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MYTHOLOGY, MADNESS, AND LAUGHTER

Subjectivity in German Idealism

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continuum

Continuum International Publishing Group
The Tower Building
11 York Road
London SE1 7NX

80 Maiden Lane
Suite 704
New York NY 10038

www.continuumbooks.com

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: HB: 978-1-4411-9105-2

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Gabriel, Markus, 1980-
Mythology, madness, and laughter: subjectivity in german idealism/Markus Gabriel and Slavoj Zizek.
p. cm.
ISBN-13: 978-1-4411-9105-2 (HB)
ISBN-10: 1-4411-9105-4 (HB)
1. Idealism, German. 2. Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, 1770-1831. 3. Schelling, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von, 1775-1854. 4. Fichte, Johann Gottlieb, 1762-1814. I. Žižek, Slavoj. II. Title.

B2745.G33 2009
141.0943–dc22 2009008265

Typeset by Newgen Imaging Systems Pvt Ltd, Chennai, India
Printed and bound in Great Britain by the MPG Books Group

Contents

Introduction: A Plea for a Return to Post-Kantian Idealism

Markus Gabriel and Slavoj Žižek

Although an insurmountable abyss seems to separate Kant's critical philosophy from his great idealist successors (Fichte, Schelling, Hegel), the basic coordinates which render Post-Kantian Idealism possible are already clearly discernible in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. The original motivation for doing philosophy is a metaphysical one, to provide an explanation of the totality of noumenal reality; as such, this motivation is illusory, it prescribes an impossible task.[1] This is why Kant's explicit motivation is a critique of all possible metaphysics (which is not yet science). Kant's endeavor thus necessarily comes after the fact of metaphysics: in order for there to be a critique of metaphysics, there first has to be an original metaphysics; in order to denounce the metaphysical 'transcendental illusion,' this illusion first has to occur. In this precise sense, Kant was 'the inventor of the philosophical history of philosophy'[2]: there are necessary stages in the development of philosophy, i.e., *one cannot directly get at truth*, one cannot begin with it, philosophy necessarily began with metaphysical illusions.[3] Post-Kantian Idealists share Kant's preoccupation with transcendental illusion but argue that illusion (appearance) is constitutive of the truth (being). This is what this whole book is about.[4]

According to Post-Kantian Idealists, the path from illusion to its critical denunciation is the very movement of philosophy, which means that the

successful ('true') philosophy is no longer defined by its truth-apt discursive explanation (or representation) of the totality of being, but by successfully accounting for illusions, i.e., by explaining not only why illusions are illusions, but also why they are structurally necessary, unavoidable, why they are not just accidents. The occurrence of illusions is necessary for the eventual emergence of truth, an idea Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel inherited from Kant.[5] The 'system' of philosophy thus no longer represents the alleged ontological structure of reality, but becomes a complete system of all metaphysical statements. The proof of the illusory nature of metaphysical propositions in the traditional sense consists in an argument to the effect that they necessarily engender antinomies (contradictory conclusions). Since metaphysics attempts to avoid the very antimonies which emerge when we make our metaphysical commitments downright explicit, the 'system' of critical philosophy is the complete – and therefore self-contradictory, 'antinomic' – series of metaphysical notions and propositions: 'Only the one who can look through the illusion of metaphysics can develop the most coherent, consistent system of metaphysics, because the consistent system of metaphysics is also contradictory'[6] – that is to say, precisely, *inconsistent*.[7]

