge, no connection or unity of one mode of knowledge with another, without that unity of consciousness which precedes all data of intuitions, and by relation to which representation of objects is alone possible. This pure original unchangeable consciousness I shall name transcendental apperception. (A 107/136)

Historically and conceptually determined by the eighteenth-century oppositions between the sensible and the intelligible, Kant's definition of transcendental apperception contains seeds for a potentially vane problem; namely, on the basis of this definition, "pure" consciousness in its function as transcendental apperception appears to possess evidence of itself only to the extent that it *coordinates* the "synthesis of apprehension" (intuition) and the "synthesis of recognition" in the concept (via the categories) in a third synthesis, that of representation [*Vorstellung*]. Put differently, there arises the danger that the "transcendental unity of apperception" remain something merely structural or aggregational, devoid of any intentional grasp and control over its own presence/unity. Should that be the case, the consciousness of transcendental apperception would prove less a philosophical principle than a signified of the relation among the three synthesis themselves. For the time being, at least, the *unity* of apperception lacks philosophical evidence (and hence authority), for it can come into view only as a virtuality, that is in seemingly contingent relation to (and, hence, merely as that very relation) the synthesis it is supposed to unite and exhibit. To serve as a philosophical principle endowed with evidence, Kant's apperception cannot simply *possess* unity but it must have an *awareness* of its unity so as to apply it to possible

intuitions a priori. Having been introduced as a constitutive, rather than derivative, aspect of the apperception, however, "unity" could become something known only if we were to have an intuition of it; yet, and here we come full circle, such an intuition cannot be adduced, because it would again presuppose a consciousness capable of synthesizing it into a proper representation.<sup>15</sup> Hence Kant settles for a rather minimalist paradigm of unity; namely, by conceiving of unity as a strictly *formal* identity: "self-consciousness is a transcendental representation, numerical identity is inseparable from it" (A 113/140). To be sure, we must guard against confusing self-consciousness with ego consciousness (consciousness of self), notions that Kant takes pains to keep distinct; in the chapter on the "Paralogisms of Pure Reason," for example, Kant expressly notes that consciousness remains "only a formal condition of my thoughts, and in no way proves the numerical identity of my subject . . . For we are unable from our own consciousness to determine whether . . . we are permanent or not" (A363-4/342-3).

And yet, the restoration of unity from a contingent effect to a principled "ground" is the subject matter of Kant's "Transcendental Deduction," that "Knot of the whole System," as Coleridge put it, where "all men participate in one Understanding, each the whole, as—to use a very imperfect illustration—a 1000 persons may all and each hear one discourse of one voice."<sup>16</sup> Coleridge's lucid and appropriately "social" illustration reaffirms that to "ground" a concept, particularly that of the unity of the subject, is to insist on universality, on the convergence of "numerical identity" (already asserted by Kant) with social authority. Unity of number is to become unity of voice: "one discourse of one voice." Yet if the "Transcendental Deduction" is strictly aimed at demonstrating the a priori (i.e., universal) validity and sufficiency of the categories, Kant remains troubled by the fact that the material which the subjective apperception is to synthesize into representations (i.e., establish as knowledge)—namely, pure intuition and the categories—remains "quite heterogeneous." This heterogeneity, it must be kept in mind, is not an effect of the empirical nature of things, for Kant's transcendental aesthetics had already argued the essential priority of "pure intuition" (space and time) over particular sensation. Yet as regards the possibility of what Kant refers to as the "transcendental synthesis," that is, the idea of a fundamental compatibility and correspondence between our spatiotemporal capacity of "pure intuition" (*reine Anschauung*) and our cognitive and conceptual potential, referred to as the "pure concepts of the understanding" (*reine Verstandesbegriffe*), the categories, the earlier question reappears. Under what condition can we argue for their synthetic unity as a *necessary* (a priori), rather than contingent, fact? Once Kant has established his inherently relational and synthetic paradigm of subjective "unity," any explication of such unity is bound to regress to one concerning the conditions of possibility for "relations in general." As Kant

puts it: "How, then, is the *subsumption* of intuitions under pure concepts, the *application* of a category to appearances, possible?" (A 138/180).

"Obviously," Kant concludes, "there must be a third thing, which is homogeneous on the one hand with the category, and on the other hand with the appearance, and which thus makes the application of the former to the latter possible." (A 138/181). Because the synthetic unity at stake is not generated by the categories themselves but regulates the successful application of categories to any possible intuition in the first place, it follows that such a synthesis must affect what Kant calls the "a priori certain formal conditions of sensibility" or "the form of inner sense"; namely, time.<sup>17</sup> For whereas Kant felt no compunctions when conceding the impossibility of deducing from the unity of apperception any evidence to the "permanence" or continuity of an empirical persona, the interference between "unity" and "time" now reappears. That is, even the seemingly innocent postulate of a strictly "formal" unity of apperception requires a criterion of intelligibility and legitimacy; in short, "formal" unity—itself paraphrased as "numerical identity"—must be supported by yet another substrate. Number, that is, merely *assumes* or *implies* identity, yet as something knowable, such "numerical identity" must be grounded in *time*.

Unlike Schelling, especially after 1801, Kant conceives of identity always as an effect of synthetic, and that is to say *thetic* (i.e., conscious), activity, and thus he insists that "it is the synthetic unity of consciousness that alone constitutes the relation of representations to an object, and therefore their objective validity" (B 137/156). Identity presupposes synthesis, rather than vice versa. For Kant, all cognition is synthetic, presupposing the copresence in the "inner sense" (time) of categories and pure intuition, for "only in so far . . . as I can unite a manifold of given representations in *one consciousness*, it is possible for me to represent to myself the *identity of the consciousness throughout these representations*" (B 133/153). The passage again suggests that apperception is to be thought as the effect (predicative or discursive), rather than origin, of the postulated synthesis of pure intuition and the categories. The theoretical contours of the crisis by which Kant's synthetic construct of apperception remains beset are stated rather concisely by Kant himself: "the thought that the representations given in intuition one and all belong to me . . . is not itself the consciousness of the synthesis of the representations, it presupposes the possibility of that synthesis" (B 134/154). To prevent the "heterogeneity" of intuition and concept from disrupting the postulated, "transcendental unity of apperception," Kant must establish this unity independent of and prior to its act of representation.

Well beyond the more traditional, substantivist models of subjectivity (already discredited by Kant himself), it is the temporality of consciousness that threatens to unhinge the transcendental frame of Kant's analysis of the

subject. Hence any *tertium quid* meant to “ground” the reflected unity (i.e., formal self-identity) of the apperception will have to contain and subordinate—in the interest of the *authority* of Reason—precisely this phenomenon of temporality. Kant refers to it as the *transcendental schema* in his arguably pivotal, though also vexingly enigmatic, chapter on “The Schematism of the Pure Concepts of Understanding” (A 137/180). Here the “transcendental schema” reveals its truly constitutive function for the unity of Kant’s transcendental apperception: “This synthetic unity presupposes or includes a synthesis and if the former is to be a *priori* necessary, the synthesis must also be a *priori*. . . . As becomes increasingly clear, only the *productive* synthesis of the imagination can assume this task *a priori*” (A 118/142f.). Because the self-identity of transcendental apperception is not originary but, qua synthesis, always a derivative one, there is need for what Kant calls a *pure image*, which would determine and control the flow of time that is constitutive of the “inner sense.” Such is the function of the transcendental schema. As Kant notes, “the schemata are thus nothing but *a priori* determinations of time” (A 145/185), and he once again restates their crucial function: “What the schematism of understanding effects by means of the transcendental synthesis of imagination is simply the unity of all the manifold of intuition in inner sense, and so indirectly the unity of apperception which as a function corresponds to the receptivity of inner sense” (A 145/185f., italics mine).<sup>18</sup> The function of the schema, namely, to ascertain the unity of the transcendental apperception prior to its synthesizing function, is apparent enough; however, as regards the equally urgent question as to what such schemata are, what evidence we could adduce for them (given that they themselves are ensure the unity of apperception in the first place), Kant declines any explicit answers, preferring instead not to “be further delayed by a dry and tedious analysis of the conditions demanded by transcendental schemata” (A 142/183).

If, in Kant’s words, “the schemata of the pure concepts of understanding are thus the true and sole conditions under which these concepts obtain relation to objects and so possess significance” (A 146/186), the schema serves as the “figure” for the possibility of a relation between those “heterogeneous” elements whose synthesis defines the subjectivity of Kant’s *Critique* in its most fundamental sense. From a rhetorical vantage point, Kant’s *Critique* implements the “schema” as the veritable mastertrope that regulates the distributive efficiency of all cognitive tropes (the categories) that, in turn, are charged with structuring the inherently entropic field of intuition. However, precisely as a trope (i.e., an act masking the projection or invention of an inherently unknowable “literal” inner essence as a belated substitution), the “schema” reinjects the very threat of contingency and theoretical illegitimacy into the Kantian subjectivity it was designed to overcome. Kant’s text, moreover, allows us to identify this contingency largely as the *temporality* of consciousness.

As remains to be seen, this problem goes to the very heart of the differences between Kant’s and, *mutatis mutandis*, Fichte’s critical philosophy and Schelling’s speculative Idealism, respectively. Although Kant invokes a new form of intuition (the schema) to contain the disruptive impact of time on the synthetic paradigm of the transcendental apperception, Schelling will reverse the hierarchical relation between the subject and time.<sup>19</sup> Time is no longer a purely formal, transcendental condition of possibility for experience but, as a *historical*, rather than formal, stratum it exhibits the endless subjective attempts at constructing an objective (“pure”) identity. The schema in Kant is a micrological version of Schelling’s epochs of history, that is, a sedimentation of culture in a form that is to stabilize the desired/projected self-identity of human consciousness through time. Similar to Herder’s somewhat earlier, critical “metacommentary” on Kant’s *Critique*, Schelling also reconceives of the schematism as a historical and, indeed, rhetorical phenomenon (rather than granting it conceptual self-evidence), precisely because it is in a constitutive sense linked to the historical particularity of language.<sup>20</sup>

At this very moment when time and temporality threaten to invade the transcendental argument with involuntary, cultural and historical sedimentations, Kant’s text itself begins to draw on a trope of identity; to determine the self-presence of a transcendental, “pure” self-consciousness as the synthesis of pure intuition and pure understanding, the schema must itself possess a quality that differs from consciousness itself: it is to be a “monogram” or pure *a priori* imagination” (A 142/183).<sup>21</sup> The trope points up a tension between the systematic and the rhetorical performance of Kant’s text that holds great significance for subsequent philosophical and literary speculation regarding the status of the subject.<sup>22</sup> The figurative or rhetorical quality of the schematism—as such in marked asymmetry to the desired rationality and cognitive autonomy postulated for the “transcendental unity of apperception”—is also reflected in Kant’s qualification of the “transcendental synthesis of the imagination” as a “*figurative synthesis*” (B 151/164).

In the rhetoric of post-Kantian Idealism, the concept that customarily serves to overcome this contingency of consciousness on a nonrational faculty (the imagination) and its performative rhetorical manifestation is that of an “intellectual intuition.” And although it is correct and well known that Kant viewed this notion with great suspicion, in at least one point in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant seems to recognize the insufficiency of casting the transcendental apperception exclusively as a *function*. For, as we saw, a purely synthetic or functional paradigm for apperception eludes theoretical control and, moreover, proves but a signified of its heterogeneous components (pure intuition and the categories). Hence, and here Kant appears to be searching for an alternative to his precarious doctrine of the schematism, the apperception must be *aware* of this function as originating in its very own *structure*. In a long note to his Paralogism chapter Kant thus seeks to endow his “pure

self-consciousness” with the capacity of reflecting on its own constitution or, as Schelling and Hegel will put it, with being *for itself*.

As Kant argues, the proposition “I think expresses an indeterminate empirical intuition, i.e., perception . . . But the ‘I think’ precedes the experience which is required to determine the object of perception through the category in respect of time” (B 423/378). In obvious violation of his own critical method, Kant here speaks of an “empirical intuition” that “precedes the experience” of its very object, and he goes on to qualify this intuition as “purely intellectual.” In trying to wrest his transcendental apperception from its purely functional, synthetic status, Kant has happened on the conception of an “intellectual intuition.”<sup>23</sup> Consequently he speaks of the “I think” as an “indeterminate empirical intuition, i.e., perception.” What, for Kant, remains a momentary slip effectively opens the path for Fichte’s radically new paradigm of subjectivity, one where the relational and synthetic conception of self-consciousness is replaced by a model of self-production. Thus it appears that the ground for the unity of all consciousness remains ultimately transcendent to this consciousness; as Schelling is to restate the dilemma of Kant’s (and, by extension, Fichte’s) *Reflexionsphilosophie*: “Everyone can regard *himself* as the object of these investigations. But to explain himself to himself, he must first have suspended all individuality within himself, for it is precisely this which is to be explained. (3,483/116).

## 3

### Mediated Immediacy: Production, Recognition, and the Affective Grounds of the Self in Fichte

I am not what I am because I think it or will it; nor do I think or will it because I am it, but I simply am and think both. There is, however, a higher cause of their agreement. . . . I, however, that which I call my “I”, my person, am not the anthropogenetic [*menschenbildende*] force itself but only one of its expressions: and when I am aware of *myself* I am aware only of this expression and not of that force which I only infer because of the need to explain myself.<sup>24</sup>

Fichte

In many respects, German Idealism is a sustained attempt to consider with the greatest consistency and conceptual rigor the implications and unresolved questions of Kant’s critical philosophy. As Hegel puts it, drawing on a popular distinction,

the Kantian philosophy needed to have its spirit distinguished from its letter, and to have its purely speculative principle lifted out of the remainder that belonged to, or could be used for, the arguments of reflection. In the principle of the deduction of the categories there is authentic idealism; and it is this principle that Fichte extracted in a purer, stricter form and called the spirit of Kantian philosophy.<sup>25</sup>

Contemporaneous with Fichte’s rereading of Kant, the initial phase of post-Kantian philosophy involved an array of statements partly critical of Kant (Jacobi, Maimon, Aenesidemus) and partly aimed at formalizing the perceived systematic and methodological implications of Kant’s work (Beck, Reinhold).<sup>26</sup> Kant’s conception of knowledge as a synthetic relation of pure intuition and pure understanding (i.e., the categories) drew criticisms that targeted both constituents of this relation. Jacobi, Maimon, and Schulze (a.k.a. Aenesidemus) repeatedly criticized Kant for reducing the question of knowledge to its subjective conditions. In recasting concepts like those of

causality or substance as subjective conditions a priori Kant had not only eroded the objective significance of these concepts, but he had effectively collapsed the possibility of determining the elusive "object" and, indeed, the telos of all philosophical practice, Being, by means of ontic determinations and ordinary predication.

