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F. W. J. Schelling's *Ages of the World*: Acting out of Time

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A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of the University of Denver and the Iliff School of Theology Joint PhD  
Program

University of Denver

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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by

Jared Kenrick Niefert

March 2015

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Title: F. W. J. Schelling's *Ages of the World*: Acting out of Time  
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#### ABSTRACT

This paper offers a new interpretation of Schelling's unfinished fragment, *Die Weltalter*, one that shows why and how he links the problem of divine creation to the modern crisis of Being and time. The growing sense of disorientation, isolation, indifference and loss that Schelling discovers in his own time parallels the metaphysical concerns and dilemmas of *Die Weltalter*. It is what draws the question of primordial time so close to our time and gives him the grounds to think them together. Cultural creation is inseparable from the enigma of divine creation. To fathom one is to divine the secret of the other and the essence of time.

Schelling only seeks access to the primordial past to discover the secret connection that unites the divine life with our own. He unexpectedly suggests that children are this missing link. They are the counter-image of all that is mechanical and false in life. They are the living promise and embodiment of divine creation. He shows they represent genuine life because they re-present nothing. They live the becoming of new meanings and new worlds.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION: WHY SCHELLING; WHY *DIE WELTALTER*?

Search, Thea, search! And tell me, if though seest

A certain shape or shadow, making way

With wings or chariot fierce to repossess

A heaven he lost erewhile . . .

-John Keats, *Hyperion*, Book I

I'll so offend to make offence a skill,

Redeeming time when men think least I will.

-Shakespeare, *Henry IV*, Part I

Why Schelling; why *Die Weltalter*? This essay attempts to answer this question and to show why *Die Weltalter* is indispensable to our own time. The spirit that animates and haunts this work spans all time, confronting each of us anew with the age old questions of time and creation.

Of everything Schelling ever planned to write, *Die Weltalter* is the most ambitious and altogether baffling, and not just because it was never completed or because it was composed in the long wake of profound loss.<sup>1</sup> It is strange for other reasons, in its uncanny, almost inestimable depth of feeling and breadth of vision, which are matched in

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<sup>1</sup> While the 1813 draft of *Die Weltalter* is written four years after the death of his wife, Caroline, and thirteen years after the death of her daughter, Auguste Böhmer, the urgent, deeply felt, almost impenetrable nature of the argument, which everywhere draws from his earlier efforts in the *Freiheitschrift* (1809), bear witness to a man still grieving, who is still trying to summon the courage to go on.

equal measure by arguments so exacting they nearly exhaust the powers of reason.

Schelling brings together in three short fragments the full scope of human concern and activity.

*Die Weltalter* achieves something else as well, something few philosophical works ever do: an intimacy charged with all the immediacy, expectation and longing of creation. It takes us back to a time when the world expected to be born anew and all things held the promise of life and wholeness. *Die Weltalter* reaches past the world we have come to know, expect and count on, a world plagued by doubt and confusion, to a time before god and the defining act that started it all; a time when time didn't matter, when the forces intrinsic to life were caught in a state of indifference, without meaning, without understanding, "locked and spellbound, frozen, dumb, struggling for release."

Schelling originally planned *Die Weltalter* in three parts—Past, Present and Future—but only started the first, leaving each of his draft versions unfinished. Part of its appeal and continuing importance has to do with why he left it incomplete and unpublished.<sup>2</sup>

Part one—the Past—envisions a time before time, before god was god, and god invoked the Word that set the world apart. Schelling thinks of this time as a time of total paralysis, when the will willed nothing and time stood still, blindly waiting for god to act. It is all too easy to misunderstand Schelling's purpose here as antiquarian. This would be a mistake, because the time that concerns Schelling is his own, which is just beginning to register the first in an endless series of disruptions that will soon revolutionize the

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<sup>2</sup> Schelling's *Freiheitschrift* (1809) was his last published work, apart from some later speeches and a polemical response to F. H. Jacobi.

modern experience of time. What Heidegger later says of the poet is also true of Schelling: “He sees the flight of the gods and along with that, the desolation of men’s dwellings, the emptiness of their work, the vanity of their deeds.”<sup>3</sup>

The American and French revolutions are the first and most powerful symptom of these changes, giving form and expression to the growing and restless tide of democratic feeling that had been in the offing since the time of the Protestant Reformation. They appealed, as Luther, Calvin and others had implicitly done, to the simple dignity, intelligence and judgment of the “common” individual who was becoming the new measure and circumference of things, confident in her own capacities to judge and act. But just as she discovered her economic, political and religious freedom, new forms of economic inequality and political disenfranchisement emerged, and the rise of the social and biological sciences, which seemed a liberating alternative to the religious fatalism of the past, introduced a new kind of determinism. Her proud affirmation of liberty in the 18<sup>th</sup> century becoming an anachronism by the 19<sup>th</sup>, a sign of forces—cultural, historical, economic and biological—beyond her control and understanding. She abandoned the world to gain herself, only to discover herself yoked to a new and in many ways more demanding master.<sup>4</sup>

It is against this background that Schelling’s *Die Weltalter* must be encountered and judged, thought and experienced. One reason he never completes *Die Weltalter* is

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<sup>3</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Sojourns*, trans. John Manoussakis (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 1.

<sup>4</sup> Herbert Muller argues the emergence of individual freedoms in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries coincides with the emergence of “new forms of compulsion” and management that undo these freedoms in the moment of their making. See Herbert Muller, *Freedom in the Modern World: The 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (New York: Harper Colophon, 1966), 41, 51.

because he comes to see that the world of shared meanings and common purposes, which once grounded experience and guided action have lost their life-giving power. In other words, *Die Weltalter* presupposes something that no longer exists—a world. And not just the old world orders, the *ancien régime* of France, for example, but all worlds. This is what Schelling comes to realize in the writing of it and why he remains silent for the next forty-five years. Like Nietzsche, he experiences something that has yet to happen, that has yet to “reach the ears of men.” He is witness to this crisis and its effects: the loss of faith, the blind and callous indifference of the coming generations, and the abstract machine that will seek its apotheosis in time. He sees what Marx, Nietzsche and so many others come to see, what leads Baudelaire to explore the boredom, anxiety, failing memory and, above all, the ghosts and “stunted flowers” of modernity. As he says in *Les Sept Vieillards*, “Vainly my reason for the helm was striving: / The tempest of my efforts made a scorn. / My soul like a dismasted wreck went driving / Over a monstrous sea without a bourn.”<sup>5</sup> Baudelaire here and elsewhere depicts a humanity that has lost its way, where its best thoughts and efforts have lost the “radiant world” that could speak and hold their truth. Humanity, lacking direction, mechanical and unthinking in its actions, increasingly incapable of meaning, has become indiscernible, a ghost of its own appearance. Baudelaire’s quick and abrupt shift in imagery—from “swarming city” to “monstrous sea”—captures this change that abandons “man” without warning to a new time, groundless, eternal and unforgiving, her only faith the now “dismasted wrecks” of civilization.

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<sup>5</sup> Charles Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du Mal* (New York: New Direction Publishing, 1989), 331-3.

Culture, which once consecrated and imbued time with a sense of direction, meaning and purpose, has reached a point where its inner ideals and resources have been spent and brought to cross-purposes, bringing the real and vital concept of historical progress and understanding to an end, hence, the appearance of figures like Lord Byron and Beau Brummell and their incapacity to affirm or deny anything. Schelling is clearly aware of the problem this loss poses, stating, “Most know only of that [past] which grows within each moment through precisely that moment, and which is itself only becoming, not being. Without a present that is determined and definite, there is no [past at all]; how many have the privilege of such a past?”<sup>6</sup> If *Die Weltalter* be our witness, Schelling seemingly fails to answer his own question and, in failing, we are delivered over to the plight of Sisyphus and the grind of eternity.

Men and bits of paper, whirled by the cold wind  
That blows before and after time,  
Wind in and out of unwholesome lungs  
Time before and time after.  
Eructation of unhealthy souls  
Into the faded air, the torpid  
Driven on the wind that sweeps the gloomy hills of London.<sup>7</sup>

It is no coincidence that in his and our collective failure to repossess ourselves and our past, the ghosts appear, making their searching and impossible claims upon the living at a time when the world has no future and no means to conceal its remainders, its “victimized” and “unrecognized.” In their presence, civilization loses its ballast and, with it, the capacities of the past and the promise of the future. Civilization appears like those

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<sup>6</sup> F. W. J. Schelling, *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*, trans. Judith Norman, with an introductory essay by Slavoj Žižek (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997), 120.

<sup>7</sup> T. S. Eliot, “Burnt Norton,” in *The Complete Poems and Plays* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1952), 120.

“offered” up to the “slaughter bench” of history, incoherent, broken, eternally adrift, haunted by the “dead generations,” who “weigh like a nightmare on the brains of the living.”<sup>8</sup> Coleridge speaks for Schelling and us all in speaking of his own personal despair at not being able to give direction to his life and his vast poetic imagination: “Mind shipwrecked by storms of doubt, now mastless, rudderless, shattered—pulling in the dead swell of a dark and windless Sea.”<sup>9</sup>

This growing sense of disorientation, paralysis, isolation and loss parallels the seemingly anachronistic concerns of *Die Weltalter*. It is what draws the question of primordial time so close to our own and gives Schelling the grounds to think them together. Cultural renewal is inseparable from the enigma of divine creation. To fathom one is to divine the secret of the other and the essence of time. The parallel for Schelling is exact.

Thus the real question *Die Weltalter* confronts is not how to fathom primordial time, because we already live it, but how to get back into time. This represents the first of two novel interpretations of Schelling’s *Die Weltalter*. Primordial time is not some distant, lost or inaccessible time but the time we now live through.<sup>10</sup> Primordial time is

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<sup>8</sup> Karl Marx, *18<sup>th</sup> Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, trans. Daniel De Leon (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr and Company, 1907), 5.

<sup>9</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Notebooks*, vol. 1, ed. Kathleen Coburn (New York: Routledge, 1973), 932.

<sup>10</sup> Dale Snow’s thought is representative of a view that interprets *Die Weltalter* as a speculative genealogy that attempts to “retrace God’s first steps, especially with respect to the fall or creation of the temporal world.” What he does not do is explicitly implicate Dasein in this time or see that Schelling can undertake this investigation only because he experiences firsthand the metaphysical dilemma first faced by god. To be sure, Snow follows Schelling’s own suggestion that we can undertake such a genealogy because we have “an essence outside and above the world,” because we are “drawn from the source of things and akin to it” but he interprets this simply to mean something past rather than lived and endured. See *Schelling and the End of Idealism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 191ff.

not the aim of *Die Weltalter*; breaking free from it is. Schelling only seeks to understand this past to discover the secret of existence and the connection that unites the divine will with our own. The will longs for eternity—for god—only because it alone can sanctify time and explain the passage from indifference to a time rich with meaning. To discover this ancient connection would be to discover how something new and overflowing with life comes to be. It would mean catching existence in the act of its own making. As Schelling says, connecting our life with the will of god, “Man is in the initial creation, as shown, an undecided being—(which may be portrayed mythically as a condition of innocence that precedes this life and as an initial blessedness)—only man himself can decide.”<sup>11</sup> But by the end of the *Freiheitschrift* and *Die Weltalter* the “innocence” and “blessedness” of creation seems to turn to despair, and the triumphant note of expectation that heralded the “harmonious connection of all the sciences” dashed by an inscrutable and jealous past, “like the jealous God of the Old Testament, who tolerated no gods but himself.”<sup>12</sup>

What meaning should be drawn from this? The most obvious is that it signals the end of idealism, exhausting the ways thought tries and fails to resolve the inner contradictions of time. Part of the renewed interest in Schelling stems from this reading of *Die Weltalter* and the way it anticipates and confirms many of the suspicions characteristic of much 20<sup>th</sup>-century thought, most notably in the way it casts doubt upon the enterprise of systematic philosophy as a whole.

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<sup>11</sup> F. W. J. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. Jeff Love and Johannes Schmidt (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 51.

<sup>12</sup> *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*, 182.

This is how Heidegger interprets Schelling's *Freiheitschrift*, seeing in it a test of the limits of the idealist tradition, especially in his concept of the "groundless" (*Ungrund*) or that which is without reason or explanation. This is important for Heidegger because it opens thought to the possibility of a more originary encounter with the question of Being. What Schelling's concept of freedom comprehends is the utter incomprehensibility of the concept. And in doing so, he not only safeguards freedom, as Kant had earlier done, but he goes on to show that at bottom reality is not rational, but groundless and absolutely free.

Kant says that the fact of freedom is incomprehensible. The only thing that we comprehend is its incomprehensibility. And freedom's incomprehensibility consists in the fact that it resists comprehension since it is because freedom transposes us into occurrence of Being, not in the mere representation of it.<sup>13</sup>

This line of engagement is further developed by Tillich, except with an emphasis on how Schelling rethinks nonbeing in *Die Weltalter* to explain nature's inexhaustibility and the possibility of genuine freedom.

He determined positively and concretely in the irrational will the amphibolic character of what is not: it is the principle of freedom of God and man, it is the nought from which the world is created, and it is that which should not be, which constitutes the power of sin and error.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Schelling's Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1985), 162. Slavoj Žižek and Dale Snow develop similar lines of argument, suggesting that the protean and fragmentary nature of his investigations together with his later concern with Being's "irreducible remainders" exposes the possible impossibility of idealism or, in Lacan's language, the "fundamental fantasy" underlying all metaphysics. Žižek, for example, puts Lacan's theories to great effect in, *The Irreducible Remainder: an Essay on Schelling and Related Matters* (London: Verso, 1996); while Snow pursues a more straightforward antimetaphysical reading of Schelling's later works in, *Schelling and the End of Idealism*.

<sup>14</sup> Paul Tillich, *Die religionsgeschichtliche Konstruktion in Schellings positive Philosophie, ihre Voraussetzungen und Prinzipien* (Breslau, 1910), 17-19.

All genuine beginnings for Tillich and Schelling are posited in closest proximity to what is not, to the “eternal No” that precedes every affirmation, bringing thought before the insoluble and impenetrable contradiction at the heart of existence.

In other words, *Die Weltalter* is left unfinished not because Schelling fails to divine the secret of creation but because he discovers it. He discovers it is a process that is fundamentally open and unconscious, overflowing with longing, with no higher purpose or deeper meaning than the play of creation itself.<sup>15</sup> He discovers the productions of culture are no different from the productions of nature; both manifest at different registers the immanent logic of desiring-production and the work of desiring-machines.<sup>16</sup> Schelling comes to share with Deleuze and Guattari a growing reluctance to overdramatize the significance of all idealistic categories or the privileged domains of “man.” We are exceptional only in the ways we come to nature, in the ways nature comes to augment its powers in us. We are in “intimate contact” with all the “machines of the universe” and we are conscious of this fact. We reveal nature as a “whole,” as one

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<sup>15</sup> The following discussion relies on terminology and concepts first introduced by Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus*, in particular, the idea that life is machinic. Machinic production is closely connected to the idea of machines but what makes a machine machinic is its dynamic, relational structure and the ways it connects with and differentiates the “material flows” of life. This new conceptualization allows them to cut through the knot of distinctions that make science, industry, technology, culture and nature different and independent domains of production. For them, everything is a machine; everything a process of production, without purpose, without end. See *Anti-Oedipus*, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2004), 4. The analogy we will draw between Schelling’s thought and the concept of desiring-machines is only meant to illuminate an important dimension in his thought. There are real differences that cannot be overlooked, not least among them is the fact that Schelling remains far more conservative in his thinking than either Deleuze or Guattari, in some way always remaining faithful to his earlier idealist aspirations.

<sup>16</sup> Deleuze and Guattari describe the internal logic of desiring-production in terms of three interconnected synthetic operations that are continuously performed by the unconscious: connective (e.g., coupling of breast machine to mouth machine), disjunctive (decoupling, recording and investment of the connection), and conjunctive syntheses (enjoyment). Taken together they constitute the production of reality, both in terms of its actualizations and virtual reserves, or what is left over and left unactualized. See *Anti-Oedipus*, 5-22.

vast time-machine, producing the endless flows and strange coagulations of spirit that make reality. Time, the time Hegel misperceived through the prism of idealism, is not teleological but machinic, spectral not eschatological. Time is a ghost machine, traumatic and excessive.

This paper will prove *Die Weltalter* Schelling's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, his great breakthrough in thinking about Being and time. And far from abandoning metaphysics, it will show that Schelling renews and deepens his faith in his speculations. What he does abandon is the Hegelian conviction that concepts can master reality. That *Die Weltalter* does not end reflects Schelling's growing conviction that creation is a process, where spirit is restless for the new and absolutely unexpected, where time is redeemed by monsters not angels, by play born of faith not facts. Nature is not a system but a ghost-machine. And what makes it spectral is not what exists but what has never existed, the forgotten remainders that grow and haunt and everywhere oppose the actual. Thus Schelling is not concerned with any ordinary past but with the "primordial" past—what Bergson and Deleuze call time's durations.<sup>17</sup> Schelling strains to fathom this time

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<sup>17</sup> Bergson defines duration in terms of that inner experience of time where time's passage produces qualitative changes in consciousness, where no two moments are experienced as the same because one will always contain the memory of the other, producing through the passage of time a layering effect. "From this survival of the past it follows that consciousness cannot go through the same state twice. The circumstances may still be the same, but they will act no longer on the same person, since they find him at a new moment in history." See *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 1998), 4-ff. Deleuze and Guattari re-describe this "pure past" in terms of the virtual surfaces that are propagated alongside the productions, connections and flows of actual bodies. The "Body without Organs," a concept they borrow from Artaud to think these operations, unconsciously and automatically records all actual connections but, more importantly, it records and multiplies those connections that have not been made. The BwO is a counterpoint and point of resistance to all contractions of substance, to the conservative impulse that would fix meaning and fully regiment the flows of desire. It is not by accident that Deleuze and Guattari link the BwO with Freud's death instinct and the severing of all connections. "In order to resist linked, connected, and interrupted flows, it sets up a counterflow of amorphous, undifferentiated fluid. In order to resist using words composed of articulated phonetic units, it utters only gasps and cries that are sheer unarticulated blocks of sound." See *Anti-Oedipus*, 10-ff.

because it is the source of all real movement and all real change. This is why Schelling, “like a god in pain” (Keats), suffers with such excitement for this time, because it confirms his deepest longings for a new world. It reminds him and us all that all is not lost. “This time, like all times, is a very good one, if we but know what to do with it.”<sup>18</sup>

Time always carries the chance and promise of rich and dynamic constancies capable of endowing life with “measures” of resonance, meaning and purpose, like, for example, what happens late in Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, when Hippolyta, remarking on the incredible story told her and Theseus by the young lovers about their evening’s misadventures, which Theseus coldly dismisses as the fancy of “seething brains,” says,

And all their minds transfigur’d so together,  
More witnesseth than fancy’s images,  
And grows to something of great constancy,  
But, howsoever, strange and admirable. (V.i.23-27)

Hippolyta strikes the balance between an idealism that demands absolute consolation and a relativism that would “shipwreck” life. The young lovers may be mistaken—as may we—but they are mistaken together, giving “fancy’s images” a measure of reality. Schelling, by the end of *Die Weltalter*, reaches a similar compromise, one that saves the possibility of meaning without surrendering life to the tyranny of the gods. Schelling succeeds where Hegel could not, he affects a genuine synthesis of process and structure, where the images of life change as much as the life they image. This does not mean there are no meaningful associations in life. Quite the contrary, they

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<sup>18</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The American Scholar,” in *Nature and Selected Essays* (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), 101.

thrive and proliferate without end. But they are increasingly orphaned meanings, without world, without time. So the real question, the question Schelling always comes back to, and the question we will strive to answer, is the question Keats asks in *Hyperion*: “But cannot I create? / Cannot I form? Cannot I fashion forth / Another world, another universe, / To overbear and crumble this to nought?”<sup>19</sup>

We will begin to resolve this question by first preparing the way for Schelling’s unique set of engagements. Part I, “Primordial Longing,” will first contextualize his philosophy with a view to his early efforts to respond to the question we believe he addresses most explicitly in *Die Weltalter*, namely, the de-worlding of the world. By the end of Part I, a world will have been lost but, in return, new beginnings will have been made available.

Specifically, Chapter 2, “The Limits of Reason and the ‘Starry Skies’ Within,” will review Kant’s critical efforts in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and their profound influence on Schelling’s speculative efforts. The chapter will contextualize Schelling’s philosophy and show that Kant accomplishes two things important to our reading of *Die Weltalter*. First, he too is trying to save a time that matters and he does this in a preliminary way by thinking time independently of experience, as an *a priori*, inner condition of existence. In doing so, he thinks time independently of space, thus making it possible to think the essence of movement as real change. While Kant continues to think time as an abstract form of intuition, without content or meaning, he nonetheless opens the way to thinking time as duration, as the source of all novelty and real movement. Second, Kant opens the way to thinking beyond the standpoint of the subject to the

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<sup>19</sup> John Keats, *Poetry and Prose* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2009), 479/141-44.

unconscious forces of will that underlie phenomenon. In doing so, the first *Critique* begins to think past the limits of representational thought and toward the idea that the world of thought and the world of nature are objectifications of will or desiring-machines. Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* and *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800) will begin to make this insight explicit and, in the process, makes it possible to think transcendental subjectivity as after-images of will and time.

Chapter 3, "Longing from the Depths: Schelling's Transcendental *Naturphilosophie*," will show how Schelling begins to rethink time and nature in terms of machinic production. In other words, Schelling not only attempts to recover but found a world. While Schelling at this point remains committed to the project of idealism, most notably in his continued interest in developing ideas latent in Fichte, we will show that he is already developing a line of thought that breaks with this inheritance, one that links real time to the virtual domain of desiring-production. Nowhere is this clearer than in the *Naturphilosophie*, where Schelling tries to understand the life of spirit from within nature itself, confirming his faith in freedom, as that which is always, already at work, even in nature's darkest and most improbable beginnings. What makes his account so important to our purposes is that he thinks this process in terms of temporal contractions of will. Everything that exists lives as a contraction of time, every new contraction a new ground for existence, every existence the image of a self-grounding and self-fulfilling freedom.

The second part will show how Schelling further develops these ideas in *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800). In this work he now strives to construct the objective world—the self-same world responsible for the emergence of human subjectivity—from the side of self-actualizing spirit. Schelling intends to show that the stages in the

evolution of subjectivity correspond exactly to the conceptual moments in the formation of the objective world, this time according to the immanent principle of self-consciousness. What the transcendental deductions seek to prove is that human freedom, which is the highest expression of spirit, is ontologically prior to nature and therefore its ultimate ground. All of nature is an expression of will, reaching its highest and most powerful expression in human existence. Nature has an obvious chronological precedence but nature can only be comprehended as spirit by spirit, not as an abstract object of knowledge but as a creation of will. As Schelling says in the *Freiheitschrift*,

Man, even if born in time, is indeed created into the beginning of the creation (the *centrum*). The act, whereby his life is determined in time, does not itself belong to time but rather to eternity: it also does not temporally precede life but goes through time (unhampered | by it) as an act which is eternal by nature.<sup>20</sup>

This argument makes it possible to link Dasein's essence to primordial time, while at the same time being one of its many creations.<sup>21</sup> It also makes possible the related claim, which will be developed in Chapter 4, "The Gift and Danger of Fire," that the relationship between Dasein and time is really the relationship between time and machines. This in our view is the ultimate insight of Division I of Heidegger's *Being and Time*, one that brings Heidegger into proximity to Deleuze. Dasein is not a thing or an

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<sup>20</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, 51.

<sup>21</sup> Dasein is a term used by Heidegger to signify human existence, though not in any usual sense of the word. Dasein is the unconscious acting out of a given understanding of Being. Heidegger takes great pains to discourage the equation of Dasein with a self-conscious, intentional subject. Dasein does signify something that belongs to both individuals and their shared social field but Dasein is as much possessed as in possession of that which defines its way of "coping" in the world. As Heidegger remarks in *Being and Time*, "Dasein 'is' its past in the way of its own Being . . . Dasein has grown up both into and in a traditional way of interpreting itself: in terms of this it understands itself proximally and, within a certain range, constantly." See Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2006), 20.

“entity” but a distillation of “equipmental relationships,” subtracted from the processes it provokes, augments and unwittingly sustains. Modern technological revealing—or the radical alignment of technology and science with market forces—as Heidegger urges us to think in *Being and Time* and later in the *Question Concerning Technology*, makes this equivalence explicit, depriving Dasein of a world, giving rise to the distinctly modern experience of anxiety and profound boredom.

Dasein, having lost a world, has lost the illusions that once held time together and defended her against its excesses and looming durations—the *Ding an sich* or Real of desire. As we will briefly show, the capitalist machine changes everything, from the nature and scope of desiring-production, which substitutes an axiomatic calculus for a world of shared, enduring meanings, to the emancipation of desire from its past, which has the unintended effect of crippling desire at the moment of spirit’s liberation.

Marx will make this latter point explicit: capital is above all a spiritual substance. And the two great obstacles to its growth are labour and the commodity-object itself. There is only so much value that can be extracted from labour and only so many things that can be made before outstripping demand. Deleuze and Guattari are right in thinking that capital deals with this problem by making the process of antiproduction immanent to the forces of production, thus creating a state of permanent crisis. But capital, as an abstract substance, strives to overcome all limits, especially the forced detour it must take through the field of commodity production. Money wants to beget money independently of a world or a ground— $m-m^1-m^2$ , *ad infinitum*—to become an autonomous spiritual substance. Money desires to be *causa sui*, eternal and absolute. The problem, as Schelling, Hegel and Marx all point out, is that this is a possible impossibility and,

between the promise and its fulfillment, there exists the unresolvable contradiction of ground and existence, and the absence of any definable world.

Chapter 5, “Losing Ground/Losing Time,” continues where Chapter 4 concluded, showing how *Die Weltalter* is already tackling the problem of a “de-worlded” world, where ground and existence have yet to become active in the “agon” of existence. One of the central innovations of the *Freiheitschrift* and *Die Weltalter* is that they are thought and experienced together in terms of love and evil, or that which “in” god is not yet “of” god. Schelling’s handling of these “movements” and “counter-movements” makes it possible to understand how a world comes to be lost and how it might be saved. Schelling often thinks of them in terms of spirit’s outward longing for existence and the evil that would thwart it, as he tries to reawaken a genuine “apprehension of life,” to summon us again to the possibility of life created in the midst of life’s contradictions.

But if we read *Die Weltalter* as symptomatic of the modern dilemma of undecided existence, we begin to see that the forces intrinsic to life have lost their native force, becoming indifferent, impelled more by inertia rather than an act of will. Life has lost its edge and danger, becoming predictable, safe, immobilized, human. Hence, we become insensible to the question of the meaning of Being, indifferent to the wonder and terror of existence, unresponsive to the call to act, to be. Indifference is primordial, the *mise en scène* of creation, and the great stumbling block to existence and real acts of creation.

Part II, “Inhuman Beginnings,” will continue to explore the meaning of this loss but now with a view to how it opens thought to the chance of new beginnings and new worlds. In this part we strive to show that the underlying idea Schelling is wrestling with is the concept of “imaging-machines” and this concept is most fully realized in the life of

children. This represents the second new way of encountering *Die Weltalter*. While there is a certain unity to our arguments, many of which are carried over into later chapters, it is important to stress the fragmentary nature of what follows, as we strive to remain faithful to the spirit of Schelling, his *Die Weltalter*, children and the creative life more generally.

Chapters 6, “Imaging the ‘Figures Wild’: Bergson, Deleuze and the Powers of Cinema” explores Schelling’s *Die Weltalter* in relation to Bergson’s concept of duration and movement, Deleuze’s theory of cinema, and how both open thought to the free-form play of images and the countless meanings they inspire.<sup>22</sup> We will argue *Die Weltalter* and creation itself is an “imaging-machine” and that it challenges the indifference and paralysis that seizes and undoes time. Time, as Heidegger shows us, is always already in the grip of an interpretation of Being. And the ontological consensus and underlying mode of conduct that now prevails, denies time its meanings. Schelling confronts this problem the only way he knows how, by linking it to the problem of divine creation. It is important not to miss the reason for this. God does not yet exist in *Die Weltalter* because god does not yet exist in Schelling’s time. God can only really exist in and through us, and we, as Schelling and Heidegger both argue, lack the courage to be. This is yet another reason for thinking primordial time as the void at the center of our present moment and for implicating not just ourselves in this time but god as well. Part of the originality and incredible audacity of Schelling’s vision is the “suggestion” that creation

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<sup>22</sup> By image we do not mean that which “copies” or “models” something else, as Plato had argued, though images do function in this way, but as the consecrated site for the creation and interplay of new and always evolving meanings. As Stephen David Ross argues, “The image always escapes into another meaning, opens into fascination, flees into the other of all meaning, which is semblance, infinitely rich in meaning while at the same time altogether empty.” See “Moving Images of Eternity,” in *Schelling Now*, ed. Jason M. Wirth (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 47.

has yet to be created, because god does not yet exist because we don't exist. Schelling means this both figuratively and literally.

Schelling's novel solution to this problem is to think the event of creation independently of any subject, divine or human. This was already presaged in the *Naturphilosophie* with its emphasis on the pre-subjective becomings of spirit. And while the *Naturphilosophie* thinks these becomings in terms of psycho-physical contractions of substance, its primary concern is not the freedom that ultimately grounds this process but the process itself. Schelling first tackles this problem in the *System of Transcendental Idealism*, and he does so in an unexpected way, thinking creation as an imaging-machine that creates countless durations of time, among them, god and us.

In this chapter we will briefly acquaint ourselves with Schelling's aesthetic ideal, which he develops in *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800) as he begins to think imaging-machines as key to understanding the mystery of creation. We will see that the primal invocation of the Word, which Schelling still aims to understand, depends upon something still deeper and more originary, images. But art, not philosophy, comes closest to realizing this truth. Art alone is capable of gaining access to the traumatic core of creation—to time's durations—without betraying it. Art alone can produce and preserve the incalculable meanings of primal Being and in a way that preserves the dignity it seeks to encounter and creative forces it seeks to engage.

But it is not just a means of engaging life, the imaging-machines are Being's highest truth, even preceding god's supreme act of self-affirmation, even though it cannot be summarized solely as god's work, because it contains only the image of god, a mere premonition of divine existence. God does not produce the vision but is its monstrous

effect. The image is of a world not yet formed, vague and indeterminate, still caught in the interminable flux of an eternal beginning. God sees all that is but just as important, is what god does not see, the counter duration this image produces, that looms and grows in the background, the mirror image of all that will one day “be” already hampered by all that will “not be” and “can never be.” It is that which “can never be” that is the “groundless ground” of all that “is.”

Chapters 7 and 8, “The Voice that Crieth in the Wilderness” and “*Beloved* and the Ghosts of Creation,” show how Schelling and Toni Morrison hope to affect the “turn” Heidegger speaks of, to move beyond the “destitution” and violence of time to its fulfillment. As Heidegger argues, “The turning of the age does not take place by some new god, or the old one renewed, bursting into the world from ambush at some time or other.”<sup>23</sup> Their return demands a place to return to, and this demands a “turn” in us.<sup>24</sup> But such a reformation in Being cannot be forced or anticipated. The best we can do is to heighten our sensitivity and openness to the call of Being and the “divine radiance” that always, already “shines forth in everything that is.”

But how is this openness to Being affected and sustained? In the “Metaphysics Lectures” (1929-30), Heidegger finds in profound boredom, as he did with anxiety in *Being and Time*, a mood that gives him a way of thinking Dasein out of the “world” and

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<sup>23</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc., 1990), 90.

<sup>24</sup> This is what Morrison’s *Beloved* so powerfully gives us to see. Sethe’s tragedy is that she has nowhere to live out the becoming of family, no place to raise and love a child, and no world to call home. But at the end of the story, a “turn” is achieved that transforms the pain of this loss into the promise of a future.

into the creative essence of time.<sup>25</sup> Boredom accomplishes this by abandoning Dasein to time, wrenching her from the complacency of the “everyday” and turning her to the question of Being and time. In boredom, time becomes conspicuous in its passing because it refuses to pass. In profound boredom, time no longer passes because it has been emptied of the meanings that once galvanized and sustained Dasein’s involvement with the world. Equipmental relationships are suspended, releasing Dasein from her attachments and obligations. Free of the world and herself, she is free to await the primordial “return of the gods.”

This is as far as Heidegger is willing to go, hence his passivism. His unwillingness to go further reflects his deep uncertainty about the future and the power of thought to free itself from the destining of Being, hence his later skepticism—“Only a god can save us.”

But Heidegger, despite the power and rightness of his thinking, does not see that the turn he waits for, which would renew our faith in Being and give time fresh measures of meaning, is always, already at hand, most especially in the longing, expectation and joy that so often accompanies the birth of a child.

It is no accident that Schelling continually references Being’s nativity with the longings of the “maternal body” where “luminous thoughts” grow into a world. But what is of ultimate significance is not the “maternal longing” but its issue. Children are the ultimate bearers of the promise and challenge of creation for the simple reason that they are as yet unformed subjects, unacquainted with the ways of Being. They are

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<sup>25</sup> Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press).

ontologically naïve, inhuman, as near a pure desiring-machine as is possible within the limits of actuality. They are the counter-image of all that is actual, mechanical and false in life; their presence a living indictment of reality and a summons to genuine creation and life. They are untouched by the conventions, practices, expectations, and fears that define a society and undo life. As Emerson says, “Ah, that he could pass again into his neutrality! Who can thus avoid all pledges and, having observed, observe again from the same unaffected, unbiased, unbribable, unaffrighted innocence—must always be formidable.”<sup>26</sup> Their revolutionary strength and vitality, their open and unrestrained enthusiasm for all things new, their freedom for existence, their spontaneity of action, judgment and purpose everywhere consecrates time anew. It is not insignificant that god’s redeeming act was heralded in the birth of a child. Children are the vital link to our ancient past, the bearers of divine freedom and life.