The critical 'system' amounts to a presentation (*Darstellung*) of the systematic *a priori* structure of all possible/thinkable 'errors' in their immanent necessity, thus preparing the ground for Hegel's 'presentation of appearing knowledge (*Darstellung des erscheinenden Wissens*)'[8]: what we get at the end is not the Truth that overcomes/sublates the preceding illusions – the only truth is the inconsistent edifice of the logical interconnection of all possible illusions . . . This shift from the representation of metaphysical Truth to the truth of the shift from error to error is exactly what Hegel presented in his *Phenomenology* (and, at a different level, in his *Logic*). The only (but crucial) difference is that, for Kant, this 'dialogic' process of truth emerging as the critical denouncing of the preceding illusion is restricted to the sphere of our knowledge, i.e. to epistemology, and does not concern the noumenal reality which remains external and indifferent to it, while, for Hegel, the proper *locus* of this process is the Thing itself. Like Hegel, the later Fichte and Schelling ultimately locate the necessary displacement of truth, the necessity of error, in the noumenal itself.[9] In other words, the relative occurs within the absolute. The absolute is not distinguished from its contingent manifestations. It loses the status of a substance underlying the illusory

appearances and becomes the movement of a self-othering without which the illusion of a substance could not take place. The traditional hierarchy of substance and accident is thus completely inverted. The accidents take over and dissolve substance into a misleading appearance.

In our view, the reason for this ontological overcoming of epistemological dichotomies (appearances vs. the thing in itself; necessity vs. freedom etc.) can indeed be motivated by the Post-Kantian insight that the very mode of appearance occurs within the noumenal. If we oppose the noumenal and the phenomenal in terms of an account of the finitude of knowledge we blind ourselves to the fact that this opposition *ex hypothesi* occurs within the noumenal itself. Otherwise put, the whole domain of the representation of the world (call it mind, spirit, language, consciousness, or whatever medium you prefer) needs to be understood as an event within and of the world itself. Thought is not at all opposed to being, it is rather being's replication within itself.

In what, then, does the break between Kant and Post-Kantians consist? Kant sets out with our cognitive capacities. The apparatus of our cognitive capacities is affected by (noumenal) things and, through its active synthesis, organizes affections into phenomenal reality. However, once Kant arrives at the ontological result of his critique of knowledge (the distinction between phenomenal reality and the noumenal world of Things-in-themselves), 'there can be no return to the self. There is no plausible interpretation of the self as a member of one of the two worlds.'[10] This is where practical reason enters the picture: the only way to return from ontology back to the domain of the Self is freedom. Freedom unites the two worlds, and it provides the ultimate maxim of the Self: 'subordinate everything to freedom.'[11]

Yet, at this point a gap between Kant and his followers is opened up. For Kant, freedom is an 'irrational,' i.e. unexplainable 'fact of reason,' it is simply and inexplicably *given*, something like the umbilical cord inexplicably rooting our experience in the unknown noumenal reality. While Kant would refuse to regard freedom as the first theoretical principle out of which one can develop a systematic notion of reality, Post-Kantian Idealists from Fichte onwards transgress the limit constitutive of noumenal freedom in Kant's sense and endeavor to provide the systematic account of freedom itself. Freedom's self-explication assumes a different shape. Freedom is no longer opposed to necessity, it does not remain a transcendent postulate, but becomes an inherent feature of being as

such. For precisely this reason, Schelling in his *Essay on Human Freedom* recommends a 'higher realism' of freedom:

> It will always remain odd, however, that Kant, after having first distinguished things-in-themselves from appearances only negatively through their independence from time and later treating independence from time and freedom as correlate concepts in the metaphysical discussions of his *Critique of Practical Reason*, did not go further toward the thought of transferring this only possible positive concept of the in-itself also to things; thereby he would immediately have raised himself to a higher standpoint of reflection and above the negativity that is the character of his theoretical philosophy.[12]

The status of the limits of knowledge changes with German Idealism. The epistemological finitude of reason which cannot legitimately be transgressed without generating metaphysical nonsense for the Idealists indicates the limitations of Kantian reflection. They believe that Kant got stuck half-way, whereas from a thoroughly Kantian perspective, his idealist successors completely misunderstood his critical project and fell back into pre-critical metaphysics or, worst even, mystical *Schwärmerei*.