Moreover, post-Kantian philosophers felt that Kant's reduction of the concept of Being to a mere "X" or *noumenon*, presupposed experience, that is, synthetic judgments, as a *fact* without bringing to light the general anthropological conditions that make such experience possible in the first place. A related objection concerned the fact that, in presupposing the experiential structure of synthetic judgments as the object of his inquiry, Kant never specified how the two constituent parts of such judgment, namely, intuition and the categories, originate in the first place. Particularly with regard to the categories, Jacobi and others felt that their origin as forms of rationality remained enigmatic, because Kant had essentially derived them from Aristotle without questioning their completeness. Still, none of these criticisms suggested any distinctively new directions regarding the question concerning the origin of our representations (*Vorstellungen*), and the possibility of a positive philosophical "step beyond the Kantian threshold," as Friedrich Hölderlin called it, remained uncertain until the arrival of Johann Gottlieb Fichte in Jena.<sup>27</sup> It is possible that, on his way to Jena, Fichte met with Schelling for the first time, and to some extent the beginning of Fichte's career as professor at Jena coincides with Schelling's emergence as a major philosophical force.<sup>28</sup>

Fichte's Jena lectures from 1794–95 which resulted in the *Foundation of the Science of Knowledge*, stress the anthropological roots of all philosophical inquiry, though not without significantly altering the question concerning man. Namely, Fichte no longer compartmentalizes the domain of the human by discriminating between theoretical, practical, and teleological reason (*Vernunft*) but insists from the outset that his *Science* "introduces throughout the whole of man that unity and connection which so many systems fail to provide" (WL 424/SK 259). In short, experience is no longer presupposed as a "fact," because "the *Science of Knowledge* must be exhaustive of the whole of man; it [experience] can only be encompassed, therefore, within the totality of all his powers" (WL 415/SK 251). If philosophical inquiry may have only one absolute point of departure, Fichte locates this point in the self as potentially absolute. The desired and potentially total "determination" [*Bestimmung*] of an individual, anthropomorphic consciousness—through it can exist only in that virtual state of a postulate—must nevertheless have taken root, qua idea or desire, within this consciousness with the very onset of self-awareness; and it is precisely this recognition to which Fichte refers as an "intellectual intuition." Contrary to Kant, Fichte employs the term to circumscribe a *postulate*, namely, to show "how [the self] could be determinable

through and for the self [*Ich*]." (WL 356/SK 190).<sup>29</sup> Well aware of the oddity of elevating a "postulate" to the status of a philosophical principle, indeed the very condition of possibility (and necessity) for philosophy as such, Fichte elaborates:

The self is infinite, but merely in respect to its striving; it strives to be infinite. But the very concept of striving already involves finitude, for that to which there is no *counterstriving* is not a striving at all. If the self did more than strive, if it had an infinite causality, it would not be a self: it would not posit itself, and would therefore be nothing. But if it did not endlessly strive in this fashion, again it could not posit itself, for it could oppose nothing to itself; again it would be no self, and thus would be nothing. (WL 404/SK 238)

Fichte's paradox displaces Kant's principal question concerning the a priori conditions of possibility for synthetic judgments in favor of that concerning the structure of the judging subject itself. Conscious of the charges that Kant's philosophy simply presupposed experience as a *fact*, Fichte scrutinizes precisely this assertion as a predicative act. As he remarks, any synthetic judgment assumes the continuity and self-identity of its *relata*; that is, it presupposes for its paradigmatic proposition,  $A = A$ , "a necessary connection [which] is posited *absolutely* and *without any other ground*" (WL 257/SK 95).<sup>30</sup> Because this connection ("X") between  $A_1$  and  $A_2$  cannot be grounded once again in  $A$ , this "A exists absolutely for the judging self, and that simply in virtue of its being posited in the self as such" (WL 257/SK 95); and because all judgment "is an activity of the human mind" (WL 258/SK 97), Fichte's inquiry into the structure of synthetic judgments cannot content itself with an analysis of the two constituents of such judgments—that is, intuition and the categories—but must inquire into the very being that posits or founds the identity and continuity of this relation in the first place. Therefore Fichte notes that "we have already arrived unnoticed at the proposition *I am*" (WL 257/SK 96). The shift from the  $A = A$  proposition to the these "I am" is a consequence of the fact that the former proposition remains still necessary for an other, whereas the I itself "is absolutely posited and founded on itself" (WL 258/SK 97).<sup>31</sup> Fichte continues: "The self's own positing of itself is thus its own pure activity. The self posits itself, and by virtue of this mere self-assertion it exists; and conversely, the self exists and posits its existence by virtue of merely existing. It is at once the agent and the product of action; the active, and what the activity brings about" (WL 259/SK 97). Fichte conceives of self-consciousness as a primordial phenomenon that, because of this primordiality, does not know its own ground. That is, self-consciousness precedes any paradigm of knowledge that would cast it as the effect of an intentional and controlled operation. Kant's analysis of synthetic judgments

and the “formal” identity that conditions the very unity of any possible synthetic judgment (i.e., the possibility of a meaningful, repeatable, representation)—which resulted in an increasingly more restrictive and troubled assessment of the subjective agency of knowledge (i.e., a pure apperception or self-consciousness)—ultimately demands a foundation that supports itself, a ground whose validity is proven by the fact that it may not differ from itself, that it cannot be defined *via* any other term or concept: the term proposed by Fichte (and marvelously elaborated by his contemporary and student Novalis) is that of *immediacy* (*Unmittelbarkeit*).<sup>32</sup> As Dieter Henrich has pointed out, the conception of knowledge changes from that of a relation to one of production: “The act of production is here taken to be a real activity, while the product is taken to be the knowledge of this act. Fichte does assert that both become actual simultaneously.”<sup>33</sup> Because Fichte remains committed to the philosophical conception of Being as a task essentially cognate to the determination of the human subject (which is the critical point of disagreement for Schelling), it is imperative to *overcome* the deficiencies of Kant’s paradigm of a “transcendental reflection”; as Fichte observes, “in the course of this reflection on itself, the self as such cannot come into consciousness, since it is never immediately conscious of its own action” (WL 424/SK 259). Reflection, then, can never lay the foundation for, but can only clarify the phenomenon or appearance of a self-consciousness.<sup>34</sup>

Still, the aporias of the reflection paradigm will not simply disappear once self-consciousness is conceived of as the correlate of a production rather than relation. Namely, the ‘I’ as producer and product, respectively, cannot be self-identical, for otherwise the operation, the “act,” would not produce any new knowledge but would merely repeat an already assumed familiarity of the ‘I’ with itself. If, on the other hand, producer and product were to differ, we would still be in need of a mediating criterion to identify them as the self-same. According to Henrich, specifically this conception of an originary positing (*Tathandlung*) fails to “bring the agent as knower into the picture.”<sup>35</sup> Although Henrich contends that Fichte recognizes the inherent need for mediation of his paradigm of the primordial “act” with itself in the later versions of the *Science of Knowledge*, this recognition already governs crucial passages in the 1794–95 version of the *Science of Knowledge*. To understand the early Schelling’s reimagining of the gap between the Fichtean “act” as performance and the reflective recognition of its product (i.e., the self) as *the proper space for a philosophy of history*, we will need to retrace Fichte’s fundamental argument somewhat further.

The first and most consequential proposition of the *Science of Knowledge* involves the positing (*Setzung*) of an absolutely subjective sphere; this act of positing an “absolute I,” we now realize, relocates the Cartesian *cogito* (i.e., the identity of the subject as a rational category) as an effect hypostatized on the provisional “grounds” of a subjective sphere that constitutes the condition

of possibility for any discrete subject *and* object. To recover this sphere, the “ideal ground” of the transcendental subject, *for* this subject (which Fichte continues to think as self-consciousness) is the task of Fichte’s “fundamental” science (*Grundlage*). That is, the “determination” (*Bestimmung*) of the conditions of possibility for any theory of the subject requires that the act of self-determination be not only performed but, simultaneously, witnessed by a philosophical self.<sup>36</sup> Because it must be mediated, the determination (*Bestimmung*) of the self “through and for the self” (WL 356/SK 190) is restated as the postulate that “the self posits itself as determined by the not-self” (WL 362/SK 195); indeed, it is only through this mediation that the dialectic of thesis and antithesis (*Setzung* and *Gegensatz*) can reach beyond its conspicuous formalism and produce knowledge, properly speaking, such as when it permits Fichte to deduce logically, rather than borrow from tradition, the categories (e.g., of substance, accident).

The possibility of converting the production of a self (*Setzung*) into a knowledge of the product (self-consciousness) as the self-same, clearly hinges on the self-transparency of the act of positing itself. The determination of the ‘I’ as the “self” implies a certain awareness of unity by the positing ‘I.’ Any determination (*Bestimmung*) of a self through *and for* this self presupposes a “feeling” of determinability (*Bestimmbarkeit*). For Fichte, the “requirement for a determination to be undertaken within it by the self as such [implies] the mere determinability of the self” (WL 355/SK 189–90). With this need to render the act of positing (*Setzung*) transparent for itself the issue of representation enters Fichte’s argument. If self-consciousness is the result of a production, an act of positing the ‘I’ as a self, this act itself must be represented for self-consciousness. “The self is to posit itself, not merely for some intelligence outside it, but simply *for itself*; it is to posit itself *as* posited by itself. Hence, as surely as it is a self, it must have the principle of life and consciousness solely within itself” (WL 406–7)/SK 241).<sup>37</sup>

To replace the traditional, specular concept of reflection with that of a production mediated *for itself* through a stratum of representation thus implicates the fundamental issue of Idealism, namely, the “grounding” of the subjectivity of the subject, in the general problematic of interpretation. Classical epistemology thus takes its by now notorious “linguistic turn,” a development most palpably demonstrated by the gradual convergence of epistemology and hermeneutics in the works of Schelling, Schleiermacher, and Coleridge. Recognition is no longer an *effect* of an inherently rational identity between the producing and the produced (i.e., the “known”) self; instead the rationality of all identity is itself predicated on an act of interpretation. The self still possesses no knowledge of itself as positing “unless the intuition and the concept of the Self are inextricably bound together with one another. They are ‘equiprimordial’.”<sup>38</sup> As becomes increasingly apparent, Kant’s struggle with establishing a “transcendental synthesis” for the postulated unity of pure

intuition and pure understanding, which for Kant constitute “indirectly” the unity of apperception itself, reappears with striking similarity. For Fichte must ground that unity which alone makes possible the synthesis of the producing intuition (*Setzung*) and the produced concept (“... as positing itself”) of the self.<sup>39</sup>

The “determinability” of all self-consciousness, then, hinges on the possibility of mediating the relation of production-product, intuition-concept with itself as a knowing relation. For Fichte, relations cannot simply bind together heterogeneous materials but, to establish knowledge, they must reflect themselves. This implicates relations in a form of representation, a ground or causality, however, that is not immediately readable for the consciousness whose specificity it conditions. In short, what (if anything) guarantees the homology of the postulated, original relation (producer/product) and the representation (intuition/concept) that was to promote the former to clear and distinct self-knowledge? To pose the question concerning the *structural identity* of the substantive unity postulated for the Fichtean ego and the evidentiary unity of its twofold representation as “intuition” and “concept,” is merely to rephrase the guiding Fichtean question concerning the “determinability” (*Bestimmbarkeit*) of the subjectivity of the subject in general. Because this determinability is to be understood as the absolute condition of possibility for self-consciousness “in general,” it must precede all mediation and objectification: it must find its evidence—a complementary “intuition”—in what Fichte refers to as *immediacy* (*Unmittelbarkeit*). Fichte speaks of it as a *feeling* (*Gefühl* WL 355/SK 190).<sup>40</sup> This feeling of a preconscious unity—the unity of the self as activity-passivity, producer-product, intuition-concept—must be brought to consciousness; that is, it must be *for* consciousness. Only a few years later, Schelling will argue that this “immediacy” or, as he puts it, “unconscious” (*das Unbewusste*) is not merely another hypostatized “ground” in the vertiginous trajectory of a strictly transcendental deduction that has come to resemble the exploration of Chinese boxes; instead, Schelling insists, this unconscious is everywhere *for* consciousness, not as its anthropomorphic and embryonic anticipation, but as a living “power” (*Potenz*), as the entire field of intuition that we customarily hypostatize under the title *nature*. That is, Schelling follows Fichte in according immediacy the status of a “ground,” yet he does not seek to sublimate this very ground into the subjectivity of human consciousness.

In some fragments and lecture notes from 1794–95, Fichte seeks to demonstrate the *essential*, albeit speculative, identity of the “immediacy” of feeling and the mediated transparency of self-consciousness.<sup>41</sup> Hence the task arises to raise “feeling” to the level of consciousness. Such a movement, because it effects the specificity of a reflected consciousness in the first place, can evidently not be intentionally conceived, and in striking analogy to Kant’s recourse in the “Transcendental Deduction” to the productive imagination, Fichte also draws on that faculty as the agency whose performance

effects this mediation of “feeling” and “reflection.”<sup>42</sup> Given that “feeling,” which Fichte essentially consigns to the domain of intuition, is inadequate (“mere belief”) *as such*, it must be conceptually grasped (*begriffen*) as the origin of, and hence as identical with, the very site of conceptual thought, *viz.*, self-consciousness. As Fichte notes, “there is something in the Self, to be sure, [and] perhaps something belonging to the Self, yet not the Self as such” (II,3:300). This “something,” Fichte elaborates, is the “feeling of determinability”; that is, an “immediate self-consciousness” that possesses formal unity in time yet has not come to know this unity *as its own identity*.