Why is child rearing then so traumatic. The pain it causes has little if anything to do with the monotonous, often disagreeable work that quickly overwhelms life or the massive time investment it demands. Its real source is children reveal the depth and scope of our responsibility for the world, and all the ways we fail to meet this responsibility, and perpetuate the “smooth mediocrity and squalid contentment of the times.” Children demand everything of us, that we be the “great responsible Thinker and Actor” of our time, working to fulfill our destiny as creator gods. They reveal how we have unwittingly forsaken this freedom for “names and customs,” for knowledge and the security of our daily bread. As Schelling says in *On Myths*:

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<sup>26</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature and Selected Writings*, ed. Larzer Ziff (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 178.

As man grows toward higher activity, he forgets the images and dreams of his youth, and seeks to make nature comprehensible to his understanding. Previously he was a friend or son of nature, now he is its lawgiver; previously he wanted to experience himself in all of nature, now he wishes to explain all of nature in himself; previously he sought his image in the mirror of nature, now he seeks the archetype of nature in his understanding which is the mirror of everything.<sup>27</sup>

But in this transition we lose what we wanted to comprehend, instead of something alive we encounter something dead. We all implicitly know this. It is shown each time we find ourselves unexpectedly reveling in their excitement for something we have long since forgotten, or our astonishment before a being that thinks, speaks and acts with such ease, candor and so little self-regard. We dimly perceive in these rare moments that we lack their intensity for life, their openness to “phenomenon,” that this openness is some-how our highest truth and calling. They arouse in us a desire to again see as they see and to do as they do, to encounter each moment, each new experience for what is, an unexpected gift, before which we should bow in gratitude and expectation.

This, in our estimation, is Schelling’s highest speculative achievement, one which brings him into close proximity to Morrison’s *Beloved*, because it provides a powerful way to reimagining and acting ourselves back into time. This remains close to Heidegger but it offers a way to repurpose our thoughts and actions, one that is not in the least trivial but charged with all the longing, expectation and danger Schelling and Morrison continually speak of. Life is really created anew each time a child is born, they represent a genuine creation because they re-present nothing; they live the becoming of new

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<sup>27</sup> Schelling, *Schellings Werke*, vol. 1, ed. Manfred Schröter (Munich: Beck, 1927), 74.

worlds. We need but have the courage of their revolutionary challenge to life, as the artist always does and Schelling always knew, to be able to grasp life anew and fulfill our highest vocation as builders of a world “fit for a god.”

## PART I: PRIMORDIAL LONGING

### CHAPTER TWO: THE LIMITS OF REASON AND THE “STARRY SKIES” WITHIN

Who will ever know what it is to know nothing? Every possible response makes me a pure suffering—blind, I am more advanced than if I see.

-Georges Bataille

In this chapter we will review Kant’s critical efforts in his *Critique of Pure Reason* and their profound influence on Schelling’s speculative philosophy. The chapter will contextualize Schelling’s philosophy and show that Kant accomplishes two things important to our reading of *Die Weltalter*. First, he too is trying to save time from what he perceives as the overwhelming destining power of the sciences. He does this in a preliminary way by thinking space and time independently of experience, as its most fundamental *a priori* condition. In doing so, he thinks time independently of space, thus making it possible to think the essence of movement and change as durations of time. While Kant will continue to think time as an abstract form of intuition, without content or meaning, he nonetheless opens the way to thinking time as the source of all novelty and real movement.

Second, Kant makes it possible to think beyond the standpoint of the subject to the unconscious forces of will that phenomenon objectify. In doing so, he begins to think past the limits of representational thought and toward the idea that the world of thought and the world of nature are contractions of time and freedom. But unlike Kant, Schelling

will perceive a profound asymmetry in this relationship where what gets represented does not so much reflect or “mirror” will as contradict time. Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie* and *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800) will begin to make this insight explicit and, in the process, give him a way of resolving the problem of creation and cultural renewal.

It may seem strange to begin with Kant in a discussion concerning the modern crisis of time and meaning but he really was the first to fully recognize the challenges and dangers posed by the scientific revolution, and not just in reason’s new found explanatory power but in all the ways that power came to be applied in the transformation of the world. But for Kant reason’s power fails to answer the really crucial question of its own meaning or purpose. Hence, in the famous preface to the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant remarks, “Human reason has this peculiar fate that in one species of its knowledge it is burdened by questions which, as prescribed by the very nature of reason itself, it is not able to ignore, but which, as transcending all its powers, it is also not able to answer.”<sup>28</sup>

Why now? Why does Kant at this particular moment ask the question of reason, of its nature and scope? What are the questions that reason suddenly finds itself unable to answer or ignore? It is the same sort of question that dominated the thinking of revolutionary Germany in the postwar years and led Max Weber in his famous address in Munich in 1919 to ask:

What is . . . the point of science as a calling when all our former illusions, such as “the path to true Being,” “the path to true nature,” “the path to the true God,” “the path to true

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<sup>28</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Avii.

happiness,” have gone? The fact that it does not supply this answer is simply indisputable. The only question that remains is in what sense does it give us “no” answer, and whether it might not instead accomplish something for him who asks the right questions.<sup>29</sup>

As Weber argues, reason cannot fathom its own nature, or the world it so powerfully determines in every way except the way that most matters. It simply is not equipped to resolve the perennial questions that haunt and incite philosophical thought. Or to acknowledge the depth of its complicity in the crises it tries to manage and resolve, and not just the crises of faith or knowledge that so affected Kant but the social and political upheavals reason creates in its name as well as the violence it sanctions in their defense. This is the immediate price of “man’s” liberation from “his self-incurred tutelage,” a growing uncertainty about reason’s powers to grasp the depths of the human condition and of reason itself. As Herder says, reason is already “later reason.” “Maternal nature hence removed from her [inner soul] what *could* not depend on her clear consciousness . . . she stands over an abyss of infinity and does not know that she stands over it; through this happy ignorance she stands firm and secure.”<sup>30</sup>

These sorts of question and concerns were new and largely foreign to modern philosophy, which preserved a deep and abiding faith in the power of reason to resolve most if not all of the problems that had plagued philosophy and science since its inception.<sup>31</sup> Kant’s most important predecessors, Descartes, Leibniz, and Spinoza, all

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<sup>29</sup> Max Weber, *Soziologie-Weltgeschichtliche Analysen-Politik* (Stuttgart: A. Kroener, 1956), 322.

<sup>30</sup> Johann Gottfried Herder, “On Cognition and Sensation,” in *Philosophical Writings*, trans. Michael N. Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 201

<sup>31</sup> Cartesian skepticism seems an early instance of critical philosophy but Descartes never questions reason itself, his skepticism more a means to radical self-possession, his proud affirmation of self-certainty

firmly believed that if philosophy adopted the methods of science, it could achieve an explanatory power equal to its historical vocation as the highest arbiter of truth and knowledge. Reason is divine, without limits, the one truly distinctive link that joins the life of “man” with the mind of god. But this faith in the power of reason comes at the price of freedom, becoming an early harbinger of the “destining” of Being and the destitution of time.

Kant is an early and forceful point of resistance to this development, striking the balance between two opposing extremes, dogmatism and skepticism, one which would surrender life to reason, the other to the “anarchy” of feeling. Again as he remarks in the preface, “Her government, under the administration of the *dogmatists*, was at first *despotic*. But her empire gradually through the intestine wars gave way to complete anarchy; and the *skeptics*, a species of nomads broke up from time to time all civil society.”<sup>32</sup> Dogmatism perceives the order of things but fails to do justice to the profound and compelling experience of freedom in life, while the skeptic, denies freedom and casts doubt on the one fundamental assumption of all experience and all science, causation. Dogmatism in trying to fathom fundamental reality, to penetrate beyond mere appearance to the *Ding an sich* of desire, loses the “real and vital” concept of human freedom and gains the cold certainty of the concept. Skepticism challenges this certainty, arguing human experience is little more than a confederation of impressions held together by the force of habit. As Hume argues the point, “It could not, therefore, be discovered in

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consummating the inner calling and truth of the Protestant Reformation. See René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. John Cottingham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>32</sup> *Critique of Pure Reason*, Aix.

the cause, and the first invention or conception of it, *a priori*, must be entirely arbitrary.”<sup>33</sup> Ideas (i.e., impressions) are not connected to one another *a priori*; hence they envelop an entire complex of possible associations. It is only through repeated associations that certain connections become fixed and the mind begins to pass automatically from one idea to the next, from fire to heat. Causal associations for Hume are an invention of the mind, of the mind stepping beyond fact to nonfactual explanations of experience.

What both views ultimately share is a fundamental skepticism regarding human freedom and a basic conviction in a determined universe.<sup>34</sup> Kant however preserves an unbreakable faith in both reason and human freedom. He sees this faith confirmed in the advances of the sciences and, later, in the revolutionary events that grip France, that not only change the tide of history but create an entirely new world. “Such a phenomenon in human history will never be forgotten, because it has uncovered an aptitude and faculty for improvement in human nature of the sort that no political mind could have inferred from the course of things up to that point.”<sup>35</sup> By the end of the first *Critique* freedom will be the unseen and unknowable power behind events, both human and natural, but not until Kant affects his own revolution.

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<sup>33</sup> Hume, *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding*, 30.

<sup>34</sup> Hume does eventually account for the idea of necessary connection, arguing that the feeling that induces us to posit its existence is the impression that explains its reality. As he argues, “This connection, therefore, which we *feel* in the mind, this customary transition of the imagination from one object to its usual attendant, is the sentiment or impression from which we form the idea of power or necessary connection. Nothing farther is in the case.” See *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding*, 75.

<sup>35</sup> Kant, *Der Streit der Fakultäten*, (New York: Abaris Books, Inc. 1979), 152.

Where do “lack of faith” in freedom and the possibility of progress in life come from? Kant suggests its source is an uncritical faith in reason. “And the true source of all the lack of faith which conflicts with morality—and is always highly dogmatic—is dogmatism in metaphysics, i.e., the prejudice according to which we can make progress in metaphysics without a [prior] critique of pure reason.”<sup>36</sup> Dogmatism in metaphysics affirms reason’s powers only by denying freedom. It does this by collapsing the distinction that will become crucial to Kant’s epistemology, the distinction between appearance and reality. Spinoza is the most extreme example of this tendency, deactivating the deontological dimension of existence by making the mind of “man” commensurate with nature, a mere thinking machine objectifying nature’s laws.

Spinoza’s metaphysic is a demonstration of the logical consequences that follow the phenomenological reduction of the *Ding an sich*. Phenomenal states become modal expressions of noumenal substance, which are nothing outside their mode of expression. There is only one substance, nature, and its modifications, ideas and the extended durations of substance.<sup>37</sup>

There are important consequences that follow from this view. There is for Spinoza no single inaugural act of divine creation. Nature has no beginning, no end, no final meaning or purpose. Purpose implies lack and divine need, a void at the heart of eternity. Eschatological fulfillment implies a limit to creation, where there is none, only the smooth, continuous functioning of nature’s immutable laws.

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<sup>36</sup> *Critique of Pure Reason*, Bxxx.

<sup>37</sup> Baruch Spinoza, *The Ethics*, trans. R. H. M. Elwes (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1955), 45-ff.

Human life likewise has no ultimate objective or final limit. We are but finite expressions of nature, psycho-physical contractions of divine substance, expressed in terms of two interrelated attributes, mind and extension. Human freedom becomes more a function of how these attributes are conceived and understood than a question of will, action or intent. Spinoza sees it most fully realized when our ideas are equal to the modal states and interactions they reference. When our ideas reflect reality, we achieve a measure of freedom that is divine. Once they form a system and a standing body of knowledge with explanatory and predictive power, we gain understanding and the freedom to actively “participate” in the divine life. The more perfect and complete the system, the closer it comes to attaining the infinite idea of god. This for Spinoza is our highest good because it means freely intuiting the “law of one’s own nature,” becoming consonant with the mind and will of god.<sup>38</sup> To recognize this is to see the pure equivalence of appearance and reality, life as it really is, the perfect coincidence of idea and object, desire and obligation. But in this knowledge something equally real and invaluable is lost—the “real and vital” concept of freedom. Kant recognizes the moral implications of this view straightaway, stating:

But instead of the conflict which now the moral disposition has to wage with inclinations and in which, after some defeats, moral strength of mind may be gradually won, God and eternity in their awful majesty would stand unceasingly before our eyes. Transgression of the law would indeed be shunned, and the commanded would be performed. The conduct of man, so long as his nature remained as it now is, would be changed into a mere mechanism, where, as in a

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<sup>38</sup> Spinoza, *The Ethics*, 250-ff.

puppet show, everything would gesticulate well but no life would be found in the figures.<sup>39</sup>

Unmediated knowledge of the *Ding an sich* immediately dispossesses the subject of the spontaneity and autonomy that is the quintessence of human freedom. Kant's critical philosophy, which limits knowledge to appearances, will transform the "I do not know" at the heart of epistemology and science into the positive condition of human freedom. It is only in a state of perpetual nonknowledge that an active respect for the moral law can be genuinely awakened within us, revealing that we are more than can be represented in time. As Kant says, "Thus what the study of nature and of the human being teaches us sufficiently elsewhere may well be true here also: the inscrutable wisdom through which we exist is not less worthy of veneration in respect to what it denies us than in what it has granted."<sup>40</sup>

So how does Kant reconceive the task of philosophy and the way we think about ourselves and the world, and how does this safeguard the possibility of freedom and "real" movement in time. In short, he thinks space and time apart from experience, as *a priori* forms of intuition, and, in so doing, breaks time's alliance with space.

His breakthrough comes through reversing the terms of the old epistemological equation. Instead of the subject conforming to the world, the world conforms to the subject and the laws that govern its appearance. Kant's insight clearly runs against the ordinary way we have of thinking about our relationship to the world as it is represented in thought. The natural tendency to think of the world as independent of human

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<sup>39</sup> Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. and ed. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 5:148.

<sup>40</sup> *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:148.

perception, as an object that thought passively represents is abandoned in favor of a view that stresses the ways in which the world is actively formed by the mind. Kant is not so much suggesting that the world is a pure mental fabrication but that the universal and unvarying features we discover in the world are actually intrinsic features of consciousness itself. The laws of nature do not exist *in* nature but *in* us, formally constituted by the transcendental machinery of the mind.

In drawing this distinction Kant hopes to avoid the consequences of a brand of idealism epitomized in the thought of Berkley and Leibniz, who in effect conclude that reality is composed entirely of minds and their corresponding ideas.<sup>41</sup> Kant is simply unwilling to go this far, wanting to preserve the objective status of the outside world but at the same time to show how its governing laws originate from within the *a priori* conceptual structures of the mind. In a striking passage from the *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, Kant remarks,

In the first case, however, reason is the cause of these natural laws and is therefore free, in the second case the effects flow according to mere natural laws of sensibility, because reason exercises no influence on them; but, because of this, reason is not itself determined by sensibility (which is impossible), and it is therefore also free in this case.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Leibniz, through much of his life, held a much more complicated and nuanced view of substance and matter. In *Discourse on Metaphysics*, for example, substance is presented as the conjunction of an ideal, substantial form and a material body, which become the visible articulation of the more basic substance of mind. He comes closest to a full-fledged idealism in his later philosophy, most notably in *Monadology*, where substance is reconceived as the immaterial source of reality and the physical world an after-image of mind. See G. W. Leibniz, *Philosophical Texts*, trans. R. S. Woolhouse and Richard Francks (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 53-93 and 267-81. For Kant's remarks on the shortcomings of Berkley's idealism, see *Critique of Pure Reason*, B70-1.

<sup>42</sup> Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, trans. Gary Hatfield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 97.

The significance of this passage cannot be overestimated, as it represents the culmination of Kant's view that the order we perceive in the world—the causal plane of rigid, formal consistency—is actually constituted by the mind prior to experience, before we or the world ever appear as objects of experience or knowledge. We appear in a world largely of our own making, which everywhere bears the unmistakable stamp of our freedom grounded in reason.

The central task of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* is to explain this remarkable claim. He achieves this by deducing the *a priori* conditions of all possible experience and, by determining its objective structures, Kant will show how metaphysical knowledge—i.e., necessary and universal knowledge—is possible within the strict limits of transcendental philosophy. These limits will prove critical to opening thought again to the possibility of freedom, a freedom that as Kant suggests and the early efforts of the German Idealists show is at the heart of all experience.

Kant defines experience as the mental representation of objects and he sees two interconnected conditions behind the possibility of their presentation in consciousness. The first and most important are the spatial and temporal forms of cognition or what Kant refers to as our outer and inner sense of things. All sensory intuitions occur under finite durations of time and all objects that appear outside the mind are extended in space. What is significant in Kant's formalization of space and time is that they are not conceived as external to human cognition but intrinsic to it. They are not outside of us existing as properties of objects nor can they be discovered in experience; they are the pure forms of intuition, independent of and prior to any particular sensible content. As Kant argues,

There is therefore only one way possible for my intuition to precede the actuality of the object and occur as an *a priori* cognition, namely, if it contains nothing else except the form of sensibility, which in me as subject precedes all actual impression through which I am affected by objects.<sup>43</sup>

In other words, before anything like a full-fledged perception of the world is constituted, the content of perception must first be received by the pure forms of sensibility, which establish the broad structural parameters for the appearance of phenomenon and the condition for the mathematically generated laws that govern their representation in consciousness.

Kant tries to demonstrate this counterintuitive insight by arguing that we cannot derive spatial-temporal relations through the experience of objects because their representation already implies them as conditions of their appearance. According to his “metaphysical exposition” space and time are irreducible presuppositions of experience that underlie all possible empirical intuition of objects. The pure forms of sensibility are at once empirically real, since they are relevant to all objects that appear, and transcendently ideal, because they are *a priori* features of the mind and only apply to objects as they appear, not as they are independent of perception. Kant further argues that while it is possible to think of a world stripped of all empirical content, it is not possible to think beyond the confines of space and time, thus demonstrating their *a priori* nature.

Both representations are, however, merely intuitions; for, if one eliminates from the empirical intuitions of bodies and their alterations (motion) everything empirical, that is, that which belongs to sensations, then space and time still

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<sup>43</sup> *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, 4:282.

remain, which are therefore pure intuitions that underlie *a priori* the empirical intuitions, and for that reason can never themselves be eliminated . . .<sup>44</sup>

This line of argument leads to one of the more striking and controversial parts of the “Transcendental Aesthetic:” the synthetic *a priori* nature of mathematical propositions. In making this claim, Kant is trying to comprehend the reason why mathematical judgments fit the world as they do. It cannot be sheer coincidence that mathematics so successfully advances our understanding of nature and determines such a broad range of phenomena, often outstripping efforts to empirically validate its theoretical predictions. Kant takes it for granted that such judgments do inform our intuition of objects and understanding of the laws that prevail in nature. The aim of his “transcendental exposition” then is to show that the reason for this consistency can be explained only if space and time are understood as *a priori* forms of cognition. Geometry, for example, defines mathematical relations between abstract and empirical objects, all of which for Kant presupposes the pure intuition of space and, because these relations determine all intuitions, space is both transcendently ideal and empirically real. As he suggests,

Therefore it is only by means of the form of sensory intuition that we can intuit things *a priori* . . . and this supposition is utterly necessary, if synthetic propositions *a priori* are to be granted as possible, or, in case they are actually encountered, if their possibility is to be conceived and determined in advance.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, 4:283-4.

<sup>45</sup> *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, 4:283.

Pure mathematics requires as its basis the pure intuition of space and time and, from this basis, it delineates the fixed and regular patterns of nature, making it possible for us to form accurate judgments about the world. Kant's attempt to comprehend the connection between experience and mathematics is critical and figures prominently in the run up to the deduction of the final condition of experience, the *a priori* concepts of the understanding.<sup>46</sup>

By the end of the "Transcendental Analytic" Kant has explained how the world that appears immediately and objectively given, that first appears indifferent and immune to our being-in-the-world, is actually in part the product of a spontaneous constitutional act of the mind. Kant insists this world is an appearance, a representation of thought. Kant, like Hume and others, argues that we have no unmediated access to the world independent of perception. We have no way of knowing whether or not our judgments correspond to the world as it is prior to our encounter with it. The world is only ever available to us through the veil of perception. To lift the veil, would demand an objective

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<sup>46</sup> The pure concepts of the understanding structure experience, making it possible for individual objects to appear and for judgments about them to be made. The understanding makes intelligible what would otherwise be a random and incoherent flux of sensations. It is made up of exactly twelve concepts that serve as the *a priori* backbone of all judgments about the world. The mind spontaneously employs them as it unifies a manifold into a determinate perception, which then becomes an object of judgment within a system of possible propositional statements. Kant argues such judgments can run the gamut, from mundane judgments of perception "it is warm outside" to the objective statements of Newtonian mechanics that have the force of law "every object remains in a constant state of rest or uniform motion unless acted upon by an external force." See *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, 4:305. Kant however not only wants to explain how a manifold is transformed into discrete blocks of perception but how a coherent continuum of experience is realized through time. Unified experience presupposes a unified subject and, for Kant, the "I think" is the supreme unifying principle of experience and is what finally makes a perception "my" perception. The "I" accompanies all representations and, through the power of the imagination, summons and brings together a diverse range of representations under the individual aspect of the "I think". "I" can, for example, imagine, recollect, reproduce, arrange, and take possession of all the representations given in intuition. They are my representations in the immediate sense of being the objects of my experience and in the transcendental sense of being constituted and unified by my mind. The world is thus my object, an object represented to me in consciousness after "I" constitute it transcendently. See *Critique of Pure Reason*, B:134.

viewpoint, from which to compare and contrast our perceptions with reality, but this is simply an impossible possibility, requiring as it does the transcendence and objectivity of a god. Reason has limits; its power is not unbounded as the Rationalists supposed. Kant's critical philosophy serves as the occasion for reason to determine its true nature and proper scope of application. Left unchecked, reason bewitches itself, seducing the mind toward a type of object it can think but not know—the noumenal object. Kant argues such objects are in principle unknowable—the world as it exists in-itself as well as the traditional metaphysical supports of the world, god and the inaugural, grounding power of freedom—because they are not possible objects of experience. Reason has limits; its epistemological power does not extend above and beyond the phenomena of sensible intuition. This is the ultimate outcome of the critical philosophy: knowledge is not without a rational basis as Hume supposed but it is knowledge of things as they appear, not as they are, as the Rationalists had argued.

When reason tries to comprehend the noumenal essence it is dialectically drawn to, it discovers a thing. And any and every object—including ourselves as objects of sensible intuition—that appears is subject to the forms of intuition and the formal rules that govern and condition their presentation. As a consequence, even if god were to appear, it would not be as Absolute subject but as an empirical object, the site of the Absolute's nonappearance.<sup>47</sup> The pantheistic reduction that results in the running equivalence of Absolute and nature strips life of its grounding freedom by making the

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<sup>47</sup> Kierkegaard argues for example that the paradoxical Christ event appears absurd before reason. Distant and contemporary observers alike only ever encounter the historical man, of which a great deal can be said and known. What will never appear and what will always remain an inscrutable object of faith, is his divinity. See Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

Absolute a thing of nature, subject to the laws of nature. This is the price of Absolute Knowledge: a world trapped in the blind, lifeless mechanism of nature. Without an epistemological blind spot, the world contracts, losing the transcendental dimension of experience and, with it, the possibility of freedom.<sup>48</sup> It is only in its nonappearance that the noumenal object is preserved as both the hypothetical ground of the world as it appears and our moral life. In the same way the presence of the Father undercuts the freedom of a child, knowledge of the *Ding an sich* immediately dispossesses the subject of the spontaneity that is the essence of freedom. In his absence, the child is awakened to the possibility of freedom, of acting against the will of the Father and becoming something “more” than a rote image. In the same way, Kant’s limiting of human knowledge to appearances is the inner condition of possibility of our freedom, the state of our nonknowledge deepening our respect for the moral law within us. As Heidegger will later argue,

What does the struggle against the ‘thing in itself’, which started with German Idealism, mean, other than the growing forgetting of what Kant struggled for: that the inner possibility and necessity of metaphysics are at bottom brought forth and preserved through the more original working-out and increased preservation of the problem of finitude?<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Unlike Kant, Schelling sees no internal contradiction between pantheism and the existence of freedom in the world. However, as will become clear in the next chapter, Schelling, despite his ranging efforts toward a full-fledged idealism, remains largely faithful to the spirit of Kant on this point, especially in the *Freiheitschrift* and *Die Weltalter*, where the Absolute increasingly becomes inaccessible to reason, even though the world is seen as the objective sign of an eternally grounding freedom. See *Philosophical Investigations*, 20.

<sup>49</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Kant & the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. Richard Taft (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), 171.

Kant's "working-out" of the limits of reason and human knowledge safeguards the possibility of faith. He opens us again and for the first time to the question of the meaning of Being and time, to that which cannot be represented in thought.

Kant's philosophy is important not for what it explains but what it cannot explain, namely, our profound indebtedness to time. Dasein is finite, ontologically divided between its representation in time and the Real of desire. If there is a lesson to be drawn from the "Transcendental Aesthetic" it is that time cannot be represented. To argue that time is the inner *a priori* condition of experience is to "suggest" it is its ground. But it is not identical to that which is represented because it is its "formal condition;" hence empty, without meaning or content. Time is no-thing and the essence of Dasein's being-in-the-world (*In der Welt sein*). Heidegger will make this last point explicit, showing how, "Interrogating the nothing—asking what and how it, the nothing, is—turns what is interrogated into its opposite. The question deprives itself of its own object."<sup>50</sup> Dasein's being-toward-death opens her to real time, to the spectral durations, responsibilities and uncertainties that plague and hamper her life in time. The weight and challenge of time—of Dasein's freedom for existence—is made all the more real, exacting and painful because she has no way of knowing whether or not her actions are genuinely free. This is the dilemma that haunts all moral deliberation and action. It is what leads Kant to the admonition to act "as if" you were free; "as if" there were a purpose to life; "as if" the hand of providence were drawing existence toward its fulfillment.

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<sup>50</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, trans. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1977), 96.

It is important to see that this breach and point of estrangement in Being is finally a split at the heart of Dasein itself, of time. We are not that which appears; we are an abyssal point outside all spatial and temporal representation. As a consequence, we never really encounter ourselves, only the after-effect—the ghostly image—of the transcendental process that is always already at work behind our appearance. As Findlay remarks,

It is also important to stress here that, for Kant, our *own* thinking selves . . . who present us with our picture of a coherent, real world . . . are themselves objects of which no intuitive, sensuous presentation is possible, and which are accordingly, in their non-apparent aspects, wholly beyond knowledge.<sup>51</sup>

At a deeper register, what lies behind the empirical aspect of our being-in-the-world is the transcendental subject, who is simultaneously everyone and no one, the precious preserve of our individuality suspended before the universalizing power of reason. Our true nature escapes us and, in missing ourselves, the possibility that saves us from a determinism that would overwhelm creation is preserved. This is the price of freedom: a hypothetical freedom that signifies nothing and that opens us to the freedom that begins and ends with nothing.

It is at this point in the argument that the revolutionary dimension of Kant's turn really comes into view, since the transcendental subject at the center of things is theoretically void, in the sense that there is nothing there but the logical structures that condition the content of experience. In fact, the subject at the end of the transcendental deduction is a formalized abstraction consisting of nothing more than the set of

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<sup>51</sup> J. N. Findlay, *Kant and the Transcendental Object* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 2-3.

conditions necessary for the mental representation of the world. While it is inappropriate to Kant's philosophy to draw too close an analogy between transcendental subjectivity and the divinely inspired acts of creation, it is still true that reason has a grounding power that is most clearly shown in moments of profound crisis, when there is no ready-made solution to resolve the deadlock of indecision, when it transcends all "pathological" attachments and decides a world, revealing reason's freedom from and for existence.

But reason, as Schelling and the Romantics will show, still "needs" the "pathological" sentiments and the surrounding world to ground its grounding activity. Kant admits as much in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, arguing the "feeling" of humiliation that always accompanies the law's injunctions is an *a priori* sentiment and necessary corollary to the moral law and the "experience" of freedom.<sup>52</sup> Schiller will take and give this idea a novel, romantic twist, seeing pain and what he calls the "play drive" (*Spieltrieb*) as integral to distinguishing the creative and moral dimension of "man".

In order, therefore, that the intelligence may reveal itself in man as a force independent of nature, it is necessary that nature should have first displayed all her power before our eyes. The sensuous being must be profoundly and strongly affected, passion must be in play, that the reasonable being may be able to testify his independence and manifest himself in action.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> "This restriction now has an effect on feeling and produces the feeling of displeasure which can be cognized a priori from the moral law. . . . so that the effect of this law on feeling is merely humiliation, which we can thus discern a priori though we cannot cognize in it the force of the pure practical law as incentive but only the resistance to incentives of sensibility." See *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:79.

<sup>53</sup> Friedrich von Schiller, "The Pathetic," in *Complete Poetical Works and Plays of Friedrich von Schiller*, trans. Nathan Haskell Dole (Delphi Classics, 2013), 1. Schiller will transform the idea of imaginative play first developed by Kant in the *Critique of Judgment* into a free ranging concept that opens "man" to the symbolic universe of culture and the free play of "human" meanings. The genuine play of forces, especially in love, art and religion, are intrinsically meaningful, with no ulterior motive or end guiding play. See

What Schiller and later Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis all in their own way argue for becomes a dominant theme in Schelling's work, especially in *Die Weltalter*: that it is through the "agon" of life, the continual contestation and overcoming of the antagonism of forces, that freedom asserts its creative power, and spirit (*Geist*) wins its truth. "Contradiction is in fact the venom of all life, and all vital motion is nothing but the attempt to overcome this poisoning."<sup>54</sup>

Schelling will be the first to really pose this conflict in terms of the difference between what can be represented in time and what can never be represented, namely the virtual durations of time. By turning the question of epistemology on the question of how experience of the world is possible, Kant opens thought to the possibility of the transcendental ideality and empirical reality of metaphysics. By identifying the conditions that underlie all objects of experience and that apply only to objects as they appear, Kant ultimately sets the stage for thinking past the threshold of representational thought to Schelling's groundless ground (*Ungrund*) of the Real. It gives Schelling a way of revitalizing the present time, of showing the beauty and sometimes sublimity of that which appears, as the culmination of hidden processes and durations of time. Common appearances are anything but common. They are signs of spirit, rooted in the earth but

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"Letters on the Aesthetical Education of Man," trans. Nathan Haskell Dole (Delphi Classics, 2013) Kindle File.

<sup>54</sup> *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*, 124. In the preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel famously declares, "It is this power, not as something positive, which closes its eyes to the negative, as when we say of something that it is nothing or is false, and then, having done with it, turn away and pass on to something else; on the contrary, Spirit is this power only by looking the negative in the face, and tarrying with it. This tarrying with the negative is the magical power that converts it into being." See *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 19.

“winged” with inexhaustible meanings. As Novalis states, “By endowing the commonplace with a higher meaning, the ordinary with a mysterious respect, the known with the dignity of the unknown, the finite with the appearance of the infinite, I am making it Romantic.”<sup>55</sup> Even though the appearance will not be commensurate with this time, it will nonetheless objectify something of its truth, and therefore be worthy of our attention, deepening our appreciation for things both seen and unseen, and for the freedom that grounds it all. As Schelling says in *Die Weltalter*,

Even the smallest grain of sand must contain determinations within itself that we cannot exhaust until we have laid out the entire course of creative nature leading up to it. Everything is the work of time, and it is only through time that each thing receives its particular character and meaning.<sup>56</sup>

In these and other ways Kant’s arguments anticipate the emerging thought of Schelling, the German idealists and romantics. His Copernican revolution in epistemology foreshadows all the important elements of Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre* and Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie* and the idealism they hope will bring about a new vision of reality. Taking Fichte’s lead, Schelling presses Kant’s thought to its most natural and logical conclusion, venturing beyond Kant’s formalism and Fichte’s subjectively oriented idealism to a full-fledged interpretation of the physical world as the visible sign of spirit’s longing for a world where its meanings can be experienced, reflected upon and enjoyed. Schelling’s advances here are significant, as they anticipate many of the dominant trends in post-Hegelian thought, from the existentialist orientation of thinkers like Kierkegaard

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<sup>55</sup> Novalis [Friedrich von Hardenberg], *Philosophical Writings*, trans. Margaret Mahony Stoljar (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997), 60.

<sup>56</sup> *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*, 121-2.

and Heidegger to the wide-ranging developments in materialist critique and poststructural analysis. While Schelling's evaluation of the limits and latent potentials of the Kantian project are not central to the purposes of the next chapter, a brief look at his general views will go a long way in framing the problems that are the immediate concern of the *Freiheitschrift* and *Die Weltalter*.

First is the formalism that runs through the critical philosophy, which too often neglects, even suppresses, the physical and historical processes behind the life of reason. Reason has a history as Hegel will later show and yet Kant more often than not treats it as a disembodied faculty. Schelling and Hegel will give these forms life, vitality and movement, Hegel by thinking himself into the dialectical becoming of the Concept (*Begriff*), Schelling by the force of the image. Kant is certainly aware of this shortcoming, which he tries to address in his *Critique of Judgment*, but his thought invariably tackles reason prior to its engagement with a world. In fact, Kant's critical philosophy pursues its unique set of investigations independently of any world, empirical or historical. Kant has good reason for confining his critique in this way, since his twin concerns are the *a priori* foundations of scientific knowledge and the possibility of human freedom. But in the process, reason is stripped of the underlying condition that make possible the synthetic activities of the mind—a world. As Hegel will later argue, Kant's deduction of the root conditions of experience remains fundamentally abstract, stopping short of a comprehensive critique of spirit's struggles through history, while Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* will try and demonstrate spirit's evolving connection to nature and how natural processes objectify and even evolve spirit.