Accordingly, there are mainly two versions of the passage from Kant to German Idealism which respectively result from the unfortunate and often even hostile dividing line within contemporary philosophy. Philosophers who characterize themselves by belonging to the analytic tradition (a term which, as a matter of fact, denotes at the most a family resemblance of methods) tend to believe that Kant is the last traditional philosopher who, at least partially, 'makes sense.' Until most recently, analytic philosophers defined themselves by a deep hostility towards the Post-Kantian turn of German philosophy and (in the wake of Moore and Russell) regarded it as one of the greatest catastrophes, as a bunch of undisciplined regressions into meaningless speculation and so forth. On the other hand, there is a group of philosophers who deem the Post-Kantian speculative-historical approach to philosophical thought the highest achievement of philosophy which we have not yet even fully understood. They believe that many of the central insights of German Idealism still wait to be translated into contemporary philosophy. However, the latter group of philosophers tends to neglect those features of German Idealism which, at first glance, do not appear to be translatable into contemporary philosophy. Yet, we firmly believe that it is an

important task of contemporary philosophy to create new possibilities of expression out of an original approach to the problem of subjectivity in German Idealism.

There are roughly speaking two perspectives on the turn from Kant to Post-Kantian Idealism. (1) According to the first approach, Kant correctly claims that the gap of finitude only allows for a negative access to the noumenal, while Hegel's absolute idealism, to name one example, dogmatically closes the Kantian gap and returns to pre-critical metaphysics. (2) According to the second approach, Kant's destruction of metaphysics does not even go far enough, because it still maintains the reference to the Thing-in-itself as an external, albeit inaccessible entity. Seen from this vantage point, Hegel merely radicalizes Kant, by offering a transition from a negative access to the Absolute to the Absolute itself as negativity.

In this volume, we will defend a reading along the lines of (2). However, we will not just offer another perspective of the transition from Kant to Hegel. We will rather focus on some widely neglected features of Post-Kantian Idealism which speak in favor of our overall thesis: *German Idealism was designed to effectuate a shift from epistemology to a new ontology without simply regressing to pre-critical metaphysics. It locates the gap between the alleged absolute (the thing in itself) and the relative (the phenomenal world) within the absolute itself. It is a crucial duty of contemporary Post-Kantian Idealism to make sense of this shift in order to contribute to the overcoming of epistemology as prima philosophia.*

If totality exists, then it necessarily remains incomplete if we continue to exclude error from truth. Error, illusion, misunderstanding, negativity, finitude, etc. are necessary preconditions for an adequate, non-objectified understanding of the absolute as the opening up of a domain within which determinate (finite) objects can appear.

As Slavoj Žižek argues, Hegel's decisive move draws on the dialectical insight that our incomplete knowledge of the thing turns into a positive feature of the thing which (qua finite, determinate object) is in itself incomplete and inconsistent. This is the Hegelian shift from the epistemological obstacle to the positive ontological condition of appearance. In other words, Hegel does not 're-ontologize' the Kantian framework. On the contrary, Kant's philosophy needs to be properly 'de-ontologized,' insofar as it conceives the gap of finitude as merely epistemological, insofar as he continues to presuppose (or postulate) the vision of a fully

constituted noumenal realm existing *out there*. The Post-Kantian destruction of this potentially damaging remainder of ontology consists in transposing the gap into the very texture of reality. In other words, Fichte's, Schelling's, and Hegel's move is not to 'overcome' the Kantian division, but, rather, to assert it 'as such,' to drop the need for the additional 'reconciliation' of the opposites. Through a purely formal, parallactic shift, Post-Kantian Idealism gains the insight that the reflective positing of the distinction constitutive of finitude already is the reconciliation.[13] Kant's failure lies thus not so much in his remaining within the confines of finite oppositions, in his inability to reach the infinite, but, on the contrary, in his very longing for a transcendent domain beyond or behind the realm of finite oppositions: Kant is not unable to reach the infinite, because there is no such 'thing' as the infinite waiting to be discovered. This is why Kantian reflection always already inhabits the allegedly transcendent realm of freedom. Our freedom consists in the ability to draw the distinction constitutive of finitude.