To “raise the feeling to [the level of] consciousness” the imagination must produce a “figure” (*Bild*) of this feeling (II,3:297). Only then can the latter become an object of knowledge *for* consciousness and, subsequently, enable the latter to recognize this image *as its own self* and to reconcile the figural and literal representations of its own identity. As Fichte notes, such figural productivity renders the “imagination the creator (*Schöpferin*) of consciousness: in this function, one is not conscious of [the imagination], precisely because prior to this function there does not exist any consciousness whatsoever”; hence, Fichte continues, we must “form (*bilden*) this figure (*Bild*) ourselves” (II,3:300). In other words, Fichte realizes that the ground for self-consciousness constitutes not an aspect of consciousness but, rather, a “feeling” whose intricate filiations with a figural mode of presentation render it “at least partially . . . foreign within the self” (II,3:300). Although it is true that Fichte’s reflections anticipate Goethe’s and Schelling’s conception of a natural *Urbild*, we must keep in mind that Fichte’s system consistently denies nature any ontological status, and that precisely this refusal to concede the heterogeneity or alterity of the “ground” of self-consciousness accounts for the eventual irruption of a profound crisis into Fichte’s conception of subjectivity. What, we must ask, are the conditions of this crisis, and what “division” does this crisis (taken here in its Greek sense of *krinein* = to disjoin) reveal?<sup>43</sup>

Fichte’s argument that a “figure” or “image” (*Bild*) mediates the immediacy of “feeling” and the reflective dimension implicit in self-consciousness with itself as a speculative identity, encounters two closely related difficulties. First, it is clear that that which mediates the “feeling” (self-consciousness as origin) and the ego (self-consciousness as effect) is “foreign” to both of them. The continuity between the self as origin and as telos cannot, therefore, be established by means of the traditional, specular paradigm of reflection (an instantaneous and unmediated, purely formal or logical self-relation) but requires an instance of interpretation. The “figure” itself, that is, must be regarded as a form of “presentation” (*Darstellung*) whose semiological status bears precisely the same, asymmetrical (non)relation to the totality of the Fichtean ‘I’ as the imagination that has produced such a “figure.”<sup>44</sup> Such asymmetry affects both the inherently material and particular qualities that constitute the “real ground” for all form and the equally empirical dependence of

the “image” (*Bild*) qua “form” on a code, a collective endorsement of its purported capacity to convert to knowledge (i.e., to impute meaning to) the affective and the reflective dimensions of the Fichtean ego consciousness. Not without anxiety, Fichte therefore continues his inquiry: “The (productive) imagination itself is a faculty of the Self. Couldn’t it be the only grounding faculty (*Grundvermögen*) of the Self?” (II,3:298).

It is significant that Fichte chose not to incorporate these highly volatile and destabilizing reflections into the *Science of Knowledge*, even though it is precisely the text’s key concept of the “determinability” of the human subject that they seek to elucidate. Similar to Kant, Fichte takes the revisionary decision to forego an extensive inquiry into the extent to which the self-transparency of the human subject is not only contingent upon but, conceivably, the effect of, the semiological and rhetorical (“partially foreign”) power of “figuration” (*Bildung*). Instead, Fichte mobilizes the ontotheological notion of an “intellectual intuition” as the criterion in which the subjectivity of human consciousness “in general” is to be grounded. By 1797, in the “Second Introduction to the *Science of Knowledge*,” Fichte will argue that “[intellectual intuition] is the immediate consciousness that I act, and what I enact: it is that whereby I know something because I do it. We cannot prove from concepts that this power of intellectual intuition exists . . .” (I,4:217/SK 38). The philosopher thus must claim this intellectual intuition “as a fact of consciousness (for him it is a fact; for the original self an Act)” (I,4:218–19/SK 40). The entire dialectic of positing and negation—and the categories that are derived from this reciprocal activity—merely fleshes out what the intellectual intuition already delineated. Hence, as Fichte suggests, “the Science of Knowledge sets out from an intellectual intuition” (I,4:224/SK 44) only to discover how “reason is absolutely independent; it exists only for itself; but for it, too, it is all that exists” (I,4:227/SK 48). As Fichte admits, to presuppose the very totality that constitutes self-consciousness in order to deduce the latter’s forms (categories) for representation as autonomous production indeed amounts to “a circle, though an unavoidable one” (I,4:226/SK 48).

The text of Fichte’s early philosophy (1794–97) thus opens up, in “Of Spirit and Letter in Philosophy,” an indelible lesion within the very paradigm of “production” that his other text, the *Science of Knowledge*, employs for the construction of the self as an autonomous and self-transparent subjectivity. Quite surreptitiously, then, Fichte’s anthropological objective (“to bring unity and coherence into the whole of man”) comes to encounter its inherently “foreign” representational premises as a threat to what Fichte continues to regard as an indisputable fact: the inherently anthropomorphic constitution of subjectivity as the center and circumference of all knowledge. In short, Fichte insists on the homology between the postulate of a philosophical totality and its sole resource, that of a principled, egological, and self-consciousness “immediacy.” The young Hölderlin, an avid listener of Fichte’s

1794–95 lectures at Jena, appears to have noticed that the early Idealist paradigm of self-consciousness had reached a crisis point and that the condition of the crisis—viz., the intrusion of imagination, figuration, and interpretation—cannot, in turn, be recuperated for the Self and as this Self. In a letter to Hegel, Hölderlin comments how Fichte “appears, if I may speculate, to have stood very much at the crossroads, or still to stand there—he wants to move in theory beyond the fact of consciousness.”<sup>45</sup> Hölderlin’s critical remarks, which he also communicated to Fichte himself, not only led to the development of his own and unique poetical position, but they also appear to have influenced the young Schelling with whom Hölderlin and Hegel passed some of the years at the seminary in Tübingen.<sup>46</sup>

## 4

### Identity Before Subjectivity: Schelling's Critique of Transcendentalism, 1794–1810

If our spirit did not involve a [form of] knowledge completely independent of all subjectivity and no longer the knowledge of the subject as subject but a knowledge of that which exists in strict autonomy (i.e., of the unconditionally One), we would indeed be forced to abandon philosophy altogether; our entire thinking and knowing would but render us forever trapped within the sphere of subjectivity, and we would have to consider and adopt the results of Kant's and Fichte's philosophy as the sole possible ones.

Schelling, 1804

Schelling's early essay, "Of the Self as Principle of Philosophy," subtitled "On the Unconditional in Human Knowledge" (1795), seems to do little more than retrace the basic argument of Fichte's *Science of Knowledge*. The essay opens with a critical discussion of Kant's table of categories, which Schelling—taking his cues from the widespread misgivings of Kant's readers—views as lacking an ordering "principle. . . . We find that the synthesis contained in the judgment as well as the synthesis expressed in the categories is only a derivative synthesis." However, the necessary and "more basic synthesis," Schelling argues, "can be understood only through a superior absolute unity" (1,154/65).<sup>47</sup> Once again, then, the problem concerning the unity supporting Kant's transcendental synthesis (i.e., of pure intuition—space, time—and the categories) surfaces, and it prompts Schelling to re-examine the philosophical concept of unity (*Einheit*). By claiming that "the very essence of man consists of unity" (1,156/67), Schelling implies that this unity can be conceived only as something prior to and independent of any conceptual and synthetic operation. Schelling follows Kant and Fichte in understanding the concept of self-consciousness as paradigmatic for a fundamentally anthropological problematic. Yet already the stress begins to shift from a strictly "critical" or "transcendental" determination of the subjectivity of the subject to a more inclusive perspective, one whose expansive

cultural concerns gradually displace the technical idiom of Kant's *Critique*: "The revolution in man must come from the consciousness of his essence" (1,157/67, trans. modified), Schelling asserts, and "we must be what we call ourselves theoretically" (1,308/173). In short, "unity" (*Einheit*) cannot be produced, let alone be recognized, by an exclusively theoretical consciousness; and consequently even Fichte's attempt, in the *Science of Knowledge*, to posit the "theoretical determinability" of self-consciousness as an "intellectual intuition" remains inadequate—at least in such form—for Schelling. In fact, Schelling unequivocally severs all epistemic ties between an individual, anthropomorphic consciousness and the ground of its unity. This unity, he observes quite apodictically, is "a Being which precedes all thinking and imagining" (1,167/75); indeed, to characterize this unity as "unconditional" (*das Unbedingte*) is to relinquish any hope that this unity could ever be reified as a concrete entity for a consciousness and, by extension, precludes its reflexive identification as this self-consciousness. Having been posited as something unconditional, this unity of self-consciousness "can lie neither in a thing as such, nor in anything that can become a thing, that is, not in the subject" (1,166/74).

## I

The most fundamental axiom of Fichte's *Science of Knowledge*, namely, that "everything that occurs in consciousness if founded, given and introduced by the conditions of self-consciousness" (WL 229/SK 50) has been decisively undermined.<sup>48</sup> For if "the condition cannot be contained in the conditioned" (1,180/84), the unity that effects the various syntheses of "all thinking and imagining" can no longer be thought of as a critical or transcendental condition of possibility, or as a postulate; instead, in virtue of its irrecoverably anterior relation to self-consciousness, such a unity can be conceived of only as categorically metaphysical in its provenance. Schelling thus rethinks the distinction between the finite form of self-consciousness and the notion of an absolute subject, claiming that "the I is no longer the pure, absolute I once it occurs in consciousness" (1,180/84). In thus conceiving self-consciousness not as an absolute principle but as a being incapable of representing for itself the ground of its own unity, the anthropological dimension of philosophy (i.e., its subjective impulse) serves no longer as a tool for resolving the epistemological, ethical, and religious questions outlined by Kant and Fichte. Instead, our anthropological disposition is promoted—as one of intrinsic "crisis"—as the most salient symptom of a metaphysical problematic. Thus the finitude of subjectivity, its "discursivity" (what Heidegger would eventually call *Umwegigkeit*), is interpreted by the early Schelling as the result of a Fall.

Rather than opening the avenue toward a “future metaphysics” or *System*, Kant’s and Fichte’s project of a “critical idealism” as *Propädeutik*, finds itself traversed by a devastating faultline. Its highly unstable topography unexpectedly reveals the “transcendental apperception” or self-positing “I” not as the autonomous, principled, and self-present summit of the critical edifice but as its abyss; the unity of the subject, until recently the designated center and foundation for a unified system of philosophy and its ancillary, scientific discourses, is found to presuppose its own identity. Unlike the first generation of Kantian readers and critics, however, Schelling’s response to the dilemma of a purely theoretical, critical philosophy is not to advocate its abandonment or refutation. On the contrary, precisely its failure, supremely evident in its aporetic mode of cognition—the “transcendental reflection” that presupposes the subject at the very moment when it seeks to elucidate the self-sufficiency of its synthetic constitution—reveals the crisis of the critical enterprise as a symptom and as evidence of a metaphysical, post-Lapsarian problematic.

Ever since Descartes, and extending all the way through the early Fichte, reflection has structurally embodied the very Fall from which it purports to redeem the human subject; for reflection invariably sets consciousness in a relation of opposition and dissociation to its object, and thus its syntheses can never reconstitute but merely presuppose the Being of a lost unity; as Schelling puts it, “mere reflection is thus a mental disorder of man” (2,13) and we can only concede it a “negative quality.”<sup>49</sup> Elsewhere he comments on how all “self-awareness implies the danger of losing the I. It is not a free act of the immutable but an unfree urge that induces the mutable I, conditioned by the non-I, to strive to maintain its identity and to reassert itself in the undertow of endless change. Or do you really feel free in your self-awareness?” (1,180/84). Unlike Kant and Fichte, then, Schelling regards critical philosophy not only as incapable of grounding self-consciousness through and for itself, he shows no investment in remedying this impasse by means of merely technical and supplementary conceptions, such as those of the schematism or an “intellectual intuition.” Although these notions reappear in his *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800), they serve strictly as the “monuments” along the first, theoretical “epoch” of the dialectical pathway toward unity. Being historically relative to their particular epoch, however, they cannot, in turn, effect the closure of this movement itself. Already in his “Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature” from 1797 Schelling writes: “How a world outside us, how a Nature and with it experience, is possible—these are questions for which we have philosophy to thank; or rather, with these questions philosophy came to be” (2,12/10).

In casting self-consciousness and its anthropological dimension as symptoms of a lost, metaphysically rooted “identity,” Schelling’s early philosophy must recover its evidence from the domain of *intuition*, where such

evidence is no longer available through a priori concepts. Hence his philosophy of nature analyzes the form of self-identity in the material or unconscious world (*das Unbewusste*); Schelling here likes to invoke the plant as a representative instance of the very identity that underlies all conscious and unconscious existence. With all its various parts (leaves, stems, roots, etc.), the plant derives its life from the fact “that it is the absolute identity of itself as unity and multiplicity” (5,56). Only by virtue of this identity can concepts of understanding ever represent more than a given individual object.<sup>50</sup> Identity, then, is no longer the synthetic unity of heterogeneous elements (Kant), nor can it ever be grasped as the object of a reflection by consciousness upon its own act of self-production (Fichte), for it encompasses the genuine alterity of material being (*Seyendes*). The plant, taken as “archetype”—the *Urbild* theory that Goethe found so congenial that he used all his influence to ensure Schelling’s appointment at Jena—is no longer the heuristic or logical *Bild* required for the mediation of the unconscious “feeling” with and as its own self-consciousness, such as Fichte had conceived of it in “Of Spirit and Letter in Philosophy.”

Beginning with his 1797 “Treatise Explicatory of the Idealism in the Science of Knowledge,” Schelling is concerned with rethinking “Being” (*Seyn*) in such a way as to preserve its material and historical autonomy as Being (*das Seyende*), albeit an autonomy that proves strictly relative (to Man). Being is not only the deficient dimension of *logos*, the not-yet-self-present concept that it becomes in Hegel but it is, and to a certain extent always remains, an index (in the sense of an “intuition”) of the inherently finite constitution of the subject. Where Hegel stresses the *logical* dimension of reflexivity in the concept, Schelling emphasizes the concreteness and indisputable, logical anteriority of Being over the conceptual; and where Hegel stresses *totality* as the re-membered “truth” of the speculative and bifurcated movement of a “natural” and a “philosophical” consciousness, Schelling accentuates the *infinity* of such a process.<sup>51</sup> As the last sentences of his 1810 lectures at Stuttgart already anticipate, a Philosophy of History cannot be written on the basis of an achieved totality; consistent with that position his next work, *Die Weltalter*, though repeatedly announced to be forthcoming would never be published during his lifetime, his last publication being, in fact, the *Philosophy of Revelation* (*Philosophie der Offenbarung*, 1843)—facts that starkly contrast with the evenhanded, almost suffocatingly self-assured tone of Hegel’s historico-systematic lectures on History, Philosophy, Religion, Aesthetics, and Law.