A second and related problem is the subjective orientation of the critical philosophy. Kant limits the scope of his investigations to the subject who wants to know, never really venturing beyond the confines of subjectivity and representational thought. In doing so he fails to explain the ancestry of consciousness or how anything like a self-conscious being first appears. There are undeniable intimations in this direction, especially since Kant sees the subject as born of unconscious processes it cannot know, only deduce. Then there is Kant's core conviction that the subject, its object and the *Ding an sich* are at bottom the self-same reality, but his insistence upon distinguishing appearance from reality prevents him from pursuing the truth implicit in his own view.

One reason why Kant "fails" in this regard is because he cannot see the subject as an emergent process, born of nature and realized in time. What Kant finally lacks is a full-fledged historical consciousness capable of thinking the natural and human worlds together within the dynamic becomings of spirit. In other words, Kant lacks a real sense of time, of the durations of unconscious, primordial time. Schelling will try to do just this, pressing thought beyond the one-sided idealism of both Kant and later Fichte and back to the time of reason's nativity. In this way, Schelling will try and bypass the *Ding an sich* in the revelation of the inaugurating event that brings nature into self-visibility and order. He won't completely succeed in this but it will lead him to think acts of creation in terms of a transcendental-empirical "imaging-event," which will give him a way of regaining what Kant formally takes away—a world.

Schelling, more so than Hegel or any other thinker, including Heidegger and his seminal questioning of Being, answers this question in a genuinely meaningful way. He does it by moving beyond the deductive procedures favored by Kant and dialectical

determinism of Hegel and attempts to intuit the initializing event of creation through a poetically charged speculative vocabulary that approaches primordial reality. This approach is not meant to transform the event into an object of knowledge, which Schelling increasingly sees as impossible, but to think ourselves into the question in a new and different way, to encourage an aesthetic response to the question that, in deepening our longing for the Absolute, attunes us to the self-same striving and stirrings of spirit that first urged the Absolute toward us and the consummating act of first creation. At the same time, the fact that our appearance and the nonbiological life of human culture comes to play such a decisive role in Schelling's thought makes it possible to draw his speculations toward something more definitive and, paradoxically, inhuman—nature's imaging-machines. This theoretical innovation, which Schelling develops in *Die Weltalter* will provide a powerful way of conceiving how new worlds are always already being formed by unconscious machinic forces.

CHAPTER THREE: LONGING FROM THE DEPTHS:  
SCHELLING'S TRANSCENDENTAL *NATURPHILOSOPHIE*

Everything is only the work of time, and it is only through time that each thing receives its particular character and meaning.

-Schelling, *Ages of the World*

The last chapter highlighted the central features of Kant's philosophy with a view to Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* and transcendental idealism. This was no mere digression, as almost all the key innovations within German idealism are clearly anticipated by Kant. While the idealists will move beyond what they perceive to be the limitations of his thought, redoubling their efforts, for example, on behalf of an idealism released from the yoke of the *Ding an sich*, it is important to see that this is all made possible through his philosophy. Kant is the condition of possibility of all that follows. The central problem of the first *Critique* in particular sets the stage for thinking past the limits of representational thought toward the possibility that the world of thought and the world of nature are after-images of an eternally grounding and self-affirming freedom. But above of all, Kant helps us see that what shows up in the world is the product of a process that is ultimately inaccessible to reason, apart from the retrospective deduction of its necessity. In other words, Kant prepares us to see the three articulations of Being—Dasein, nature and the Absolute—as after-images of time. Schelling's transcendental

*Naturphilosophie* makes this insight explicit and, in the process, makes it possible to think transcendental subjectivity itself as a production of will.

The aim of the present chapter is to begin to make sense of this insight and prepare a way for seeing how the transcendental *Naturphilosophie* attempts to think the creation of a new world. Only then will we begin to appreciate the true force of Schelling's thought. To begin with, a brief look at Fichte's idealism is in order, as it will help clarify the context that made it possible for Schelling to make the leap to a full-fledged *Naturphilosophie*. What they share is an unflinching faith in freedom as absolute reality but, unlike Fichte, Schelling comes to see this freedom at work in the deepest recesses of nature's darkest beginnings. Schelling will try and show that human freedom is only intelligible and genuinely meaningful within this context.

Fichte, taking Kant's lead, sees the task of philosophy as coming to grips with two seemingly incorrigible aspects of experience: the feeling of being blindly determined by things over which we have no control and the equally compelling experience of spontaneity in our thoughts and actions. As he says, "We can say in brief: some of our presentations (*Vorstellungen*) are accompanied by the feeling of freedom, while others are accompanied by the feeling of necessity."<sup>57</sup> Fichte tries to resolve these seemingly contradictory aspects of experience by highlighting the ground that gives rise to experience in the first place. But how we proceed depends on whether we see experience as the product of a free, self-producing intelligence or the consequence of the *Ding an sich*. The first is the way of idealism; the second, the path to dogmatism. Fichte naturally

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<sup>57</sup> Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Werke*, vol. 1, ed. F. Medicus (Leipzig: 1908-12), 423.

chooses the former as his starting point, though his justification for doing so goes no further than his own native “inclination” toward freedom as the natural first principle of philosophy.<sup>58</sup> From this Kantian inspired starting point, Fichte proceeds to deduce nature—all that is Not-I—from the self-positing (*setz*) activity of the pure-ego, who in freely positing itself at once begets itself and its world in freedom. Fichte is not advocating a vulgar solipsism but he is drawing out attention to the fact that the I encounters the Not-I as an aspect of the I, as a relation that is always already in process and alive with possibility. Reality objectifies this process and the freedom that swells in the overcoming of nature’s limitations, from the artistic and scientific productions of culture to the throbbing “teeth, throat, and intestines” of Schopenhauerian man to the statistically underdetermined fluctuations of subatomic phenomenon.

Schelling goes one step further and argues that whether from the side of the subject or the side of the object, nature is revealed as a self-organizing totality. In his early *Naturphilosophie* and *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800) Schelling conceives human subjectivity and the natural world as interdependent expressions of the same divine substance. The emergence of human consciousness represents only a culminating point in nature’s drive toward intelligibility and understanding. Nature becomes available to itself in us, where it is revealed and grasped in time as objectified spirit. But once nature attains itself in human understanding it loses itself in objectivity, becoming estranged from the activity of thought. As Fichte and Schelling both see,

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<sup>58</sup> Fichte thinks that we should not take the “I” for granted as some-thing already given because that then obscures the nature of what actually happens when we think the “I think” and of our responsibility for that which is thought, namely, ourselves and the world that is generated in the event of reflection. Fichte’s great insight is that the “I” is constituted in a process of self-generation, where what gets generated is “saturated” with the life and vitality of the “I.” To think otherwise is to surrender to the stress and burden of freedom, to become Not-I, a determined thing.

reflection introduces a fundamental rift between subject and object, between the ideal and the actual that is indispensable to the appearance and dialectical evolutions of thought. Fichte was the first to notice this as a condition of self-consciousness, since the subject can encounter itself only by way of a detour through an objectifying activity that constitutes the ontological field that will frame its appearance and practical engagements. In its most original sense, reflection is not simply a theoretical orientation but an intersubjective relationship between rational subjects acting within a common natural world. Fichte's point is that, "No free being becomes conscious of itself without at the same time becoming conscious of other similar beings."<sup>59</sup> The aim of his *Wissenschaftslehre* is to establish the ideal conditions for the free association of rational subjects and, the *System der Sittenlehre*, the ethical framework for its historical realization. Fichte and Schelling are both acutely aware that reflection drives the subject-object relation, multiplying distinctions, refining taxonomies and deploying new concepts to manage the excess its own activity produces. The task of thought is to reveal the ontological ground from which this multiplicity of phenomena originates. This is in part why Fichte insists that beneath the subject-object relation is the infinite activity of the pure ego. The only way to get back to the unifying essence underlying empirical representation is through the "intellectual intuition" of the pure activity behind it. This immediately contradicts Kant's arguments against any faculty having the capacity to go beyond appearance to some supersensible object. Fichte argues, as will Schopenhauer, that the object of "intellectual intuition" is not an object at all, but a process revealed to

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<sup>59</sup> Fichte, *Werke*, vol. 2, 143.

the subject in the act of objectifying its own action. All that is ever intuited is the activity as it becomes an object of reflection; no object-entity is ever intuited or inferred. Thus as Fichte argues, “For idealism the intelligence is a doing (*Thun*) and absolutely nothing else; one should not even call it an active thing (*ein Tätiges*).”<sup>60</sup>

Schelling agrees with the overall aim, content and conclusions of Fichte’s idealism. He too comes to think fundamental reality as the pure activity of willing. As he remarks in the *Freiheitschrift*, for example,

In the final and highest judgment, there is no other Being than will. Will is primal Being (*Ursein*) to which alone all predicates of Being apply: groundlessness, eternity, independence from time, self-affirmation. All philosophy strives only to find this highest expression.<sup>61</sup>

The shortcoming of his idealism is that he fails to see the freedom of the subject as an emergent phenomenon grounded in nature. Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie* is realist in a way that Fichte’s idealism is not. The natural world is not incidental but necessary to the revelation of spirit. It possesses an autonomy and spontaneity of purpose that in one sense exists independently of us. Kojève’s remarks on Hegel’s realism are equally relevant to Schelling’s concept of nature: “Nature is *independent* of Man. Being eternal, it subsists before him and after him. It is in it that he is *born* . . . Man who *is* Time also *disappears* in spatial Nature. For this Nature *survives* Time.”<sup>62</sup>

Schelling’s crucial insight is that all articulations of Being are living contractions of divine substance. The inaugurating power of freedom grounds (*Ungrund*) this process.

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<sup>60</sup> Fichte, *Werke*, vol. 1, 440.

<sup>61</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, 21.

<sup>62</sup> Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, trans. James H. Nichols, Jr. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969), 158.

It is what makes possible in Schelling's eyes the coincidence of thought and Being. It is the most basic presupposition of all scientific inquiry and is confirmed for Schelling every time nature conforms to the demands of reason and proves intelligible. His early conviction in the self-organizing, self-fulfilling unity of nature follows from the fact that since we are born of nature, the ideal structures intrinsic to mind must be intrinsic to nature as well. This is what both Kant and Fichte fail to elaborate. If Schelling is right, then it doesn't matter where one begins, for all roads lead to this truth and the "golden age heralded in the harmonious connection of the all the sciences."

If Schelling is right, then it is possible in principle to transcend the divisions thought introduces and unwittingly perpetuates. The true task of philosophy is thus to think again and for the first time the identity of thought and object through the activity of thought itself. Thought must comprehend the truth that is most clearly revealed in the depths of feeling, in our innermost intuition (*in's Schauen*) of the basic unity of nature. As Schelling remarks,

We do not live through intuitions. Our knowledge is incomplete (*Stückwerk*); that is, it must be produced piecemeal (*stückweis*) in sections and degrees, and this cannot occur in the absence of reflection. Accordingly, the goal is not reached through mere intuition. For there is no understanding in intuition, in and of itself.<sup>63</sup>

To transform this intuition into genuine understanding nature must be reconceived as a living expression of the self-same transcendental freedom that informs the life of Dasein. But this is possible only on condition that freedom is active in the beginning of things. Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* attempts to show just this, how freedom in nature

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<sup>63</sup> *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*, 117.

evolves a free subject capable of comprehending the natural world as the living sign of its own world-forming activity.

This leads Schelling to the central question of how nature evolves beyond any given set of limiting conditions. How does something as primitive as inorganic material result in a being that comes to wonder about this strange and most improbable genealogy. The only truly meaningful and satisfactory answer for Schelling is one that posits freedom as integral to creation. Freedom is what explains emergent phenomenon and every “line of flight” that transcends a given condition. Freedom is the source of all change and all development. As Schelling remarks, “Every organic individual exists, as something that has become, only through another, and in this respect is dependent according to its becoming but by no means according to its Being.”<sup>64</sup> Everything that comes to exist does so only in relation to some already determinate ground, which conditions the becoming but not the underlying essence. In the *Freiheitschrift*, for example, Schelling describes this fact in connection with the biological autonomy of the eye in relation to the broader confines of the body. “An individual body part, like the eye, is only possible within the whole of an organism; nonetheless, it has its own life for itself, indeed, its own kind of freedom, which it obviously proves through the disease of which it is capable.”<sup>65</sup> The significance of Schelling’s insight cannot be overestimated, as it abandons any mechanistic view of nature. Spinoza, as we have seen already, who deeply affected Schelling’s thinking about nature and who promoted a mechanistic interpretation

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<sup>64</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, 17.

<sup>65</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, 17.

of natural phenomenon, thinks of substance strictly in terms of things within a closed system of logical relationships. The immediate effect of this reduction is the loss of the “real and vital concept” of freedom as well as any way of doing justice to the fine and manifold complexity of nature. Schelling sees in this view a fundamental error, which compelled Spinoza to think of nature in this way. As he explains,

Spinoza therefore must be a fatalist for a completely different reason, one independent of pantheism. The error of his system lies by no means in his placing things *in God* but in the fact that they are *things*—in the abstract concept of beings in the world indeed of infinite substance itself, which for him is exactly also a thing.<sup>66</sup>

The shortcoming of Spinoza’s views is not simply that his philosophy forces him to betray the concept of freedom, which Schelling thinks he can recover, but that he is incapable of grasping the reality of change and real movement in time. Spinoza’s theory is perfectly adequate to events with straightforward linear sequences, but it fails when faced with emergent phenomenon, which cannot be reduced to antecedent conditions. Schelling wants to think real change and structured systems together under the constraints of a univocal ontology.

To accomplish this speculative feat, Schelling argues nature must be reconceived as a self-organizing totality enveloped in a self-grounding freedom that continuously resolves itself through the dynamic interplay of attractive and repulsive forces. The contradictions, tensions and intensities these forces produce are what explain all vital movement, variation and change in nature. Schelling, who here echoes ideas earlier developed by Hegel, states, “Without contradiction there would be no life, no movement,

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<sup>66</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, 20.

no progress; a deadly slumber of all forces . . . Contradiction is in fact the venom of all life, and all vital motion is nothing but the attempt to overcome this poisoning.”<sup>67</sup> Life is born of contradiction and dies in indifference. All life endlessly struggles to overcome this divide between the actual and ideal, to bring actuality as close as possible to the life of the Absolute without losing the ontological distance necessary for its articulation. With Dasein, this will mean bringing consciousness as close to the unconscious longings of spirit as is possible without losing itself.

Schelling’s view helps explain life’s tendency toward existence and capacity to evolve beyond certain limiting states, since nature’s nascent beginnings are the most distant and improbable approximation of the freedom that later defines the life of Dasein. Elementary particles and gases have a degree of autonomy, for example, but the ideality they express is inadequate to the real concept of freedom.<sup>68</sup> The vast disparity between the ground and the ideality it reveals lies behind nature’s compulsive drive toward existence and forms more adequate to the ideal concept of freedom.<sup>69</sup> Once nature

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<sup>67</sup> *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*, 124.

<sup>68</sup> Hydrogen and oxygen, for example, are both chemical elements that occur naturally in gaseous form but the covalent bonding of two hydrogen atoms and an oxygen atom creates a new chemical compound that is more than the sum of its parts. Water is a liquid at standardized temperatures and pressures and, unlike hydrogen and oxygen, water extinguishes an open flame. This innovation could not have been predicted through an analysis of initial conditions or the elements active in its production. But once formed and recorded as a viable molecular pattern, this connection bifurcates, generating new virtual lines of emergence. In Schelling’s terminology, H<sub>2</sub>O has a degree of autonomy that outstrips the conditions it depends upon, becoming a decisive transitional point in the evolution of life. Water, for example, can now be connected with a turbine machine that unlocks and exploits latent energy potentials, which becomes the basis of hydroelectric power and all the new relationships this innovation generates and supports, including the machine recording this thought. As this example, inspired by Heidegger’s *The Question Concerning Technology*, suggests, Dasein is the highest expression of this nascent freedom, which culminates with the technological revealing of Being. See Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1982).

<sup>69</sup> Schelling’s theory also explains nature’s regressive tendencies, since one way nature resolves the antagonisms of life is through their suspension. Schelling will show how something like Freud’s “death

evolves the capacity to represent itself in understanding and grasp its underlying ideality, it can begin to think the possibility of re-unifying the ideal and the real under the historical sign of the Absolute. Whether or not this ideal of thought can be realized, is one of the great ambivalences of Schelling's early thought, especially as this underlying essence may be nothing more than an ideological residuum engendered by thought from within the particular preontological understanding of Being that it itself is. As Heidegger will later put it, "True, Dasein is ontically not only what is near or even nearest—we ourselves *are* it in each case. Nevertheless, or precisely for this reason, it is ontologically what is farthest away."<sup>70</sup> While Schelling is increasingly sensitive to this possibility in his later work, he nonetheless sees this ontological rift as metaphysically necessary, both as a condition for the revelation of Being and as a condition for the evolution of understanding.

So what explains the present state of development within nature, with its rich, diverse and ever evolving content as well as the system of physical laws that govern its presentation? It is clear from what Schelling says that in the beginning, the activity of willing is pure and unbounded but, for the objective world and its underlying structures to exist, this infinite activity must be limited by a countervailing force, producing through the interaction a residuum, which actualizes what was previously only virtual. If we

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drive" is rooted in the self-same longing that animates nature's drive toward growth and understanding. For example, "For the will that wills nothing always penetrates through the greatest turmoils of life and the most violent movement of all forces. Everything aims for it, everything longs for it. Every created thing, every man in particular strives, in truth, only to return to the condition of nonwilling." Schelling will emphasize how both tendencies bring thought to the limits of rationality. See *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*, 134.

<sup>70</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 58.

think the concept of an individual man, we immediately see that the concept is a polyvalent multiplicity, a differential field of potentials from the ground up. In order to become something actual, the concept must contract in order to appear under the limiting conditions of space-time. Napoleon was an outcome of a biological and anthropogenic process that isolated, selected and unified certain tendencies and capacities, while at the same time excluding others. He who would be something must decide all he is not, or as Schopenhauer famously remarks, “he who would be everything cannot be anything.”<sup>71</sup>

But unlike the concept of “man,” which anticipates a range of probable outcomes within a pre-established biological and symbolic universe, the contractions Schelling has in mind are absolutely unique and therefore entirely unpredictable. What Schelling hopes to describe is nothing less than how a new world is created, where before there was nothing, only divine indifference.

In the first great convulsion of time, when the infinite activity of the will for the first time encounters resistance by an opposing force, the initial synthetic outcome is physical matter. This connective synthesis is the founding moment in the formation of the world, producing in the process the basic building blocks and structures of nature. Once the interaction produces what Schelling refers to as nature’s “first potency,” it is recorded, regularized and repeated, becoming the material basis of all future development. But since the infinite activity is excessive to any articulation of substance—every expression inadequate to the challenge and demands of infinity— it

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<sup>71</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, “On the Metaphysics of Mores,” in *Philosophische Vorlesungen*, vol. 4 (Munich/Zurich, 1985), 103.

reflexively recoils, withdrawing to the virtual domain of substance, only to again yield to the attractive force of existence.

The process is repeated, generating nature's "second potency" or the physical laws that govern the interaction of bodies. Schelling sees this second repetition as a further elaboration of matter and the forces active within its constitution. Initially there are the forces of attraction and repulsion and the product of their interaction, matter and mass. After the second repetition, however, these self-same forces are further defined in terms of magnetism, electricity and the chemical processes and properties of bodies. Nature has now evolved beyond the limiting threshold of simple matter, creating in the process the conditions necessary for the emergence of nature's "third potency," which raises, unifies and extends the first two potencies within the life of the organism.

It is at this transitional point that the forces specific to biological life give rise to an entirely new range of tendencies and capacities, from the emergence of elementary forms of perception combined with an evolving behavioral repertoire sensitive and responsive to changing stimuli to new reproductive capacities for the propagation, transmission and evolution of biological life. The emergence of the organism, with its heightened capacities to respond and adapt to environmental changes in combination with the infinite number of almost imperceptible, sometimes random differences that emerge within its own individual lines of becoming, introduces a new degree of plasticity and dynamism into nature that is particularly suited to the life of spirit. It is here that Schelling describes a veritable explosion of activity, out of which finally grows Dasein from within the rich and varied biological background that grounds and sustains its existence. The emergence of Dasein discloses for the first time the ideality implicit

throughout nature, from nature's humble and unlikely beginnings to its crowning achievement, Dasein, who reveals the whole of nature as saturated with spirit. Nature has finally made for herself a subject, who exists in the midst of a universe now invested with significance and purpose but also alienated from itself, plagued by new and insatiable longings.

While Schelling's genealogy may appear arbitrary and simplistic in citing three key phase-transitions in nature's evolution, he never meant this to be understood as an exhaustive description of nature's evolutionary history. Even less did Schelling intend to suggest that these transitions were spontaneous productions of nature.<sup>72</sup> Evolutionary processes, especially those Schelling highlights as significant to the emergence of organic and human life, are highly complex and multifaceted at every stage of development. Evolution is at best a protracted, often discontinuous process where competing, divergent and sometimes contradictory tendencies all struggle for existence, many of which fail to gain the minimal cohesion and traction necessary for survival. Schelling tends to see much of nature's prehistory as an endless series of dead ends and premature births. Yet in each attempt, however primitive, there exists spirit.

The dead and unconscious products of nature are merely abortive attempts that she makes to reflect herself; inanimate nature so-called is actually as such an immature intelligence, so that in her phenomena the still unwitting character of intelligences is already peeping through.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> As will become clear, Schelling advances a much more complicated view of temporal durations, especially as they are thought in relation to singularities and the primordial time that seals the event of their becoming. Also, viewed from Schelling *System of Transcendental Idealism*, these three phase-transitions can be understood as singular and spontaneous events of mind.

<sup>73</sup> Schelling, *Sämmtliche Werke*, vol. 3, 340-1.

Even in those early, failed intimations of substance intelligence still shows itself, however malformed or inconsistent with the longings and demands of spirit. There are thus significant and necessary gradations of existence for Schelling, especially within the domain of organic life. Reproductive protocols will be dominant within the biology of monocellular units of life, for example, while their perceptual capacities and sensitivities appear profoundly primitive in comparison with those exhibited by vertebrate animals. At higher levels of development, by contrast, where sensibility is more highly evolved, the individual organism is more clearly defined in relation to its species existence. Dasein represents such a pivotal turning point in the progression of spirit not just because it is able to isolate and reflect its relationship with the whole in thought but, in doing so, it creates a new nonbiological life that transcends the condition of its own biology. Dasein releases spirit into time, where it slowly achieves something of its truth in history. It is thus best to think of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* as a deduction of the necessary conceptual moments intrinsic to the ideal construction of nature and, in the final analysis, the nonbiological life of culture.

The *Naturphilosophie* is complemented and completed by his *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800). In this work he now strives to construct the objective world—the self-same world responsible for the emergence of human subjectivity—from the side of the ideal subject. In doing this, Schelling hopes to show that the stages in the evolution of subjectivity correspond exactly to the conceptual moments in the formation of the objective world, this time according to the immanent principle and structures of consciousness. Since Schelling's efforts here continue in the direction of Fichte's idealism, despite a surprising and novel turn toward a philosophy of art, we will confine

our discussion to a few brief remarks that will show how and why the *Naturphilosophie* is the inverted counter-image of Schelling's transcendental idealism. In doing so, we will sparingly utilize language and ideas developed by Lacan as a way of unpacking a significant dimension of Schelling's deduction.

First, the transcendental philosophy does not even need to be thought of in terms of an alternative progression of spirit. The movements that define nature's evolution are repeated in the creation of Dasein, only this time from the side of self-actualizing spirit. In each of us a world is born; in each of us a world will die. This explains why Schelling is so convinced that we are capable of summoning this truth from within ourselves. Each of us is touched in some way by the dim, inescapable feeling that we somehow hold within ourselves the meaning of all meanings, that we are somehow the answer to the question we ourselves are.

Drawn from the source of things and akin to it, what is eternal of the soul has a co-science/con-consciousness [*Mitt-Wissenschaft*] of creation. Because this essence holds time enveloped, it serves as a link that enables man to make an immediate connection with the most ancient past as well as with the most distant future. Man often sees himself transported into such wonderful relations and inner connections through precisely this innermost essence, such as when he encounters a moment in the present as one long past, or a distant event as if he himself were witness to it.<sup>74</sup>

The question of divine creation is equally our question, just as the question of nature is god's concern. Our lives and the witness of culture are but the means to achieve a form that arrests this meaning, to prepare a place where the gods can alight and again dwell upon the earth. Pound, like Schelling, believes he can summon—if only for a

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<sup>74</sup> *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*, 114.

fleeting moment—this ancient meaning in its terrible, awe-inspiring majesty from within the remnants of “dead,” primordial civilization, that is, from within himself.

See, they return, one, and by one,  
With fear, as half-awakened;  
As if the snow should hesitate  
And murmur in the wind, and half turn back:  
These were the “Wing’d-with-Awe,” Inviolable.

Gods of the winged shoe!  
With them the silver hounds,  
Sniffing the trace of air!

Haie! Haie!  
These were the swift to harry;  
These the keen-scented;  
These were the souls of blood.<sup>75</sup>

The power of Pounds poem lies in its power to capture, however briefly, what Schelling aims to achieve philosophically—the resurrection of the past and, with it, a meaning that grounds and once again sanctifies the becoming present of the future of spirit.

Viewed in this way, there is nothing arbitrary in Schelling’s account. In language that will be later utilized by Heidegger, Dasein always tries to comprehend the fact of its existence from within its own pre-understanding of Being. Dasein embodies unconscious, cosmic forces, ancient signs and practices, and comes to itself in understanding only after

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<sup>75</sup> Ezra Pound, “The Return,” in *Early Writings: Poems and Prose* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 52. Robert Urquhart suggests this poem must be read together with *The Cantos* (1925-1969) to register the full impact of its meaning, beginning with *Canto I*, where Odysseus or the “I” of the *Cantos* descends to Hades to question Tiresias in an effort to divine wisdom that will cast light on his future fate, as he moves to restore order to his homeland, Ithaca, and ours. This initial meeting with the “dead”—“These many crowded about me; with shouting”—is repeated throughout the *Cantos*, where the “I” encounters countless figures from the past speaking “out of” the truth of their worlds, their “procreative energy” echoing the essential “life-force” of the Homeric hero and poet. See *The Cantos*, ed. George Kearns (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

it has been given the gift of fire, which delivers her over to a world. But these unconscious forces always produce traces that can be interpreted and, in being interpreted, brought into some proximate relation to us. As Schelling remarks, “Not only human events but even the history of nature has its monuments, and one can well say that they do not leave a single stage . . . without leaving behind a mark.”<sup>76</sup> What is thus needed is a hermeneutic capable of deciphering and unifying these trace structures. Schelling’s transcendental idealism is the first tentative step in this direction. The three phase-transitions outlined in the *Naturphilosophie* are now revealed in the growth of Dasein and the setting-up of a world of shared meanings and practices. The unconscious forces active in the formation of the universe are active in the making of Dasein, until they undergo their highest transfiguration in the intersubjective life of culture.

While Schelling never fully addresses the issue of biological conception or the gestation period prior to birth and the neonatal phase of life, it is always implied. For example, in a rich and highly suggestive passage from the *Freiheitschrift* that we will return to later, Schelling remarks,

All birth is birth from darkness into light; the seed kernel must be sunk into the earth and die in darkness so that the more beautiful shape of light may lift and unfold itself . . . Man is formed in the maternal body; and only from the obscurity of that which is without understanding (from feeling, yearning, the sovereign a [herrlich] mother of knowledge) grow luminous thoughts.<sup>77</sup>

From the primordial warmth of the maternal body and the passing, pulsating sensations that register on the body to the near total absorption in the connections that

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<sup>76</sup> *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*, 116.

<sup>77</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, 29.

define and sustain its life, grows the ground from which will grow “luminous thoughts.” Schelling equates this state of primitive sensation, which is wholly unconscious, with matter. Life at this primitive, material level is wholly unbounded and without individuality and for this reason closest to the Real of desire.

Even here, however, it is already beginning the subtle, still unconscious task of territorializing its reality, segregating and ordering regional blocks of sensation in relation to distinguishable objects invested with varying degrees of psycho-physical significance. It is evolving what Schelling calls “productive intuition” and the capacity to make rudimentary causal inferences in the midst of spatial-temporal relationships. It begins to make increasingly complex distinctions between objects, based on past impressions and the associations they engender. The breast, mouth, voice, gaze of the m-Other are all partial objects with varying degrees of significance for the child. Once certain connections have been repeated and regularized, causal associations and the inferences they inspire begin to pattern experience and expectation. The presentation of the breast to the mouth, for example, typically incites a feeling of excitement in anticipation of the renewal of a bond so intimately tied with pleasure and satisfaction. It has been invested with a primitive and highly compelling meaning. It is also here that a vast repertory of potential modulations and responses develop in connection with the larval selves gestating beneath the surface of sensation and intelligibility, until an imaging-event unlocks a new set of relations that come to anticipate a self-conscious being. Schelling here largely underwrites Lacan’s “mirror stage” of development, when the child for the

first time encounters and recognizes its own image.<sup>78</sup> In this decisive moment of identification, a world of separable objects opens in relation to a universe of primitive meanings and associations, while the order of the Real withdraws, subsisting within and beneath the “evaporative effect” of emergent intelligibility. The price of this transition for Lacan is permanent alienation, from which grows the fantasy of a post-ideological encounter with the Real. Hegel remains in the thrall of this fundamental fantasy, while Schelling will “traverse” it and affirm the permanent gulf separating the two.

This highly ambivalent moment anticipates the final epochal transition to the founding act of the will that produces a subject capable of abstract thought, of perceiving and recognizing itself as intelligence. Schelling sees in this not just the highest expression of spirit but the grounding event of creation, the original self-limiting activity of the Absolute-I. The revealed subject, in deducing and comprehending the derivative moments that lead to self, envelops this history within the deeper folds of a more primitive limitation. “The original limitation, which we have in common with all rational beings, consists in the fact of our intrinsic finitude. In virtue of this we are distinguished, not from other rational beings, but from the infinite.”<sup>79</sup> The same principle operative in the *Naturphilosophie* is at work in the production of subjectivity. In order for the subject to emerge under the limiting conditions of space and time as an object to itself, it must

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<sup>78</sup> Just as it is for Lacan, Schelling sees the formation of the “I” as nature’s great breakthrough into time but also as the beginning of the alienation of desire. As Lacan says, “It is this moment that decisively tips the whole of human knowledge [savoir] into being mediated by the other’s desire, constitutes its objects in an abstract equivalence due to competition from other people, and turns the *I* into an apparatus to which every instinctual pressure constitutes a danger, even if it corresponds to a natural maturation process. See “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the ‘I’ Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience,” in *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996), 79.

<sup>79</sup> Schelling, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 3, 409.

decide itself once and for all time. This determination is never in-itself commensurate with the limiting effect that shows up in the world but is always, already excessive to itself, extending to infinity. “As surely, indeed, as I am limited as such, I must be so determinately, and this determinacy must reach into the infinite, for this infinitely outreaching determinacy constitutes my entire individuality”<sup>80</sup> The self-conscious subject is thus a condensed point—a psycho-physical contraction in time—produced at the intersection of biological need and intersubjective desire. It is only through the presence of other intelligences that the world becomes available as a meaningful discursive object.

This represents one of the most accurate and enduring insights of the German idealists, first introduced by Fichte then advanced to its logical conclusion by Schelling and Hegel. The human reality is only achieved in relation to other intelligences or, as Hegel later argues in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, desire is always already anthropogenic desire. Schelling thus remarks, “We are not speaking of this, but rather of the fact that the whole essentiality of objects only becomes real for me, in that the intelligences are outside me.”<sup>81</sup> What is created in the becoming real of the objective world is a subject. They speak us and we are magically “there,” alongside the others and the symbolic universe that en-frames our desires and meanings. It is no accident that Schelling’s deduction of the unconditioned condition of human subjectivity is immediately followed by a system of practical philosophy. For what is most remarkable in the transition to subjectivity is the setting-up of a world according to a system of practical laws that

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<sup>80</sup> *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 3 409.

<sup>81</sup> *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 3, 555.

ground and sustain the intersubjective life of Dasein as well as the physical laws of nature. In a reversal first suggested by Kant and later introduced by Fichte, theoretical reason grows from within the more fundamental self-legislating activities of the subject. Schelling will ultimately press this idea beyond all sense and reason, back to the irrational drives cascading beneath the surface of all intelligibility.

The ontological conversion to subjectivity is thus realized when the ego transcends its maternal fixation—i.e. the imaginary stage of development—and submits to the symbolic order of the Father—i.e. the linguistic and juridical order of a social field. It is this transition that really signals the birth of Dasein to a world but something else, something unexpected is also begotten in the midst of Dasein's own nativity—the Absolute. Subjectivity becomes for Schelling something wholly inseparable from the Absolute and the irreducible remainder that continually presses Dasein back toward that unity broken in time.

Schelling is clear that once Dasein appears, the Absolute appears as an irreducible remainder, the “time-image” of all time. It is no “phantom of the brain” dissimulating the Real. The Absolute is the ghostly ideal that swells and staggers under the growing weight of a time. Dasein's fate is bound to it, each are born of the Other, each buckle under the pressures of creation, each suffers on behalf of time, Dasein most of all, because we name the ontological breach that lifts Being out of its primordial concealment and into time.