To acquire a more precise insight into the uniqueness of Post-Kantian Idealism, it is also possible to access it from the other end of history, that is from the vantage point of Post-Hegelian anti-philosophy and its criticism of the idea of a 'mirror of nature' (Rorty), i.e. of representationalism as such. Post-Hegelian anti-representationalism in its various disguises (deconstruction, post-structuralism, neo-pragmatism, and so forth) seems to debunk the language of representation/appearance altogether. Instead, it emphasizes the excess of the pre-conceptual productivity of Being or nature over its representation: representation is reduced to truth-apt discourse which is rooted in the productive ground of what there really is. Whereas Hegelianism still seems to operate on a transcendental level, apparently ascribing the power of world production to an absolute subjectivity, Post-Hegelian anti-philosophy is characterized by the introduction of a determination of self-determination that cannot be dissolved into the movement of a self-othering of absolute subjectivity. As Walter Schulz has argued in his influential book *The Completion of German Idealism in Schelling's Late Philosophy*, Post-Hegelian anti-philosophy which already begins with the later Fichte and Schelling defines itself as 'mediated self-mediation (*vermittelte Selbstvermittlung*).'[14] The subject is thrown into a process of self-mediation it ultimately neither controls nor triggers. The subject, in other words, turns out to be the result of an inversion which alienates the subject from its alleged

capacity to transparently manage itself. The later Schelling refers to this process in terms of an 'ecstasy' of the subject or, even more fundamentally, as an 'uni-versio,' an inversion of the One.

> If we regard the process that we postulate here or rather whose possibility we indicated in general, this process appears to be a process of inversion, that is to say, of an inversion of the One, of the pre-actual Being, of the prototype of all existence, for that which is the subject, –A, becomes the object, and that which is the object (+A), becomes the subject. Hence, this process can be called 'universio' whose immediate result is the inverted One – Unum versum, whence universe.[15]

To be sure, according to our view of Post-Kantian Idealism, Hegelian dialectics too draws on inversion as the true motor of the dialectical movement; recall the 'inverted world' of philosophy Hegel refers to in the *Phenomenology*.[16] Hegelian dialectics is precisely a movement of auto-displacement which is not enacted by a pre-established absolute subjectivity or, even more absurd, by some transcendent absolute subject. The general thrust of our argument is that the alleged 'Post-Hegelian' turn of philosophy really takes place in the work of Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel and it does so in a more reflected manner than much of the self-declared overcoming of Hegel in twentieth- century analytic and continental philosophy.

In so-called post-structuralism, for example, the relation between the two terms of a binary opposition (phenomenal/noumenal, subject/object, etc.) is inverted: the presence (the space) divided and thereby required by the opposition is denounced as the illusory result of a productive process which can never be presented. The self-othering of binary oppositions exhibited by the performance of deconstruction generates an absence which is, however, not the absence of something which antecedes the inversion of the opposition. In other words, post-structuralism could object against our reading of German Idealism that it still privileges one relatum of a binary opposition over the other in order to define an absolute immune to inversion. It could make the case that we leave the original One untouched to the effect that it remains the subject of a merely accidental uni-versio. Post-structuralism invokes an account of the shift taking place in the inversion which might appear to dispose of the absolute in an even more radical way than suggested by

Post-Kantian Idealism's interpretation of the notion of the absolute in terms of a self-othering activity.