Schelling’s *Treatise Explicatory of the Idealism in the Science of Knowledge*, first published as a review article in several installments in the *Philosophisches Journal* in 1796–97, thus proposes a dialectical, rather than logical, reconstruction of self-consciousness by distinguishing between a given stage of consciousness and what, at that stage, consciousness is for itself. Schelling

refers to a specific form of consciousness, when viewed as corresponding with the unconditional identity of the absolute, as *spirit* [Geist]. Consciousness qua spirit therefore is analyzed independent of any object relation: "As spirit [Geist] I designate that which is only its own object. . . . Spirit can only be apprehended in its activity" (1,366–7). Already a year earlier, in his *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism*, Schelling had remarked how "we awaken through reflection," and if reflection indeed effects a consciousness of self, such a "return to ourselves . . . is [not] thinkable without resistance, no reflection without an object" (1,325/185). From a philosophical perspective—which is primarily concerned with questions of evidence and its representation—this return into itself by consciousness must also reveal the ground of unity for consciousness. How else—the argument is familiar—could consciousness recognize the reflection as its own?

For the first time, to overcome the Kantian and Fichtean impasse, the analytical concept of reflection is replaced by a dialectical one whereby the initial consciousness of an object now appears as the object for the philosophical narrative itself.<sup>52</sup> Surely, any interiority of consciousness, including its dynamic or "active" construction-representation of an object, can become knowable (i.e., conscious) only through a reflection on the form of its own existence. Its existence, Schelling admits—up to this point still in agreement with Fichte—lies in its capacity to act, to be active, by constructing its world relative to itself. This reflexive inversion, meanwhile, "repeat[s] this mode of activity [Handlungsweise] with freedom" (1,371); and precisely this reflective doubling back unto itself announces the arrival of speculative "truth" in consciousness. For Schelling, "only a force returning into itself creates an interiority" (1,379), and simultaneously, "in its tendency toward self-inspection [Selbstanschauung] the spirit limits itself" (1,380). This very capacity of reflection not only to "separate what nature had united forever" (2,13), but also to isolate the forms of Geist in the material of finite consciousness marks the emergence of history and of a certain form of temporality in the Romantic speculation on self-consciousness:

All acts of the spirit thus aim at presenting the infinite within the finite. The goal of all these actions is self-consciousness, and their history is none other than the history of self-consciousness. Every act of the soul is also a determinate stage of the soul. Hence the history of the human spirit will prove none other than the history of the different stages in passing through which it progressively attains an intuition of itself. . . . The external world lies unfolded before us, so that we may rediscover within it the history of our spirit. Hence philosophy cannot rest until it has accompanied the spirit to the goal of all its striving, to self-consciousness. (1,382f.)<sup>53</sup>

History, for Schelling, is to be understood as the progressive recovery of the speculative content (i.e., "spirit") in the relatively autonomous forms and material sedimentations of our anthropomorphic self-consciousness (i.e., material nature, feeling, reflection, and the will). Though still Fichtean in much of its argument, the 1797 *Treatise* radically reconceives the relation between subject and ground as one of *identity* rather than as a unity that remains grounded in the synthetic power of Kant's "productive imagination" or in the apodictic evidence of Fichte's "intellectual intuition."<sup>54</sup>

## II

The consummate formulation of Schelling's dialectical conception of subjectivity occurs in his *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800), a text in which Schelling is particularly concerned with pointing out the strict continuity between the theoretical and the practical conception of reason, an intention he shares with Fichte. Yet as he revisits his earlier postulate that "we must be what we call ourselves theoretically" (1,308/173), Schelling also breaks decisively with Fichte's strictly logical construction of the self. Unlike Fichte's system, particularly in its revised version of the *Science of Knowledge* of 1797, Schelling's *System* seeks philosophical truth not in the propositional grammar of an individual, anthropomorphic consciousness and its (self-)grounding, purely positional "act" (*Tathandlung*). Instead, the *System* aims at rendering the very debris of such a "grammar" or knowledge legible as the "trace" of an agency or absolute ("Being" as the identity of subject and object) of whose plenitude a strictly egological consciousness or anthropomorphic self can never fully partake. In other words, the discrete stages of a purely theoretical consciousness are reinterpreted as discrete stages in a temporal and narrative trajectory whose "truth" or "meaning" coincides in all respects with its Being. Hence, as we shall see, Schelling does not seek to render it "knowable" through the traditional, deictic or referential model of a propositional grammar. Truth, from here on, emerges not by means of but, instead, through the failure of such a model of representation.

As a theoretical agency, human consciousness works progressively, albeit unawares, toward realizing the ground of its unity (Being), one it can never properly "know" as a discrete subject. Still, being effectively constrained by the practical postulate (whose subjective form lies in the "will") that it ought to render the ground of its own being intelligible, consciousness gradually assembles a trajectory of discrete stages, each linked to the next by an instance of theoretical crisis. What, from the perspective of an anthropomorphic consciousness, seems merely the debris of failed paradigms of self-cognition, becomes legible and meaningful as the history of a spirit whose

ultimate telos we are to locate in the convergence or, rather, coalescence of the *form* with the *object* of knowledge, of ground and Being, of the theoretical with the practical. We are offered a temporal rather than logical conception of the subject, a subject whose epistemic forms as a theoretical *consciousness* will reveal themselves as the very content of a dialectical and historical progression for the *spirit*. As such, the logical forms merely extend what, according to Schelling, can already be found in nature; namely, that nature or the unconscious proves structurally cognate with the first "epoch" of the spirit. Understood as "a progressive history of self-consciousness," this dialectic also reveals "the parallelism of nature with intelligence. . . . For in this work it will become apparent, that the same powers of intuition which reside in the self can also be exhibited up to a certain point in nature" (3,331f./2f.). Once again, it proves essential that the spirit "is to inspect not these products [*natura naturata*] but itself *within* these products," that is, its activity [*natura naturans*], as Schelling's 1797 *Treatise* had put it (1,390). In the words of one critic, "Schelling is able to combine Fichte's opposing philosophies of Idealism and Realism (Dogmatism) because for him nature has become an unconscious power [*Potenz*] of reflective life itself."<sup>55</sup> Indeed, Schelling repeatedly designates his 1800 *System* as a "Real-Idealism" (3,386/42).

The *System* (1800) opens with the familiar Fichtean claim that the "concept of the self arises through the act of self-consciousness, and thus apart from this act the self is nothing" (3,366/25). Such a postulate regarding self-consciousness not only implies the formal identity of self-consciousness ( $A = A$ ) but, as a synthetic proposition, it also asserts the existence of the self (*I am*). At first, little seems to have changed since Fichte advanced his ostensibly identical proposition from Part I of the 1795 *Science of Knowledge*. Schelling reiterates the originally Kantian distinction, also retained by Fichte, between the formal and *analytic* unity of the self, which is expressed in the proposition ' $A = A$ ,' and the *synthetic* unity, which we assume as soon as we predicate the self's existence (e.g., ' $I = I$ ' or '*I Am*'). Unlike Kant or Fichte, however, Schelling does not believe in the possibility of deducing one from the other, and he shows even impatience with Fichte's conception of being (*Seyendes*) as strictly a derivative 'notion' or effect of the purely positional "act" or self-assertion.

Not only can consciousness, according to Schelling, *not* know the grounds for its own unity, but any paradigm of unity, if it is to be capable of "truth," cannot in turn coopt an oppositional logic, such as it persists in Kant's distinction between analytic and synthetic unity. What confers truth on unity is an *identity* in relation to which the human subject qua self-consciousness functions not as a proprietor but as a medium and effect. As Schelling seeks to demonstrate throughout this text, philosophy itself evolves as a dramatic narrative, offering us a progressive revelation of the very identity that sustained (even as it is being obscured by) the seemingly

endless struggle between formal and material, immanent and extrinsic, analytical and synthetic paradigms of knowledge and propositional coherence or unity. The dialectic of the *System* is thus designed to uncover an "original duplicity [*ursprüngliche Duplizität*] within the identity" (3,373/30). Schelling continues: "From this original duality in itself there unfolds for the self everything objective that enters its consciousness; and it is only that original identity in the duality which brings unification and connection into all synthetic knowledge" (3,374/31).<sup>56</sup> This duality remains as long as self-consciousness has not yet set itself into a knowing relation (absolute reflection) to its formal-analytical ( $A = A$ ) and to its material and synthetic ( $I = I$ , hence "*I am*") unity *as its own*. With its unity remaining contingent on the forever deferred reconciliation of its ethical and its material sense of unity, of its "limiting activity and the activity limited" (3,391/43), self-consciousness will remain the site of an "infinite conflict" (3,398/50) between the competing paradigms of Idealism-Realism, Transcendentalism-Skepticism, and so forth.

Clearly, the identity that binds together these activities as parts of the same self cannot, in turn, ever become an object for this very consciousness. Hence Schelling refers to it as the correlate of an act "which, since it is the condition of all limitation and consciousness, does not itself come to consciousness" (3,395/47). So, if no philosophical presentation of this identity is conceivable within a strictly theoretical idiom, Schelling's dialectics must evolve strictly as "the free imitation, the free recapitulation of the original series of acts into which the one act of self-consciousness evolves" (3,397/49). The demonstration of this absolute identity takes the form of a *repetition* whereby stages of consciousness become the object of analysis. In apparent imitation of the Platonic concept of *anamnesis*, Schelling thus speaks of a "twofold series" (*[doppelte Reihe]* 3,397/49) of consciousness, and he continues: "Philosophy is thus a history of self-consciousness, having various epochs, and by means of it that one absolute synthesis is successively put together" (3,399/50).<sup>57</sup> In clear prefiguration of Schelling's later philosophy of history, the *System* (1800) distinguishes between three epochs through which the Identity or Absolute progressively reveals itself as the unifying ground for the formal and material unity of human consciousness, respectively. In this dialectical progression consciousness evolves from (1) a state of primordial sensation to one of productive intuition, (2) from intuition to reflection and to the absolute act of will, which constitutes the beginning of the third epoch.

For the first two of these epochs, Schelling can still point to a corresponding form within nature, namely, unconscious matter and, subsequently, the organic forms of life (3,490 ff./122 ff.). However, for the last epoch, wherein the spirit has attained the form of the will, no corresponding power in nature can be determined, because, when considered in a formal sense, the will no longer constitutes a synthetic activity. Instead, in reflecting on the act

of reflection itself—itsself the culminating point of all synthetic (purely theoretical) practice—human consciousness qua will assumes an analytic relation to its former, synthetic acts; that is synthetic acts are now remembered and interiorized (*erinnert*) as the past forms of the spirit. At the corresponding moment in the “transcendental deduction” of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant had introduced the power of the “imagination” and its “transcendental schemata” to effect the “transcendental synthesis” that the “unity of apperception” had merely presupposed. Schelling at this point in his *System* also makes reference to the schematism, yet he insists that it, too, must be understood as but a passing form within the dialectical progression of the spirit. In contrast to Kant, Schelling can thus no longer posit the schemata as “*a priori* determinations of time” (A145/185) but, on the contrary, comes to view the schematism itself as an inherently temporal stage or “form” of consciousness.

For Schelling, that is, the technologies of self-knowledge and, by extension of knowledge as method, institution, and generally as cultural and social force, remain subordinate to time and, because time can no longer be thought under the aegis of formal logic, that means to *historical time*; hence these “technologies of knowledge” prove by definition incapable of “truth” and, indeed, lay bare a division within the discipline of philosophy between a single, monolithic, quasi-ontological perspective and multiple, heteronomous, and competing hermeneutic perspectives on the question of Being. In a highly astute analysis that develops with much acumen a similar argument from the 1797 *Treatise Explicatory of the Idealism in the Science of Knowledge*, Schelling shows how the division among the various Kantian categories had already been temporally marked. Focusing on the categories of relation, Schelling notes how the first of these, that of substance and accident, can reach beyond the formal dyad of a logical subject and predicate only because its application is regulated by a second category of relation: causality and effect. Hence, Schelling concludes, “the opposition obtaining between the first two categories is the same as that obtaining between space and time.” For it is only through the second category that “we add the transcendental schema of time” (3,521/146). Contrary to Kant, however, Schelling resituates the third category of relation, that of “reciprocity between agent and patient,” within a temporal rather than logical frame. Because the transition from the “intuitionless concept” (first category) to the “conceptless intuition” (second category) “is possible only through the schematism of time, we conclude that time, too, must have already entered into that original synthesis” (3,523/148). This schematism of time Schelling also calls a *transcendental abstraction* and as such it constitutes “the condition of judgment, but not judgment itself” (3,516/142). However, because “the condition does not come to consciousness prior to the conditioned” (3,523/148), Kant’s theory of the pure concepts of understanding (i.e., the categories) proves the result of an “abstraction” that remains inaccessible to a purely

theoretical consciousness such as that of Kant’s apperception. Schelling thus interprets this abstraction as an absolute act of will:

But now it is obvious that only by also becoming conscious of transcendental abstraction could the self first elevate itself absolutely, for itself, above the object (. . .) and that only by elevating itself above any object, could it recognize itself as an intelligence. But now this act is an absolute abstraction and, precisely because it is absolute, can no longer be explained through any other in the intelligence; and hence at this point the chain of theoretical philosophy breaks off, and there remains in regard to it only the absolute demand: there shall appear such an act in the intelligence. But in so saying, theoretical philosophy oversteps its boundary, and crosses into the domain of practical philosophy, which alone posits by means of categorical demands. (3,224/149)

Schelling’s passage—as indeed his extended analogy between philosophy’s and geometry’s reliance on “postulates” in the “Appendix” to his 1797 *Treatise* and in the 1800 *System*—shows the “infinite conflict” within theoretical self-consciousness to stem from the impossibility of *knowing* the identity that binds together the limiting (ideal) and the limited (real) acts of this consciousness itself. Hence, Schelling notes, “throughout the whole of theoretical philosophy we have seen the endeavour of the intelligence to become aware of its action as such, persistently fail” (3,536/158); and the world of theoretical consciousness whose origins are rooted in intuition “falls . . . behind consciousness” and thus “falls altogether outside time” (3,537/159). By contrast, the practical self-consciousness no longer opposes these ideal and real acts of intuition and understanding but, as an “idealizing” form, it contemplates this very opposition itself. For here “by an absolute act[,] the intelligence elevates itself above everything objective” (3,525/149). Thus “absolute abstraction, i.e., the beginning of consciousness, is explicable only through a self-determining, or an act of the intelligence upon itself” (3,532/155). As Schelling elaborates, the “absolute act of will” and practical self-consciousness “cannot simply express a concept in the object, but by free action must express therein a concept of the concept.” The objects of practical consciousness no longer amount to mere entities, ascribed to an outside world with which the understanding maintains only a reflective, antithetical relation. Instead these objects must be inherently reflexive themselves, for the self can become conscious of the act of will as *its own act* “only in that an object of intuition becomes the visible expression of its willing” (3,557/175).