Schelling stresses this time and again. It is reenacted each time Dasein is delivered over to a world. We are the image of the breach in Being that we ourselves “are.” This is significant because Schelling is now complicating our everyday understanding of temporal progression. It is natural to think of the stages of development

that lead to human life in strictly linear terms but what this description misses is that what is created each time Dasein is born to a world is time. Dasein is nothing less or more than nature's breakthrough into time. To answer the question Heidegger will later pose, the meaning of Being is time and Dasein is an endless provocation toward this meaning. As Žižek suggests,

Schelling's greatest achievement was to *confine* the domain of history, to trace a line of separation between history (the domain of the Word, *logos*) and the nonhistorical (the rotary motion of drives). Every 'historicization', every symbolization, has to 'reenact' this gap, this passage from the Real to history.<sup>82</sup>

While it is too early to fully appreciate the significance of Schelling's insight, it is worth pointing out that the production of time creates a primordial residuum that withdraws and envelops the life of Dasein from beyond this world. Dasein, as the point where these two times converge, is both a symptom of an inscrutable past and an unresolved sign enfolding the future. Schelling will explore this idea in much greater detail in his *Freiheitschrift* and *Die Weltalter*, both of which are the central concern of later chapters. For now, we can simply say that Schelling finally sees this temporal rift as the irreducible condition of intelligibility and, for this reason, Dasein is time and again crucified on the cross of time.

We have reached a point where we can consider the outstanding implication of all this and its importance for thinking about meaning and time. It is easy to see Schelling's two interconnected deductions as an elucidation and elaboration of the process that

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<sup>82</sup> *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*, 37.

generates the transcendental structures Kant discovers in the first *Critique*. As Schelling remarks,

The peculiarity of transcendental idealism in regard to its doctrine is precisely this, that it can also demonstrate the so-called *a priori* concepts in respect of their origin; a thing that is only possible, indeed, in that it transports itself into a region lying beyond ordinary consciousness.<sup>83</sup>

*A priori* concepts have an origin, an origin that encompasses and grounds reality, both in terms of its empirical content and underlying formal structures. In Kantian terms, Schelling is effectively arguing that the conceptual categories of the understanding, the mathematical judgments that underwrite physical law and the pure forms of sensibility such judgments presuppose, are derived from a more fundamental event that runs up against the inscrutability of a more ordinary limiting condition. Schelling is not arguing that transcendental structures have a history or that they evolve through time. Quite the contrary, once established, they function, just as they did for Kant, as the abstract theoretical basis for the representation of objects. Their origin is thus not to be found in time but outside of time, in the depths of primal reality—time’s durations. This is why it is a mistake to think solely in terms of the *a priori* and *a posteriori* distinction and the variants it engenders, most importantly, Kant’s synthetic *a priori* form of judgment. The combined aim of the transcendental *Naturphilosophie* is a still tentative attempt to think past these distinctions to the initializing event of creation, not simply in terms of physical matter and law but, much more radically, in terms of reason itself. Schelling’s ultimate purpose is to stage reason’s nativity and his first efforts in this direction hit upon Fichte’s “I” and, most importantly, the work of art, which becomes the vehicle for manifesting

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<sup>83</sup> Schelling, *Sämtliche Werke*, 528.

what cannot be re-presented in thought—the inscrutable *Ungrund* of thought, the pure time-image of thought. The search for reason’s origins is really a search for the individual, whom Schelling believes exists as the virtual, ever receding ground of reality. To get past all representation to the “white hot kernel” of this truth is the goal and, to reach it, would mean wresting our meaning from nature and the representations that would destroy it.

René Magritte illuminates this last and difficult point. In *Time Transfixed*, Magritte presents us with what first appears to be the random juxtaposition of common objects, most notably, a clock sitting atop a mantel and a steam locomotive emerging from within an adjoining fireplace. The overall effect of the picture is unsettling because it defies expectation, momentarily revealing these everyday objects in the truth of their becoming, prior to their capture and inscription within a coordinated system of representation. Magritte frees the viewer and the object from any obligation to “fit” a world. The picture transfixes time, setting the imagination and time free. What is being “represented” or “imaged” is the truth event beneath the surfaces of representation and before the order of reason. This is what Schelling is after and what leads him to the monumental question of reason’s origin. In asking this, as we already know, Schelling is really asking the question of Dasein and her world and, as we will now start to see, the interconnected questions of Dasein and the meaning of Being are inseparable from the question of time and technology.

## CHAPTER FOUR: THE GIFT AND DANGER OF FIRE

Now come, fire!

Eager are we

To see the day . . .

-Friedrich Hölderlin, *The Ister*

The visible realm should be likened to the prison dwelling, and the light of the fire inside it to the power of the sun.

-Plato, *The Republic*

Apart from a few passing remarks, we have yet to ask the question of technology. It was first necessary to set up a world in order that we might come before its grounding event, Dasein. We began with Kant's critique of reason and his attempt to work out how objects are represented in experience. Kant's Transcendental Aesthetic and Logic showed that the subject plays a pivotal, though ambivalent, role in this process. From here, we turned to Schelling's transcendental *Naturphilosophie* to think reason and nature together under the sign of spirit, and to show why he thinks the subject-object distinction grows out of a deeper machinic process, time's durations.

We now will show that the relationship between Dasein and time is really the relationship between time and machines. This in our view is the ultimate insight of *Die Weltalter* and Division I of Heidegger's *Being and Time*, one that brings Schelling and Heidegger together and into proximity with Deleuze. Dasein is not a thing or an "entity"

but a distillation of “equipmental relationships,” subtracted from the processes it provokes, augments and unwittingly sustains. Modern technological revealing—or the radical alignment of technology and science with market forces—as Heidegger urges us to think in *Being and Time* and later in the *Question Concerning Technology*, makes this equivalence explicit, surrendering Dasein to eternity and the tedium of modern boredom. As we will now see, technological revealing takes away a world, leaving Dasein indifferent to life, but it also reveals Dasein as essentially world-forming.

In this chapter we will think Schelling and Heidegger together, drawing Heidegger’s seminal questioning of technology in relation to Schelling’s speculative metaphysics. This will not be an invented or forced connection. Schelling efforts, especially in his middle philosophy, point decisively in this direction. The argument we will now begin to develop can be summed up in the following way: the world and its three interconnected articulations—Dasein, nature and the Absolute—are after-images of time’s machines.

Since the time of Ancient Greek thought, Plato and Aristotle being decisive of the time, there has been a strong tendency to privilege theoretical knowledge over practical “know how.” Plato, for example, thinks philosophy’s true and exclusive concern should be scientific knowledge of what “is,” of the eternal Ideas (εἶδος) constitutive of reality. Knowledge of the good life and the ultimate nature of things take precedence over the technical skills that we have evolved to get along in the world. Technical knowledge, being concerned as it is with the practical understanding of how to order, exploit and advance natural and social relations, is secondary to the more immediate task of grasping reality as it is in-itself. In *The Republic*, for example, Plato describes the view given by a

practitioner of mathematics, rather than a “lover of wisdom,” whose main object is pure mathematics. “They give ridiculous accounts of it (geometry), though they can’t help it, for they speak like practical men . . . They talk of ‘squaring’, ‘applying’, ‘adding’, and the like, whereas the entire subject is pursued for the sake of knowledge.”<sup>84</sup> While the practical application of mathematical principles is legitimate and, in some measure, unavoidable, it nonetheless remains for Plato as it will for Aristotle a deficient form of knowledge. This is due in no small part to the fact that technical knowledge is first and foremost concerned with appearances and not reality, with engaging and manipulating phenomena in reference to some practical end, such as satisfying a biological need or realizing some political end. This view not only leads to the subordination of technics (τέχνη) to scientific knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) but to the ontological reduction of nature (φύσις) to a practical object, whose value is derived in relation to the human activity that encompasses and takes possession of it. Neither Plato nor Aristotle go this far, though Plato’s understanding of the body in particular goes a long way in this direction. Plato’s *Phaedo*, for example, is representative of a view that gradually gains currency in the tradition. Here Socrates speaks of the body as something to be distrusted and avoided at all costs. It is the root cause of all error and all suffering. This is why, as he says,

We are in fact convinced that if we are ever to have pure knowledge of anything, we must get rid of the body and contemplate things by themselves with the soul by itself . . . that the wisdom which we desire and upon which we profess to have set our hearts will be attainable only when we are dead, and not in our lifetime.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Plato, “The Republic,” in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, trans. and ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005), 527b.

<sup>85</sup> Plato, *Phaedo*, 66e.

These early misgivings will eventually grow into a full-fledged skepticism under Christianity and, with the scientific revolution in 16<sup>th</sup>-century Europe and the dramatic technological innovations that grounded it, nature's productions will become more and more objects of calculative thought, caught up in an ever evolving economy of instrumentalized desire. Bacon will be the first to fully embrace this development along with its implications for human progress. "Human knowledge and human power come to the same thing, for where the cause is not known the effect cannot be produced."<sup>86</sup> Plato's philosopher king will be transformed in Bacon's vision into a technocrat guiding civilization to the realization of the kingdom of heaven on earth.

Plato however is an immovable point of resistance to this development, sharply distinguishing these sorts of activities, which he sees as inextricably caught up with the demands of the body, with what he sees as the real pursuit of philosophy, Wisdom. Philosophy is not concerned with the conveniences or pleasures that can be seized through the technical manipulation of nature. Neither is philosophy concerned with the knowledge that comes from understanding the workings of nature. These are at best intimations of philosophy; at worst, distortions of reality, producing in their combined effect, unsettled opinions and, worst of all, unresolved fears. Genuine philosophy endeavors to emancipate life from fear by overcoming artifice in the truth of scientific knowledge.

Platonic enlightenment though is almost always cast within the confines of civic engagement and our broader connection to natural and cosmic processes. To get the

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<sup>86</sup> Francis Bacon, "Aphorisms Concerning the Interpretation of Nature and the Kingdom of Man," in *Novum Organum*, trans. Peter Urbach (Chicago and LaSalle: Open Court Publishing, 1994), 43.

Ideas right is to arrive at a true understanding of ourselves and our place in nature.<sup>87</sup>

Philosophical knowledge has an important relationship to craft knowledge and, for Plato and Aristotle both, such knowledge thus never leads to the outright subjugation of nature but to a free, harmonious association with it based on the principles of reason.

Technological interventions should cooperate with nature, preserve a degree of fidelity to its inner workings, rhythms and structures and, in so doing, bring about an interaction in some way commensurate with reality. In remarks concerning Aristotle's discussion of technics, health and its restoration, Heidegger says that, "τέχνη can only cooperate with φύσις, can more or less expedite the cure; but as τέχνη it can never replace φύσις and in its stead become itself the ἀρχή [origin] of health as such."<sup>88</sup> For the Ancient Greeks, technics was a practical knowledge of how to engage and relate to physis but it could never completely displace it and become the *de facto* origin of nature. Physis had a straightforward ontological priority for the Greeks. Natural beings hold the source of their movement and rest from within, for, as Aristotle suggests, "Every natural being . . . has within itself a beginning of movement and rest . . . [whereas] not one product of art has the source of its own production within itself."<sup>89</sup> Craft knowledge depends upon an already available nature, and an understanding and agreement of how to interpret and engage it. It exists to serve the interests of civil society and to help bring about the

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<sup>87</sup> Aristotle will develop a much more realistic and relaxed view than Plato, especially in his ethical and political thought, neither of which will be held to the same exacting standards demanded of the sciences. Aristotle, for example, thinks it is not necessary for a politician to be trained in pure mathematics, which has little if any relevance to the art of governing. Aristotle thinks Plato demands too much in that he demands everything of his philosopher king.

<sup>88</sup> Martin Heidegger, "On the Being and Conception of φύσις in Aristotle's Physics B, 1, 235," in *Pathmarks*, trans. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 196.

<sup>89</sup> Aristotle, "Physics," in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol. 1. trans. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 192<sup>b</sup> 10-30.

balanced way of life that forever stands as the Greek ideal. This explains in great part why the Ancients took such great pains to cultivate a high-minded aesthetic that informed every aspect of life, from the speech, dress and manner of the citizen to the temples of the Acropoleis to the construction of vast works projects. Rome's *Porta Maggiore*, for example, with its massive vaulted archways and extended elevated sections, is as much an aesthetic triumph as it is an unrivaled engineering feat. What stands out most is the underlying aesthetic dimension that coincides with its utility, as if it were a product of nature, not of human doing. It was meant to live and age alongside ancient rivers. It was built into them, drawing its meaning as much from this relationship as from the convenience it provided. The Ancient Greeks were not much interested in dominating nature—in fact, this an entirely foreign concept to the Greek imagination—as transforming our relationship to it, bringing technical know-how into agreement with a philosophical understanding of the Good. The net effect of such a transformation would be the realization of our true humanity, where our desires, thoughts and actions come into harmonious agreement.

This early intimation at thinking of technology as a progressive force serving the greater interests of humanity becomes a standing article of faith in modern thought. In the Anglo-American empiricist and Continental positivist traditions, for example, technology comes to be seen as an unqualified and unmatched power for human progress. All that is needed is for technology to be properly aligned with the sciences as they plumb the depths of nature and reveal our part in it. It is no accident that epistemology and ethics become so central to these traditions from this point forward, as philosophy must come to terms with both the nature of scientific knowledge and its implications for

ethical thought. For the logical positivists, progress in the physical and human sciences brings the human understanding that much closer to a unified system of true propositions concerning its objects, both human and nonhuman.<sup>90</sup> Success in these two interrelated domains of inquiry would go toward determining technology's future employment and how it might become a means for optimizing relations in the natural and human worlds according to the methods and standards of science.<sup>91</sup>

What is significant to our present purposes is the way this tradition consistently has viewed theoretical knowledge as the favored domain of human activity; the way it has tended to uncritically accept and adopt its exacting methods of engagement; and the way it has taken for granted the subject-object relation from which this disposition draws its power. It goes without saying that its strength and resiliency, especially since the time of the scientific revolution, is in no small part based on its unmistakable predictive power and the unprecedented way it grasps and refashions reality. Ever since its discovery, the scientific method has time and again revealed an intelligible nature, confirming time and again our faith in science and the power of reason. What the theoretical understanding cannot grasp on its own terms however is the meaning of the ontological breach in Being that its own activity implicitly supports and presupposes. Science can comprehend facts

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<sup>90</sup> This view follows in large part from the *physicalism* of such thinkers as Schlick and Neurath, who see no real difference between the physical and social sciences. Both form hypotheses about their respective objects, which are then tested by observation. See, for example, Moritz Schlick, "What is the Aim of Ethics," in *Logical Positivism*, ed. A. J. Ayer (New York: The Free Press, 1959), 247-9; and *Otto Neurath: Empiricism and Sociology*, ed. Marie Neurath and R.S. Cohen (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1973), 1-20.

<sup>91</sup> It is important to note that there have been strong objections to this line of thinking from the start, most notably in the Romantic and post-Hegelian traditions, neither of which see technology or modern science in strictly neutral or utilitarian terms. Blake, Herder, Marx, Nietzsche, Weber, Scheler, and members of the Frankfurt School are all strong instance where the scientific disposition and its methods are not taken for granted but subjected to rigorous, sometimes ruthless, examination.

and their mathematical relational structures; it cannot grasp the transcendental empirical event that produced these orders in the first place. In other words, science, along with all its assumptions about itself and its objects, cannot represent the preontological understanding of Being that informs and determines its particular interpretation and involvement with the world. Again, as Weber famously remarked:

What is . . . the point of science as a calling when all our former illusions, such as “the path to true Being,” “the path to true nature,” “the path to the true God,” “the path to true happiness,” have gone? . . . The fact that it does not supply this answer is simply indisputable. The only question that remains is in what sense does it give us “no” answer, and whether it might not instead accomplish something for him who asks the right questions.<sup>92</sup>

In order to do what Weber recommends we must think past the prejudices that have tended to conceal a much more basic relationship to technology, which we will now begin to think in terms of a prominent dimension of Heidegger’s analytic of Dasein’s being-in-the-world. Throughout his lifelong engagement with the question of the meaning of Being, Heidegger continually understood this question as inseparable from the question of technology. In doing so, he brought thought closest to the (transcendental-empirical) event of its own emergence. Heidegger does this through an analysis of those cross-cultural structures that precede and cut across our engagements with the world. In this and other respects, Kant’s influence is clearly evident but, unlike Kant, Heidegger begins his investigations in the midst of other beings, giving us a much more dynamic and situated understanding of Dasein, one which leads to what we may be provisionally call a revolutionary fourth Critique—the critique of technology.

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<sup>92</sup> Max Weber, *Soziologie-Weltgeschichtliche Analysen-Politik* (Stuttgart: A. Kroener, 1956), 322.

So we don't lose sight of Schelling in this discussion, it will be important to keep in mind that Heidegger's ontological investigations at this point are concerned with getting at the source of the subject-object relationship or, in the language of phenomenology, representational intentionality. Both want to arrest the meaning of Being and to think past the ontic reduction and restriction of phenomenon; both want to get back to a time before there was ever anything like a world, in all the various senses that Schelling and, especially, Heidegger comes to understand and use this term.<sup>93</sup> In doing so, they hope to reveal Dasein as essentially world-forming. That Dasein goes through life largely unaware of her responsibility for the world she unconsciously acts out is of great consequence, but only because in doing so she forgets herself (*Seinsvergessenheit*) and, in forgetting herself, loses the truth that is hers as a child of Dasein. Heidegger will try to set the stage for Dasein to reclaim this truth, to awaken her from her "dogmatic slumber" to the possibility of her freedom for existence.

Heidegger does this by first delineating Dasein's ontological (transcendental) structures in order to show how Dasein is always already claimed by what he calls a "preontological understanding" of Being. This is not defined by any sort of thematic content but by a practical activity caught up in an ever evolving equipmental whole. What Heidegger has in mind is the way we already find ourselves acting in a world. In fact it is more true to the spirit of Heidegger to say that Dasein is the acting out of an

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<sup>93</sup> In *Being and Time*, Heidegger introduces four ways the term *world* is used and understood: ontical-categorially, ontologico-categorially, ontical-existential, and ontologico-existential. These terminological uses are closely allied to the notion of *worlding*, which is a central idea worked out at length in Division I of *Being and Time* and the *Metaphysic Lectures* (1929-30). What is important for our purposes is the fact that none of these senses exhaust the meaning of Being. Each comes to light by virtue of a specific ontologico-existential interpretation of Being. See *Being and Time*, 65-66.

interpretation that already en-frames its involvements with the world.<sup>94</sup> This unconscious acting out of a given understanding of Being is what underwrites and secures the life of Dasein. Heidegger here takes great pains to discourage the equation of Dasein with a self-conscious intentional subject. Dasein does signify something that essentially belongs to both individuals and their shared social field but Dasein is as much possessed as in possession of that which defines its way of being-in-the-world. The simple reason for this is that, “Dasein ‘is’ its past in the way of *its* own Being . . . Dasein has grown up both into and in a traditional way of interpreting itself: in terms of this it understands itself proximally and, within a certain range, constantly.”<sup>95</sup> Long before we are ever aware of ourselves in any self-conscious way, we undergo a complicated and painstaking process of socialization, where we are adopted and gradually adapted to a particular understanding of Being, one which will imperceptibly influence all our future dealings and understandings, irrespective of whether we know it or not. In fact, we can’t really posit it as a possible object of knowledge at all, since we *are* this understanding.

To see what Heidegger means we can consider the “slave boy” argument at the heart of Plato’s *Meno*. The dialogue is thematically organized around the question of virtue. Socrates argues that if they could just hit upon the right questions, they would recollect the essence of virtue just as the little boy has just recollected a fundamental geometric truth. But by the end of the dialogue they have failed in this. The reason for their failure is that they could not bring themselves to ask the one question that would

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<sup>94</sup> Heidegger will attempt to delineate those transhistorical structures that cut across cultural boundaries and frame Dasein’s general comportment within the world. In doing so, he hopes to grasp something of the Being of beings, the various ways beings can and do come to presence within a world.

<sup>95</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 20.

have made all the difference: the question of the “slave boy.” They cannot ask it because they cannot see him; they cannot see him because he is the obscene secret to their understanding of Being. This is why the Socratic question of virtue remains just that, a question, because *they* cannot ask a question disavowed as the unacknowledged condition of philosophy. What is important is that their behavior is not in any way calculating or intentionally malicious. Socrates and Meno are simply acting out a certain understanding of Being, which establishes in advance what sort of objects can show up and which cannot. To them the proceeding was entirely transparent and natural, since it is the only world they have ever known. For this reason, they are as unaware of the “slave boy” as they are of a common household doorknob.

So we don't miss the significance of what Heidegger is suggesting, we could say that Dasein, both in terms of its pre-theoretical understanding and conduct, already exhibits and lives the truth Schelling tries to recover retroactively.<sup>96</sup> Dasein never gets its start in the midst of subjects and objects. In fact, this common way of thinking about ourselves fails to do justice to the much more basic way we live our understanding of Being. We are that preontological understanding of things that informs our interactions with other beings; we are “absorbed” in them, existing in the midst of them. Very little of our day is involved in the contemplation of things or in deliberative action; rather, the better part of our time is spent in a state of absorbed engagement or “circumspective concern.” Almost no one who has grown up within modern society, when recounting the

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<sup>96</sup> Heidegger was always deeply intrigued by this aspect of our being-in-the-world, even though he will also suggest that Dasein's deeper truth is revealed in moments of profound alienation, when we catch sight of the truth of our being-there, that Dasein is essentially world-forming and thus responsible for her world. See *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 142-5.

day's events, would ever think to include in their description the countless doorknobs they successfully manipulated. No adult would ever cite such a detail but a child would, for the simple reason that this commonplace activity is anything but commonplace, the opening of a door being a magical, mysterious process. But once mastery is achieved these sorts of activities gradually recede into the background, becoming routine, involuntary and transparent features of their everyday way of getting things done. Once this transition happens, they will no longer see them, taking them for granted, as the unacknowledged facts of their existence.

Part of the aim of Division I of *Being and Time* is to describe this primordial way of being-in-the-world, what Heidegger calls Dasein's ontical-transcendence. This aspect of human experience is what the tradition has continually missed since the time of Plato all the way through the phenomenological investigations of Husserl. One of Heidegger's most far-reaching conclusions is that our most basic way of understanding ourselves is not the product of theoretical reflection but of lived practical involvement within the world, and not just any kind of involvement either but one that is everywhere caught-up with equipment (*das Zeug*). What we hope to show is that Heidegger's description of Dasein's primordial involvement with equipment not only gives us a way of thinking the emergence of theoretical states of consciousness but also the *mise en scène* of creation.

In bringing attention to this long neglected aspect of human experience, Heidegger brings us toward those beings, whose being is furthest removed from us because it is that which is nearest and, for that reason, transparent in its "availableness." He argues however that these beings can be exhibited, in "The kind of dealing which is closest to us is as we have shown, not a bare perceptual cognition, but rather that kind of

concern which manipulates things and puts them to use; and this has its own kind of ‘knowledge’.”<sup>97</sup> As we will now see, this knowledge however does not concern things cut-off and isolated from their environment (*vorhanden*) but things that are “ready-at-hand” (*zuhanden*), ready to be used for some purpose, the “in-order-to” that underlies our everyday engagement with equipment. “What and how it is as this entity, its *whatness* and *howness*, is constituted by this in-order-to as such, by its involvement.”<sup>98</sup> It is the functional relationships of equipment that determines both what it is and how it is, and this system of relationships and the set of practices they involve determine in advance what and how we are.

When asked to describe what a hammer is, for example, we are naturally inclined to treat it as a theoretical object, abstracting the hammer from its native context (e.g. the workshop) and isolating those features that fit and define it (e.g. metal head with claw and wooden shank, etc.) Or we might define it practically in terms of how it is used “in-order-to” . . . , (e.g. to join two boards). Both of these descriptions however miss the way equipment is contextually imbedded in an evolving system of relationships. These relationships, which form a structure of interconnected “references” and “assignments” are what define the nature and scope of equipment. Every instance of equipment belongs to other equipment, deriving both its function and meaning from these relationships, just as the “inkstand” in Heidegger’s hut in Todnauberg is primordially related to, “pen, ink,

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<sup>97</sup> *Being and Time*, 67.

<sup>98</sup> Heidegger, *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 293.

paper, blotting pad, table, lamp, furniture, windows, doors, room.”<sup>99</sup> In the same way, a hammer is revealed by what it is used for and what it is used for can be understood only from within the ontological field that frames its use, which includes the set of tools, techniques, practices and concerns that condition the activity of hammering. In a way similar to Wittgenstein’s later conception of language, what a tool “is” and how we understand it is defined by its use in relationship to the equipmental whole in which it appears. “The specific *thisness* of a piece of equipment, its *individuation* . . . is not determined primarily by space and time . . . Instead, what determines a piece of equipment as an individual is its equipmental character and equipmental nexus.”<sup>100</sup>

It is this shared background of equipment, practices and concerns that make-up the particular pre-ontological understanding of Being that allows beings to show up in the world the way they do. To complete the analogy we started with, a hammer is what it is only in context and only as it is ready for use in relation to some underlying purpose. I might, for example, build on an arable plot of land (where-in) with a hammer (with-which) “in-order-to” frame the site that will become a house (towards-which) and the place of my family’s future habitation (for-the-sake-of-which). It is important to underline the fact that this sort of activity and the set of concerns it presupposes is an outgrowth of a historical interpretation of Being that is for the most part transparent. What this means is that Dasein’s everyday involvement with equipment has a tendency to withdraw toward a point of indiscernibility, where there is no clear way of separating the

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<sup>99</sup> *Being and Time*, 68.

<sup>100</sup> *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, 292.

two. In skillful hammering, for example, the hammer becomes as much a living extension of Dasein as Dasein becomes the activity of hammering, each indistinguishable from the circumspective grasp that holds them in understanding. It is in the midst of such masterful coping that we and the beings we are brought into relation with are revealed and held in their truth. As Heidegger provocatively suggests,

. . . what we have in view is a positive phenomenal character of the Being of that which is proximally ready-to-hand. With these negative prefixes we have in view the character of the ready-to-hand as ‘holding itself in’; this is what we have our eye upon in the ‘Being-in-itself’ of something, though ‘proximally’ we ascribe it to the present-at-hand—to the present-at-hand as that which can be thematically ascertained.<sup>101</sup>

Once the continuity of this sort of engagement is broken-off, when for example the hammer breaks or is found to be too heavy, etc., this truth withdraws as the equipment becomes unavailable. In these inopportune moments things suddenly stick-out, becoming distinct from their environment. It is here that the character of the thing—i.e. its outstanding characteristics and substantial properties—as well as the matrix of relational structures can become visible and a point of concern, as the break in activity is addressed.<sup>102</sup>

Temporary interruptions that block the flow of our skillful dealings with the world do not yet produce the dichotomies characteristic of theoretical reflection but they do call for a type of involved deliberation—a new way of seeing things—that *envisages* what is

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<sup>101</sup> *Being and Time*, 76.

<sup>102</sup> Heidegger distinguishes between varying degrees of the unavailable, from brief interruptions that are quickly resolved to protracted delays that uncover not only the object but also the network of *references* and *assignments* the object implies and depends upon. These two types of breakdowns are genetic precursors to the radical break introduced by theoretical and contemplative reflection.

needed to restore activity. When for example the hammer breaks or goes missing, our available responses become visible from within the background of our absorption in the world, e.g., grab another hammer from the bench or make plans to replace it with a hammer from the hardware store. Neither of these responses indicates a new attitude but simply a different kind of engagement still firmly held in “circumspective concern.” “Holding back from the use of equipment is so far from sheer ‘theory’ that the kind of circumspection which carries and ‘considers’, remains wholly in the grip of the ready-to-hand equipment with which one is concerned.”<sup>103</sup> It is only when there is an irreparable breakdown in activity that a new mode of intentionality emerges, one where a de-worlded world of separable objects encounters a conscious subject as present-at-hand (*vorhanden*).<sup>104</sup>

This ontological breach in the Being brings about sweeping changes in how they encounter us, the most important of which is a new kind of primordial activity and mode of engagement, theoretical reflection. This new way of approaching phenomenon proceeds by way of directed observation, where the object is de-contextualized and its specific properties are identified, selected and defined according to a new conceptually exacting language, mathematics. Once practical activity is formally suspended, the new and conscious activity of observation leads to the construction of theoretical models and new relational structures built around purely functional concepts, like, for example, the relational equivalent of the mass of an object and its corresponding energy value. These

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<sup>103</sup> *Being and Time*, 358.

<sup>104</sup> *Being and Time*, 73-4.

two properties, which are common to all physical systems, are isolated and together redefined according to a new mathematical relation, one which has explanatory, predictive and productive power. As Heidegger indicates,

When this kind of talk is so understood, it is no longer spoken within the horizon of awaiting and retaining an equipmental totality and its involvement-relationships. What is said has been drawn from looking at what is suitable for an entity with 'mass'. We have now sighted something that is suitable for the hammer, not as a tool, but as a corporeal Thing subject to the law of gravity.<sup>105</sup>

The final step in this transition re-inscribes things within a new context, where newly discovered relationships theoretically bind objects under physical law and an interpretive projection, which determines in advance their state as beings. This new way of "sighting" things not only produces a new encounter but also a new set of practical involvements that become a specialized background from which scientific inquiry is conducted. Just as before, these practices become for the most part routine and largely transparent and, just as before, they conceal the deeper registers of meaning on which they depend. Heidegger takes the now discounted Newtonian mechanical theory as paradigmatic of this sort of preontological projection of Being.

In this projection something constantly present-at-hand (matter) is uncovered beforehand, and the horizon is opened so that one may be guided by looking at those constitutive items in it which are quantitatively determinable (motion, force, location, and time). Only "in the light" of a Nature which has been projected in this fashion can anything like a "fact" be found . . . The "grounding" of "factual science" was possible only because

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<sup>105</sup> *Being and Time*, 361.

the researchers understood that in principle there are no  
“bare facts.”<sup>106</sup>

This way of speaking may sound strange but Heidegger along with Nietzsche and later Kuhn were the first to see that science does not deal with facts but with theoretical constructions that determine *a priori* what and how phenomenon show up. The way Dasein is engaged by Being frames how things are revealed, and, for this reason, science produces as much as discovers its object. This is not to in anyway reduce scientific knowledge to mere interpretation but to show that the ontical restriction of phenomenon to what is present-at-hand presupposes a preunderstanding of things that grounds and encompasses the activities of science. Scientific revolutions, which occur because of unresolvable disruptions in the conduct of everyday science reveal what was previously transparent, an interpretive horizon of shared skills, practices and concerns, which, after a new ontological projection has become normative, become irrelevant and impractical, like the manual typewriter. It may still work but it is an anachronism within the ontological field of digital processing technology. Its obsolescence indicated by the fact it is no longer an object of concern but nostalgia.

The importance of Heidegger’s view cannot be overestimated and not just because he cuts into Kuhn’s later thinking on the history of science. In view of what we want to argue, this is an important but still preparatory insight. What is of real interest is how this insight, especially with its emphasis on practical activity, points beyond every understanding of Being to the almost imperceptible preontological equipmental whole that grounds every concerned engagement with the world. The consensus generated by

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<sup>106</sup> *Being and Time*, 362.

science is indeed exceptional, both in terms of its determining power and the way it initiates phenomenon to new conceptual arrangements and new modes of revealing. But science is rooted in a still deeper exception, the breakdown in equipment that first suspends and then subordinates practical activity in all its possible registers to economic production. This is what Heidegger is trying to understand, because it is finally what explains the “de-worlding” of all practical activity and the growing forgetfulness and indifference to the question of the meaning of Being. Heidegger later thinks this change in terms of the technological “en-framing” (*Ge-stell*) of life, where Dasein increasingly runs the risk of becoming indistinguishable from the world she orders and brings to presence as “standing reserve” (*Bestand*).<sup>107</sup> Deleuze and Guattari will re-describe this process as the recoding of the flows of desire according to the axiomatic imperative of capitalism, which seeks only to extract new quantities of value from deterritorialized flows of labor and capital. With capitalism, antiproduction becomes immanent to production, bringing about a state of near permanent revolution, where there is no longer any interval or “difference” between the old and the new, hence the obsolescence of the new and the “eternal return” of the same.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Heidegger argues modern technology is a global mode of revealing Being, where what gets revealed and ordered is fundamentally interchangeable with everything else, losing the distinctive character that makes one thing distinguishable from another. See *The Question Concerning Technology*, 26-7.

<sup>108</sup> Following the work of Georges Bataille, Deleuze and Guattari convincingly show how capitalism accomplishes this by introducing “lack” where there is none—“where there is always already too much”—as a means to extracting new surplus value. “The apparatus of antiproduction is no longer a transcendent instance that opposes production, limits it, or checks it; on the contrary, it insinuates itself everywhere in the productive machine and becomes firmly wedded to it in order to regulate its productivity and realize a surplus value—which explains, for example, the difference between the despotic bureaucracy and the capitalist bureaucracy.” See *Anti-Oedipus*, 235.

It is in this context that Nietzsche's much quoted provocation in the *Gay Science* strikes with the greatest possible effect. The death of god signifies more than anything the dying of culture and the judgments that historically invested and captured the inner life and desire of the "socius." The alignment of technology and science with the interests of the market economy introduces an unprecedented productive power that quickly dispenses with the old cultural forms, leaving Dasein in the lurch, homeless, helplessly adrift amid the ruins of time. As Nietzsche famously asks,

What did we do when we unchained this earth from its sun?  
Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving now?  
Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually?  
Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there any  
up or down left? Are we not straying as through an infinite  
nothing?<sup>109</sup>

These are the unprecedented questions that come to haunt the life of Dasein. She cannot arrest the vertigo this change produces, in part because Dasein is this change, having for the first time discovered her "there" only in losing it. There is a great truth that comes with the "de-worlding" of Dasein: she discovers that nothing arrests the truth of Being, that her world is an interpretation, her desire an image of desire and the institutionalized lack constitutive of her world and the de-centering of time.

Space-time, as Einstein tells us, is a surface that warps in predictable ways in the presence of massive objects, gravitation being a function of the curvature of space-time in relation to the relative motion of inertial objects. Sometimes, in the event of a supernova, when an object collapses under its own internal weight, it produces a gravitational

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<sup>109</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: The Viking Press, 1954), 95.

singularity capable of capturing anything, even light. The table I am now writing on has a mass value too but it also bears the incalculable weight of memory, the indentations, scarring and warped surfaces the visible reminders of time, activity and feeling, of its almost imperceptible “accumulation” of mass within the becoming of family, of its strange attractive force, capable of drawing us together from sometimes great distances. In the end, we will say as Michaux does,

As it stood, it was a table of additions, much like certain schizophrenics’ drawings, described as ‘overstuffed,’ and if finished it was only in so far as there was no way of adding anything more to it, the table having become more and more and accumulation, less and less a table . . .<sup>110</sup>

In the end, as Schelling reminds us, the table like everything will succumb to the gravitational force of the ground, becoming less and less a table and more a dense-point with the pull of irrepressible longing.