However, we will argue against precisely this objection. The absolute of the German Idealists is not some pre-existing totality or some absolute subject creating the course of worldly events out of its unhampered spontaneity. Such an interpretation of German Idealism would miss the crucial shift from substance to subject. The subject Hegel has in mind is an absolute negativity which can only constitute itself after the fact. Without its manifestation, i.e. without the finite, it would be nothing. The 'absolute' is, hence, nothing but the proper name of the belatedness constitutive of any logical space as such: our conceptual abilities to refer to something determinate in the world can only take place after the fact. The fact is constituted by this 'after,' by the belatedness of the subject.

Let's say that 'ontological excess' denotes the excess of productive presence over its representation, the X which eludes the totalization-through-representation. Once we accomplish the step towards the gap within the space of productive presence itself, the excess becomes the excess of representation which always already supplements productive presence. A simple political reference can make this point clear: the Master (a King, a Leader) at the center of a social body, the One who totalizes it, is simultaneously the excess imposed on it from outside. The struggle of the center of power against the marginal excesses threatening its stability cannot ever obfuscate the fact, visible once we accomplish a parallactic shift of our view, that the original excess is that of the central One itself. As Reiner Schürmann would put it, all hegemonies as such are broken.[17] In Lacanian terms we can also say that the One is always already ex-timate with regard to what it unifies. The One totalizes the field it unifies by way of 'condensing' in itself the very excess that threatens this field.

In other words, any totalizing gesture of completion derives its energy from something which cannot be constituted by the very gesture itself. The very intention of completion, of a fully determinate, all-encompassing structure fails because the activity of constituting cannot itself be constituted in the terms of the overall sphere of intelligibility which is the result of the activity.

To illustrate this point, let us consider Italo Calvino's 'A King Listens.'[18] In an anonymous kingdom, the royal palace becomes a giant ear and the

king, obsessed and paralyzed by fears of rebellion, tries to hear every sound that reverberates in his palace: footsteps of the servants, whispers and conversations, fanfare trumpets at the raising of the flag, ceremonies, sounds of the city at the outskirts of the palace, riots, the rumble of rifles, etc. He cannot see their source but is obsessed by interpreting their meaning and the destiny they are predicting. This state of interpretive paranoia only seems to halt when he hears something that completely enchants him: through the window the wind brings a singing voice of a woman, a voice of pure beauty, unique and irreplaceable. For the king it is the sound of freedom: he steps out of the palace into the open space and mingles there with the crowd . . . The first thing to bear in mind here is that this king is not the traditional monarch, but a modern totalitarian tyrant: the traditional king doesn't care about his environment, he arrogantly ignores it and leaves the worry and care to prevent plot to his ministers; it is the modern leader who is obsessed by plots. This is why the perfect formula of Stalinism, of the system of endless paranoiac hermeneutics is 'to rule is to interpret.' So when the king is seduced by the singing voice of the woman pronouncing immediate life-pleasure, this is obviously (although, unfortunately, not for Calvino himself) a fantasy – precisely the fantasy of breaking out of the closed circle of representations and of rejoining the pure outside of the innocent presence of the feminine voice. However, the fantasy of the pure outside, the fantasy of the original One anteceding its inversion or even perversion by the symbolic order, is nothing but the excess of the self-mirroring prison-house of representations. What this fantasy misses is the way this innocent externality of the voice is itself already reflexively marked by the mirror of interpretive representations. This is why one can imagine what the story's ending really is, what is missing in Calvino's explicit narrative: when the king exits the palace, following the voice, he is immediately arrested: for the feminine voice was an instrument of the plotters to lure him out of the safety of the guarded palace.