Schelling thus must introduce an object that is independent of the act of will, for it is to render the latter intuitable for a self-conscious subject without, however, being qualitatively heterogeneous or extrinsic to this self-consciousness. “Products of this kind are the ideas” (3,559/176) Schelling

asserts, and their corresponding intuitional form can be found in art.<sup>58</sup> As a product of the imagination, as the faculty “wavering between finitude and infinity,” art expresses the “concept of a concept” and thus impels “reflection immediately to an *intelligence outside itself*” (3,554/172). Although superior to the merely theoretical opposition between the ideal and the real (*ideell-reell*), art and the idea—the intuition and concept complementing the practical stage of the spirit as an unconditional act of will—cannot resolve the question of self-consciousness in its entirety:

But now how, in willing, the self makes the transition, even in thought from the Idea to the determinate object (for how such a transition may be objectively possible is still not in question at all), is beyond comprehension, unless there is again some intermediary which is for acting precisely what in thinking the symbol is for ideas, or the schema for concepts. This mediating factor is the *ideal*. (3,559/176)

To be knowable by consciousness as its own authentic ground (i.e., in and of itself), each notion that is introduced as the prospective ground of unity (i.e., as the absolute identity) for self-consciousness requires that it be mediated, as intuition or representation. This by now familiar constraint in the competing, idealist models of subjectivity, extends into the domain of freedom, with practical reason and art functioning as its conceptual and intuitional pillars, respectively. Here again, then, Schelling’s dialectic seeks to uncover the temporal and historical significance of the will and aesthetic “presentation” (*Darstellung*) of its ideas. The conversion of the will into a symbolic form of intuition—itsself patterned as a temporal succession of the various forms and genres of art—enables the by definition belated, analeptic narrative of the dialectician to inspect the import of truth within the productions of a finite consciousness. It is, in short, the by now familiar reversal of an act into a form of human consciousness, the exegesis of a product as the “trace” of a vanished or, rather, unrepresentable absolute Being (*Seyn*).

In the final analysis, such a dialectical schema must confront its own enabling condition, that is, a certain paradigm of historical time; and indeed, Schelling remarks, such a dialectical reversal “will lead us to a philosophy of history, which latter is for the practical part of philosophy precisely what nature is for the theoretical part” (3,590/201). On the one hand, then, “there can only be a history of such beings as have an ideal before them” whereas, on the other hand, “man has a history only because what he will do is incapable of being calculated in advance according to any theory” (3,589/200). From the perspective of the individual consciousness, then, history would be the site of an absolute and potentially hubristic freedom or “spontaneity” (*Willkür*). And yet, precisely because the *System* (1800) consistently points to the irremediably temporal constitution of all anthropomorphic consciousness

as the very index of its theoretical limits, history per se can no longer be reduced to a merely empirical contingency of interpretation, though it would be equally fallacious to elevate it to a transcendental concept. For if, according to Schelling, all transcendental or “purely” theoretical reflection remains itself enclosed by a historical horizon, it can follow only that “theory and history are totally opposed” (3,589/200):

All that has ever *been* in history is also truly connected, or will be, with the individual consciousness of each, not immediately, maybe, but certainly by means of innumerable linkages, of such a kind that if one could point them out it would also become obvious that the whole of the past was necessary in order to put this consciousness together. (3,590/201)

In his later philosophy, Schelling attempts to specify what he understands by these linkages and how they could be rendered intelligible for a self-consciousness. If human consciousness was capable of a reflection whereby it could reassemble all these linkages, the point of convergence (i.e., the absolute identity) of free spontaneity (*Willkür*) and necessity (*Notwendigkeit*), of Idealism and Realism would have been attained.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, the drive toward such an identity proves to be the “primary characteristic of history, namely, that it should exhibit a union of freedom and necessity” (3,593/203).

And yet, Schelling’s introduction of tragedy as the complementary aesthetic form of intuition for “such an intervention of a hidden necessity into human freedom (3,595/204) reveals the incompatibility of a transcendental consciousness of inherently anthropomorphic constitution with the revelation of the absolute as this identity. The ultimate consequence of Schelling’s dialectics, therefore, *lies in the transference of authenticity and truth from the subjectivity of an individual consciousness to the historicity of the “spirit.”* The supreme literary genre of tragedy thus culminates in the disclosure of tragic meaning as an event precisely linked to and, indeed, contingent upon the death of the subject-protagonist. The annihilation of the protagonist’s individual consciousness occurs at the very moment when he or she recognizes the “linkages” of the past as the necessary result of his or her own act of will. For Schelling, then, we must think of our finite consciousness not as a playwright independent of his or her creation (the *text* of history), nor are we to reduce it to the level of a merely functional (yet entirely unself-conscious) agency, a protagonist indifferently reciting a history without, however, recognizing the latter as the very “ground” of his or her own being. Instead, situated between an absolute subject (the *archetypus intellectus*, God) that has traditionally been conceived as entirely unconstrained by historical time and process (a notion Schelling will later challenge) and a finite consciousness wholly enclosed and determined by historical necessity and hence incapable

of recognizing itself as a product of this history, Schelling's self-consciousness occupies the ambiguous zone of the "copoet" ([*Mitdichter*] 3,602/210) of its own becoming.

It is this zone—between autonomy and necessity, between certainty and dependency—in which Schelling, after 1801, seeks to expand a metaphysical conception of God and History; and any discussion of Schelling's philosophy after 1801 can succeed only if it understands and, in its specific construction, constantly acknowledges that Schelling's speculative and metaphysical claims are rooted in a highly refined and advanced analysis of the anthropological constitution of human consciousness. Schelling's metaphysical conception of identity unfolds the positive image of such an identity from the inherently negative imprint or tract of the irremediably interpretive (*Mitdichter*) and heteronomous subjectivity of human consciousness.<sup>60</sup> With its collapse of the first, theoretical epoch into a second, practical one the history of consciousness "provides a continuous demonstration of God's presence, a demonstration, however, which only the whole of history can render complete" (3,603/211). Because, as a "never wholly completed revelation of [the] absolute" (3,603/211), history remains ultimately undecidable for any finite subjectivity, this interpretive, anthropomorphic consciousness can only "find traces of this eternal and unalterable identity [*die Spur dieser ewigen und unveränderlichen Identität*] in the lawfulness which runs, like the texture [*Gewebe*] of an unknown hand, through the free play of choice in history" (3,601/209, trans. modified).

Schelling's *System of Transcendental Idealism* articulates a tension between history and theory to which Schelling responds with a suspension of historical speculation for nearly ten years so as to rethink the logical and metaphysical implications of that tension itself. Between 1801 and 1809, notwithstanding the considerable range of his writings, he directs most of his attention to the ground of this perceived incompatibility between historical, cultural, and subjective processes and the consistency and totality that theoretical speculation always proclaims for the former. The overriding concern of these "middle years" of Schelling's career involves the thinking of identity as the negotiation—qua process—of differences, not opposites. The analytic, free, ideal, and conceptual unity and the synthetic, dependend, real, and intuitional unity must each be thought as but one hermeneutic perspective (as such constrained by what its historical epoch *could* think) on the absolute, self-same, and atemporal identity of Being.

### III

Early on in his 1804 essay on "Philosophy and Religion" Schelling characterizes the monolithic nature of God or the Absolute as one of strict simultaneity,

even if from the viewpoint of an "ideal" mode of finite, human cognition such a totality can be understood only as a transition between form and essence and therefore is inevitably temporalized:

what is monolithic [*das Einfache*] or the essence is neither the *effective* nor the *real* ground of form, and we find no more of a transition between it and form than there could be between the idea of a circle and the form of equidistant, concentric points describing a line around one common center. In this region there is no succession, but everything has its Being simultaneously, as with one single stroke, notwithstanding that in an ideal sense one appears to derive from the other (6,30).

Hence, Schelling remarks somewhat later, "God is the *immediate* in-itself of history" and He "is strictly the totality of History—and the latter is merely a successive development of God" (6,56–7). Consequently, to (re)construct the Absolute under the aegis of a temporal form, even under a speculative model of reflection (such as Hegel's "reflexive determinations" in the *Phenomenology*), is to leave inherently unexamined the overarching concept of identity that enables differences as such to coincide with themselves and thus ensures that any play of differences will yield a progression.<sup>61</sup> In his 1804 lectures in Würzburg, which resulted in his *System of Philosophy in General* (published posthumously), Schelling sets out to rethink this concept of identity, taking as his point of departure the ostensibly universal, propositional grammar of epistemic predication (e.g., "The apple is green," or "A = A'"). As it turns out, all propositional statements appear to be marked by a formal paradox in that all cognition implies a form of relation whose condition of possibility remains unaccounted for in the actual proposition itself:

The *truth* of knowledge, for instance, is located in its *correspondence* with its object, or truth is explained as the correspondence of subjectivity and objectivity in knowledge. It is claimed that only a knowledge corresponding to its object constitutes genuine knowledge; a knowledge without any corresponding object is no knowledge but mere thinking. Such reflections occur even in ordinary consciousness. It is evident that, in explaining truth as a correspondence of subjectivity and objectivity in knowledge, subject and object are already assumed to differ from one another, for only different [entities] may correspond [whereas] nondifferent ones are inherently one. (6,138)

In Schelling's view, all predicative knowledge is unsettled by an almost imperceptible fault line or rift between its formal condition of possibility (namely, that subject and object "are inherently one" or nondifferent) and its actual (material) purpose, according to which they must differ—for why else predicate

anything in the first place. Clearly, the logic of cognition mandates a certain dismantling of the subjectivity of the knowing subject. Schelling thus notes that “we now abandon forever that sphere of reflection which discriminates between the subject and the object, and our subsequent investigation can only be the development and exploration of the presupposition that the knower and what is known are one and the same: (6,140).

Difference, that is, can evolve only under the aegis of a unified, unchanging oneness, an essential identity of Being. Consequently, the “differends” of difference cannot be understood as parts or representations of Being (*Seyn*) but, on the contrary, exhibit the relative “Nonbeing” of all phenomenal and material being (*Seyendes*) or form. What is related with one another in the kind of relation that structures propositional knowledge can thus attain the truth of Being only if it is not reified as subject and object. And yet, far from presuming that the subject-object opposition could simply be discarded, Schelling suggests that the identity on which any predicative or unconscious relation between what are traditionally called *subject* and *object* is based must itself be *known* as *their* identity. In reconceiving subject and object as virtualities or “powers” or, as the 1804 *System* puts it, as dynamic “quantitative differences”—demarkating a certain interpretation of the inherently unrepresentable identity—Schelling does not deny them existence but, to the extent that they exist in reified and propositional form, denies them the power of “truth.” Truth thus inheres neither in an empirically conceived relation between entities (subject-object), nor can it be conflated with the unity that, in Kant’s *Critique*, is claimed as the ground for the propositional subject-predicate grammar of synthetic judgments. As the unrepresentable and, strictly speaking, still unthought condition of possibility for such a “transcendental unity,” identity thus no longer conforms to traditional philosophical (i.e., oppositional) models of “difference.” To be sure, though, Schelling in no way replaces the oppositional paradigm of difference with one of mere “indifference” (*Einerleiheit*); for to think identity as “indifference” would amount to a mere negation or suspension of an already reflected, once again oppositionally structured, difference between two heterogeneous entities, and therefore would be a derivative of the Kantian conception of “unity.”<sup>62</sup> Instead, we find Schelling adopting what might be called a *variational*, rather than *relational*, paradigm as the one enabling us to think the economy of identity and difference. Indeed, as Schelling comments in his 1805 “Aphorisms for the Philosophy of Nature”: “Anything that originates in a relation, *insofar* as it is strictly grounded in a relation, is merely an *ens imaginarium*, an empty creation without an inner unity, a chimera (*simulacrum*) which both is and is not, depending how we look upon it” (7,164).

Yet in what way can we positively think such an isomorphous paradigm of identity/difference? And what possible significance and benefit could such a

thinking yield especially for today’s highly diverse discourses of “Theory”? How are we to think (and represent) an identity whose *constitutive and dynamic unfolding of difference* evolves neither as a juxtaposing of heterogeneous entities (which would compromise its very authenticity or “truth” as absolute Being) nor as a merely contingent and unreflected process (i.e., as an “indifference”), but that instead constitutes the very “essence” and totality of knowledge, value, and truth? Clearly, Schelling has pushed “theory” to its very limits or, as some of his contemporaries and perhaps some of his readers today might argue, well beyond those limits into a domain of outright mystical speculation that, it appears, no longer answers to logic, let alone to more empirically construed standards of discursive accountability.

Before we can fairly address these concerns, as indeed we must, we may have to suspend our disbelief a little longer and listen in on Schelling’s continuing modulation of his central issue in some of his later texts, specifically those presented here for the first time in translation. If it is true that Schelling invests his concept of “identity” with supreme epistemic significance, we now notice how—unlike the inadequate notion of mere “indifference”—this identity appears to resurrect, at least implicitly, a certain anthropomorphic quality that Schelling’s earlier critique of subjectivity had rejected. Consider, for example the following passage: “the supreme knowledge necessarily implies that the self-sameness of the subject and the object becomes itself something known; or, since this self-sameness consists precisely in the identity of the knower and the know, it is that knowledge wherein the eternal self-sameness comes to recognize itself” (6,141). Identity, it appears, mandates a doubling of the traditional concept of relation. That is, instead of the object emerging as the “property” of the knowing subject, both are but variational manifestations of an identity and hence cannot be *qualitatively* different; or, put differently, their inherently homologous relation comes to know itself as such; that is, as identity. In a series of concise steps (§§ 1–32), Schelling’s 1804 *System* begins to develop this concept of identity, insisting that identity—if thought as an ontotheological, absolute agency—*must appear and hence is committed to difference*, albeit only quantitative difference (because all quality, insofar as it bears a *legitimate* or “true” relation to the essence of *Being* is One). Furthermore, all difference that, in its relation to *Being*, Schelling calls *powers* (*Potenzen*) and *ideas* is to partake of a variational continuum of appearances that may not exhibit any discontinuities (*natura non saltat*).