A table is never just a table. It’s never simply a matter of “what” is encountered but also “how” it is encountered. As Husserl and Heidegger argue, alterations in “how” something shows up produce changes in “what” shows up. The table I just regarded with fondness and appreciation and the table as seen from the vantage point of its factual being are not the same table. It’s not a question of what the table “is” in reality but, in phenomenological terms, of “how” I “stay with it.” To remain faithful and open to this indeterminacy means surrendering to what Heidegger argues every way of being invariably conceals, Dasein’s own finitude. Dasein has no fixed or discernible essence or limits, only the self-interpreting activity that makes it possible to take a stand on its

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<sup>110</sup> Henri Michaux, *The Major Ordeals of the Mind*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974), 125-7.

being. Dasein is nothing outside of this activity. Dasein can take-hold of its being because it is already grasped in some way by Being. And as we have just shown, Dasein's interpretive activity is fundamentally defined by its inescapable involvements with equipment. This is to say that Dasein is always already grasped in all its dealings by equipment. Thus the real source of ontological indeterminacy is Dasein's irreducible connection to technology and this "fact" only comes to light in the technological "enframing" of life or the "de-worlding" of the world.

The breach in Being, the opening in time that allows beings to come to "presence," is ultimately then a technological breach in Dasein, who, in a Fichtean turn, is both the cause and effect of the ontological rift that makes the activity of setting-up of a world possible. Dasein ceaselessly builds—and is built into—its "there," only now its "there" is "nowhere." With no world, no unity of historical time, no horizon of intelligibility, all that remains is darkness and unintelligible longing. "In so far as Dasein temporalizes itself, a world *is* too . . . If no *Dasein* exists, no world is 'there' either."<sup>111</sup>

This finally leads us to the question of how Heidegger thinks Dasein moves beyond the "destitution" of time to its fulfillment. First, as he argues, "The turning of the age does not take place by some new god, or the old one renewed, bursting into the world from ambush at some time or other."<sup>112</sup> Their return demands, as he goes on to suggest, a place to return to, and this demands a "turn" in us. But such a reformation in Being cannot be forced or anticipated. The best we can do is to heighten our openness to the

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<sup>111</sup> *Being and Time*, 366.

<sup>112</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 90.

call of Being and the “divine radiance” that always, already “shines forth in everything that is.”

Part of how this comportment toward Being is realized is by becoming aware and responsible for how we are always, already seized by an equipmental projection that holds us in the grip of the future. In practical terms, this is revealed in every “in-order-to” that orders and drives our engagement with the world. But at the existential register, our primary experience of time is again revealed in the future but this time in anticipation of our own death (*Sein-zum-Tode*). As Heidegger argues, we are always already running ahead of ourselves to our past. In projecting ourselves toward the future (*Zukunft*) we are actually “coming-towards” (*zukommen*) our past, and what comes out of this projection is our shared past, our human and inhuman having-been-ness (*Gewesenheit*). What is important is that this past is never simply past. As Marx famously says, “The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living.”<sup>113</sup> Our human and inhuman past makes a claim on us, on “our future,” releasing us from rote obligations, opening us to impossible possibilities, to the virtual domains of Being. As we suggested in the last chapter, our meaning, the meaning of Being, is time and our lives are but an endless provocation towards this meaning. The unity of time, according to Heidegger, is what gives us a way of seizing and wresting this meaning from the present moment, of grasping the future, our past, our indebtedness to time in one ecstatic “moment-of-vision” (*Augenblick*).

But exactly how the “moment-of-vision” comes about remains shrouded in mystery. Our resolute openness in the face of this challenge is everything. This is as far

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<sup>113</sup> Karl Marx, *The 18<sup>th</sup> Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, 7.

as Heidegger is willing to go, hence the later charge of passivism. His unwillingness to go further reflects his deep uncertainty about the future and the power of thought to free itself from the destining power of technology, hence his final skepticism—“Only a god can save us.”

Heidegger is nonetheless invaluable for the methodical way he uncovers the source of our modern indifference to the question of Being and the way this sheds light on Schelling’s seemingly esoteric speculations. His implication of technology in the “de-worlding” of Dasein’s “there” makes it impossible to clearly distinguish human and natural processes from technological interventions. The ambivalence is metaphysical and originary. It is a mistake to think of technology as colonizing a previously untouched nature. Technology is no mere external supplement to nature, as was argued by Plato and Aristotle, but a fateful bringing into question of this very distinction, which unfolds ever anew from within the strange indeterminacy of Dasein.

What Heidegger misses and Schelling sees is the importance of thinking Dasein in relationship to eternity. But what does he mean by eternity? Eternity can mean many different things for Schelling—for example, the pure past or the eternities of longing and pain or the indeterminacy of undecided existence—but in this “context” it signifies time deprived of its time. Dasein has no distinctive time, because she has no distinctive “there,” only an eternity of unfulfillable, primordial longing.

## CHAPTER FIVE: LOSING GROUND/LOSING TIME

Estragon: I can't go on like this.

Vladimir: That's what you think.

-Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*

Schelling often runs up against a tension in his own thought, one he never resolves that splits the divide between his idealism and the indivisible remainders that threatens it. His idealist tendencies, backed by his Fichtean inheritance, lead him time and again to affirm our and god's creative autonomy, while his critical investigations into the essence of human freedom lead him to posit remainders or durations of time that cannot be entirely understood or controlled, even by god. *Die Weltalter* and the *Freiheitschrift* concern the durations of love and evil, or that which "in" god is not "of" god. Schelling conceives them and the unities they create as the source of all genuine change or movement as well as the source of our uniquely modern predicament of undecided existence.

In this chapter we will briefly explore Schelling's conception of "ground" and "existence" and the unities of love and evil they make possible. While our discussion will anticipate the constructive, "worlding" arguments of Part II: "Primordial Beginnings," our present purpose is to bring into sharper focus the idea we concluded last chapter with: the "de-worlding" of the world and the primordial longing it awakens in

us.<sup>114</sup> What has been lost is the “ground” of existence, bringing us before the “groundless” ground (*Ungrund*) of all worlds. Love and evil, as we will now show, are groundless, and how this groundlessness is encountered determines whether it is experienced as the end of time or its beginning.

Schelling defines love as spirit’s outward longing for existence and renewal, and, evil, as that force that would thwart spirit’s progress. It is the divide between divine love and the cruelty that would defile it, that would make wretched what first came as a gift, coming as we did out of the darkness. It is by no accident that Schelling draws god’s nativity together with our own, each “new” life a reenactment of divine creation and a confrontation with a past that cannot be fully fathomed or realized in time. As Schelling says, “Man is formed in the maternal body; and only from the obscurity of that which is without understanding (from feeling, yearning, the sovereign (*herrlich*) mother of knowledge) grow luminous thoughts.”<sup>115</sup> Everything that comes about bears witness to this yearning to be drawn together in love and understanding, even though, as Shelley suggests, we gradually lose our sense of this connection and its redemptive and

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<sup>114</sup> Primordial longing is characteristically unconscious. This is just to say that we do not necessarily experience the loss Heidegger or Schelling speak of or the longings it provokes. What we do have immediate access to are the symptoms of such loss and longing. *Die Weltalter* stands as an interpretation of these symptoms.

<sup>115</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, 29. Schelling extends this argument later in the essay, stating, “Man, even if born in time, is indeed created into the beginning of creation (the *centrum*). The act, whereby his life is determined in time, does not itself belong to time but rather to eternity . . .” It is statements like these that make it possible to affirm not just our indebtedness to but our responsibility for the world in which we are born. See *Philosophical Investigations*, 51.

destructive power.<sup>116</sup> Schelling tries to reawaken this native “apprehension of life” grounded in love and feeling, saying,

This representation is at the same time the understanding—the *Word*—of this yearning . . . and impelled by the love that it itself is, proclaims the word so that the understanding and yearning together now be will and build in the come a freely creating and all-powerful initial anarchy of nature as in its own element or instrument.<sup>117</sup>

We will come back to this passage again but for now we can say that the love behind all outward movement, the love that is at the source of all creation and development, is infinite and groundless, without reason, spiritually dense.

In the final act of Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, when Cordelia is finally reunited with her estranged father, who banished her for what he first and wrongly perceived to be her lack of devotion, he realizes how foolish he has been, how much harm he has caused and that she has every cause to hate him. Cordelia however replies, “No cause, no cause.” Her love for Lear runs so deep, as real love always does, that it defies explanation. She cannot explain her love “Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave my heart into my mouth” any more than a parent can fathom the love that is awakened when their child first “smells the air” and “wails and cries” to the world. We lack the wherewithal to make sense of such love, let alone the divine love that sacrificed everything—an innocent child—for an undeserving humanity, the supreme act of fidelity to existence, to something that transcends all filial attachment, extending love to all. “God as spirit (the eternal bond of

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<sup>116</sup> *Shelley’s Poetry and Prose: Authoritative Texts, Criticism*, ed. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat (New York: Norton, 2002), 506.

<sup>117</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, 31.

both) is the purest love: there can never be a will to evil in love just as little as in the ideal principle.”<sup>118</sup> Love is groundless, without understanding.

Evil is abyssal too and, like love, active, the difference being that the unities evil produces generate regressive movements that impede nature’s progress. Schelling, in the *Freiheitschrift*, gives evil an unexpected metaphysical weight that cuts sharply from the view of evil as mere privation of being, a view first formalized by Leibniz then reengineered by Hegel into the engine of history and progress. Evil is real for Schelling and, like love, excessive in its power and effects. It is provoked each time an individual makes themselves the center of things, subordinating the will of god, which strives toward unity of meaning and purpose, to the will of the ground, which blindly exalts the life of the individual over the whole. “The principle, to the extent that it comes from the ground and is dark, is the self-will of creatures which, however, to the extent that it has not yet been raised to (does not grasp) complete unity . . . is pure craving or desire, that is, blind will.”<sup>119</sup> Such unities are perverse and fundamentally anarchic, striking back to the chaos from which the divine will first raised itself up.<sup>120</sup> Reason produces unities, while evil produces strife, discord, alienation and the irrational impulse that would hold creation hostage to satisfy a trifle. Evil creates chaos, not meaning. In Hegelian terms, evil cannot be appropriated conceptually. Evil is the negation of all meaning, the abyssal point that would swallow creation whole, leaving those who remain “groaning for burial.”

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<sup>118</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, 42.

<sup>119</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, 32.

<sup>120</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, 43,

In *Othello*, Iago seduces Othello into thinking his wife unfaithful. By play's end, Iago has so convinced the Moor of Desdemona's infidelity that in a fit of blind rage, he kills her. Iago is blind too, to what drives him to destroy a good man and a happy marriage. He cannot fathom the depths of his hatred, let alone the reason for his actions, even though he endlessly searches for one. Do his actions follow from a deep seated racism "an old black ram is tugging your white ewe" or the indignity he suffers in Cassio's promotion or a secret desire for Desdemona or a repressed sexual longing for Othello himself? Each of these motives is cited and pursued in the play but none have the power to explain either the scope or depth of Iago's intent or malice. Coleridge once quipped that Iago's principle activity was the "motive-hunting of motiveless Malignity."<sup>121</sup> Iago, aware of the harm he is inflicting, searches for a motive and discovers none. The evil he commits has no higher purpose or deeper meaning than to see the world burn and hear it cry in confusion.

What is unique in Schelling's account of love and evil is that he thinks them as durations that have both creative and destructive power. All movement originates in their combined interaction, in the mobilization of life's expansive and regressive forces, as life strives to resolve itself into an enduring unity. As Schelling remarks, "Without contradiction there would be no life, no movement, no progress; a deadly slumber of all forces. Only contradiction drives us—indeed, forces us—to action."<sup>122</sup> What is of equal significance is that these durations concern a time outside of time. They produce effects

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<sup>121</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lectures 1808-1819 On Literature*, ed. R. A. Foakes, vol. 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 315.

<sup>122</sup> *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*, 124.

in time, while not being of time but of eternity. In Schelling's language, and here he again shows his indebtedness to Fichte, genuine love and real evil are unconditional and self-positing, their source of movement occurring from within, rather than from without. "But what is the unconditioned? It is the essence that is from itself and comes out of itself, whose nature consists in an eternal positing-of-self or affirming."<sup>123</sup> It is our awareness of the possibility of acting on behalf of love and evil that binds us in essence to god, with one important difference: that that which is "indissoluble" in god is "severable" in us.<sup>124</sup> This basic, though inescapable, instability in our relationship to ground and existence is what perpetually alienates us from the Absolute and stimulates our deepest metaphysical desire and the movements it inspires. It is also the animating and creative principle of all life. Both tendencies, what Freud later identifies as the life instinct (*Eros*) and the death drives (*Todestriebe*), draw life inexorably toward eternity, the nominal difference being that evil seeks the dissolution of existence, while love seeks its affirmation. Again, as Schelling remarks, "If we recognize contradiction, then we also recognize noncontradiction. If the former is motion in time, then noncontradiction is the essence of eternity . . . then time itself is nothing but a constant yearning for eternity."<sup>125</sup>

Real movement cannot be comprehended quantitatively in terms of spatial-temporal relations or their synthesis, as Kant describes in the first Critique, but qualitatively in terms of "intensities" or changes produced primordially that are then translated back into space and time. This traversal constitutes the virtual-actual circuit of

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<sup>123</sup> *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*, 125.

<sup>124</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, 33.

<sup>125</sup> *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*, 125.

time and leads to the temporary congealing of forces into recognizable, repeatable forms or, in Schelling's idiom, visions with sense (*Gesicht*). Nature, as we have already seen, is the outcome of these opposing forces—ground and existence—and their corresponding durations, which combine to produce durable, vibrating blocks of “sensation.” These blocks of “sensation” are in no way static or fixed but after-images of an originary creative act. But what is borne to the surface is not simply what appears but that which withdraws and is “withheld” in the appearing, the rejected past, of all that has not been—or cannot be—given its time. “Indeed, we will hazard the assertion that every act of generation occurring in nature marks a return to the moment of the past, a moment that is allowed for an instant to enter the present time as an alienated (re)appearance.”<sup>126</sup>

This is one of the ways Schelling conceives primordial time. It is the pure past, everything that is inexpressible and unfulfilled in existence, the “world of spirits” that make their impossible claims upon the present. It is, “The return of a moment of the past in each act of generation could even lend credence to physical appearances: there is a disruption of forces, a relaxation of all links, and being is posited-outside-itself.”<sup>127</sup> Every single contraction of substance, every partial object, is connected to the eternal, overloaded with an alienated past, and when a moment from this past intervenes in all its “alienated majesty,” it interrupts all automated functions and forces a decision. This is because, as Deleuze and Guattari argue,

Every coupling of machines, every production of a machine, every sound of a machine running, becomes

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<sup>126</sup> *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*, 162.

<sup>127</sup> *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*, 162.

unbearable to the body without organs. Beneath its organs it senses there are larvae and loathsome worms, and a God at work messing it all up or strangling it by organizing it.<sup>128</sup>

It is in these moments of stalled action and faltering sensibility that we come closest to the inhuman and virtual remainders of creation and the decision such images force upon us. Schelling, to reference an image Deleuze and Guattari adopt in *A Thousand Plateaus*, is envisioning the “becoming-animal” of god and “man,” before the crisis of god’s oedipalization and the displacement of the image by fact.<sup>129</sup>

Schelling is clear that the image, not the Word, was in the beginning. Before the Word, was the image.<sup>130</sup> God’s invocation of the Word colonizes a pre-logical ground and introduces the pure formal consistency of physical law. This decision alone is properly the self-positing action of the Absolute. But before god’s supreme act of self-affirmation is the imaging-event and this event cannot be summarized as the exclusive work of god, because it contains only the image of god, a mere premonition of the existence to come. So if not god, then “who” or “what?”

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<sup>128</sup> *Anti-Oedipus*, 9.

<sup>129</sup> The image of “becoming-animal” is intended to encourage us to think beyond straightforward genealogical relationships to their immanent production. “Natural history can think only in terms of relationships (between A and B), not in terms of production (from A to x).” See Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 234.

<sup>130</sup> We have already defined the image, not in terms of what it “copies” or “models” or sometimes “resembles,” but as the absolutely distinctive that is “cut out” and surfaces from an altogether indistinct back-ground. As Jean-Luc Nancy argues, what the image “transports to us, then, is its very unbinding, which no proximity can pacify and which thus remains at a distance: just at the distance of the touch, that is, barely touching the skin, *à fleur de peau*.” The image, while certainly having a visual register of encounter, is most properly experienced as an intensity that is “extracted” from an imperceptible field and “cast forth” into an intimacy that is all the more profound and unsettling because it “touches us” and “offers itself fully for what it is, a *world*.” This is what portraits accomplish. They mark out a distinctive feature, something singular that reaches out and touches us, something that prevents the portrait from becoming an “identification photo, a descriptive record,” a thing. See *The Ground of the Image*, trans. Jeff Fort (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 3-4/5.

Schelling's answer to this question is deeply ambivalent. In one sense, Schelling does continue to affirm the more or less traditional view that the image has its source in god. God or, "Eternal being is nothing other than the eternal ectype [Gegenbildliches] or what is objective of God."<sup>131</sup> But in saying this and in adopting the idea of a counter-image Schelling is already complicating things by acknowledging the forced detour god must make to arrive at a pre-perception of divine life. The image, or that which "in" god is not yet properly "of" god is that "toward which" and "against which" (*Gegenbildliches*) god moves from indifference to self-fulfillment. "Spirit does so in order to hold [this actualization] up to eternal being (which in itself is pure spirit) as if in a mirror, and thereby pull this being to itself and out of its eternal indifference."<sup>132</sup> This represents a fundamental ambivalence in god, unsettling god from "within" in relation to that which is "without." The recognition that is brought to light in the image and later confirmed in the Word has the unintended effect of making god a collateral effect of the image. What Kojève says of the slave in his interpretation of Hegel's *Phenomenology* is relevant to the predicament faced by god. "He is outside of himself [insofar as the other has not 'given him back' to himself by recognizing him, and by showing him that he (the other) depends on him and is not absolutely other than he]. He must overcome his being-outside-of-himself."<sup>133</sup> And this is exactly what god cannot accomplish because god's existence depends upon this structural *aporia* and the fundamental fantasy it inspires—the future presence of what is presently absent—and the frustrations it perpetuates.

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<sup>131</sup> *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*, 154.

<sup>132</sup> *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*, 154.

<sup>133</sup> Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 13

In another sense, however, Schelling envisions something else entirely—the anarchic, “blind drives” gestating beneath the surface of all intelligibility and the passing forms (Ideas) that make-up the moment-of-vision (*Augenblick*). The vision is not just produced out of nothing but is an effect of machinic relationships and processes that are always already at work producing the connections that cut into, direct and evolve the flows of substance. Each and every connection that is made immediately bifurcates, producing in the effect a virtual residuum—a mirror image of the connection—that is recorded, then multiplied through the free association of countless variations *ad infinitum*. The proliferation of these virtual relationships is fundamentally excessive and unencumbered by conventional limits, whether natural or social, physical or spiritual. As Deleuze and Guattari remark, “The molecular unconscious, on the contrary, knows nothing of castration, because partial objects lack nothing and form free multiplicities as such; because the multiple breaks never cease producing flows, instead of repressing them . . .”<sup>134</sup> The BwO is nothing less than the flows and flowering of pure durations, of the undifferentiated past that is produced alongside and heterogeneous to the productions of the present. In other words, the BwO is the mirroring the “figures wild” of eternity. This is what god sees in the moment-of-vision, the wild proliferation of images generated by the endless mirroring effect of god’s eternal ectype. “But all this passed before the eye of the Eternal only as a view or vision [Gesicht] . . . as a vision, because no sooner had it arisen than it passed away; and nothing was enduring, nothing was solid, but

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<sup>134</sup> *Anti-Oedipus*, 295.

everything was in unceasing formation.”<sup>135</sup> Without nature’s machines, there would be nothing, no production, no image, no divine life. Before god and Dasein was the silent roar of machines.

And what these material processes produce is visions (archetypal Ideas) of life, both as it is (the actual/possible relations of time) and as it’s not (the Real or the indivisible remainders of pure duration). For Schelling there is finally no difference between the image and its machinic analog—they merely signify at different registers the multiplicity of variable relations and dynamical movements, which generate the units of production that become the basis for the vision of god’s consummating act of “jouissance”: the coming-to-light and agonizing enjoyment of Being. The machine is simply an image and the image a machinic relation. God depends upon this relation and, for that reason, god’s imaging-event cannot be thought independently of the real physical processes that ground its production.<sup>136</sup> It is for the same reason that images cannot be conceived Platonically as imperfect “copies” of static idealities. As Schelling says of ideas, “They are neither merely universal concepts of the understanding, nor fixed models; for they are Ideas precisely because they are eternally full of life, in ceaseless motion and production.”<sup>137</sup> And one of the things they produce is a theological substance, god. It is not a purely autonomous substance but a material residuum of

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<sup>135</sup> *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*, 154.

<sup>136</sup> Schelling repeatedly stresses the fact that the archetypal image cannot be “thought apart from all physicality.” A little later he develops this idea in reference to all germinal life, stating, “All merely germinal life is of itself full of longing . . . the earth sucks the force of heaven into itself through countless mouths; the seed strives toward light and air, in order to catch sight of an image, a spirit . . .” See *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*, 161/165.

<sup>137</sup> *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*, 161.

desiring-production, a surplus-value that, in becoming the consecrated site for the enjoyment of creation, is set apart from the rest, deducted from the process of its own production. God is a product and as Deleuze and Guattari say about all products, “Hence the product is something removed or deducted from the process of producing: between the act of producing and the product, something becomes detached, thus giving the vagabond, nomad subject a residuum.”<sup>138</sup>

This process generates another material residuum, Dasein, who radically extends the powers of desiring-production. We too are a product of unconscious forces, both in terms of our biological life and our nonbiological desire. What is of decisive significance is the way Dasein makes the machinic character of nature explicit. We come to light only because of the set of equipmental-machinic relationships that produce a new kind surplus-value, historical time, and a new mode of desiring-production, culture. Kojève, argues, “Without man, Being would be mute; it would be there, but it would not be the True one.”<sup>139</sup> Kojève is right, for Being’s “there” is produced in the all-consuming consummating activity of desiring-production and the technological rupture that lifts both Being and Dasein out of obscurity and into time. Heidegger is right too in thinking technology as the originary breach in Being (*Ereignis*) and culture as a vast assemblage of evolving, often transparent techniques whose ultimate function is to reproduce the nonbiological domains of desiring-production and its aftermath, cultural enjoyment. Heidegger shows us how these twin developments makes possible the revealing of

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<sup>138</sup> *Anti-Oedipus*, 26

<sup>139</sup> Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading Hegel*, 188.

Being, transforming what would otherwise be an unavailable past into a visible image—clearing (*Lichtung*)—invested with the durations of time. Deleuze and Guattari complete this line of argument by cutting through the knot of distinctions that continue to occupy even Heidegger’s thinking on technology, stating:

Industry is then no longer considered from the extrinsic point of view of utility, but rather from the point of view of its fundamental identity with nature as production of man and by man . . . who is responsible for even the stars and animal life, and who ceaselessly plugs an organ-machine into an energy-machine; a tree into his body, a breast into his mouth, the sun into his asshole: the eternal custodian of the machines of the universe.<sup>140</sup>

The productions of culture and industry are no different from the productions of nature; both manifest at different registers the immanent logic of desiring-production and the work of desiring-machines.<sup>141</sup> This step is clearly anticipated by Schelling who shares with Deleuze and Guattari a deep reluctance to overdramatize the significance of all idealistic categories or the privileged domains of “man.” We are exceptional only in the ways we come to nature, in the ways nature comes to us to augment its powers. We move at speeds that bring us into “intimate contact” with all the “machines of the universe” and we are aware of this fact, and the fact that we are born of the ground. In short, we reveal nature as a “whole” as one monstrous imaging-machine, producing the endless material flows and the strange coagulations of spirit that make reality. There is

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<sup>140</sup> *Anti-Oedipus*, 4.

<sup>141</sup> Deleuze and Guattari describe the internal logic of desiring-production in terms of three interconnected synthetic operations that are continuously performed by the unconscious: connective, disjunctive [BwO], and conjunctive syntheses. Taken together they describe the production of reality, both in terms of its actualizations and virtual reserves. See *Anti-Oedipus*, 5-22.

nothing outside of this process, even god is caught in its machinery, even though we strive with god to guide it in its actualization, to re-image through invention and nonbiological means the ground of existence.

This profound structural ambivalence in Being helps explain the deep ambivalence of Dasein, who, especially in the aftermath of the social, political, economic and scientific upheavals of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, gradually loses the ground from which she might cultivate and assert her new found independence. With increasingly no ground to limit the play and movement of time, Dasein becomes increasingly indiscernible and nomadic. Such a transformation, which has been in the offing ever since the time of Plato, generates the speeds of eternity and the immeasurable movements of an all-encompassing, stalled duration. Schelling argues, “Because of their natural yearning to be one, these forces constantly strive to cancel their opposition . . . But because spirit stands in connection to eternal being, it works freely against matter, not blindly and insensibly, to disperse the forces.”<sup>142</sup>

Our shared connection to the ground—to the actual biological processes of life and the nonbiological life of culture, with its diverse histories, traditions, institutions, shared practices, beliefs, hopes, etc.—has been irreparably weakened, leaving us increasingly adrift, imperceptible, and altogether indifferent to life and to one another. Schelling sees in this development a new and perverse substance—the undead—and he argues that the resulting apathy and vicious monotony of existence “exists” as an analog to the state of divine indifference prior to creation, with one important difference: that

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<sup>142</sup> *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*, 153.

nature would now mechanically repeat each of its “original combinations or types” *ad nauseum*.<sup>143</sup>

This approaches Blanqui’s nightmare vision of a state of universal paralysis, where, “the universe is a site of lingering catastrophes. The same monotony, the same immobility, on other heavenly bodies. The universe repeats itself endlessly and paws the ground in place.”<sup>144</sup> And what inspires Blanqui’s image of time is the industrial revolution, which not only revolutionizes the powers of desiring-production but dramatically alters the nature of our fundamental life activities and relationships, most notably to time.

This has as its most immediate cause the social and productive relationships that are formed to support this new mode of production. Mind and body are committed to new divisions of labour, to new durations of work, work divided against work, “man against man,” and the world that’s made in another’s image. Time not only becomes the objective measure of productivity but its accumulation becomes the source of all value. Labour must endlessly complete and renew the circuit of production—m-c-m<sup>1</sup>. Time’s passing becomes conspicuous under these exceptional conditions because it refuses to pass—labour’s enslavement to time. As Heidegger shows us, time fails to pass because life is being emptied of all its past meanings. What is lost is any meaningful sense of the

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<sup>143</sup> Žižek, in an introductory essay to Schelling’s *Die Weltalter*, makes the important observation that the death drive is implicated in both the tendency toward existence as well as in its active negation. In other words, the unimpeded expansion or contraction of forces produces the same negation of life. As he states, “Insofar as, for Lacan, drive as such is ultimately the death drive, the Freudian antagonism between Eros and Thanatos has to be transposed within the death drive itself.” See *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*, 103n.

<sup>144</sup> Louis-Auguste Blanqui, *Instructions pour une Prise d’Armes: L’Eternité par les astres—Hypothèse astronomique* (Paris: Société Encyclopédique Française, 1972), 167-9.

world. We no longer have ourselves because we no longer have a world. We have become indefinite, opaque, without a point of reference. This again is what leads Nietzsche to ask, “Whither are we moving now? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? . . . Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space?”<sup>145</sup> This new and profound sense of disorientation, chronic paralysis and loss stems from the endless disruptions registered at the level of the ground. Jules Michelet famously describes the physical nature of these dislocations and the eternities they create. “There were ‘true hells of boredom’ in the spinning & weaving mills: ‘*Ever, ever, ever*, is the unvarying word thundering in your ears from the automatic equipment which shakes even the floor. One can never get used to it.”<sup>146</sup> But one does get “used” to it. Nietzsche’s later image of the “eternal return” at one level speaks to the repetitions of labour and returns of capital; at another, it acknowledges the growing tide of apathy—the “human, all too human”—in the face of a mode of production that isolates the identity implicit in all things, the underlying abstract essence that unifies creation and envelops time in its truth—money.<sup>147</sup>

The parallel between Schelling’s *Die Weltalter* and our modern predicament is exact. His sensitivity to this fact shows that he is more of our time than the time of the German idealists. He sees the coming crisis, the loss of faith, the coming wars, the blind

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<sup>145</sup> *The Portable Nietzsche*, 95.

<sup>146</sup> Jules Michelet, *Le Peuple* (Paris, 1846), 83.

<sup>147</sup> Engels draws an analogy to the labor of Sisyphus, stating, “The miserable routine of endless drudgery and toil in which the same mechanical process is repeated over and over again is like the labor of Sisyphus. The burden of labor, like the rock, always keeps falling back on the worn-out laborer.” See Friedrich Engels, *Die Lage der arbeitenden Klasse in England*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Leipzig, 1848), 217; cited in Marx, *Kapital*, vol. 1 (Hamburg, 1922) 388.

and often callous indifference of the coming generations, and the abstract machine that will seek its apotheosis in time.

Marx makes this last point explicit: capital is above all a spiritual substance. And the two great obstacles to its growth are labour and the commodity-object itself. There is only so much value that can be extracted from labour and only so many things that can be made before outstripping demand. Deleuze and Guattari are right in thinking that capital deals with this problem by making the process of antiproduction immanent to production, thus creating a state of permanent revolution, the deterritorialization of old, unprofitable flows. But capital, as an abstract substance, strives to overcome all limits, especially the forced detour it must take through the field of commodity production. Money wants to beget itself independently of ground— $m-m^1-m^2$ -*ad infinitum*—to become an autonomous spiritual substance. Money desires to be *causa sui*, eternal, absolute. The problem, as Schelling, Hegel and Marx all point out, is that this is a possible impossibility and, between the promise and its fulfillment, exists the unresolvable contradiction between ground and existence, something neither dead nor alive.<sup>148</sup>

This is the price of eternity; the price modern culture is paying for its “liberation” from the tyranny of matter, space and time. We move at the speed of light but with lifeless force. This is what it was like before god was god, before ground and existence became active principles and life overcame an eternity of indifference.

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<sup>148</sup> It might be objected that this argument overreaches in its treatment of Schelling, placing him too closely to Marx and Nietzsche in particular, especially as he always remains faithful to the spirit of his idealist heritage, never pressing his own insights to their most logical conclusion. As an example, Schelling clearly sees that the will is unconscious and not entirely rational, anticipating the pessimistic conclusions of Schopenhauer. But he remains unwilling to acknowledge what Schopenhauer naturally accepts—the irrationality of the will. Despite these differences, Schelling is a powerful critic of trends that are just becoming perceptible as well as their long term consequences, naturally bringing him into the company of a more cynical generation.

The last two chapters have been building toward the *mise en scène* of creation. This is possible because what is envisioned, irrespective of intent, whether explicit or not, is the uniquely modern dilemma of undecided existence. Our time confronts us in the same way it encountered god, as an inescapable and impossible choice between being and nothing. As Schelling says, “But most men shy away from this freedom that opens like an abyss before them, just as they are frightened when faced with the necessity of being wholly one thing or another . . . They feel themselves crushed by this freedom.”<sup>149</sup> There is nothing that is distinctively and rightfully ours that we possess by an act of self-will that we can affirm as our own. The state of indifference that prevailed before time prevails in our time. We are of eternity, caught somewhere and somehow between the living and the dead.

But what prevents us from deciding and achieving ourselves in truth? Why do we feel ourselves “crushed by this freedom?” “Can an ass be tragic? To perish under a burden it can neither bear nor cast off—the case of the philosopher.”<sup>150</sup> What is the burden Nietzsche speaks of, that prevents us from creating ourselves anew and a time that truly matters? Nietzsche’s answer is time. And why is this time different than before? Because we have lost the illusions that once held time together, that defended us against its excesses and looming durations—the *Ding an sich* or Real of desire. The capitalist machine changes everything, from the nature and scope of desiring-production, which encompasses everything and substitutes an axiomatic calculus for meaning, to the

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<sup>149</sup> *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*, 175.

<sup>150</sup> *The Portable Nietzsche*, 408.

emancipation of desire from the dead “social machines” of the past, which has the unintended effect of crippling desire at the moment of its liberation.

This is all foreshadowed in Hegel who brings the real and vital concept of progress to an end. It is no coincidence that after Hegel the ghosts appear, making their searching and impossible claims upon the living at a time when the world has no future. As Hegel says,

But even regarding History as the slaughter-bench at which the happiness of peoples, the wisdom of States, and the virtue of individuals have been victimized—the question involuntarily arises—to what principle, to what final aim these enormous sacrifices have been offered.<sup>151</sup>

After Hegel, the “victimized” and the “unrecognized” rise up as a question and a challenge that cannot be answered, because they are the disavowed secret of idealism and lack a history in which their meaning can be named or interred. They are the orphans of time, and their return stalls time, bringing with it an eternity of loss, pain and paralysis.