If one translates the moral of this story into the language of philosophy, it becomes evident that the One, the master-signifier which is supposed to constitute the 'divine gift' of intelligibility, is not exempt from the process of totalization. The obvious problem is that there are various simulacra of the One, various totalizing opportunities which are inherently destabilized because they are only maintained by the fantasy

of an original One. In other words, the Hegelian 'true infinite' is the infinity generated by the self-relating of a totality, by the short-circuit which makes a totality an element of itself (or, rather, which makes a genus its own species), which makes re-presentation part of presence itself. The One is included in the act of excluding it. It becomes the inclusion of exclusion, i.e. the inversion of itself. This inversion occurs within totality: first, a paradoxical element (which is not a proper element of the apparently all-encompassing set-structure in question) is designated as transcendent and secondly this paradoxical element is drawn into totality in an act of closure. The impossibility of reconciling *transcendence* and *closure* motivates Hegel's claim that totality is not complete, that it constantly stands in need of its realization in finitude. The infinite is not always already established but turns out to be the result of an excess of intelligibility.[19]

This structure can also be made apropos the properly dialectical notion of abstraction: what makes Hegel's 'concrete universality' infinite is that *it includes 'abstractions' into concrete reality itself, as their immanent constituents*. For Hegel, the elementary move of philosophy with regard to abstraction consists in abandoning the common-sense empiricist notion of abstraction as a step away from the wealth of concrete empirical reality with its irreducible multiplicity of features: life is green, concepts are grey, they dissect and mortify concrete reality. (This common-sense notion even has its pseudo-dialectical version, according to which such 'abstraction' is a feature of mere Understanding, while 'dialectics' recuperates the wealth of reality.) Philosophical thought proper begins when we become aware of how *such a process of 'abstraction' is inherent in reality itself*: the tension between empirical reality and its 'abstract' notional determinations is immanent to reality, it is a feature of things themselves. Therein resides the anti-nominalist accent of dialectical thinking (just like the basic insight of Marx's 'critique of political economy' is that the abstraction of the value of a commodity is its 'objective' constituent).

This brings us to the question: what is a dialectical self-deployment of a notion? Imagine, as a starting point, our being caught in a complex and confused empirical situation which we try to understand, to bring some order into it. Since we never start from the zero-point of pure pre-notional experience, we begin with the double movement of directly

applying the abstract-universal notions at our disposal to the situation. We analyze it and compare its elements with our previous experience, generalizing, formulating empirical universals. Sooner or later, we become aware of inconsistencies in the notional schemes we employ to understand the situation: something which should have been a subordinate species seems to encompass and dominate the entire field, different classifications and categorizations clash, without us being able to decide which one is 'true,' etc.

In what, then, resides Hegel's uniqueness? Hegel's thought stands for the moment of passage between philosophy as Master discourse (the philosophy of the One that totalizes the multiplicity) and anti-philosophy (which asserts the Real that escapes the grasp of the One). On the one hand, he clearly breaks with the metaphysical logic of counting-for-One; on the other hand, he does not allow for any excess external to the field of notional representations. For Hegel, totalization-in-One always fails, the One is always already in excess with regard to itself, it is itself the subversion of what it purports to achieve, and it is this tension internal to the One, this Two-ness which both makes the One one and simultaneously dislocates it, it is this tension which is the *movens* of the dialectical process. In other words, Hegel effectively denies that there is a Real external to the network of notional representations (which is why he is regularly misread as an *absolute idealist* in the sense of the self-enclosed circle of the totality of the Notion). However, the Real does not disappear here in the global self-relating play of symbolic representations: it returns with a vengeance as the immanent gap or obstacle on account of which representations cannot ever totalize themselves, on account of which they are 'non-All.'[20]

In our spontaneous mind-frame, we dismiss such inconsistencies as signs of the deficiency of our understanding: reality is much too rich and complex for our abstract categories, we will never be able to deploy a notional network able to capture its entire wealth . . . However, once we develop a refined theoretical sense, we sooner or later notice something strange and unexpected: it is not possible to clearly distinguish the inconsistencies of our notion of an object from the inconsistencies which are immanent to this object itself. The thing itself is inconsistent, full of tensions, struggling between its different determinations, and the deployment of these tensions, this struggle, is what makes it 'alive.' Take

a particular state: when it malfunctions, it is as if its particular (specific) features are in tension with the universal idea of the state. Or take the Cartesian *cogito*: the difference between me as a particular person embedded in a particular life-world and myself as abstract subject is part of my particular identity, since to act as abstract subject is a feature that characterizes individuals in modern Western society. The notional reality is not opposed to the empirical. It is not the case that we simply take in an in itself consistent world to which we then apply a propositionally structured system of beliefs. This idea itself is already the application of a notional structure, one way of describing our position in the world, what Gabriel in his chapter will call a 'constitutive mythology'.