If Schelling’s 1804 lectures succeed in elaborating, with generally admirable clarity, the metaphysical dimension of relations in general, they do not yet fully address the actual purpose of this differential continuum whose sole task appears to consist in affirming the absolute. What purpose, we might ask, does the drama of finite, individual consciousness and cognition serve, if it is understood that it cannot ground itself and, consequently, cannot declare itself, as the knowing subject, to be that purpose? Or, as Schelling puts it,

that ultimate question posed by the vertiginous intellect hovering at the abyss of infinity: "Why [is] something rather than nothing?", this question will be swept aside forever by the necessity of Being, that is, by the absolute affirmation of Being in knowledge. The absolute position of the idea of God is indeed nothing but the absolute negation of nothingness, and the same certainty of reason that ensures the negation of nothingness and thus the nullity of nothingness also affirms the totality [das All] and the eternity of God (6,155).

This eternal "subjectivity" is also referred to, in the preceding passage, as *Reason* or *God*, and it is manifestly incompatible with the traditional, Kantian and Fichtean concept of reason and subjectivity. "By reason," Schelling notes in his 1804 *System*, "I do not merely understand its manifestation and its gradual progress toward self-knowledge in humanity, but Reason insofar as it is the universal, true essence, [and] the substance of all things which inhabits the entire universe" (6,208).<sup>63</sup>

Schelling's later writings, especially his *Treatise of Human Freedom* and his *Stuttgart Seminars*, pursue what, in the preceding passage, is already hinted at. Any concept of the absolute, be it called *God*, the *Absolute*, or *Reason*, remains a vacuous formalism unless it is invested with an epistemic desire, a desire for self-knowledge, and thus, ultimately, is understood as an inherently differentiated subjectivity. Hence its coherence is neither vested in an unreflected unity nor in an eventual synthesis but, on the contrary, is to be thought as an identity of inherently differential constitution, namely, as Being (*Seyn*) and as existence (*Existenz*). To characterize identity as capable of meaning is to delineate its forms of appearance, which is tantamount to conceiving of it as a purposeful play of quantitative or variational difference. Especially in his *Stuttgart Seminars* (1810), whose moderately introductory tone sought to accommodate a largely lay audience, Schelling comes to develop more emphatically his notion of the inherent dependency of a metaphysical God on a controlled economy of difference or otherness. As he comments, "this transition from identity to difference has often been understood as a cancellation of identity; yet that is not at all the case. . . . Much rather it is a doubling [*Doubling*] of the essence, and thus an intensification of the unity, something that is once again aptly illustrated by means of an analogy with ourselves" (7,424–5).

As Schelling then goes on to note, "this act of restriction or of a descent by God is spontaneous [*freiwillig*]" because "only God Himself can break with the absolute identity of His essence and thereby can create the space for a revelation" (7,429). Even more emphatically than in his 1809 *Treatise of Human Freedom*, Schelling now relies on a paradigm of subjectivity as all but indispensable for understanding God or the absolute as an inherently doubled identity; namely, as "being" (*Seyn*) and "existence" (*Existenz*).

To be sure, subjectivity here no longer functions as an ontological characterization but as a heuristic conception (perhaps the only feasible strategy of representation) of God as Identity. As Schelling puts it, "the entire process of the creation of the world—which still lives on in the life process of nature and history—is in effect nothing but the process of the complete coming-to-consciousness, of the complete personalization of God" (7,433). Such remarks reiterate Schelling's suggestions, in his 1809 *Treatise of Human Freedom*, that God "allowed the basis to operate independently, because he felt the will of the ground to be the will towards his revelation and recognized, in accordance with his providence, that a ground independent of him (as spirit) would have to be the ground of his existence" (7,378/55).<sup>64</sup>

God, then, is ultimately to be thought as a will, even as a "desire or passion [*Begierde oder Lust*]" (7,395/75) for Being as both "ground" and "existence." The differential, indeed relatively deficient (and thus relatively autonomous) finite world of nature and humanity, therefore appears as the material condition of a desire for self-presence:

Because there is in God an independent ground of reality, and hence two equally eternal beginnings of self-revelation, therefore God with respect to his freedom, must also be viewed in relation to both. The first beginning of creation is the longing of the One to give birth to itself, or the will of the ground. The second is the will of love through which the Word is pronounced in nature and through which God first makes himself personal. (7,395/74)

"All Existence," Schelling argues, "must be conditioned in order that it may be actual, that is, personal existence. God's existence, too, could not be personal if it were not conditioned, except that he has the conditioning factor within himself and not outside himself" (7,399/79).

What might seem an unabashed, even reckless proclivity toward mysticism, I would argue, may yet offer us insights such as will not only deflect such charges (which Schelling does quite explicitly when insisting on the hubris of thinking rationality as a kind of foundation [see *Stuttgart Seminars*; 7,469ff.]) but may even challenge contemporary critical discourses to reevaluate their often unexamined paradigms of "identity." Far beyond the often arcane and perilously specialized debates regarding the question of Pantheism, Materialism, or the notion of a "positive philosophy" in Schelling's later work, his central quest for a rigorous thinking of identity remains as urgent today as it proved to Schelling.<sup>65</sup> First and foremost, Schelling's writings after 1801 decisively critique the common practice of conflating identity with unity and, by extension, of assigning identity as an attribute and property to the various constructionist or essentialist theories of the subject that have descended upon contemporary discourse since the mid-nineteenth century. Rather than

being the attribute of a reified subjectivity (alternatively thought as absolute, collective, or finite-individual), identity *can appear only* as a dynamic and interpretive continuum of *variational difference*. Being posited as the material condition of possibility for any manifest identity—both in the realm of finite cognition and its construction of an absolute homology of God and History—*difference* can neither be grounded in, nor tethered to, an absolute rationality (e.g., a “natural law”) but, on the contrary, is a temporal “power” or “stage” in an ongoing process of self-realization (or self-revelation) fueled by an inherently arational desire. Consequently, Schelling argues late in his *Treatise of Human Freedom*, “there must be an essence [*Wesen*], *before* all ground and before all existence, that is, before any duality at all; how can we designate it except as ‘primal ground’ [*Urgrund*] or, rather, as the ‘groundless’ [*Ungrund*]?” (7,406/87).<sup>66</sup>

#### IV

Part of the appeal and “modernity” of Schelling’s conception of identity, I would argue, lies in his recognition that any paradigm of subjectivity involves a reinscription of the very oppositions it is meant to control. This dilemma, which constitutes a much more serious challenge to theory than a merely formal paradox, can be perceived not only in the Kantian and Fichtean oppositions of intuition-concept or feeling-concept and in Schelling’s own, earlier dialectic of a self gradually assembled by the temporal movement of unconscious production and reflective remembering. Quite beyond the Idealist discursive tradition of which, according to Walter Schulz, Schelling is to be regarded as the consummate representative, Schelling’s later texts strongly suggest that any paradigm of “identity”—irrespective of whether we situate it in the traditional discursive space of formal epistemology or even in contemporary, theoretical discourses on the politics of gendered, sexual, racial, and ethnic identity—has inscribed within it the impossibility of identity as personal, individual, or even collective “property.” In fact, any subjective attempt to prepossess the concept of identity in a proprietary sense, even if it were to be promoted on behalf of a collective body, constitutes, according to Schelling, a form of *hubris*; it disrupts the metaphysical import—which is fundamentally one of ethics—of the very figure of identity. Anticipating similar ideas in the work of Jacques Lacan, Heidegger thus can comment that the “other” toward which the individual subjectivity is driven always implies the “absolute disruption of existence.”<sup>67</sup> Indeed, Schelling’s gradual development of his philosophy of identity out of the debris of the Kantian and Fichtean theories of the subject is driven by the recognition that the very opposition between a constructivist (dialectical) and an essentialist (intuitional) paradigm of the subject is not to be resolved, even though as a *constantly self-*

*transforming opposition*, it would seem to be the simultaneously indispensable and deficient medium for the possible revelation of the absolute.

For to seek to arbitrate between an essentialist (and, contiguous with that trope, intuitional, affective, private, expressivist) and constructivist (as well as discursive, ideological, public) identity of the subject in theories of gender, race, ethnicity, and sexuality is to return to a Kantian, Fichtean, even Cartesian model of the subject without adequately addressing the impasses generated by that tradition. What renders Schelling’s speculations on the concept of identity so potentially significant is precisely his insistence on its irreducibly metaphysical-ethical dimension commonly unrecognized by essentialist and constructionist representations of identity, respectively. For even the very totality of an absolute subject of metaphysics (God, Reason) cannot be thought *in conjunction with the phenomenal, finite world* unless its identity, too, is understood as a structured and necessary process of differential relations. That is, “the longing of the One to give birth to itself” evinces the management of difference between His “ground” and “existence” to be neither a systematic, theoretical nor a contingent, historical event but a reflex of his intrinsic dependency on “an essence before all ground” (7,406/87). In contemporary terms, one might speak of this mystical concept as a desire for the construction of an essence.<sup>68</sup> Such a desire, it ought to be stressed, can no longer be ontologically classified as “natural” or essential, or as ideological and constructed, because it is the ineffable productivity of such a “desire or passion” that first opens the space for theoretical attempts—alternatively formalist or dialectical—at remembering the subject as an essence or construct, respectively.

Beyond the fundamental fact that, for Schelling, “the absolute identity is not a mere identity but the identity of unity and oppositionality” (7,445), it also holds true that the opposition between essentialism and constructionism arguably underwrites the entire project of Schelling’s philosophy of identity, because nature (in its various powers) is but a *Konstruktion* whose material (or real) dependency on “essence” (*Wesen*) is matched by God’s cognitive (or ideal) dependency on a relatively independent, material existence. In other words, identity, for Schelling, ultimately designates a controlled and continuous play of differential relations, that is, a bidirectional dependency, between “ground” and “existence” or between the Oneness of a hypostatized, ideal “essence” and the multiplicity of the former’s heterogeneous, material “construction.” Identity thus can neither be thought as a natural nor as a constructed *attribute* and, considering its ultimate metaphysical nonplace—which, while shading off into mysticism, cannot, therefore, simply be rejected as a *particular position* by theoretical discourse—it not only cannot “ground” some version of epistemic authority but, more seriously, exposes the inherently arational nature of the philosophical operation of “grounding” itself.

In Schelling's texts of 1809 and 1810, identity instead uncovers the profoundly mystical desire for a controlled, subject-producing relation between the essential (*Wesen*) and the constructed (*Seyendes*), a distinction that resonates in contemporary distinctions between the essential and the constructed dimension of the subject (itself, rather carelessly, understood as a "theoretical" distinction). Identity, that is, constitutes not the ground of subjectivity but, in a truly vertiginous reversal, exposes the "anthropomorphic" quality of the subject (both in man and God) as rooted in an irremediably "groundless" (*Ungrund*) "desire" or "lust" for the operation of grounding itself. Refusing to be prepossessed by Reason, whose historicity it continually exposes, Schelling's conception of identity would rather seem to be at once the source and the telos of a desire (such as it manifests itself in the ongoing theoretical quest for a "grounding" of the subject; i.e., as essence, construct, or syncretistic amalgamation of both). Identity or, alternatively, its phenomenal disclosure as self-focused desire thus remains irrecoverably anterior to any paradigm of rationality, such as instantiates a discursive or interpretive community, even as it attempts to demarcate the authority of representation, knowledge, ethical accountability, and so on. It is, in other words, a *trope* in the most rigorous sense.

It is worthwhile reiterating the "irreducibly" tropological nature of "identity"—"irreducibly," once again, because this trope resists any remission into a literal frame of reference. That is, once conceived of as the inherently arational *Ungrund* of the absolute subject (Reason or God), identity defies conceptualization and, in consequence of that impossibility, cannot be consigned to the status of a mere metaphor in the historical narrative of philosophies of the subject. On the contrary, as a master trope invoked as the operational center by both philosophical and political theories of the subject and by their ideological critiques, identity simultaneously presupposes and hides from sight the economies of thinking about difference (e.g., of race, sex, gender, culture, money) that underwrite and enable any hermeneutics of the subject. Put differently, we may expect critical theories as well as ideological critiques of identity to confront their ethical and, by extension, metaphysical debt at precisely that moment *when they decide* (in a gesture that often goes unnoticed and, generally speaking, proves embarrassingly contingent) *on a certain paradigm of controlled difference as such*.

Hence to assert that identity is particular, constructed in accordance with often repressed or suppressed mechanisms of economic, gendered, ethnic, and sexual causes—though it may sound more "contemporary"—does little to circumvent the pitfalls of the very discourse on subjectivity that Schelling's philosophy of identity both exposes and attempts to bridge. The concept of identity, I propose, demarcates the site of an ongoing, quite possibly inescapable, crisis within the practice of theory. For inscribed within it is a general form of "desire" that both ensures and hides from sight the as it were

mystical dimension of identity.<sup>69</sup> Perhaps identity can be best understood as that which opens the "ground" (*Grund*) for a critique of the opposed paradigms of the subject (ranging from Kant's synthetic reconciliation of his intuition-concept dichotomy to current attempts at balancing the essentialism-constructivism dyad in gender theory) while simultaneously exposing the contingency (*Ungrund*) of such a grounding, epistemological desire for self-presence, even where it concerns the absolute subject (Schelling's God). The "in-mixing" of a structure of relative "Nonbeing" or otherness—which also appears to set Schelling and Lacan into striking, if unexpected, proximity—thus appears the condition for any subject whatsoever. Yet because the moment of pronouncing the identity of the subject means primarily a certain engagement of otherness within a *specifically* controlled and restricted economy of difference, as Schelling well knew, identity involves, *prima facie*, not the birth of the subject but that of a certain ethical practice. Schelling's gradual dissociation of the notion of identity from that of the subject thus suggests that, when understood as a desire for "ground" rather than as that ground itself, "identity" *tends to demarcate a certain paradigm of theoretical practice* that, in turn, is composed of a *paradigmatic (and, indeed, a pragmatic) management of difference and relations*. Theories of subjective identity—regardless of their cognitive intention and discursive inflection—thus constitute a fundamentally unself-conscious ethical practice. It is quite possibly the recognition of this ethical undercurrent within all theoretical practice that leads Schelling, in his *Stuttgart Seminars*, to venture a comment as paradoxical as it appears profound: "The soul is something impersonal," he notes, "for it is through the soul that man establishes a rapport with God" (7,469).

#### NOTES

1. See, for example, Nicolai Hartman, *Die Philosophie des Deutschen Idealismus*, Vol. I, p. 112. For arguably the most famous instance of restricting Schelling to the pre-Hegel years, which turn out to be Schelling's publishing years, until 1809, see Richard Kroner, *Von Kant bis Hegel* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1961 [2 ed.]).