Marx and Nietzsche come to see this as the inevitable outcome of Hegelian idealism and to see his consummating act as the exhaustion of civilization’s inner ideals and resources. They are the first to recognize those who have been “offered” up to the “slaughter-bench” of history in the name of progress. They are also the first to try and think beyond the dead forms of the past, to give these “others” a voice and a place to dwell. But both fail and in their failure is the challenge of our time and of creation, and the growing sense that we lack the resources to escape an eternity of anxiety, indecision and pain. It is as if all our efforts are swallowed in advance by the pain of the past. This

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<sup>151</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1956), 21.

is why all attempts to create in the midst of this truth appear so feeble and uncertain, sometimes even pathetic, when compared to the miraculous life-works of the past. We have lost our naiveté and, with it, the capacities of the past and the possibility of a future.

What is needed is a Word that could bear witness to these “others” and their truth, and draw the world out of its eternal indifference and back into time. But there may be no saving Word; no redeeming act. As McGann, in *The Romantic Ideology*, says of Wordsworth, “From Wordsworth’s vantage, an ideology is born out of things which literally *cannot* be spoken of . . . The idea that poetry, or even consciousness, can set one free of the ruins of history and culture is the grand illusion of every Romantic poet.”<sup>152</sup>

In this way, time may be most fundamentally a ghost-machine, producing images that gather through the time of their duration forces and meanings that outstrip the powers of reason and prevent thought from achieving solidarity with Being and time. Time, as Wordsworth recognized, makes ghosts of us all. And they arrive with a vengeance in the wake of Hegel’s accomplishment and failure. They are nothing less than the overcoming of the Concept (*Begriff*) by spirit, of history by its ghosts. Even in the best of all possible worlds, a world in which love is over abundant and unfailing, becomes through the arc of time charged with remainders that haunt it and prevent it from pulling itself together into a coherent form—into a world.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Jerome McGann, *The Romantic Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 91.

<sup>153</sup> Even in the experience of profound love, there is always that which prevents that moment from being fully consummated, perhaps through the nagging feeling that this is too good to be true, that some chance event will soon intervene and destroy the present harmony. This is the sort of worry common to parents, one that “haunts” every experience of joy.

## PART II: INHUMAN BEGINNINGS

### CHAPTER SIX: IMAGING THE “FIGURES WILD”: BERGSON, DELEUZE AND THE POWERS OF CINEMA

A rock pile ceases to be a rock pile the moment a single man contemplates it, bearing within him the image of cathedrals.

-Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

Part I: “Primordial Longing” ended without a world and with a presentiment that the inner resources of culture were no longer capable of responding to the dilemma of undecided existence or the indifference it encourages. It is important to see that this has little to do with the often mentioned difficulties that attend and imperil acts of creation, or the impoverishment and old embarrassment of the artist before the ideal achievements of the past, the “anxiety of influence” that so concerned and preoccupied the English and German Romantics.<sup>154</sup> The past does overtax the modern imagination in this way and does have the effect of undermining the creative spirit but these difficulties are now compounded by the inescapable presence of the “victimized” and “unrecognized” of history and their unmistakable challenge to life. As Schelling hypothesizes,

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<sup>154</sup> Keats, in particular, stands out as a telling witness to the dilemma that now plagues artistic creation. His first and only epic poem, *Endymion*, which he saw not only as test of his poetic gifts but also as an experiment of the forms capacities, is by all accounts a failure. It fails because it lacks a ground to anchor and focus the action. Despite it having a subject (Endymion’s love and pursuit of the ideal of beauty, Diana, the moon-goddess) and a tenuous plot structure, the most outstanding feature of the poem is its lack of subject, plot or movement. It goes nowhere; its failure reflecting the growing impossibility of the form as well as the old ideals that would ground it.

No entity to this day can be created without the repeated production of its archetype. Indeed, we will hazard the assertion that every act of generation occurring in nature marks a return to a moment that is allowed for an instant to enter the present time as an alienated (re)appearance.<sup>155</sup>

It is no accident that late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>-century art lacks the overall coherence, beauty and meanings typical of the past, for the simple reason that it faces new and irrepressible realities—the ill-fated remainders of the past—that cannot be ignored or exorcised from time. “Language maintains a strict distinction between nature and the world of spirits by calling the latter quite simply *eternity*. Accordingly, someone who passes over into the world of spirits is said to have gone to eternity.”<sup>156</sup> They pass to the “unbeginning of time,” haunting time as its inescapable, “escaping shadow.”

Hence the growing importance and ubiquity of non-representational art and the extensive borrowing of indigenous art forms—Asian, African and Melanesian. To be sure, these trends reflect new artistic frontiers—as well as new dangers—the broadening and enrichment of the creative sensibility and what “counts” as art, the cross fertilization of ideas and bold experimentation leading to many of the striking innovations characteristic of 20<sup>th</sup>-century art. But it is ultimately an “art of breakdown” and excess, one that continually explores and reflects cultural fragmentation and collapse amid the joint displacement/disappearance of “man” and “god.”<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*, 162.

<sup>156</sup> *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*, 156.

<sup>157</sup> Derrida highlights this tendency throughout his work, most especially in his essay, “Violence and Metaphysics,” where philosophy’s task is to explore its relation to nonphilosophy, and the way it has always “wandered toward the meaning of its own death.” Derrida sees in this relation the promise of philosophy’s future, but it is difficult not to perceive the sense of profound loss that pervades his writings, his works more an act of mourning than philosophy. “That philosophy died yesterday, since Hegel or Marx,

In Part II: “Inhuman Beginnings,” we explore what we perceive to be Schelling’s constructive response to these problems and the ways he tries to think life into new beginnings. In this chapter, we bring together Bergson and Deleuze as we explore the powers of cinema in relationship to Schelling’s provocative discussion of the divine “imaging-event” that anticipates god’s great breakthrough into time and a world.

Plato famously opens Book VII of the *Republic* with the *Allegory of the Cave*. It serves to highlight many of the central themes in Platonic thought. But it will also serve to illustrate Schelling’s position. Plato envisions the lives of men who have been imprisoned deep within a cave since birth, their bodies fixed, chained to the earth, their eyes set toward a wall where there is a play of shadows. It is only when one is freed and made to turn that he comes to see the nature and extent of his error, of how he mistook an elaborate fiction for reality. He learns the images are an effect of bodies interfering with the light of fire. In short, he discovers he has been living a lie. From here, he is guided up a steep path where he comes upon the light of day and discovers the natural world and begins to learn its laws and reasons. The Platonic project rests on this distinction and the possibility of revealing the truth behind the sham of appearance. The Platonic *Dialogues* are however a protracted coming to terms with truth’s possible impossibility and the inevitability of the image.

Plato is really the first to think seriously about the power of the image and to think it in relationship to technology, in this instance, a primitive imaging-machine. Plato, of

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Nietzsche, or Heidegger—and philosophy should still wander toward the meaning of its death . . . or that it has always fed on its own agony, on the violent way it opens history by opposing itself to nonphilosophy, which is its past and its concern, its death and wellspring . . .” See *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1978), 97-8.

course, thinks it in terms of something to be overcome but the ambiguity of the analogy makes it possible to not only reverse the terms of the argument but to do away with the distinction altogether. The weakness and strength of the *Allegory* is that it ends up in the world Plato wishes to escape. In doing so it begs the question “what if there is no truth outside the cave?”. What if the truth of the image is that it hides and models nothing at all? What if the movement of the “philosophical turn” is nothing more than an imaging-event that generates nothing but a new register of images that “escape into new and other meanings?” We may still speak Plato’s language but now with the added understanding that the image of the Real is a simulacrum. Baudrillard himself emphasizes this point when he suggests in reference to the Byzantine Iconoclasts:

If they could have believed that these images only obfuscated or masked the Platonic Idea of God, there would have been no reason to destroy them. One can live with the idea of distorted truth. But their metaphysical despair came from the idea that the image didn’t conceal anything at all, and that these images were in essence no images, such as an original model would have made them, but perfect simulacra, forever radiant with their own fascination.<sup>158</sup>

If we continue speaking this language, it is only because we wish to stipulate that what lies behind the image are imaging-machines. Ultimately however there is no deeper reality running the activity of image production. The image itself is the process of its own imaging. It is not a representation but a becoming of vision, of sense and force. It is a central tenet of this paper that this is what Schelling in *Die Weltalter* was trying to think and comprehend all along. It took Heidegger to show the extent to which the question of

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<sup>158</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994), 4-5.

Being is tied to the question of technology. This connection makes it possible to reconceive Schelling's ideas in *Die Weltalter* in terms more adequate to his original intuition. It also gives us a way of achieving what Schelling desires most, a meaning rich time. Scribner, in his essay *A Blasphemous Monologue*, is after a similar thesis, suggesting:

Specifically, we will suggest that Schelling's approach to memory—the memory of an immemorial past in which one approaches eternity through time, and thus aspires for the infinite through finite means alone—is achievable (without contradiction) by technical means if one recognizes at the outset that metaphysics cannot be freed from technology, that “originary Being” is inseparable from an “originary technicity.”<sup>159</sup>

Scribner's hypothesis is formed in relation to the “internal monologue” at the center of *Die Weltalter*. Given Schelling's unmistakable partiality toward thinking in terms of an imaging activity, it is surprising that Scribner takes such a long and complicated route in making his argument, introducing for example Derrida's early critique of Husserl as a way of highlighting the *aporia* at the center of the technological/ontological divide. We wish avoid this detour and jump right to the heart of the matter by taking up Schelling's discussion of the imagining-event itself. We will show how Schelling's conjectures immediately suggest an machinic-imaging process that he first thinks in relationship to artistic production and, later, in reference to maternal longing and its issue—children. This latter connection may seem contrived at first but it is fully supported by the text of *Die Weltalter* and Schelling's lifelong interest in aesthetic

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<sup>159</sup> Scribner, F. Scott, “A Blasphemous Monologue: Technologies and Metaphysics of the Imagination in Schelling's *Ages of the World*,” in *Schelling Now: Contemporary Readings*, ed. Jason M. Wirth (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 148.

experience, which, as we have already seen, is central to his positive efforts in the *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800). This will make it possible for us to think anew the strange and radical vision of *Die Weltalter*, making it possible to envision a new world, rich with new and ever evolving meanings

To help see why this move is appropriate, we must first remember that Schelling gives us a dynamic vision of nature in process. This process is driven by the interaction between pre-subjective forces and the conscious aspiration toward self-understanding and unity of meaning. Representational thought as we have seen is incapable of achieving this end, since it deals with objects conditioned by strict transcendental rules. It can at most discover and define the conditions governing the presentation of objects, as Kant did, or the conceptual genealogy of spirit, as Hegel did in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, not the unconditioned ground from which this order is first established. In other words, the theoretically inclined mind can think the distinction between the ideal and real, not resolve it. Conscious thought cannot re-present the absolute identity of subject and object because it depends on this distinction as the condition of its emergence. Only the work of art can do this.

This is why the work of art and experiences that defy conceptualization figure so prominently in Schelling's evolving view and why it will be the key to unlocking the deepest registers of meaning in *Die Weltalter*. What thought betrays art reveals. Art can show what cannot be said, transcending the limits of matter, form and intention, signifying meanings beyond initial conditions. No amount of scientific analysis can exhaust this meaning, since the work of art does not concern what is present and available but what is absent, the virtual, free-form play of becoming, what Schiller thought under

the name *Spieltrieb*. The work of art is nothing less than an invocation of the Absolute by means of the image. It strikes back in time to primal Being, to its eternal, uncertain beginnings. We know from the *Naturphilosophie* that all empirical phenomenon are contractions of infinite substance, this being a precondition for the appearance of an object under the limiting conditions of space-time. With the work of art its objective aspect withdraws, vanishing in a “moment-of-vision” (*Augenblick*). What is envisioned in its place is fundamental reality, the productive, unconditioned ground of the Real. As Schelling suggests,

The work of art reflects to us the identity of the conscious and unconscious activities . . . Hence the basic character of the work of art is that of an *unconscious infinity* [synthesis of nature and freedom]. Besides what he has put into his work with manifest intention, the artist seems instinctively to have depicted therein an infinity, which no finite understanding is capable of developing to the full.”<sup>160</sup>

The work of art makes available what the conscious understanding conceals, the infinite play of Being, and it achieves this end paradoxically through finite means. It is essentially creation in reverse, passing beyond the threshold of knowable conditions to the *mise en scène* of Being itself. We know Schelling always thinks the ontological conversion to Being in terms of a primordial breach incited by the Word: “He speaks, and they are there.”<sup>161</sup> We also know that the Word signifies many things at once for Schelling: the formal, ritualized induction of Dasein into its specific “there” (the conferring of a “name” underwritten by the Law, Lacan’s *Nom du père*); the coming-to-

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<sup>160</sup> Schelling, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 3, 619-20.

<sup>161</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, 21.

presence of nature and the formal consistency of physical law; and the virtual durations that grow with the growth of the Word. Finally we know the invocation of the Word is most properly an act of the will, a decision, which carries the inestimable weight of creation. “Will is primal Being [*Ursein*] to which alone all predicates of Being apply: groundlessness, eternity, independence from time, self-affirmation. All of philosophy strives only to find this highest expression.”<sup>162</sup> But art not philosophy comes closest to realizing this truth. Art alone is capable of gaining access to the traumatic core of time without betraying it, in part because art not only reflects but reenacts the breach in Being that makes it possible for beings to come to “presence.” Art is the traumatizing event it seeks to express. Hence art alone can preserve the incalculable meanings of primal Being without succumbing to rote presentation. Art is capable of sighting and engendering pure becomings. Art for Schelling is life-giving and life-sustaining. And it does this in a way that preserves the dignity of the activity without losing sight of the singular individual that emerges from this process. It is at this point that Schelling is furthest from Fichte and closest to Schopenhauer, both of whom see in art the way to revealing fundamental reality. Schelling however sees in art a way of revealing the free individual in time, as the trans-empirical event of freedom toward Being.

Schelling’s purpose becomes clearer when we remember that he is trying to gain access to unconscious perceptions and processes from the position of consciousness. This is something the subject cannot achieve on its own terms because it is not an object it is after but an unconscious process. We know the emergence of the conscious subject is ontologically decisive in the revelation of Being but we also know this event is

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<sup>162</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, 21.

inadequate to the demands of spirit. Consciousness is a trap, drawing thought toward what amounts to an impossible possibility. Derrida describes this “aporetic” aspect of thought in terms of a process of differentiation and deferral, arguing that efforts in the direction of unity and transparency of meaning—what he sometimes refers to as the terminal point of “transcendental signification”—unscrupulously and unavoidably suppress elements that are nonetheless indispensable to its production, elements that cannot be formally recognized without undermining the system of “signification” in play.

Žižek makes this insight painfully concrete, stating:

A symptom, however, is an element which—although the non-realization of the universal principle in it appears to hinge on contingent circumstances—*has* to remain an exception . . . if the universal principle were to apply also to this point, the universal system itself would disintegrate. Today’s ‘exceptions’ (the homeless, the ghettoized, the permanent unemployed) are the symptom of the late-capitalist universal system, the permanent reminder of how the immanent logic of late capitalism works . . .<sup>163</sup>

Consciousness is a trap in another related way: it tends to privilege and protect the subjective position and its own mode of becoming over others. In fact it tends to entirely conceal the process of its own making. Heidegger as we know sees this tendency as the great stumbling block to thinking clearly about the question of Being. Dasein takes great comfort in the certainty of its self, its unity, transparency and constancy through time, even though this idea is furthest from the truth. Heidegger shows how difficult it is to overcome this prejudice and to think the inhuman events and processes that are everywhere implicated in the production of our understanding of the world. Schelling in his turn shows us the deep importance physical systems have in the becoming of spirit.

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<sup>163</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (London: Verso 1997), 127.

The life of the mind depends as much on the fitness and capacities of the body as on the quality of its cultural environment. This is a truth and relationship Descartes could never have imagined, let alone accept, because it makes of the subject a process within a process, and a material and unconscious process at that! The Cartesian subject can lay claim to itself only by disavowing its own body, thus implicating the body in the resurgence of the Cogito by excluding it.

It is in this context that Schelling's efforts in *Die Weltalter* must be understood and judged. His response to this set of problems is unique and, while it has become all too easy to regard Schelling as an early critic of Hegel and system building, it is important to take Schelling at his word and not turn *Die Weltalter* into a postmetaphysical document. At the same time that Schelling tests the limits of system he continues to explore its possibility. *Die Weltalter* continues Schelling's earlier efforts, reaffirming art's capacity to "sight" what thought can only "represent." Two examples will illustrate this claim and point us toward the novelty of Schelling's *Die Weltalter*.

Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam*, which is part of the large scale fresco inside the Sistine Chapel, is an exemplarily instance of art's capacity to go beyond recognizable forms to the imperceptible event of their becoming. What the painting immediately gives us to see is Adam after the moment of his creation. He appears to us a fully formed man, complete and in full possession of himself, his arm outstretched toward the god in whose image he was made, whose likeness he mirrors. As Vasari famously remarked, "... a figure whose beauty, pose and contours are such that it seems to have been fashioned that very moment by the first and supreme creator rather than by the drawing and brush of a

mortal man.”<sup>164</sup> Part of Michelangelo’s achievement is how he marks out the likeness and unfathomable distance between Adam and god in the infinitesimal gap between their fingers. Adam now exists and, in existing, he is set apart from god and his own emergence.

The real achievement of the painting however is the stark contrast Michelangelo draws between Adam and the elusive figures accompanying god. Some, like what appears to be Eve, the Virgin Mary or an apprehensive witness to creation, are clearly executed and well-defined. Others, especially the nebulous apparition emerging from beneath god’s outstretched arm, are ill-formed and frightening in their effect. We glimpse a freakish mass before it can properly appear to us. We see the picture decomposing from within, contracting to the indecipherable point of its creation. What is important is that the image represents and models nothing. It is an inchoate thought god has yet to fully form and bring to the light of day. Whatever it is becoming, it is not yet captured by the divine imagination. Neither god nor Adam can catch creation in the act but Michelangelo can and does.

Michelangelo achieves what Deleuze argues Bacon does, except this time with disenfranchised flesh. He images the imperceptible in all its uncertainty and strangeness. His pictures literally vibrate away and toward intelligibility. These almost indiscernible oscillations produce a palpable smearing effect between psycho-physical states and the visceral response the unresolved kinetic warping of flesh provokes. His portraiture in particular exemplify this effect, the most famous of which is his *Three Studies of Lucian*

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<sup>164</sup> Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists*, trans. Julia Conaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 445.

*Freud* (1969). They restlessly waver between worlds, an intensive iridescence of flesh at the impossible point of its crystallization into fact and geometric space. What we all too easily call a self is for Bacon, as it is for Deleuze and Schelling, a point marking a threshold of bodies in process. Bacon's pictures completely do away with any idea of a straightforward subject. In a triptych entitled *Oresteia of Aeschylus*, for example, the unidentifiable figure in the second panel combines a surface of folding flesh and an exposed, slumping vertebrae and skull in what appears to be a libation bowl, possibly commemorating a sacrifice, possibly the death of Agamemnon, the son of Atreus and king of Greeks. With the death of the king all that remains is flesh, a body suspended between worlds at the indiscernible point of its apotheosis.

Bacon's pictures are not so much depictions of bodies in various states of decay or emergence as fleeting glimpses of the body's escaping "shadow" in its imperceptible "line of flight."<sup>165</sup> It remains but only virtually. In other words, it is not what is "there" that counts but what is absent, and what is absent is right there on the surface of the canvas. As Deleuze suggests, "They are all present in the canvas as so many images, actual or virtual, so that the painter does not have to cover a blank surface but rather would have to empty it out, clear it, clean it."<sup>166</sup> Bacon's pictures mark this strange and almost indiscernible passage from the actual to the virtual and back, and the inhuman, indivisible remainder of flesh that leaches imperceptibly from the image. As Deleuze again suggests,

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<sup>165</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, trans. Daniel W. Smith (Minneapolis-Saint Paul: University of Minnesota Press, 2005) 20.

<sup>166</sup> *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, 71.

In fact, the self is only a threshold, a door, a becoming between two multiplicities . . . And at each threshold or door, a new pact? A fiber stretches from a human to an animal, from a human or animal to molecules, from molecules to particles, and so on to the imperceptible.<sup>167</sup>

This is what the work of art can “do” and Schelling recognizes this capacity early on. This is most clearly in evidence in *Die Weltalter*, which moves beyond the arguments of *System of Transcendental Idealism* in two important ways. First, the work of art now has both revelatory and productive power. Shelley famously declares the poet to be the “unacknowledged legislator” of the world. *Die Weltalter* literalizes this idea by conceiving artistic production metaphysically. Secondly, Schelling does this by thinking the image in relation to movement and time, that is, he thinks in terms of imaging-machines. The cinematic image is the key to grasping this point, and the essence of movement and time independently of any representational system. In doing this he not only develops an astonishing account of creation but a means of re-imaging it.

Early in the prologue to *Die Weltalter* Schelling gives strong indication that this line of interpretation is not only appropriate but essential to understanding his deepest speculative intuitions.

Buried within it is the memory of all things, their original conditions, their becoming, and their meaning. But this archetypal image of things slumbers within it—not, indeed, as an extinguished and forgotten image, but rather as an image growing with its own essence that it cannot take out of itself and call upon . . . But incessantly called by this [other] to its ennoblement, the higher essences notices that the lower is assigned to it, not to be held in idleness, but rather that it might have an instrument in which it could

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<sup>167</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis-Saint Paul: University of Minnesota Press 1987), 249.

behold itself, express itself, and become intelligible to itself.<sup>168</sup>

The emphasis Schelling gives to “having an instrument,” one that can produce a perception of the “archetypal image of things” is highly suggestive, even within the scope of more traditional readings. The event that produces the ontological rupture in Being is an imaging event. It is the image that anticipates the great breakthrough to Being and time and it is we who serve as its instrument, in which things formally concealed and held in reserve by the “higher essence” become active and available. But this conversion to Being is deeply ambiguous, not least of all because we lack the “means” to reveal the “image growing” alongside our duration in time. Where before there was darkness and unconscious longing, now there is desire and estrangement. The great truth of the *Freiheitschrift* and *Die Weltalter* is that this problem cannot be solved on “human” terms. This helps explain why *Die Weltalter* was never completed, why Schelling’s best efforts are cut short. This seems to confirm the suspicion that he is attacking the metaphysical impulse. This may be true but it is more true that he is searching for a means—a new instrument—to provoke an ontological break in order to sight the pure time-image. He never leaves any doubt about this or the fact that many of us have had intimations of this truth. Take for example a striking passage toward the end of the essay.

Think!—have you ever enjoyed those rare moments of such blissful and perfect fulfillment, when the heart desires nothing, when you could wish these moments to remain eternally as they are . . . Think of this and try to remember how, in just such moments, a will is already at work producing itself, although unbeknownst to you and without

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<sup>168</sup> *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*, 114-5.

your effort—indeed, you could not prevent this production.<sup>169</sup>

This echoes an idea later developed by Joyce in *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, when Stephen Dedalus remembers a time when words encountered him as incomprehensible noise, before he became habituated to their meaning and use. His deeply personal memory traverses time to the impersonal pre-symbolic events of his emergence, one which cannot be reconciled with his present life without doing violence to its truth. Our dim perception of this shared past and its relation to the production of present time is what binds us in essence to the Absolute and is what gives us the chance of unveiling the truth and transcending our indifference.

Schelling all but says that to do this means overcoming what Nietzsche refers to as the “human, all too human.” What is needed is an inhuman means of seeing capable of producing perceptions that no longer depend upon subjects or logical constructs that artificially suspend the flows of life. Schelling is no longer concerned with deducing the life of the Absolute. He wants to produce a pre-human perception of the Absolute’s entry into time, to see, as Tarkovsky says in *Sculpting in Time*, time appear “beyond events, as the weight of truth.” In other words, he wants to restage creation’s nativity, maximizing the tensions between Absolute and ground in order to suspend them at the point of our shared indifference, replicating the state of immobility—the same immobility that now afflicts and undoes our own time— that prevailed in the time just before the act of creation, when the Absolute summoned the will to cut through an eternity of indecision.

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<sup>169</sup> *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*, 136.

Cinema can do this and in a way that is unique to the arts. Bergson, who was among the first to theorize the form, thinks the “cinematographic mechanism” betrays the “cinematographic tendency” of thought, reduplicating and reinforcing what he sometimes calls our “natural metaphysic.”<sup>170</sup> What he has in mind is close to what Heidegger understands as our everyday practical orientation toward the world. Cinema, by artificially suspending and decomposing a live process, produces “immobile sections” that are reconstituted and then reanimated, generating an abstract movement and a false image of substance. Cinema makes plain how we always already find ourselves acting out an interpretation of Being, limiting our perception of things in order to adapt ourselves to an always changing reality. This practical orientation toward what is practically relevant and reliable is necessary to our survival but it leads us to think of change as a property of more durable stuff. Mobility comes to be understood in terms of an immobility that precedes and grounds movement. For Bergson, this tendency and its offspring, the subject, serves a real purpose but it ends in confusion and a fiction—the subject. We are in essence extracting from a process something that does not exist, an abstract point artificially suspended between life and its concrete organization.

But, as our attention has distinguished and separated them artificially, it is obliged next to reunite them by an artificial bond. It imagines, therefore, a formless *ego*, indifferent and unchangeable, on which it threads the psychic states which it has set up as independent entities.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (Mineola, NY.: Dover Publications, Inc., 1998), 325-6.

<sup>171</sup> *Creative Evolution*, 3.

This false image of life distorts its true nature and the real nature of movement and time, which he thinks in terms of living durations. Life is pure mobility and the endless mobilization and deployment of forces. Life in short is the stuff of time. Cinema however not only betrays the “cinematographical character of our knowledge of things” it also produces registers of meaning beyond this false image, reaching even the sublimity of divine creation and the making of the absolutely new.

This is why the invention of cinema would have meant so much to Schelling. Cinema not only reveals our deepest, most ingrained tendencies toward things, it perceives movements and times independently of representational thought or before there is anything like a world.<sup>172</sup> This is why Deleuze argues the form’s novelty is not that it sets images in movement—though this is an important innovation and condition of the truth it can produce—but that it poses anew and from the “outside” the question of our relationship to space and time

Cinema is unique in that the perceptions it produces and records are generated by an inhuman, unconscious imaging-machine. It has no “there,” no Dasein, only the set of connections it registers and records. It unconsciously perceives the flows of life in much the same way as plants spontaneously perceive and react to light, heat and water. There is however no instinctual or conditioned break in perception; no *a priori* conceptual apparatus structuring content or judgment; and no subject acting as the gravitational

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<sup>172</sup> The question here arises as to the relationship between the cinematic and the images it produces. Inasmuch as the cinematic image reconfirms everyday prejudices and the habits that underwrite them, then it is no different from what it represents. In other words, it fails both cinematically and as an image. On the other hand, when it disrupts these automated functions and processes, and produces something “distinctive” or “sacred,” then the relationship can be understood cinematically, that is, productive.

center of the perception. There is only the flow of images and the site of their connection.

Deleuze argues the whole cinematic assemblage, which we can loosely define in terms of the new set of equipmental or “machinic” relationships and capacities that come to engage the life of Dasein, extends the power of perception in an unprecedented way, and not just in the now familiar way it “sees” events and processes that were formerly invisible, like the seasonal life-cycle of a forest or a pupating animal or a shot traversing its line of flight. Cinema’s ability to capture these events is striking, especially as it enables us to begin to think the vast array of affective and perceptive capacities of life and its many and varied durations. We can begin to “see” and think becomings not our own.

Schelling has already suggested in the *Naturphilosophie* that nature is not a homogenous, fully integrated whole but an intensive field of competing forces that generate diverse durations. The same is true of Dasein. Life moves at different speeds. What something “is” is as much a function of its speed and what it can and does do. There is no self-contained reality, only durations of substance. Schelling thinks these durations as outcomes of competing forces. What holds life together and tears it apart, both in terms of fatal contractions and the breaking free of new forms and new trajectories, is the interaction of attractive and repulsive forces.

We regard nature in its initial stages, we find an attracting, inward-returning force in all corporeal things; this force never appears for itself alone, but only ever as the bearer of another essence, fastening it down and holding it together.

This other essence is expansive by nature, and it is thus volatilizing and spiritualizing.<sup>173</sup>

What something “is” has to do with how it responds to the endless play of forces active in its becoming. A plant instinctively reacts to light, heat and water; an animal hesitates, slowing time, producing a time of judgment and deliberative action. Dasein establishes an explicit relationship to time by thinking time and existence together. Time is our concern. We are made and unmade by time and we know this, exploiting it in our turn, adapting existence to our ends, re-making it in our image and our own time, all the while longing to move at the speed of light.

What Schelling, Bergson and Deleuze have in mind has nothing immediately to do with physical speed or changes in spatial-temporal relationships but with non-extended durations of substance. Real movement cannot be reduced to “space covered.” This kind of movement, which is made possible by translating real movement back into space, is thought in terms of divisible points marking the path and transition of an object’s trajectory. A dancer moves from *seconde* to *plié* to *arabesque*. The progression is judged by the form of the movement, not the movement itself, which only serves to realize the position. Movement is incidental to and detached from the thing that moves, its ideal function to advance and unify the action. When we try to analyze or recapture the movement, we miss it and end with the fiction of the dancer, when all there is, as Nietzsche famously argues, is the dance. This is because real movement, unlike space, is indivisible, singular and productive. Their identification homogenizes movement and makes time its measure, “the number of movement.” The spatial representation and

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<sup>173</sup> *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*, 139.

coordination of time and movement is what makes daily life predictable, routine and livable. Their conflation normalizes judgment and patterns action and expectation.

Most films exploit this identification by constructing images that correspond neatly with already established patterns, expectations and desires. Their trajectory can be clearly anticipated and defined, as they draw on normative conventions that orient and fix the play of images in terms that are both familiar and reassuring. As Deleuze remarks,

What we mean by normality is the existence of centres; centres of the revolution in movement itself, of equilibrium of forces, of gravity of moving bodies, and of observation for a viewer able to recognize or perceive the moving body, and to assign movement.<sup>174</sup>

But for Bergson and Deleuze, this interpretation is incomplete and cannot make sense of real change or real time because the simple succession of instants marking blocks of movement fixes time in the present. “For our duration is not merely one instant replacing another; if it were, there would never be anything by the present—no prolonging of the past into the actual, no evolution, no concrete duration.”<sup>175</sup> For this reason, movement cannot be defined in terms of space covered any more than time can be confined to the present as the measure of movement. Each of these definitions represents both movement and time in relation to an object that has been extracted from the flow of experience. Movement cannot be separated from the object that moves any more than time can be reduced to the present it grounds. Once we can think time and movement intensively rather than extensively, we see that real movement depends upon the

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<sup>174</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1989), 36.

<sup>175</sup> *Creative Evolution*, 4.

intensive durations of time and that cinema has the power to image this nonchronological time.

Bergson encourages us to think of the most fixed internal perception, “the visual perception of a motionless external object.”<sup>176</sup> When we properly attend to it, we notice that even though it appears the same now as it did when we first started the exercise, our perception changes with time, as our memory of the past intervenes and redefines the present. Dubuffet tells of a man who every day for many years lived his life in the midst of impoverished surroundings.<sup>177</sup> Dubuffet tells us that through it all nothing of any consequence changed in the physical makeup of the place but the man’s relationship to it did. Over time it became invested with meaning and life, with memory, filled with the duration that accumulated in his time, just as “the trees that whisper round a temple become soon dear as the temple’s self.”<sup>178</sup> It became by degrees virtual, spiritually dense, overcharged and rich with the past and future. This change is what Bergson and Deleuze mean by duration, the sometimes almost imperceptible, incalculable changes that are continuously effected by the layering of time upon time.

These changes occur because, as Deleuze argues, time’s most basic function is the splitting of time in each moment into past and present, where the past is not simply a past present but a virtual corollary to the production of the actual present and the constitution of the future.

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<sup>176</sup> *Creative Evolution*, 2.

<sup>177</sup> William Barrett, *Irrational Man* (New York: Anchor Books, 1958), 57-8.

<sup>178</sup> John Keats, “Endymion,” in *Complete Poems and Selected Letters of John Keats* (New York: The Modern Library, 2001) 63.

Time has to split at the same time as it sets itself out or unrolls itself: it splits in two dissymmetrical jets, one of which makes all the present pass on, while the other preserves all the past. Time consists of this split, and it is this, it is time that we *see in the crystal*.<sup>179</sup>

Real time, time at the foundation of existence, is the pure past, subjectivity at the point of an irreparable split between a time that passes on and the singular time that is preserved in the swelling of our duration, a time that refuses to pass. The actual present, our present, is always being doubled by its virtual image, expanding the registers of memory in the ever widening array of virtual circuits, in which we can create for ourselves a memory with increasing temporal heft, deepening not only the registers of meaning but of reality itself.

This vision of duration not only runs against the grain of our everyday understanding but of Kant's *a priori* conception of time. Kant was right in thinking time independently of space but misguided in thinking it in terms of an interiority that properly belongs to us and us alone. Schelling was always deeply skeptical of this view because it deprives time of any concrete reality, being as it is for Kant an interior mode of representation.

Additionally, a false representation of the concept of time has permitted so much that is illusory and partially false to creep into the concept that it is almost pardonable to look upon it as a mere gear in our thoughts that would stop if we no longer counted days and hours.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, 81.

<sup>180</sup> *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*, 122.

We and everything else belongs to time, not the other way around. Everything longs in its own way for eternity, for its own time, just as eternity longs to crystalize into spirit.