2. Martin Heidegger, *Schelling's Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom*, p. 3.

3. For a brief and concise account of popular and enduring prejudices and reductive views regarding Schelling, see Victor C. Hayes, "Schelling: Persistent Legends, Improving Image."

4. See, for example, Horst Fuhrmans's remarks on Schelling's philosophical continuity in *Schellings Philosophie der Weltalter*, p. 6. For Fuhrmans,

Schelling's philosophical career involves, at most, only two distinct phases, that of his Philosophy of Identity and that of his Christian or "Positive Philosophy." Fuhrmans is right, I think, in conceiving of an overarching, consistent agenda for the Philosophy of Nature, the Transcendental Idealism, and the System of Identity (1801–1806).

5. For recent arguments and counterarguments regarding the (im)possibility of a postindividualistic, postsubjectivist model of "theory," see *Who Comes After the Subject*, ed. Jean Luc Nancy, Eduardo Cadava, and Peter Connor (New York: Routledge, 1991), Paul Smith, *Discerning the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988); and Manfred Frank's *What Is Neo-Structuralism?* trans. and ed. Sabine Wilke (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

6. Regarding the function of "identity" in recent, critical theories on issues of race, gender, sexuality, and culture, see Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking* (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1988); Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1978); Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990). Form a brief and selective survey of the competing paradigms of the subject in current critical discourses on questions of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and race, see again Smith, *Discerning the Subject*.

7. The source of most of this significant and, ultimately, fruitful controversy is, of course, John L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962). For various and often competing exegeses of Austin's work and, specifically, the apparent condition of "explicitness" for genuine performatives, which Derrida interprets as a "citationality" or self-referentiality that causes speech acts to derive the semantic identity of their utterances always from elsewhere, a potentially illimitable "context," see Jacques Derrida's "Signature, Event, Context" in *Margins of Philosophy* trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); and his *Limited Inc*, ed. Samuel Weber (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1988), which reprints that essay and, responding to John Searle's critique of his arguments ("Reiterating the Differences," in *Glyph 2* (1977): 198–208), the title essay itself. See also John Searle, *Speech Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969); Charles Altieri, *Act and Quality* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1981); Stanley Fish, "How to Do Things with Austin and Searle," in *Is There a Text in This Class?* (Cambridge, Mass.: University Harvard Press, 1980), as well as Fish's "With the Compliments of the Author: Reflections on Austin and Derrida" in *Doing What Comes Naturally: Change, Rhetoric, and the Practice of Theory in Literary and Legal Studies* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1989), pp. 37–67. A generally lucid

recapitulation of this debate has been offered by Sandra Petrey in *Speech Acts and Literary Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

8. In speaking of a "hypnotic" power of theory, I by no means wish to devalue theory as such. On the contrary, as with empirical hypnosis, the object of our concentration (i.e., theory) is not chosen but, indeed, inevitable; yet, in all fairness, we must recognize (at least post factum) that this "inevitability" no longer reflects the rational and, ultimately ontological, concept of "necessity." Rather, to extend the analogy with the paramedical procedure of hypnosis, the practice of theory hides from the subject thus mesmerized the ultimate "use value" of theoretical reflection. To stretch the analogy yet further, the power that emanates from theory is at once intrinsically unknowable and arbitrary, just as hypnotic authority is not grounded in the individual personality of the hypnotist but proves an effect of a felicitous performance; consequently, as Schelling's philosophy time and again suggests, proper theoretical reflection precludes any attempt at stabilizing its meanings on the grounds of subjective authority, because theory, according to the term's Greek roots (*theoria* = contemplation), implies the abandonment of subjectivity. Thus it follows that the various "challenges" against theory are, as it were by definition, coming from "outside" of theory, in that they generally demand a genealogical narrative of self-legitimation of "theoretical behavior." Consistent with the hypnotic attainment of lucidity, theory is constitutionally incapable of disclosing, let alone "grounding" itself in, some authoritative origin. Schelling's philosophy of identity may arguably have driven this hypothesis further than most of the prior or contemporaneous instances of mainstream philosophy.

9. Because little of the preceding appears to indicate a clear departure from Hegel's thought, prior and up to 1807, and because, in their collaboration on the *Kritisches Journal* between 1801 and 1803, Hegel and Schelling actively collaborated on rethinking the crisis of the subject of critical philosophy as the seed for speculative thought, we ought to remark, albeit with rather schematic brevity, some of those differences between Schelling and Hegel that tend to fall outside of the genealogical narratives that have plotted the history of German Idealism primarily as a transition from one to the other.

Generally speaking, Hegel reframes the Aristotelian question concerning Being (*ti to on*) by arguing for a progressive sublation of Being (*Sein*) into the subjectivity (*Bewusstsein*) of the spirit which, in turn, has transcended the anthropomorphic forms of consciousness precisely insofar as it has attained the truth of Being through the "concept of spirit" (*Begriff des Geistes*). Contrastingly, Schelling's philosophy after 1801 progressively formulates a theory of Being as an infinite index of an absolute identity that constitutes the condition of possibility for any philosophical reflection. In apparent contrast to Hegel, Schelling continues to emphasize the *materiality* of Being as

irreducibly anterior to all conceptual speculation: "Surely, Being holds priority over knowledge; for the latter is but the actuality [*Daseyn*] in relation to Being and, consequently . . . subordinate to a Being which is categorically independent, and thus prior to the knowledge by which it is presupposed: (7,68).

To be sure, the materiality of the created world (*natura naturata*) is not, therefore, its own "truth," yet neither can it be consigned to a mere "ground" for the unfolding of a truth that, eventually, would be said to exist autonomously. A condition can never be completely sublated into that which it has conditioned. Not only can the human, finite subject not transcend it, but the created material world serves as the "ground" through which the eternally self-same identity of God or the Absolute actuates itself. Where Hegel stresses the logical dimension of reflexivity in the concept, Schelling emphasizes the material grounds as a condition that can always be negated (i.e., spiritualized), yet that can never be voided in an ontological sense by any spirit (including the spirituality attributed to God).

A corollary of this philosophical difference involves Hegel's apparent emphasis on the totality of the absolute concept as the endpoint of the bifurcated, speculative movement of a natural and a philosophic consciousness. Whereas this movement eventually results in the erasure (*tilgen*) of time itself, Schelling insists on the "infinity of all self-cognition of identity" (4,141), and on the "duplication" that inheres in identity at all times (Being-being, ground-existence).

Regarding Schelling's relation to Hegel, see especially the essays by Bernard Reardon, Klaus Düsing, Werner Hartkopf, and Manfred Frank (1975). For a lucid discussion of the fundamental movement of Schelling's thinking after 1800, see Horst Fuhrmans, *Schellings Philosophie der Weltalter*, 34 and 38.

10. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, § 54. The translation is my own.

11. Schleiermacher, the only thinker in German Idealism to point to a fundamental asymmetry between Subject and History as the two dominant tropes of speculative philosophy. See my "Immediacy and the Text: Friedrich Schleiermacher's Theory of Style and Interpretation." *JHI* 51 (1990): 51-73. An analogous insight, I would like to propose, accounts for a theoretical "modernity" of Schelling that still awaits full recognition. In addition to Schleiermacher's contemporaneous writings, another strikingly cognate philosophical orientation appears to prevail in the early work of Walter Benjamin. See my "Thinking Beyond Totality: *Kritik, Übersetzung*, and the Language of Interpretation in the Early Walter Benjamin." *MLN* 103, no. 5 (1988): 1072-1097.

12. *Introduction to Logic*, p. 15. In German, *Logik, Werkausgabe*, IX, 25.

13. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 105/135. For citations of editions of Kant's, Fichte's, and Schelling's complete works, see the editorial apparatus above.

14. For a general exposition of Kant's theory of subjectivity as "transcendental apperception," see Ernst Cassirer, *Kant's Life and Thought*, trans. James Haden (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1981), pp. 193 ff.

15. "If I want to observe the mere 'I' in the change of all representations, I have no other correlatum to use in my comparisons except again myself, with the universal conditions of my consciousness. Consequently, I can give none but tautological answers to all questions, in that I substitute my concept and its unity for the properties which belong to myself as object, and so take for granted that which the questioner has desired to know." *Critique of Pure Reason* (A 366/344). Recently, Stanley Rosen has offered a very lucid reading of Kant's theoretical strategy in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, focusing on the related centrality of the concept of "spontaneity" in that text. *Hermeneutics and Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 19-49.

16. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Marginalia*, vol. III, ed. H. J. Jackson and George Whalley (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 242-243).

17. My subsequent analysis of Kant's chapter on the transcendental schematism draws on Martin Heidegger's analysis of Kant's transcendental deduction of the categories. For a balanced, critical review of Heidegger's argument, see Ernst Cassirer, "Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics: Remarks on Martin Heidegger's Interpretation of Kant," in *Kant: Disputed Questions*, ed. Moltke Gram (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1967).

18. As Heidegger comments, "time is not only the necessarily pure image of the schemata of the pure concepts of understanding but also their only possibility of [presenting] a pure aspect [*Anblick*]. This unique possibility of presenting an aspect reveals itself to be nothing other than time and the temporal" *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, p. 109. For a detailed discussion of the differences between schema and image, see Ernst Robert Curtius on "Das Schematismuskapitel in Kants 'Kritik der Reinen Vernunft.'" *Kant-Studien* 19 (1914): 338-366.

19. To refer to the schema as a form of intuition constitutes, of course, a certain disruption of Kant's own understanding of that term. What changes, to be sure, is that the schema is in principle located on the axis of production, not reception, and that it is not referential or empirical. Yet Kant's deployment of the schema, which in many ways is rethought by Kant himself in the chapter on the "aesthetic ideas" in the *Critique of Judgment*, is bound up with a notion of "creative" or, as Fichte will call it, "intellectual intuition." That

becomes apparent in Kant's long note (B 422–23) to the "Paralogism" chapter.

20. See Schelling, *System des Transzendentalen Idealismus* (III, 508–23) and Herder, *Metakritik zur 'Kritik der Reinen Vernunft'*, *Werke*, ed. B. Suphan (Berlin: n.p., 1881), vol. XXI, p. 125.

21. For a detailed discussion of the "productive imagination," see Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, pp. 145–146 and, on the schematism in general, pp. 193–201. Kant's principal definition of the "imagination" in the *Critique of Pure Reason* can be found on B 151/165.

22. Indeed, Kant is forced to acknowledge that the relation between the transcendental imagination and apperception is contingent, that the "schematism . . . is an art concealed in the depth of the human soul, whose real modes of activity nature is hardly likely ever to allow us to discover, and to have open to our gaze" (A 141/183). For a very lucid description of the hypothetical rhetoric of Kant's *Critique*, see Rosen *Hermeneutics and Politics*, pp. 26–32.

23. For a discussion of this passage in Kant, see Manfred Frank, *Eine Einführung in Schellings Philosophie*, pp. 38–47. As Frank points out, Schelling seems to be the only one of the Idealists to have alluded to this passage in Kant; namely, in his *Treatise Explicatory of the Idealism in the Science of Knowledge*, translated later (1,420–1 n.). Schelling appears to be the first to notice that self-consciousness, in Kant, remains an ontologically unexamined presupposition, and that only the identification of self-consciousness and apperception allows Kant to postulate the necessary continuity among the three syntheses of apprehension, reproduction, and recognition.

24. Fichte, *Die Bestimmung des Menschen*, *Gesamtausgabe* vol I, p. 6: 200, 202. *The Vocation of Man*, pp. 12, 14.

25. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*; the quotation is from the "Preface," p. 79.

26. See especially Ernst Cassirer, *Das Erkenntnisproblem in der Philosophie und Wissenschaft der Neueren Zeit*, vol. III, pp. 1–125; and George di Giovanni's Introduction, "The Facts of Consciousness" to the first part of his and J. S. Harris's *Between Kant and Hegel*, a book that provides translations of some of the pivotal texts in this period, pp. 1–50.

27. Friedrich Hölderlin, letter to Neuffer (October 10, 1794), *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. VI, p. 1: 137.

28. Having passed through Tübingen once before, in June 1793, Fichte returned there, on his way to Jena where he was to begin lecturing as a

recently appointed professor of philosophy, in May 1794. Schelling sent Fichte a copy of his first published philosophical essay, "On the Possibility of a Form of All Philosophy," published in translation as the first of four essays in *The Unconditional in Human Knowledge*. See *Briefe und Dokumente*, vol. I, pp. 26–31; and Schelling's accompanying letter to Fichte, *ibid.*, vol. I, pp. 51–52.

29. Regarding the notion of an "intellectual intuition" in Kant, Fichte, and Schelling see note 34 to the 1797 *Treatise Explicatory of the Idealism in the Science of Knowledge*, and note 28 to the 1804 *System of Philosophy in General*, later.

30. On Fichte's grounding of the proposition  $A = A$  through a primordial, "positing" self, see Cassirer, *Das Erkenntnisproblem*, vol. III, pp. 141 f.

31. Schelling's analysis of the proposition of identity (" $A = A$ ") in his *System* of 1804 (6,145 ff.), translated below, contrasts in significant ways with Fichte's earlier development of his "Principles" for the *Science of Knowledge*. See also note 10 to the text of the 1804 *System*.

32. Having quoted Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (B 132), Fichte comments: "Here the nature of pure self-consciousness is clearly described. In all consciousness it is the same; hence undeterminable by any contingent feature of consciousness; the self therein is determined solely by itself, and is absolutely determined" "Second Introduction to the *Science of Knowledge*," (I,4: 229/SK 49). Fichte subsequently discriminates between Kant's and his own position, noting that "according to Kant, all consciousness is merely conditioned (*bedingt*) by self-consciousness, that is, its content can be founded upon something outside self-consciousness. . . . According to the *Science of Knowledge*, all consciousness is determined (*bestimmt*) by self-consciousness, that is, everything that occurs in consciousness is founded, given and introduced by the conditions of self-consciousness" (I,4: 229/SK 50). See also Fichte's "Grundriss des Eigenthümlichen der Wissenschaftslehre," vol. I, p. 3:144 ff.

33. "Fichte's Original Insight," in *Contemporary German Philosophy 1* (1982): 26. Elsewhere Fichte explicitly aligns the producer-product paradigm for the Self with the one of intuition-concept (reflection); see, "Grundriss des Eigenthümlichen," vol. I, p. 3:159.

34. Henrich, "Fichte's Original Insight," p. 20. On the general problematic of grounding the phenomenon of self-consciousness in a theory of reflection, see also Dieter Henrich's "Selbstbewusstsein: Kritische Einleitung in eine Theorie," in *Hermeneutik und Dialektik*, ed. R. Bubner, K. Cramer, and R. Wiehl (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1970); and Ulrich Potthast, *Über einige Fragen der Selbstbeziehung* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1971). On the significance of Idealist conceptions of reflection for contemporary theory see Rodolphe

Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), pp. 13–57.

35. Henrich, "Fichte's Original Insight," p. 26.

36. Regarding Fichte's extension of his "critical Idealism" into a metaphysics that interprets self-consciousness as "a manifestation of God, . . . emerging from an inconceivable ground which the Self does not control," see also Henrich, *ibid.*, p. 42.

37. Regarding this crucial passage, Dieter Henrich notes that "the 'as' here means the same as the Greek *e*, the particle of representation <as in Aristotle's phrase *to on e on* (being qua being).> All intentional meaning means something in a definite way; every instance of explicit knowledge knows something about a specific item and therefore recognizes it 'as' this. . . . However, the expanded formula leads to a new problem. The particle of representation 'as' designates a three-term relation: Something (1) represents something (2) as something (3). We shall have to ask what roles these three factors are meant to play in the Self that posits itself". "Fichte's Original Insight," p. 28. Already Schelling, in his 1806 critique of Fichte, points to the problematic nature of this representational doubling (7,76–77). For similar formulations of the self positing itself as self-positing, see WL 347, 358, 361 / SK 182, 192, 195.

38. "Fichte's Original Insight," pp. 29 f. Henrich goes on to note that "we form an idea of an active ground existing prior to the active Self, a ground that explains the equiprimordial unity of the factors in the Self, but is not itself present to the self. The term 'Self' refers not to this ground, but only to its result," p. 30.

39. "The Self's immediate knowledge first makes possible the 'as' of the concept. For by virtue of this immediate self-knowledge, intuition and concept stand immediately in relation to one another within the Self" *ibid.*, p. 37. Ernst Cassirer observes that for Fichte, "the schema does not appear as the imitation [*Abbild*] of existing empirical objects, but as the example [*Vorbild*] a priori for possible empirical syntheses which it dominates and determines as a necessary precept" *Das Erkenntnisproblem*, vol. III, p. 158. Significantly enough, on the occasion of postulating that "cause and effect ought, indeed, to be thought of as one and the same" Fichte hints at a renewal of Kant's "schematism" (WL 294–95/SK 131).

40. Fichte's entire theory of *Gefühl* remains profoundly indebted to Kant's *Critique of Judgment*. Kant's text itself involves the significant shift from a reception of aesthetic form, which facilitates what he calls *cognition in general*, to a production of aesthetic ideas. Such ideas, for Kant, are characterized by a certain semiological excess: "In a word, the

aesthetical idea is a representation of the imagination associated with a given concept, which is bound up with such a multiplicity of partial representations in its free employment that for it no expression marking a definite concept can be found" (B 197/160). See also Fichte, *Gesamtausgabe* vol. I, p. 6:344 ff.

41. The fragments edited under the title "On the Duties of the Scholar (1794–95) are cited from volume II, p. 3 of the *Gesamtausgabe*; all translations from this text are mine.

42. Fichte speaks of the "wonderful power of productive imagination within ourselves . . . without which nothing at all in the human mind is capable of explanation" (SK 188/WL 353). Like Kant, Fichte asserts that this faculty alone—albeit in logical asymmetry to the rationality of self-consciousness it is said to effect—decides on the possibility of self-consciousness. The productive imagination alone "makes possible life and consciousness, especially, as a progressive sequence in time" (WL 350/SK 185). Thus "the act of the imagination forms the basis for the possibility of our consciousness, our life, our existence *for ourselves*, that is, our existence as selves" (WL 369/SK 202).

43. The concept of "crisis" in German Idealism is explored incisively in Schelling's "Treatise of Human Freedom," where the concept achieves its greatest significance. See David Farrell Krell, "The Crisis of Reason in the Nineteenth Century: Schelling's Treatise on Human Freedom."

44. Fichte does not, however, chose to pursue this inquiry, which would undoubtedly have mandated a revision of his conservative philosophy of language according to which language remains secondary and inessential for philosophical reflection. See his "Von der Sprachfähigkeit und dem Ursprung der Sprache" (1,3:93–127). On Fichte's overall conventional philosophy of language, see Kurt Müller-Vollmer, "Fichte und die Romantische Sprachtheorie," in *Der Transzendente Gedanke*, ed. Klaus Hammacher (Hamburg: Meiner, 1981).

45. Hölderlin, letter to Hegel, #94, January 26, 1795. *Friedrich Hölderlin: Essays and Letters on Theory*, p. 125.

46. Regarding Hölderlin's influence on Schelling, see Frank, *Eine Einführung in Schellings Philosophie*, pp. 61–70; and by the same author, *Der Unendliche Mangel an Sein*, pp. 19–31. Regarding Schelling's early attempts at supplanting Fichte's critical idealism, Hölderlin appears to have encouraged Schelling, who was five years younger. See the reports on their conversations in 1795 in Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. VII, p. 2:47 f.

47. Both "Of the Self as Principle of Philosophy" and the "Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism" are included in Fritz Marti's transla-

tion of four early essays by Schelling, published as *The Unconditional in Human Knowledge*. As usual, parenthetical citations refer first to the German text and, after a /, to the English translation.

48. Schelling's critique of Fichte in his earlier writings has been discussed by Reinhard Lauth, in several publications, as well as by Manfred Frank, *Eine Einführung in Schellings Philosophie*, Ingtraud Görland, *Die Entwicklung der Frühphilosophie Schellings in der Auseinandersetzung mit Fichte* (esp. pp. 19–36); and Harald Holz. See the Bibliography.

49. See Schelling's *Stuttgart Seminars* (1810), where Schelling claims that all rational, cognitive, and reflective activity of the finite human subject essentially displaces its entropic and "irrational ground" (7,469 f.); "madness" thus proves an epiphenomenon of the reflective understanding, and rather than "originating" in some unaccountable manner, it merely "breaks through." See also *On the Essence of Human Freedom* (7,382/59 f.).

50. On the conception of nature and the unconscious in Schelling's Naturphilosophie, see George Di Giovanni, "Kant's Metaphysics of Nature and Schelling's Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature," in di Giovanni and Harris, *Between Kant and Hegel*; and George Seidel, *Activity and Ground*, pp. 100–107.

51. We should remember, however, that Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, too, ends with the word *infinite*, slightly misquoted from Schiller. In Schelling's critical analysis of the relation between "Being" (*Sein*) and "concept" (*Begriff*) in Hegel, see Frank's brilliant discussion, *Der Unendliche Mangel an Sein*, pp. 32 ff.

52. On this distinction, which clearly anticipates Hegel's concept of an "absolute" reflection, see Frank, *Eine Einführung*, pp. 94 f.; and Cassirer, *Das Erkenntnisproblem*, vol. III, pp. 225 ff.

53. Schelling elaborates this dialectical schema as late as 1827 in his *Vorlesungen zur Geschichte der Neuren Philosophie* (10,93).

54. We must sharply differentiate between Schelling's notion of "identity" and the Fichtean conception of "unity as indifference"; in the latter, the anthropomorphic consciousness as producer and (qua self-consciousness) as product always determines this identity *as its own*, reappropriates the self as the signifier and the signified of such unity. Identity thus involves a reconciliation of the opposition of intuition-concept, producer-product, etc. By contrast, Schelling's conception of identity involves not the "sphere" of self-determination of an anthropomorphic self-consciousness but of God or Being as both its own autonomous "ground" and as its own heteronomous existence.

55. Görland, *Die Entwicklung der Frühphilosophie*, p. 174.

56. The exposition of this duplicity recurs whenever Schelling elaborates his philosophy of identity. Thus he speaks of a quantitative difference in all identity (4,126 n.), for identity never involves a merely formal notion of self-sameness. "In the proposition  $A = A$  the same is posited as the same for itself [dasselbe wird sich selbst gleichgesetzt]." Hence we have what Schelling calls the *identity of identity*; that is, an identity that knows of itself as such (6,165). See also 4,121; 4,389 f.; 7,342 ff.; 7,426 ff.; 10,102 ff.

57. See also *The Ages of the World* (1813), where Schelling argues with unmistakable Platonic overtones how "this archetype of things slumbers in the soul like an obscured and forgotten, even if not completely obliterated, image. . . . What we call science is but a first striving for conscious recollection [Wiederbewusstwerden]" (10,200 f./85 f.).

58. Schelling elaborates this conception of art at the end of his *System* 1800 (3,616 ff./222–28) and in the "Introduction" to his *Philosophy of Art* (5,373 ff./23 ff.). The most explicit definition of Schelling's understanding of *idea* is found almost simultaneously, in his *System of Philosophy in General*, the so-called Würzburger System, of 1804 (6,186–91), translated later.

59. Schelling repeatedly metaphorizes these "linkages" as "monuments [that] for the most part remain still mute to us because they do not resolve in our inwardness" *Initia Philosophiae Universae*, p. 48 (Enderlein's version). This conception of history is elaborated at great length in *The Ages of the World*, where Schelling speaks of the need for consciousness to decipher these linkages of its own past as a transition from the "ineffable to the utterable" (*das Unaussprechliche zum Aussprechlichen*), and of the "nonfigural to the figurative" (*aus dem Unfigürlichen etwas Figürliches*; 8,253). For an extensive discussion of that text, see Fuhrmans, *Schellings Philosophie der Weltalter*.

60. Schelling elaborates this conception of tragedy at great length in his *Philosophy of Art* (5,690 ff./249 ff.). For a detailed analysis of Schelling's aesthetic philosophy and its complex interaction with his theoretical position, see Peter Szondi, *Poetik und Geschichtsphilosophie* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1974), vol. II, pp. 187 ff.

61. Manfred Frank has argued, convincingly as I feel, for the effectiveness of Schelling's critique of Hegel. In a slight, though significant shift of emphasis, I would argue that Schelling does not so much question the logical problems of Hegel's concept of reflection as challenge Hegel to admit the condition of possibility (i.e., some unstated notion of identity) for the *coincidentia oppositorum* that characterizes Hegel's movement of a "return into itself" and the recognition of that "new" self as the "truth" of the previous "meaning" (*Meinen*) of a "natural consciousness." See Manfred Frank, *What Is Neostructuralism?* trans. Sabine Wilke (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota

Press, 1989), pp. 262–278, and Manfred Frank's earlier, unfortunately still untranslated, study of Schelling's critique of Hegel, *Der Unendliche Mangel an Seyn*.

62. By contrast Schelling's 1804 essay notes, in § 53: "Absolute identity is a self-sameness of essence, or it is the essential, qualitative unity. Indifference is merely a quantitative unity or a quantitative equilibrium. For example, the infinite space is the absolute identity of the three dimensions, of length, width and depth, though not their indifference. By contrast, the cube or the sphere also exhibits a homology [*Gleichheit*] of the three dimensions, though not as absolute identity but only in an equilibrium or as indifference" (6,209).

63. See §§ 50 and 51 of the 1804 *System*, below, where Schelling elaborates on the essentially identical nature of Reason and God. As the 1805 *Aphorisms* make abundantly clear, "Not we, neither you nor I, know about God. For insofar as reason affirms God it cannot affirm *anything else* and thus at once annihilates itself as something particular, as something *outside of God*. . . . Reason is not a faculty, not a tool, nor can it be used" (7,148/250).

64. Translation modified; consistent with more recent practice, I translate the German *Grund* as "ground" rather than "basis."

65. As regards intellectual history, Schelling's mystical conception of two, as yet unreflected, beginnings of the Absolute seeks to reconcile the Christian and the Pantheist conceptions of God: "By means of the theory of the two principles inherent in God we avoid two errors that are common to many doctrines of God. With regard to the idea of God there prevail two forms of aberration. According to the dogmatic view, which is considered orthodox, God is conceived of as a particular, isolated, unique, and entirely self-centered essence, thereby separating Him from all creation. Contrastingly, the common pantheist view does not grant God any particular, unique, and self-centered existence; instead, it dissolves Him into a universal substance that is merely the vehicle of all things. Yet God is both of these; to begin with, He is the essence of all essence, yet as such He must also exist, that is, as such an essence He must possess a grasp or foundation. Hence God, in His supreme dignity, is the universal essence of all things, yet this universal essence does not float in the air but rather is grounded in, as it were supported by, God as an *individual essence*; *the individual in God thus is the basis or foundation of the universal*" (4,438). The passage does much to clarify the recurrent, careless qualification of Schelling's later philosophy as mere Pantheism.

66. Translation modified. Schelling goes on: "The essence of the ground, or of existence, can only be precedent to all ground, that is, the absolute viewed directly, the groundless. But, as has been shown, it cannot be

this in any other way than by dividing into two equally eternal beginnings, not that it is both *at the same time* but that it is in both *in the same way*, as the whole in each, or a unique essence" (7,407–8/88–89).

67. The passage, from Heidegger's book on Schelling's *Treatise of Human Freedom*, is quoted as the opening epigraph for this introductory essay.

68. Such a critical rethinking of the opposition between essentialist and constructionist paradigms of identity reveals rather striking affinities between recent gender theory and the Idealist (notably Schelling's) reflection on what we might term the *paralogical figure of identity*. Thus the assertion in a recent study on the subject that "any radical constructionism can only be built on the foundation of a hidden essentialism" reveals, once more, the dependency of the deconstructivist process of unmasking the faultlines in oppositional thought, on an overarching, inherently arational identity. Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking* (New York: Routledge Paul, and Kegan, 1989).

69. In employing the concept of "desire," I am thinking in loosely Lacanian terms; for in the present context desire clearly cannot be an attribute of subjectivity (be it conscious, unconscious, or divine); rather, by manifesting itself in the virtually inexhaustible idioms of "grounding" a subject in the first place, such a "mystical" desire creates forms of prospective self-identification for what, in a moment of apparent metalepsis, is then "recovered" as the origin or "ground" of the human as such. Paul de Man sees this desire as inherently rhetorical practice—particularly exemplified by the figures of "anthropomorphism" and "prosopopeia"—which ensures the continuity of the human by creating forever new possibilities of its transferability onto otherness. "Autobiography as De-Facement" in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).