Time has its own interiority in which we—and god—are among its many effects. We belong to time and we are able to think, remember and create ourselves anew because of a past that grows and stays with us throughout our time. “Time is not the interior in us, but just the opposite, the interiority in which we are, in which we move, live and change . . . Subjectivity is never ours, it is time that is, the soul or spirit, the virtual. The actual is always objective, but the virtual is subjective . . .”<sup>181</sup> And it is this subjective dimension that traverses all time, holding our time in the grip of an infinitely dense and rich memory, the generative source of all movement and all change—the pure crystalline image of creation itself. This last idea helps us see that Deleuze is conceiving cinema, not just artistically, but, with Schelling, metaphysically. Time is an inhuman imaging-machine. In a striking passage, Schelling says,

And so the Eternal saw for the first time, in the immediate ectype of its essence, everything that will one day be in nature, whereupon it saw in just this the deepest thoughts of what lies innermost within its own self; for these rose out from it as spirits, exhibited and actualized in eternal being as if in material; and the view of these spirits, due its purity, ascended to the highest subject.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, 82-3 The virtual plays a central role in the work of Schelling, Bergson and Deleuze and, while there are differences in their understanding, they all agree that it refers in some way to the pure past, which is real and connected to the production of all change. It does not signify possibility, which is properly aligned with the actual, but with that which stands in contradiction to it. See Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Zone, 1988), 54-56; Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University, 1994), 203-7; and Deleuze, *Negotiations: 1972-1990*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University, 1983), 65-67.

<sup>182</sup> *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*, 155.

What is important in this passage is not simply the vision and all that it encompasses and promises, but that it has no gravitational center—divine or human—from which to ground the image or stabilize the act of perception. There is no instinctual or conditioned break in perception; no *a priori* conceptual apparatus structuring the content or grounding judgment; and no subject at the center of the perception. There is only the flow of images and the site of their connection. No subject has yet entered time but is instead “folded imperceptibly” into a movement that is spontaneously “nomadic,” visionary and “cinematic.” It is paradoxically a “seeing” that does not “see,” but for this reason, it sees all, including everything that will “not” or “cannot” be in nature, the imperceptible “blind spot” of creation. Once a subject appears, the vision vanishes, leaving only a broken image of time and the indivisible remainders that grow and loom in the background of time’s duration.<sup>183</sup>

But this is not all, because Schelling’s genealogy of the Absolute suggests a backward interpretation of this passage, where the primordial vision is not originary but an after-image of the mirroring-event that first anticipates a unified whole. From this perspective, there is no primordial past preceding the act of creation, only the splitting durations born of the image. The saving-time created and heralded by the image is purely virtual, a ghost born from the trauma of creation. As we will see next chapter, god is born of a child as much as a child is symptomatic of god’s yearning. The pain of this creation

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<sup>183</sup> *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*, 154.

is time's irreparable wound; the price of creation, our sacrifice to time; our hope, times rescue.<sup>184</sup>

As we have already seen, time produces durations so dense that the present cannot pull itself together into a durable form or world, each instant faltering beneath the weight of the past and “the pressures of time.” Part of cinema's native power is its ability to produce anomalies that traverse present time, that generate aberrant movements and an image of movement and time itself. Deleuze makes this into an axiom of the movement and time-image, stating,

If normal movement subordinates the time of which it gives us an indirect representation, aberrant movement speaks up for an anteriority of time that it presents to us directly, on the basis of the disproportion of scales, the dissipation of centres and the false continuity of the images themselves.<sup>185</sup>

When Andrei first visits Domenico in Tarkovsky's *Nostalghia*, for example, he encounters his mirror image on his right, the camera then shifts away to the left only to hit upon Andrei again. This “impossible continuity shot” coupled with the doubling effect the mirror produces visually displaces Andrei, reduplicating at a spiritual level his—and

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<sup>184</sup> In *La Jetée*, a film by Chris Marker, following a nuclear holocaust that leaves the planet uninhabitable save an underground Parisian community living inside the *Palais de Chaillot* galleries, a prisoner is enlisted to time-travel to the past and future in an effort to save the present. He succeeds in his mission, but it comes at the price of his own life, redeeming himself and his time by surrendering to the past—his past. The film reveals these changes, not through moving-images, but through a series of still-photographs that are accompanied only by the voice of the narrator. This nonconventional approach gives the viewer strange access to the unconscious becomings, durations, and movements of time. We feel ourselves moved in the midst of images that don't move, but that change profoundly for us in the memories they come to bear through time's passage. In other words, we are made to “see” what cannot be seen, what cannot make it into our time, our vision of “times not our own,” that we are nonetheless somehow responsible for. This is what makes the prisoner both tragic and heroic. He is not just made to account for his own crimes, which are never explained, but to suffer the burden of creation's “fall” into time or the creation of the temporal world.

<sup>185</sup> *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, 37.

Tarkovsky's—physical exile from Russia and the modern world. He is estranged from himself, his country and his art; he has become indiscernible to himself and to us, a ghost of his own appearance, indifferent to life, someone unable to adapt himself to a world deprived of meaning. Andrei's duration cannot be joined with his present, poetically or otherwise. Time surfaces directly for him and us because his time is "out of joint," it refuses to pass, hence the stalled and constipated action of the film, which, taken together with Alain Resnais' *Hiroshima, mon amour* and *Nuit et Brouillard*, comes in many ways to signify the irreparable losses suffered in the aftermath of the Second World War and the difficulty of just "going on." "Why is the Second World War taken as a break? The fact is that, in Europe, the post-war period has greatly increased the situation which we no longer know how to react to, in spaces which we no longer know how to describe."<sup>186</sup> Andrei's inability to create himself anew or do anything of interest at all parallels the paralysis and bored anguish of modern day civilization. His powerlessness made all the more acute by his hallucination of the pregnant Madonna and everything her image implies and fails to accomplish for him and for us. Time shows itself because we feel we cannot repair the rift in time that would make possible the resumption, let alone the redemption, of life.

Sometimes however time affects a miracle, the glorious emancipation of life from the ruins of time. Gabriel Axel's *Babettes Gaestebud* does just this by heightening the strained tension between the austere life of two sisters, both of whom sacrificed their loves and talents for their father and the religious community he founded, and the social and political upheavals of 19<sup>th</sup>-century Europe. The spiritual event that once galvanized

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<sup>186</sup> *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, xi.

their community has since become more a matter of custom than faith, this fact borne out by the absence of children and the absence of color in the first half of the film. A traumatic past looms in the background, along with the still distant violence of revolutionary France, in much the same way as it does for Andrei but, unlike him, they have taken refuge in the safety of routine, customs and old forms—a different kind of paralysis and sickness. It is only when Babettes arrives that things change, having come seeking refuge from the counter-revolutionary violence in France, she gradually overcomes the strained forms and dull monotony that dominate their severe and unadorned existence through the vitality of her art, cooking. Through a chance event, she is able to fully exploit her talents, preparing a meal so rich and abundant, that it renews and even deepens the community's spiritual ties, redeeming life in shared communion, in the simple act of breaking bread together. Babette achieves through her art what Andrei could not, a vision so powerful that it overwhelms and transforms everything it encounters, including us. Axel, unlike Tarkovsky and others, does not subvert the conventions of cinema, the film is strictly conventional in its makeup and effects, but we feel at its conclusion not only that life can be redeemed but that it just has, that we have been revealed and lovingly held in its truth.

We cite these two examples, *Nostalghia* and *Babettes Gaestebud*, because they both deal with the problem of time and creation and how life can be grasped and created anew. Andrei lacks the poetic imagination that would save him from his past and a world of indifference. He remains at the end as he was at the beginning, unactualized. Babette, who is equally estranged from home and family, is different. She is possessed of that rare gift, that divine light that creates a time that is truly alive. We cite these two examples

because they give us a way of seeing and feeling the problem that faced god—that faces us—before the act of creation, before the advent of time.

CHAPTER SEVEN: “THE VOICE THAT CRIETH IN THE WILDERNESS”

Yet he dismisses without notice his thought, because it is his.

In every work of genius we recognize our own rejected thoughts;

They come back to us with a certain alienated majesty.

-Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Self-Reliance*

Not ripe for my ideal. And I live

A citizen of ages yet to come.

-Friedrich Schiller, *Mottoes*

We argued in the last chapter that, before god invoked the Word that broke through an eternity of indifference, there was the image, and that Schelling is urging us to think of originary creation cinematically, as the interplay of images. We argued that what makes an image or a process cinematic has little to do with setting images in motion but rather with setting life into motion, opening life to the unexpected and new, creating movements that break with inherited prejudices, expectations and desires. In other words, as Schelling and Deleuze both argue, nature is fundamentally an imaging-machine—cinema is primal.

Now we will develop the arguments of last chapter in the strongest way possible, by arguing that the life of children comes closest to actualizing in time the concept of the cinematic, surpassing even the work of art. Schelling continues to suggest that what the Absolute longs for is the Word, but the Word is not the first gift of creation: the child is.

She is the cumulative effect of god's unintelligible longing for existence made real in a "cry" that announces the coming of our judge and redeemer,

It is no accident that Schelling continually references Being's nativity with the longings of the "maternal body" where from "feeling" and "yearning" "grow luminous thoughts." But what is of ultimate importance is not the "maternal longing" but its issue—children. Children are the ultimate bearers of the promise and challenge of creation for the simple reason that they are as yet unformed subjects, unacquainted with the ways of Being. They are ontologically naïve, as near a pure imaging-machine as is possible within the limits of actuality. The imperceptible lines of signification they unleash grow from the wildly fluctuating forces of ground and existence, the finite, still crystallizing image of "man" indiscernible under the pressures of eternity. Children are the pure time-image, the fleeting "moment-of-vision" that sees—without seeing—all that will one day be decided and acted out in time amid the metaphysical indeterminacy of the Real or all that "in" god is not yet "of" god.

This explains in part why children are the counter-image of the capitalist machine, and all that is actual, mechanical and false. They have yet to climb trees or have their desire "captured" by the family or the state.<sup>187</sup> As Deleuze and Guattari remark, "It has been noted that for children an organ has 'a thousand vicissitudes', that it is 'difficult to localize, difficult to identify, it is in turn a bone, an engine excrement, the baby, a hand,

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<sup>187</sup> Deleuze and Guattari employ the image of the schizoid and the budding, sometimes extraordinary associations they make as a revolutionary alternative to the hierarchical "arboreal" image that has dominated Western conceptions of thought and desire. "Once a rhizome has been obstructed, arborified, it's all over, no desire stirs; for it is always by rhizome that desire moves and produces." Children according to this view are schizoid, that is, deterritorializing-machines. See *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Continuum, 1987), 15.

daddy's heart . . ."<sup>188</sup> The imaginary power of children and their capacity to proliferate associations and "concepts" beyond what is merely given naturally invests life and "things" with strange, often "singular" meanings that could in no way have been anticipated. The way a simple everyday object "dishcloth," which has a prescribed place and function within a given context "the kitchen" can be liberated and initiated to strange new worlds, to new relational structures and the play of "signification"—e.g., the becoming-princess of the dishcloth—temporarily releases "things" from the yoke of the past and restores something of their native dignity. Children do this spontaneously, the routines of daily life still a minor hiccup in the productions of desire. As Emerson remarks,

That divided and rebel mind, that distrust of a sentiment because our arithmetic has computed the strength and means opposed to our purpose, these have not. Their mind being whole, their eye is as yet unconquered, and when we look in their faces, we are disconcerted. Infancy conforms to nobody: all conform to it, so that one babe commonly makes four or five out of the adults who prattle and play to it.<sup>189</sup>

This also helps explain the nature and revolutionary power of their questions. They are not simply trying to decide what something "is" but also what it can "do," and what sorts of relationships and new capacities it can engender. They want to mobilize life into endless play, instinctively resisting any force that would interrupt or limit that play, or disturb their "unbiased, unaffrighted innocence." As Deleuze and Guattari continue, "Children's questions are poorly understood if they are not seen as question-machines;

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<sup>188</sup> *A Thousand Plateaus*, 282.

<sup>189</sup> Emerson, *Nature and Selected Writings*, 177

that is why indefinite articles play so important a role in their questions (*a* belly, a child, a horse, a chair, ‘how is *a* person made?’).”<sup>190</sup> In fact indefinite articles and pronouns are a pervasive feature of their discourse in general and they hold the same significance as they do for Heidegger in his analysis of boredom in the *Metaphysical Lectures* (1929-30), with one important exception: instead of first signifying the abyssal character of Dasein, the proverbial everything/nothing and everyone/no-one of “It is boring to one” (*Es langweilt einen*), they signify the unadulterated ontological depth of “phenomenon,” the sheer abundance of life’s productions. Being “lacks” for nothing, because there is nothing and no “one” to displace desire. It is only with her surrender to the Law (Lacan’s *Nom de père*) that “lack” is formally institutionalized as the *a priori* and purely artificial condition of human existence. As Deleuze and Guattari powerfully argue, “Lack (*manque*) is created, planned, and organized through social production . . . It is never primary; production is never organized on the basis of a pre-existing need or lack (*manque*).”<sup>191</sup> Desire is revolutionary in that it demands the return of everything, settling for nothing less than the displacement of lack with the fullness of time.

For these reasons, children represent a revolutionary and paradigmatic challenge to life because this is what they secretly demand; their presence a living indictment of reality and a summons to genuine life. They are untouched by the conventions, practices, expectations, and fears that define a society and undo life. As Emerson says, “Ah, that he

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<sup>190</sup> *A Thousand Plateaus*, 283.

<sup>191</sup> *Anti-Oedipus*, 29-30. Before the appearance of the “castrated” subject and the introduction of “lack” where previously there was none, all there is a “molecular unconscious” and the unconditioned flows and temporary breaks of desire. “The molecular unconscious on the contrary, knows nothing of castration, because partial objects lack nothing and form free multiplicities as such ; because the multiple breaks never cease producing flows . . .” See *Anti-Oedipus*, 295.

could pass again into his neutrality! Who can thus avoid all pledges and, having observed, observe again from the same unaffected, unbiased, unbribable, unaffrighted innocence—must always be formidable.”<sup>192</sup> Their revolutionary strength and vitality, their open and unrestrained enthusiasm for all things new, their freedom for existence, their spontaneity of action, judgment and purpose everywhere consecrates time anew. It is not insignificant that god’s redeeming act was heralded in the birth of a child. Children are the vital link to our ancient past, the bearers of divine freedom and life.

While the artistic impulse and the cinematic imaging-machine in particular come close to realizing Schelling’s vision of Being’s nativity, the life of a child consecrates and fulfills the analogy he has been wrestling with from the very beginning, bringing the pre-symbolic strivings of the Absolute and Dasein together in a way that is both natural and revolutionary in its implications, for at this moment in time there is no division between “god” and “man,” because there is no “there,” only the unconscious bourgeoning images of time, of will that has yet to create itself in time.<sup>193</sup> There is no division because in the beginning there is only a child, a pre-subjective imaging-machine.<sup>194</sup>

This is why the invention of cinematography would mean so much to Schelling. Cinema not only reveals our deepest, most ingrained tendencies toward things, as

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<sup>192</sup> *Nature and Selected Writings*, 178.

<sup>193</sup> It is difficult not to think of Nietzsche’s landmark study of Greek tragedy, *The Birth of Tragedy*, and the Apollonian and Dionysian forces that describe the divine illusions of measure, form and constancy, and the unconscious, creative life of will that would destroy it, their brief reconciliation the source of the miracle of Greek tragedy and civilization. See “The Birth of Tragedy,” in *Basic Writings*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: The Modern Library, 1992).

<sup>194</sup> Schelling makes this point explicit, stating, “Everything divine is human, according to Hippocrates, and everything human is divine. If so, we can hope to approach the truth by relating everything to man.” See *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*, 157.

Bergson argued, it perceives movements and times independently of representational thought, before there is anything like a world. What Deleuze idiosyncratically describes as cinema's unique and native power already belongs to children, and in exactly the way he theorizes the cinematographic process. Children are imaging-machines. They have no "there," no Dasein, only the set of connections they register, record, and enjoy.<sup>195</sup> They spontaneously perceive and act out the flows of life. There is no instinctual or conditioned break in perception; no *a priori* conceptual apparatus structuring content or grounding judgment; and no subject acting as the gravitational center of the perception. There is only the flow of images and the site of their connection. They naturally accomplish what Fichte argues is the principle aim of life: the bringing together of empirical perception with the unconscious imagination, where the empirical I (*das empirische*) touches its transcendental ground (*das transzendente Ich*), the vast, still "undiscovered country" of will and the free-form play of images. Children are ontologically indeterminate in this way, existing between the Real and the possible, a homogenous constellation of forces—expansive and contractive—emanating a spiritual substance, which touches and in its own way redeems the "lowest" and "highest" realities. For Schelling the highest aim of spirit, ". . . would be one in which the process of freedom spreads up to what is eternal of the soul itself, within which alone free communication takes place between what is eternally objective and what is eternally subjective of the soul."<sup>196</sup> Schelling conceives this Absolute relation in terms of spirit's

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<sup>195</sup> This is true despite the fact that children, as Heidegger and Lacan both point out, are already the unwitting object of desire, thrown into a world not of their choosing, subject to its colonizing forces, subjects in waiting.

<sup>196</sup> *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*, 159.

growth through culture, but the metaphysical backbone of culture—what continually renews and strengthens its inner ideals, resources and resolve—is the life of children, who are the vital link to culture’s future and the redemption of time’s past.

This is why it is a terrible mistake to think of god’s longing for existence as something past, or the analogies it inspires as merely symbolic. Every child is an incarnation of this divine longing and co-eternal with the Lord who grasps the nascent life of Dasein,

. . . in the beginning of his way, before he did anything.  
When he prepared the heavens above, I was there: when he  
set the compass upon the face of the depth; when he  
appointed the foundations (*Grund*) of the earth, then I was  
by him (as one brought up with him): and I was daily his  
pleasure, playing always (by) him.<sup>197</sup>

This passage not only references the “play” explored by Kant, Schiller and Friedrich Schlegel, who each in their own way develop this concept in relationship to what they perceive to be our highest calling but also and simply the everyday play of a child, who delights all who see her, her play the living ground from which the intricate play culture grows. All there has ever been or ever will be is play. As Schiller makes the point, “For, to mince matters no longer, man only plays when he is in the fullest sense of the word a human being, and *he is only fully a human being when he plays.*”<sup>198</sup> Schiller for his part makes play (*Spieltrieb*) a prerequisite for “man” transcending her biological condition; the spontaneous play of a child becoming the civilizing force of culture, an

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<sup>197</sup> *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*, 164.

<sup>198</sup> Friedrich von Schiller, “Letters on the Aesthetical Education of Man,” in *Complete Poetical Works and Plays of Friedrich Schiller*, trans. Nathan Haskell Dale (Delphi Classics, 2013), Letter XV. Kindle File.

elaborate means to coping with and mediating the crises and anxieties of subjectivity. It becomes the way we achieve a degree of mastery and control over things, a means to compensating for the fact that we are, as Herder says, “instinct poor” and, as Heidegger later argues, beings-toward-death. It puts things, especially ourselves, at a safe remove from the anarchic forces of the Real that threaten to devour our time.

But there are different kinds of play, some which revitalize and strengthen the experience and wonder of life, others which stifle it, like the danger Schiller and the Romantics saw realized in revolutionary France, with the indiscriminate violence of the Terror, which dashed the hopes and republican aspirations of a generation “a great moment has found a little people,” and the growing bourgeois consensus that yoked thought and desire to utility, shattering the image of “man” through its new divisions of labor, destroying the inner life of the individual in order to save the whole.

Enjoyment was divorced from labour, the means from the end, the effort from the reward. Everlastingly chained to a single little fragment; everlastingly in his ear the monotonous sound of the wheel that turns, he never develops the harmony of his being, and instead of putting the stamp of humanity upon his own nature, he becomes nothing more than the imprint of his occupation or of his specialized knowledge.<sup>199</sup>

Under these conditions, the play of children and art becomes at best a distraction, at worst, another moment in the reproduction of life. As Schiller continues, anticipating many of the insights and concerns that will later dominate the thinking of the Frankfurt School:

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<sup>199</sup> “Letters on the Aesthetical Education of Man,” Letter VI. Kindle File.

Utility is the great idol of the time, to which all powers do homage and all subjects are subservient. In this great balance on utility, the spiritual service of art has no weight, and, deprived of all encouragement, it vanishes from the noisy Vanity Fair of our time. The very spirit of philosophical inquiry itself robs the imagination of one promise after another, and the frontiers of art are narrowed in proportion as the limits of science are enlarged.<sup>200</sup>

What becomes lost is an appreciation for those forms of life that in the past were seen as “ends” in themselves—love, friendship, art and religion—not means to other ends. Love begins and ends in love, friendship in friendship, art in art—love that is calculating is not love. Love gives of itself freely, with no expectations, not even of understanding. Love, like genuine friendship and art, is of no value because it is of inestimable worth, limitless in its capacity to console and inspire us through life. But, as Schiller concludes, the price of developing the wealth of talents and capacities of the “great instrument of civilization” is the fragmentation and, ultimately, impoverishment of the individual, and the resources that once supplied her with a sense of meaning, purpose and wholeness. As a final consequence, as Hölderlin says in *Hyperion*,

You see artisans but no men, thinkers but no men . . . is this not like a battlefield on which the hands and arms and all other limbs lie dismembered in heaps while the spilled life-blood seeps away in the sand . . . Yet that could be suffered if only such men need not be so devoid of feeling for all beautiful life.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> “Letters on the Aesthetical Education of Man,” Letter II. Kindle File. Horkheimer and Adorno develop these ideas into a full-fledged critique of modern day culture, which for them has lost much of its former independence and vitality, becoming indistinguishable from the motives that rule the market economy. “Culture today is infecting everything with sameness . . . Each branch of culture is unanimous within itself and all are unanimous together. Even the aesthetic manifestations of political opposites proclaim the same inflexible rhythm.” See *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. Edmond Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 94. For a modern treatment of Schiller’s *Spieltrieb* as a way of reinvigorating the creative life of culture, see Marcuse’s *Eros and Civilization* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1987).

<sup>201</sup> Friedrich Hölderlin, *Hyperion*, trans. Ross Benjamin (Brooklyn, NY: Archipelago Books, 2008), 206-7. Emerson introduces a similarly gruesome image of modern “man” in his famous address before Phi Beta

This is why the birth of a child is a source of such profound joy and pain, and why in her presence we are re-awakened to the promise of life and all we have unwittingly forfeited. We come face to face with our Lord and savior, judge and redeemer, and the Wisdom that was first “possessed” by the Lord and was “with” him before the beginning of time.<sup>202</sup> She reveals the depth and scope of our responsibility for the world, and all the ways we have failed to meet this responsibility, and perpetuate what Emerson calls the “smooth mediocrity and squalid contentment of the times.” She reminds us, as Schiller says, that, “Into your hands the dignity of man is given. Now keep it well! It sinks with you! With you, again, it rises.”<sup>203</sup> She demands everything of us, that we be the “great responsible Thinker and Actor” of our time, working to fulfill our destiny as creator gods. She reveals how we have forsaken this freedom for “names and customs,” for knowledge and the security of our daily bread. As Schelling says in *On Myths*:

As man grows toward higher activity, he forgets the images and dreams of his youth, and seeks to make nature comprehensible to his understanding. Previously he was a friend or son of nature, now he is its lawgiver; previously he wanted to experience himself in all of nature, now he wishes to explain all of nature in himself; previously he sought his image in the mirror of nature, now he seeks the archetype of nature in his understanding which is the mirror of everything.<sup>204</sup>

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Kappa Society, at Cambridge. “But unfortunately, this original unit, this fountain of power, has been so distributed to multitudes, has been so minutely subdivided and peddled out, that it is spilled into drops, and cannot be gathered. The state of society is one in which the members have suffered amputation from the trunk, and strut about so many walking monsters, — a good finger, a neck, a stomach, an elbow, but never a man.” See *The American Scholar*, 84.

<sup>202</sup> *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*, 164.

<sup>203</sup> Friedrich Schiller, *An Anthology for Our Time* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing CO. 1959), 7.

<sup>204</sup> Schelling, *Sämmtliche Werke*, vol. 1, 74.

But in this change, even though it is necessary to the growth of thought and civilization, we lose that vital link to life, that trust in our “own voice,” and instead of something alive we encounter something lifeless and mechanical. We all implicitly know this. It is shown each time we “lose” ourselves in her excitement for something we have long since forgotten, or our astonishment before a being that thinks, speaks and acts with such ease, candor and so little self-regard. We dimly perceive in these moments that we lack their openness to “phenomena” and that this openness is somehow our highest truth and calling. They arouse in us a desire to see as they see and to do as they do—to play as they play—to encounter each moment, each new experience for what is, an unexpected gift, before which we should bow in gratitude and expectation.

She is a living image of our relationship to the Absolute. She is a revelation of a Wisdom that surpasses all understanding, redeeming time through her simple, spontaneous act of play, play that “moves” and consecrates time from somewhere other than our world, the “inexpressible” ground from which grows “luminous thoughts” and new worlds, her (Wisdom’s) “inexpressibility” a condition of life and all vital movement.<sup>205</sup> As Schelling says, “Wisdom is compared to a child: a child can be called self-less when, in the earliest time, all of its inner forces work with each other, but without a will having come forth to hold them together and make itself their collective force and unity.”<sup>206</sup> The indeterminacy of her will represents the “saving power” and

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<sup>205</sup> *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*, 170.

<sup>206</sup> “One must in fact insist on this very inexpressibility, because it is necessary for the highest life . . . How would there be an impulse toward expressibility, articulation, or organic relation?” See *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*, 165.

danger, her indecision and unpredictability a source of fear and promise, heralding the blessing of creation as well as the terror of destruction. It is finally the difference between ground and existence and her existential struggle for unity in time.

She yearns, as all life does, for a world adequate to her deepest longing, to be recognized, understood and loved. As Schelling says,

In the same way, we see the whole of nature to be equally full of longing; the earth sucks the force of heaven into itself through countless mouths; the seed strives toward the light and air, in order to catch sight of an image, a spirit; the flower sways in the sun's rays in order to pull them into itself as color.<sup>207</sup>

Everything yearns for the life of spirit in this way, her life being exceptional only in that her play will one day rise above biological necessity to the play of culture, where she will discover herself in an image, "sucking the force of heaven," living and "contemplating the figures wild." She longs like Büchner's Lenz to experience the flux of life, to participate in every form, every process, to, as Thoreau says, "suck out all the marrow of life," and devour the Absolute in time.

He thought that it must be a feeling of endless bliss to be in contact with the profound life of every form, to have a soul for rocks, metals, water, and plants, to take into himself, as in a dream, every element of nature, like flowers that breathe with the waxing and waning of the moon.<sup>208</sup>

But she is not content with the happy play of forces; she is the anticipation of their future unity in time, where the force of the ground will one day enter into the service of spirit, bringing to light all that was formerly concealed. She is the liminal point between

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<sup>207</sup> *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*, 165.

<sup>208</sup> George Büchner, *Complete Plays and Prose*, trans. Carl Richard Mueller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1963), 141.

this dark, inexpressible force and the light of culture. She harbors a great capacity for love and renewal but she lacks the coherence that is the prerequisite to independence and growth in time. This is the nature of desiring-production at its purest, her pre-subjective life charged with all the volatility, unpredictability, and danger that accompanies new life. This is why she must become the “mediating” link binding matter and the “world of spirits,” going outside herself to find her “self,” to objectify to the world the “bright divinity” of creation. As Schelling says, still drawing on his earlier analogy of children and Wisdom, “And even in this early time, Wisdom’s pleasure was the creation that was destined to one day produce the link between matter and the world of spirits, and to be immediately receptive to Wisdom, although mediately receptive to the bright divinity.”<sup>209</sup>

She is the bringing to light of Wisdom. And what is Wisdom for Schelling? On the one hand, it is understanding grounded in the indescribable reality of the fundamental unity of life, where everything radiates divinity and the inner contradictions of time are overcome in the fullness of time. But we have become insensitive to her Wisdom and the call of truth. The fact that we even distinguish between aesthetic forms of experience and the commonplace reveals we somehow misunderstand her. Art attempts to compensate for an already established indifference to life. We feel life is lacking somehow and invent ways to fill the void we misdiagnose as the unfortunate but inescapable malady of existence. But this judgment, as Nietzsche shows us, is symptomatic of something else: decadence and decline. As he famously says at the beginning of *Twilight of the Idols*, “Concerning life, the wisest men of all ages have judged alike: *it is no good*. Always and

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<sup>209</sup> *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*, 165.

everywhere one has heard the same sound from their mouths—a sound full of doubt, full of melancholy, full of weariness of life, full of resistance to life.”<sup>210</sup> And what is the source of this judgment and the impulse to escape the “sickness” of the world? We do not love the world and see that it is as it should be, that it is already perfect, and the void at the center of our experience is produced rather than given, something to be overcome, not accepted. As *Zarathustra* asks, “Have you ever said Yes to a single joy? . . . ‘You please me, happiness! Abide, moment!’ then you wanted *all* back. All anew, all eternally, all entangled, ensnared, enamored—oh, then you *loved* the world.”<sup>211</sup>

Wisdom is the refutation of all this, of all that is false and anti-life. Her play by nature self-affirming, overloaded with all the vitality of genuine existence, rich with unsayable meanings that challenge the dull complacency of the times. She brings us back to the “naked that” of existence, where we stand before creation as if for the first time, before the wonder, majesty and terror of creation. As Emerson says,

When good is near you, when you have life in yourself, it is not by any known or accustomed way; you shall not discern the footprints of any other; you shall not see the face of man; you shall not hear any name—the way, the thought, the good, shall be wholly strange and new. It shall exclude example and experience.<sup>212</sup>

It is in these decisive, precious moments, when we no longer know who we are, where we are or where we are going, that we come closest to Wisdom and the fullness of time, when play replaces work, and joy resounds in the passionate encounter. It is finally

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<sup>210</sup> *The Portable Nietzsche*, 473.

<sup>211</sup> *The Portable Nietzsche*, 435.

<sup>212</sup> *Nature and Selected Writings*, 190.

something akin to the experience Whitman describes early on in *Leaves of Grass*, “I will go to the bank by the wood and become undisguised and naked, I am mad for it to be in contact with me . . . You shall no longer take things at second or third hand . . . nor look through the eyes of the dead . . . nor feed on the specters of books.”<sup>213</sup>

She is the bringing together of this intuitional state and the understanding, overcoming the demands of a child and the expectations of the world. For as important as the intuitional experience is to culture’s renewal, it is insufficient by itself, in the same way as a child needs a home and family to grow and flourish. As Schelling argues, “We do not live through intuitions. Our knowledge is incomplete (*Stückwerk*); that is, it must be produced piecemeal (*stückweis*) in sections and degrees, and this cannot occur in the absence of reflection.”<sup>214</sup> Intuition, like a child, must be carefully and painstakingly guided by mature reflection, even though she serves as its inexhaustible ground, if her play is to in turn guide and nourish the inner life of spirit.

But Wisdom is not simply the unity but the struggle of these worlds. Her unpredictable, sometimes violent protestations evidence enough of the conflictual nature of the relationship. On the one side, the force of the “reality principle;” on the other, the “will to power” that resists it, there inter-play the source and downfall of all worlds. As Schelling says, “Forsaken, Wisdom laments the lot of her creatures, that the children of her pleasure do not remain, but rather (stand) in perpetual struggle and through this struggle pass away again. But longing draws near, and the invisible too is thereby drawn

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<sup>213</sup> Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 27.

<sup>214</sup> *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*, 117.

to the visible.”<sup>215</sup> The still nascent interplay of ground and existence that defines her life is redoubled in her interaction with a world that demands too much and too little of her. In her own way she is the ever receding, inexpressible ground from which we and the life of spirit draws its strength and renews its struggle for existence. To fail her is to jeopardize everything that has come to pass. A way must be discovered to bring them together, to fulfill their competing demands, otherwise Wisdom is lost and life ends in anarchy or complacency, in terror or boredom.

In some exceptional moments, however, a miracle happens, when nature’s forces achieve a momentary reconciliation, and a new form is realized and we enter into a new and singular time. It may be the transformation that is so often effected in a home, when her arrival brings about the reformation of life. Or it can be a change more decisive in its scope and effects, what, for example, Nietzsche argues occurred in ancient Greece with the birth of tragedy—and briefly in Richard Wagner’s music-dramas (*Gesamtkunstwerk*)—when Dionysian forces and the Apollonian dream mastered for one brief moment the *agon* of time.

What Aeschylus and Sophocles accomplish is they strike the balance between the Apollonian impulse toward order, form and the “divine illusion” of heroic autonomy, and the Dionysian intoxication that swells beneath this surface, threatening to overwhelm and shatter it all, the incommensurable feelings of life reconciled with the “image of man” and the measured serenity and intelligibility of his world. It is what makes *Oedipus Rex* so compelling and the great masterwork of Attic tragedy. Oedipus’ self-certainty and

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<sup>215</sup> *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*, 165-6.

expectation that through his efforts health and peace will be restored to Thebes is part of the grand illusion that he—and everyone else—lives by, one that unwittingly fulfills a prophecy he can neither fathom nor control. By plays end, he is overcome by the swelling sound of the chorus—“And lo! In what a sea of direst woe he now is plunged”—his life drowned in a “sea of tone,” anguish and lamentation. In our collective experience of Oedipus’ downfall and the currents of sound that draw him under the Apollonian surface, we encounter something of the terrible though sublime truth of existence, the Dionysian ecstasy of sacrifice, dismemberment, and reunion with primordial reality. As Nietzsche says,

Under the charm of the Dionysian not only is the union of man and man reaffirmed, but nature which has become alienated, hostile, or subjugated, celebrates once more her reconciliation with her lost son, man . . . as if the veil of māyā had been torn aside and were now merely fluttering in tatters before the mysterious primordial unity.<sup>216</sup>

But the unity Nietzsche speaks of and Schelling draws us toward is not only the unity of universal accord but of discord, the playful creation and destruction of life as nature’s highest truth. He echoes Schelling’s earlier contention that, “Although men—in both living and knowing—seem to shy away from nothing so much as contradiction, they still must confront it, because life itself is in contradiction.”<sup>217</sup> And not just confront it but affirm it all, the tremendous joys and sufferings, dangers and exalted encounters, participating to the fullest extent possible in the awesome vitality of nature, while

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<sup>216</sup> Nietzsche, *Basic Writings*, 37.

<sup>217</sup> *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*, 124.

accepting that there is no resolution to the dissonance of life, save what the work of art accomplishes for us in our moments of greatest need.

With this chorus the profound Hellene . . . having looked boldly right into the terrible destructiveness of so-called world history as well as the cruelty of nature, and being in danger of longing for a Buddhist (i.e. Schopenhauerian) negation of the will. Art saves him, and through art—life.<sup>218</sup>

Art for Nietzsche is our one “metaphysical consolation,” without which life becomes intolerable, brutish. As Schelling argues, it has a “rejuvenating effect,” touching the “pulse of life” and “indescribable reality,” drawing us to the inexhaustible source of things. Life is fundamentally unjust to the aspirations of the individual, indifferent to the plight of “man,” at every turn thwarting her progress, unsparing in its final judgment. Art provides a way of compensating for this fact, even justifying our existence, delivering us over to “limitless and boundless” existence and the meanings we briefly achieve through our shared cultural life. But it does so only as long as we remain enthralled in those surging “peaks of rapture” that briefly illuminate our meaning from within, justifying our existence before the radiant image it awakens in us. Sooner or later we must return to everyday and then we see everywhere what Nietzsche describes as the “horror and absurdity of existence.”<sup>219</sup> The horror however is not just the everyday world seen in the aftermath of Dionysian rapture, with its “thirst for amusement,” “distraction at any cost,” “pomposity” and “brutal greed for money” but the Dionysian viewed from the

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<sup>218</sup> *Basic Writings*, 59.

<sup>219</sup> *Basic Writings*, 135.

safety and comfort of the everyday.<sup>220</sup> Life must range between both, keeping contact with the “ravishing,” life-renewing power of the Dionysian, while submitting in some measure to the “reality principle” and its saving-power before the disintegrating violence that threatens to overwhelm it. Lashed to the mast of the ship, Odysseus can hear and bear the Siren’s song without losing himself to it. Life simply cannot be sustained by spirit alone; it needs physical nourishment and the ballast of culture, with its normalizing conventions and practices, without which we risk shipwreck and the loss of everything we have for so long worked.

This final idea, how two contradictory forces can be brought together into an enduring, reciprocal relation, echoes Schelling in all the different registers his philosophy hits. The attractive and repulsive forces explored in the *Naturphilosophie* explain the controlled ontological spasms that give rise to nature and the wonder of all wonders, the human reality. Schelling then inverts this genealogy, retrospectively re-describing it in anthropocentric terms, where we are conceived as preparing—“deciding”—the way for our own appearance, the play of “ground” and “existence” now internalized in terms of a primordial imaging-machine. Now in the *Freiheitschrift* and *Die Weltalter* he completes this line of thought by invoking a divine imaging-machine and he does this in the strongest way imaginable: by drawing an absolute analogy between Wisdom and the play of children, who are the prologue to the coming of the Lord and the inaugural Word that will create and sustain a world. He shows this is a process that is repeated each time a child is born, blindly longing for a world that will reflect her deepest yearning for

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<sup>220</sup> Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 210

freedom and recognition—she yearns with creation to enter time.<sup>221</sup> She lives in dreams and, as Leonce says to Lena in Büchner's *Leonce and Lena*, “dreams are blessed. So dream yourself to blessings, and let me be your blessed dream.”<sup>222</sup>

This deeply romantic vision is rooted in the simple conviction that we have yet to enter time. As Schelling observes, “We can easily observe that it is no sufficient for a man's complete actuality that he merely be something or implicitly have something. In addition, he needs to become aware of what he is and what he has.”<sup>223</sup> What makes us aware of ourselves, of what we have, so we can put our talents and capacities to good effect? In one sense, as Schelling suggests here, it is the intersubjective life Fichte first noticed as the necessary condition of “human” life. But this is not what first draws us out of ourselves and into the light of understanding. As Schelling continues, “But both this thing-that-he-is and this being (that he has) are ineffective until a force is found that independent of both, that becomes aware of them both and activates them.”<sup>224</sup> And what is the force that accomplishes what has never been accomplished before?—Love.

Without love, nothing is revealed. There is nothing that guarantees divine revelation. The god could have chosen otherwise, and a child never born. “And it was

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<sup>221</sup> Again, by idea we mean a living or mobile structure that organizes a multiplicity of competing forces or “images,” and does so in a way that preserves and encourages the free-play of its members. In other words, a concept is not static but a working distillation of a duration or process. As Schelling argues, “They are neither merely universal concepts of the understanding (i.e. Kant), nor fixed models (i.e. Plato); for they are Ideas precisely because they are eternally full of life, in ceaseless motion and production.” See *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*, 161.

<sup>222</sup> George Büchner, *Leonce und Lena*, trans. David Wilson (Zürich: NordSüd Verlag, 2013), 28.

<sup>223</sup> *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*, 166.

<sup>224</sup> *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*, 167.

precisely the will that did not want revelation that had to be posited at the beginning.”<sup>225</sup>

Divine freedom does not dictate existence, only love does, and that is exactly what envelops creation in the beginning, the attractive force that draws Being out of its primordial concealment and into time. Creation must isolate itself and will contract so there might be something to “bear the grace (*Huld*) of the divinity and to carry it upward” but the countermovement of love is what is of decisive importance, because it alone overcomes the “wrath” and “violence” of the ground through the saving power of grace and the chance of existence.<sup>226</sup> A child is born of this love and bearer of this grace, a sign of a decision held in the grip of a promise. As Schelling concludes, “Thus, Wisdom played before the Lord, filled with childlike presentiment, and he saw in her what will one day be, as if it were a golden future in a youthful dream.”<sup>227</sup>

Why does Schelling in the *Freiheitschrift* and *Die Weltalter* change his vocabulary and begin to reference “maternal longing” and child’s play in place of the work of art, which was the focus of his earlier philosophy? As we mentioned at the beginning, the 1813 draft of *Die Weltalter* was written four years after the death of his wife, Caroline, and thirteen years after the death of her daughter, Auguste. The deeply felt language, the inconsolable longing, and a broken text that in some way reflects a “broken man” all point to a renewed appreciation for the fragility of life and an understanding that family and, especially, children are the living ground from which spirit rises or falls, grows or fails, surpassing in their own way the work of art itself.

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<sup>225</sup> *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*, 178-9.

<sup>226</sup> *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*, 179.

<sup>227</sup> *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*, 165fn.

For what other spiritual encounter demands so much, so often, for so long? What other relationship enlivens our inner resources and creative capacities as they do or gives us to see that the gods are already in our midst? What else can make us so ready to sacrifice everything for their future? The fact that there is no escape makes their implicit challenge to life all the more compelling and unavoidable, momentous and oppressive. We all casually acknowledge that the fate of our world lies in our children and theirs in ours but who can fathom the nature of this responsibility and all that it demands of us, especially when we try to think of it in Schelling's exacting terms?

The burden and tremendous joy of existence is that we are responsible for bringing gods into time, and this tremendous task demands that we carefully create and preserve a time for her coming, for she is a sign that they are ready to return and dwell in our midst. Everything Schelling ever wrote presses toward this one central idea and it is why he continually strives to link our lives and nature with the life of god. In his early work, human life and the natural world are seen as interdependent expressions of divine substance. Our arrival realizes the higher aspirations of spirit to exist in-and-for-itself (*an und für sich*). The central striving of his middle period, which includes *Die Weltalter*, concerns the moment of creation, when primordial longing is overcome in a child and a god entered time. Our lives matter. What we do with them matters, for, whether we know it or not, we carry the heavens and the heavens carry a child.

CHAPTER EIGHT: *BELOVED* AND THE GHOSTS OF CREATION

Weren't you always distracted by expectation, as if every event  
announced a beloved? (Where can you find a place  
to keep her, with all the huge strange thoughts inside you  
going and coming and often staying all night.)

-Rainer Maria Rilke, *Duino Elegies*

I want to see with my own eyes the hind lie down with the lion and the victim rise up and  
embrace the murderer. I want to be there when everyone suddenly understands what it  
has all been for. All religions emerge from this longing, and I am a believer. But then  
there are the children . . .

-Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*

We have made the searching claim, drawing on Schelling's brief but highly  
suggestive remarks in the *Freiheitschrift* and *Die Weltalter*, that the child is the answer to  
nature's inexpressible longing for creation and that time is somehow—however briefly—  
fulfilled in them, reendowed with all the wonder, terror and expectation of originary  
creation. We have argued with Schelling that it is not only appropriate but necessary to  
see in each child the reenactment of the divine imaging-event that first anticipates god's  
great breakthrough into time and, through their unassuming and spontaneous play, they  
create time anew, giving it new durations and expanding measures of resonance that defy

the indifference that would defile god's most precious gift. What we have not emphasized, though it has been an ever present feature of our discussion, are the ghosts—the irreducible remainders—in the machine of creation. If time is to be in any measure restored and creation liberated from the indifference and pain that everywhere thwarts its progress, then the ghosts have to be reckoned with, for their searching and impossible claims are unrelenting and inescapable. Ghosts are real and they demand a response, one that neither avoids nor conceals the traumas of time but allows them to hold us in their truth.

Toni Morrison accomplishes this and so much more in her book, *Beloved*, which concerns one family's attempt to come to grips with the profound traumas of the past, posing the still deeper Sophoclean question of whether not being born is perhaps the greatest boon of all.<sup>228</sup> In other words, *Beloved* is a profound challenge and counter-argument to Schelling's faltering idealism and everything we have argued for so far. It is important to stress that *Beloved* is not just a poetical response to these problems, even though it is highly lyrical and elegiac in tone and effect, a work of mourning as much as a work of hard won hope and promise, but a real argument that asks to be judged by the strength and rigor of its claims.

One of the strongest is that ghosts are real, that the dead remain, refusing to pass into the past. For the grandmother, Baby Suggs, there is nothing at all extraordinary in this. It is simply a fact of life, especially for blacks. "Not a house in the country ain't

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<sup>228</sup> *Beloved* is loosely based on an incident that occurred in 1856 when, Margaret Garner, a slave, escaped with her husband, Robert, and their family to Ohio, only to be discovered by U. S. Marshals and "Slave Catchers." Rather than surrender herself or her family to slavery, she planned to commit family suicide, but only succeeded in killing her two-year old daughter.

packed to the rafters with some dead Negro's grief. We lucky this ghost a baby."<sup>229</sup>

Ghosts are real both in terms of their spiritual effects and the way they impact physical reality, the outward signs of decay, despondency and ruin symptomatic of a deeper, inner struggle with time and its remainders. In fact, Morrison argues ghosts sabotage the realization of the present moment because they cannot be presented or overcome in time. This is why Sethe says, "So, Denver, you can't never go there (Sweet Home). Never. Because even though it's all over—over and done with—it's going to always be there waiting for you."<sup>230</sup> And this is because it is not "over and done with." This is the nature of traumatic durations and what makes their claim on the living so painful and insistent, compelling and oppressive. Morrison makes this clear at the beginning, saying,

The grandmother, Baby Suggs, was dead, and the sons, Howard and Buglar, had run away by the time they were thirteen years old—as soon as merely looking in a mirror shattered it (that was the signal for Buglar); as soon as two tiny hand prints appeared in the cake (that was it for Howard).<sup>231</sup>

The presence of the ghost prevents this family from coming together as family, undermining their best intentions and efforts, leading them inexorably to the heartbreaking physical and spiritual desolation of "124." Her sons, Howard and Buglar, seem to escape, but only from the house, not the ghost. And what prevents them from starting their life anew after escaping "Sweet Home," that place that "never looked as terrible as it was" with "boys hanging from the most beautiful sycamores in the world,"

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<sup>229</sup> *Beloved*, 6.

<sup>230</sup> *Beloved*, 44.

<sup>231</sup> *Beloved*, 3.

and after Sethe kills her baby daughter, is that a reality encounters them that cannot be represented. What Sethe has done is unthinkable in the same way as the solace the “men” of Sweet Home take in “fucking cows” and “dreaming of rape” defies explanation.<sup>232</sup> This is why the “mirror shatters”: it cannot hold in coherent form or “reflect” lives and bodies that have been broken and degraded beyond recognition. As Orwell knew, this is the power and ultimate effect of torture and pain, which has a “breaking function” like nothing else. Heidegger talks about the slowing of time in moods of boredom and anxiety. What he does not—and could not— incorporate into his analytic of Dasein is the experience of time in pain. Pain creates real eternities. The mind and body can be made to suffer endlessly and they can be made to think, believe, do, even desire unthinkable things—“Do it to Julia.” Pain can unmake a world and thwart its remaking, “dirty you so bad you forgot who you were and couldn’t think it up.” As Rorty argues, “The idea is to get her to do or say things—and, if possible, believe and desire things, think thoughts—which later she will be unable to cope with having done or thought.”<sup>233</sup> Morrison’s Schoolteacher parallels Orwell’s O’Brien in this regard exactly. Their only interest is the study of their subjects, not for the sake of learning, but for the purpose of discovering the “secret” that will produce the most exacting, depersonalizing pain possible. For Winston it is the “rats;” for Paul D, the chain-gang and Mister: and, for Hal, the “taking of Sethe’s milk.”

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<sup>232</sup> *Beloved*, 12-13.

<sup>233</sup> Richard Rorty, “Orwell on Cruelty,” in *Contingency, irony, and solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 177-8.

Afterwards, these men are irreparably broken, only Paul D recovers himself, and then, only in bits and pieces, and only because he is grasped by a stronger, higher force, Sethe. But even Sethe, “the quiet, queenly woman,” who “never looked away” from anything, is unable to make life whole again, to summon an image from which to found a new world. By stories end, Sethe’s inner resources have been nearly exhausted, having become a ghost of her former self—the ghost she always already was. Her brokenness recognized and in some measure healed in Paul D, the only one who can begin to fathom the depths from which Beloved emerged or her insatiable hunger for Sethe.

Morrison here goes beyond the argument that ghosts are real to the more radical claim that all there has ever been are ghosts, that creation is a ghost machine, that they are an inevitable, even necessary effect of being in time. Beloved is a ghost of time, a child of finitude, the remains of a decision. Sethe cannot fathom her depths because she is not exhausted by Sethe; she encompasses us all because she is born of us all. Beloved is our secret truth, she grows from within us and the “jungle” we planted. As Morrison argues,

But it wasn’t the jungle blacks brought with them to this place from the other (livable) place. It was the jungle whitefolks planted in them. And it grew. It spread. In, through and after life, it spread, until it invaded the whites who had made it. Touched them every one. Changed and altered them . . . The screaming baboon lived under their own white skin; the red gums were their own.<sup>234</sup>

She is the sign of all that we have done and failed to do. She grows in our forgetfulness and indifference, in our negligence and cruelty, her insatiable claim on life

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<sup>234</sup> *Beloved*, 234.

a looming judgment as well as a promise, because above all Beloved longs to be seen and heard, felt and loved. She, like those she haunts, longs for the saving Word that could surrender her to the past with a dignity she never possessed in life. And yet, there is no saving Word capable of righting the wrongs of the past.

This helps explain her physical incarnation. She desire's Sethe, she wants to physically and spiritually repossess the mother who abandoned her to the "Ghosts without skin (who) stuck their fingers in her and said beloved in the dark and bitch in the light."<sup>235</sup> She demands everything of Sethe and Sethe obeys but she cannot give her the one thing she most desires—the sense of wholeness that comes with genuine recognition and understanding. She cannot give this because Beloved is finally a mirror of Sethe's own brokenness. They are both apparitions of aborted life and unfulfillable longing, drifting through an eternity of pain, made palpable in the desolation of "124," where nothing, not even the light, escapes intact. They become more or less what Baby Suggs says of her first born, "disremembered memories." "All I can remember of her is how she loved the burned bottom of bread. Can you beat that? Eight children and that's all I remember." They are bits and pieces of dismembered memory, "disremembered."<sup>236</sup>

The "burned bottom" of bread does not occasion anything for Baby Suggs as the famous "madeleine cake" incident did for the narrator of *In Search of Lost Time*, one that restores and in some measure saves a world that has been lost and forgotten.<sup>237</sup> There is

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<sup>235</sup> *Beloved*, 284.

<sup>236</sup> *Beloved*, 6.

<sup>237</sup> Marcel Proust, in *In Search of Lost Time*, introduces the idea of "involuntary memory," when an everyday experience unexpectedly evokes the recollection of some past event, as suddenly happens to the

nothing but the “burned bottom” of bread and the memory that her first born loved it. That is all. No world is occasioned, no further meaning discovered, no maternal feeling reawakened, because there is no world in which to grow and live out the becoming of family, hence Baby Suggs’ stern admonition not to “love anything too much.” What has not been lost however and what returns involuntarily and with extreme prejudice is the pain of this loss. As Sethe says,

Nothing else would be in her mind . . . Then something.  
The splash of water, the sight of her shoes and stockings  
awry on the path . . . and suddenly there was Sweet Home  
rolling, rolling, rolling out before her eyes, and although  
there was not a leaf on that farm that did not make her want  
to scream, it rolled itself out before her in shameless  
beauty.

Unlike Proust, Morrison is searching for a way to surrender this past to the past, to allow it to hold us in its truth without destroying us in the process. Sethe unconsciously longs for this too, she yearns, like *Beloved*, for the saving Word that would release her from the past and open her to the seemingly hopeless prospect of a future. *Beloved*’s power grows from Sethe’s inability to discover the Word that would absolve her actions, just like Plato fails to discover the question that would liberate the soul from ignorance. There is simply no reason she can give to justify herself before *Beloved* and no answer to *Beloved*. “Sethe pleaded for forgiveness, counting, listing again and again her reasons . . . *Beloved* denied it.”<sup>238</sup> This is because there is no “reason” to what she did; her fateful

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narrator when he tastes a madeleine cake dipped in tea. See “Swann’s Way,” in *In Search of Lost Time*, trans. C. K. Scott Moncrieff (New York: Random House, 1934), 34.

<sup>238</sup> *Beloved*, 284.

decision decided outside of time, carrying the inestimable weight of eternity by deciding the impossible—the unthinkable.

This fact also explains why Paul D, who represents the “masculine” principle of reason and order, who from the time of his arrival seems to herald their deliverance, fails to complete them as family. His first encounter with the ghost ends triumphantly, with her departure and the promise of peace and new life. He immediately assumes the role of husband and father, lover and confidant, his strength revealed in the profound cathartic effect his presence evokes in Sethe, a man who could “walk into a house and make the women cry.” He inserts himself into the void of “124,” penetrates it, takes command of it, bringing light to the darkness, founding through his presence a new world. Before, “There was no room for any other thing or body until Paul D arrived and broke up the place, making room, shifting it, moving it over to someplace else, then standing in the place he had made.”<sup>239</sup> But this world does not last. No sooner does the ghost leave than Beloved emerges from the swamp, this time physically reclaiming “124.” Upon her arrival, Paul D is gradually, almost imperceptibly displaced as the emerging center of the family—“She moved him.” Before he understands what is happening, he finds himself living out of the shed, no longer finding comfort or “his” place inside the house, and, then, as if to seal his fate, Beloved seduces him. This time no world emerges, only a void. Stripped of his manhood and native power, she delivers him over to his own demons, to drown his sorrows, homeless.

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<sup>239</sup> *Beloved*, 47.

What they all have in common, from Sethe to Denver to Paul D, is a profound desire not just to go on but to achieve a dignity that has so far been denied them, to discover a Word and a reason that would ease their pain. What makes their lives so unbearable and leads them to the edge of madness is there pain has no greater meaning or purpose. They are alienated from it because it has none, their pain signifying the incomprehensible—they were made to suffer. And yet, in the midst of their destitution, there is something at work in them that they cannot fathom, that draws them toward the impossible, their salvation.

This is what is so powerfully suggested in the retelling of the Denver's birth story and the pain she experienced whenever she would try and stop to rest. "But she could not, would not stop, for when she did the little antelope rammed her with horns and pawed the ground of her womb with impatient hooves."<sup>240</sup> A little later, she wonders why of all things "she thought of an antelope." She has no memory of the word, of its meaning or use, or why she thought of it in a moment of crisis. Like her, this word has no home. It is abandoned, homeless. It fails its object, even though it is overloaded with meaning, memory and the saving power to release Sethe from her past. She cannot know all that it signifies and holds in perpetual trust. She cannot see that the antelope is summoning her to herself, to her alienated past, a past she has never known, and, that in telling this story, she is conjuring, as if by magic, humanity's own nativity, that she is somehow our primordial mother. But she has no way of knowing this. To her the antelope is—and always will be—just another animal, a chance, possibly "invented," image, but not the

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<sup>240</sup> *Beloved*, 36.

image of her salvation. Sethe is barred from this knowledge and its redeeming power. It longs like *Beloved* to speak its truth, to be heard and remembered. But she and the antelope never find their way.

Sethe is alienated from the Word by the fact that she speaks the antelope in another's tongue: she thinks it in another's thought. She does not speak in her own voice, her "own" native tongue. She never has, even though she thinks she speaks for herself out of the truth she believes to be hers. In fact, she does not so much speak the other's language as it speaks her into its truth. She is acting out of an interpretation and a life not her own. She is a slave to this interpretation. It is for this reason that she is most truly a slave when she thinks herself most free. The same is true of Winston in *1984*. When he writes "Freedom is the freedom to say that two plus two makes four," Winston is unwittingly living out the destiny that has already been decided by O'Brien, which will climax with the "rats." Sethe is literally made in another's image, Garner's, then Schoolteacher's. While Garner is a benevolent master compared to Schoolteacher, conferring on her and the men of Sweet Home a dignity his neighbors deem dangerous and unconscionable, the simple fact remains that they are not their own, which becomes terrifyingly clear when Garner dies and Schoolteacher arrives.

Slaves are not just found but made. In a Kantian turn, slaves are constructed before they appear. This fact is fully revealed in the "chokecherry" tree that grows on Sethe's back, the final physical humiliation that followed the "taking of her milk." The scar is not just a sign of physical violence but a sign that she is the property of Sweet Home and, like a cattle brand, it signifies where and to whom she belongs.

Baby Suggs knows all this and denies Sethe the benefit of the illusions she tacitly accepts and unwittingly promotes. She knows they have no real connection to “their” ancient past and she knows there is no final saving Word. It is imaginary, inaccessible, an after-image of their enslavement, framed and perpetuated within an-other’s symbolic universe. Sethe’s every word and thought, her every action is overdetermined by this universe. It is what leads her to inexplicably defend “them” before Baby Suggs, after all “they” have done.

‘They got me out of jail,’ Sethe once told Baby Suggs.  
‘They also put you in it,’ she answered.  
‘They drove you cross the river.’  
‘On my son’s back.’  
‘They gave you this house.’  
‘Nobody *gave* me nothing.’  
‘I got a job from them.’  
‘He got a cook from them, girl.’  
‘Oh, some of them do all right by us.’  
‘And every time it’s a surprise, ain’t it?’  
‘You didn’t use to talk this way.’  
‘Don’t box with me. There’s more of us they drowned than there is all of them ever lived from the start of time.’<sup>241</sup>

So if they—and we—are barred the saving power of the Word, how do they come to be liberated from *Beloved* and in some measure restored to life? Morrison’s unexpected answer is that what they cannot do *Beloved* can, because she inhabits two different worlds, two different times, and she is the point of their violent intersection, the warping point of time into a “single unwavering line of fate.” *Beloved* is their shared fate—their shared duration—and she longs to be recognized and this longing demands a

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<sup>241</sup> *Beloved*, 287.

certain kind of response, one that is open and available to her unshakeable claim on life. She appears as our judge and redeemer, a harbinger of vengeance or grace, and how she comes depends on how we receive her.

What makes her tremendous challenge so difficult to accept and why life is so often crippled by it is that Beloved does not just signify Sethe's dead baby girl, she encompasses our entire traumatic past, she lives by it, and draws her strength from it. She is the visible sign of an indivisible remainder: time. She is so much more than the sum total of past violences, her appearance in some measure a necessary outcome of Being and time. If Kojève is right in his interpretation of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* that our "human reality"—i.e. historical time—comes to light only in the "fight to the death for recognition" and history is the history of misrecognition, then the inhuman remainders of history are not accidental to time but its necessary condition. If Hegel's *Phenomenology* is stripped of its eschatological trappings, it becomes a spectral phenomenology and, with them, a failed attempt to exorcise the ghosts from time. Beloved is the underlying condition of the *Phenomenology*, its animating principle, its disavowed ground, growing in strength as the *Phenomenology* progresses toward its final, consummating act: the unleashing of spirit from the confines of history. Beloved's arrival is only possible in the wake of Hegel's accomplishment and failure. She is nothing less than the overcoming of the Concept by spirit, of history by its ghosts.

To wrestle with Beloved, then, is to struggle with time, with ourselves as beings-toward-death, whose meaning is not given but invented, created not found. We are that ontological rupture in Being and time from which Beloved's power grows. We have no

ready-made way of dealing with her save the stories we tell as we try and cope with the trauma of being alive.

It is no accident that after “sweets” stories are Beloved’s favorite thing. She needs them like food and she devours them when they are made available. “It became a way to feed her. Just as Denver discovered and relied on the delightful effect sweet things had on Beloved, Sethe learned the profound satisfaction Beloved got from storytelling.”<sup>242</sup> And there is initially a cathartic effect this exchange provides. Sethe finds pleasure in telling her story; the act relieves her of the past, her pain now a strange source of enjoyment (*jouissance*). She becomes lighter in the telling, gradually emaciated, transparent, while Beloved grows larger, becoming by degrees overstuffed with the past. She desires Sethe—and Sethe her—all the time, until there is once again no time, only an eternity of misunderstanding and pain. The halcyon time lasts only as long as Sethe misrecognizes Beloved. Once she discovers the fateful scar in the “kootchy-kootchy-coo place under the chin,” she sees her as her own, and everything changes, with Sethe unable to defend herself against her relentless, sweeping judgments.

After this, their shared life unravels, their spiritual destitution now mirrored by their physical isolation. All that remains is the ghost. Sethe has become indistinguishable from Beloved, an apparition made weak by “time and fate,” the ghost she has been from the beginning. Deprived of her illusions, she is delivered over to the Real of desire, to the nameless and unnamable void that she has become. She has no time and none of its familiar trappings, only an eternity of life-denying pain.

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<sup>242</sup> *Beloved*, 68.

But then, unexpectedly, a miracle. The black community, which, until now, has rejected Sethe, turning a blind and callous eye to her suffering, come together to intervene on her behalf, to rid “124” of its ghost. They do so because Denver, who, until now, has remained in the thrall of Beloved, acting as her most fierce and loyal defender, begins to recognize the irreparable harm that is being done her and her mother. She seeks autonomy and understanding; she finds both, first in a job with Bodwin, then in the unexpected kindness of Ella. Ella is the decisive turning point in the story because, “She understood Sethe’s rage in the shed twenty years ago, but not her reaction to it, which Ella thought was prideful, misdirected, and Sethe herself too complicated.”<sup>243</sup> In the aftermath of that decision, Ella turned from her, “junked her.” But now it is Ella who brings the community together to save Sethe. This “new” movement is made possible only by an implicit acknowledgment of shared complicity and responsibility. Beloved is not the sole product of Sethe’s actions but the consequence of all the relationships and decisions that conditioned such an unthinkable act. This is what Ella and the others begin to see and it is what ultimately galvanizes their response. They bear some responsibility for what has happened to this family and it is this conscious acceptance of responsibility for an-other’s past and an-other’s pain that brings about the great breakthrough into time. They recognize that their fate is somehow tied to Sethe’s. This simple, yet profound “turn” transforms Beloved from a harbinger of vengeance into time’s redeemer. She is no longer overstuffed with the pain of the past; she is pregnant with it, her suffering now the pain of new life.

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<sup>243</sup> *Beloved*, 299.

The story climaxes with Sethe and Beloved stepping onto the porch, with Denver in the yard waiting for Bowden and Ella and her congregation of singers singing before the house, full of expectation, wonder and terror.

The devil child was clever, they thought. And beautiful. It had taken the shape of a pregnant woman, naked and smiling in the heat of the afternoon sun. Thunderblack and glistening, she stood on long straight legs, her belly big and tight. Vines of hair twisted all over her head. Jesus. Her smile was dazzling.<sup>244</sup>

Beloved is transformed in this brief paragraph into the crucified savior “standing on long straight legs,” as our judge and redeemer. She appears adorned with a crown of “twisted hair,” smiling before us all. Jesus. She appears this way because “they” are prepared to receive her this way. And in that moment, a god enters time and something becomes available for the first time: a future. And this future is announced and made possible by Beloved, just as the Messianic dimension of time is opened through Jesus. This may seem a strange and forced analogy but only if we think of Jesus and Beloved in terms of what they have come to represent and not in terms of their underlying truth. Beloved and Jesus are not objects of knowledge but of “faith.” They are both divine incarnations of an eternal duration. When approached as objects, their truth withdraws, appearing absurd, even vengeful. It simply cannot be given objectively, as Hegel had argued, only “inwardly” in a moment of faith, which risks everything and promises nothing. Heidegger once remarked that the movement toward genuine “belonging together” cannot be conceptually engineered because, “This move is a leap in the sense of

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<sup>244</sup> *Beloved*, 308.

a spring. This spring is the abruptness of the unbridged entry into that belonging which alone can grant a toward-each-other of man and Being, and thus the constellation of the two.”<sup>245</sup> This is why every effort to explain or narrate the event comes up short of its truth and why “letting-go” is so important to its realization. In “letting-go” the event is given a time to traumatize, to do its work, to build us into its way. It is no accident Jesus was a carpenter, his earthly calling reflecting his higher divine vocation as a builder of new worlds, in exactly the same way as Hegel sees in Napoleon the historical realization of this divine imperative, the summary judgments and violence of the event a prologue to the wonder of new community. What matters is that we have the courage of the event; that we are open to all that it asks us of us; that we have faith in its power to “turn” us to new ways of being-in-the-world.

And what is the object of this faith? Isn’t it the chance of a real future, where life becomes again possible. And isn’t this future most tangibly experienced in the birth of a child, the objective sign of an implicit yearning and promise that grounded the coming together of two people, a community, and a world. It is all too easy to forget who Beloved is, especially given all she comes to imply and accomplish for Morrison. But in the beginning, Beloved, like Jesus, is simply, innocently a child.

Morrison is inviting us to abandon the habit of thinking the event as something past, done and finished and to experience it as that which is always already at hand, growing from within the duration that emerges with our time. To be faithful to “their”

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<sup>245</sup> Heidegger was indebted to Søren Kierkegaard for this idea but he does not understand the movement unilaterally as Kierkegaard does but thinks the leap as a “coming-together” in mutual appropriation and belonging. See Heidegger, *Identity & Difference*, trans. J. Stambaugh (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 32-3. For a moving account of Kierkegaard’s conception of the “leap of faith,” see *Fear and Trembling*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

truth is finally to be faithful to ours. We too were once children and the implicit claim we made upon life remains—the crucified savior is as much a child as a man. The children we once were live on in us and out in the world, not so much in our present moment, which so often fails them, but in our individual and shared futures. We are as much haunted by ourselves as by the “others.” Our truth is delivered at the moment of our creation to this time, where it waits to be reclaimed by us. This is powerfully suggested at the end when Sethe finally breaks down, saying, “She left me . . . She was my best thing.” Paul D then makes the decisive correction: “‘You your best thing, Sethe. You are’.” His fingers are holding hers. ‘Me? Me?’”<sup>246</sup> Sethe’s final question breaks Beloved’s hold and brings her back to herself, just before she repossesses her-self, not as she is or as she was but as she has never been. She comes to herself as a question, one that opens her to the most important thing she has never had: a future—her future. We are the “ones” we have been longing for and, when we know this, we open ourselves to the one thing we have longed for since time immemorial—the gift of life and the fellowship of community.

It is not the sort of grand high minded community first envisioned by Plato then Hegel. It is a much more modest vision but, what it lacks in scope and completeness, it makes up for in its generosity of spirit. All that truly matters is that we find those who can “hear” our story, who come as friends, who somehow get us through to tomorrow.

Thomas Mann once warned that his *Doctor Faustus* should not be taken as a “higher interpretation of the crude event” (the Second World War), even though, as

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<sup>246</sup> *Beloved*, 322.

Safranski argues, this is exactly what it became, depriving it its truth by rendering it sublime.<sup>247</sup> Morrison and Schelling are different. They abandon the Romantic hope that the “crude event” can or should be mastered or given a “higher” meaning or purpose. They don’t even try, instead allowing it to reveal them in its truth, to speak them into its meaning, its purpose. This is why *Die Weltalter* and *Beloved* end in the silence of an unanswerable question—“It was not a story to pass on”—that draws them and us beyond ourselves, beyond the “clamor of Being” to that innermost truth waiting in the wings to be born. It is not Schelling or Morrison that summon this truth. They are drawn to it from out of the mysterious depths of time, toward that which is “mute and cannot express what is enclosed within it.”<sup>248</sup> They are the acting-out of a world in the making, “eternally young,” themselves in the process of an eternal beginning, becoming the truth that makes of them a “witness to a time before the world,” when the world’s remainders are drawn together, enclosed within a promise.<sup>249</sup>

Sixto once said of Thirty-Mile Woman, “She is a friend of my mind. She gather me, man. The pieces I am, she gather them and give them back to me in all the right order. It’s good, you know, when you got a woman who is a friend of your mind.”<sup>250</sup> The Romantic dream and grand narratives that for so long defined the inner spirit of Western civilization are gone and, in their place is something much more personal,

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<sup>247</sup> Safranski, Rüdiger, *Romanticism: A German Affair*, trans. Robert E. Goodwin (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2014), 254.

<sup>248</sup> *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*, 114.

<sup>249</sup> *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*, 114.

<sup>250</sup> *Beloved*, 321.

fragile and comforting, a well-worn patchwork of lost souls loosely “quilted” together, trying to find their way back to the future.

He wants to put his story next to hers. “Sethe”, he says,  
“me and you, we got more yesterday than anybody.  
We need some kind of tomorrow.”<sup>251</sup>

For now, this may be enough.

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<sup>251</sup> *Beloved*, 322.

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