The transition from Kant to Hegel can be formulated as the passage from the notion of a substantial Real to the purely formal Real. The formal Real is the immanent gap within the coordinates of representation. Another key figure of nineteenth-century philosophy, Schopenhauer, also contributed to this transition in his interpretation of the noumenal thing as will. The Kantian unknowable which escapes our cognitive grasp turns out to be the ontological essence of cognition. Intentionality, i.e. our reference to determinate objects in the world, is directed by the will, by the noumenal itself, which objectifies itself in our referring to determinate objects. What happens in Hegel is that the Real is thoroughly de-substantialized: it is not the transcendent X which resists symbolic representations, but the immanent gap, rupture, inconsistency, the 'curvature' of the space of representations itself.

One of the most prominent anti-Hegelian arguments reminds us of the fact of the Post-Hegelian break: what even the most fanatical partisan of Hegel apparently cannot deny is that something changed after Hegel, that a new era of thought began which can no longer be accounted for in Hegel's own explication of absolute conceptual mediation; this rupture occurs in different guises, from Schelling's assertion of the abyss of prelogical will (later vulgarized by Schopenhauer) and Kierkegaard's insistence on the uniqueness of faith and subjectivity, through Marx's assertion of actual socio-economic life-process, up to Freud's notion of 'death-drive' as a repetition that persists beyond all dialectical mediation. Something happened after Hegel, there is a division between before and after, and while one can argue that Hegel already announces this break, that he is the last of the idealist metaphysicians and the first of the post-metaphysical historicists, one cannot really be a Hegelian after this break.

Hegelianism has lost its innocence forever. To act like a full Hegelian today is the same as to write tonal music after the Schönberg revolution.

The predominant Hegelian strategy that is emerging as a reaction to this scare-crow image of Hegel the Absolute Idealist, is the 'deflated' image of Hegel freed of ontological-metaphysical commitments, reduced to a general theory of discourse and to discourse's constitutive normativity. This approach is best exemplified by so-called Pittsburgh Hegelians (Brandom, McDowell): no wonder Habermas praises Brandom, since Habermas also avoids directly approaching the 'big' ontological question ('are humans really a subspecies of animals, is Darwinism true?'), the question of God or nature, of idealism or materialism. It would be easy to prove that Habermas's neo-Kantian avoidance of ontological commitment is in itself necessarily ambiguous: while Habermasians treat naturalism as the obscene secret not to be publicly admitted ('of course man developed from nature, of course Darwin was right . . .'), this obscure secret is a lie, it covers up their deeply idealist form of thought (the *a priori* transcendentals of communication which cannot be deduced from natural being). The truth is hidden and at the same time manifested in the form: while Habermasians secretly think they are really materialists, the truth lies in the idealist form of their thinking. To put it provocatively, Habermasians tend to be royalists in the republican form. They reduce naturalism to a fruitful hypothesis which seems to be inevitable given that contemporary discourse has committed itself to a scientific world-picture. Yet, to be an actual naturalist is not to subscribe to necessary fiction, but to really believe in materialism. It is, in other words, not enough to insist that Kant and Hegel have to teach us something about the realm of normativity which takes place in the wider domain of the realm of nature. It is, on the contrary, important to re-appropriate German Idealism to a fuller extent. If discourse, representation, mind, or thought in general cannot consistently be opposed to the substantial real which is supposed to be given beforehand, independent of the existence of concept-mongering creatures, then we have to bite the bullet of idealism: *we need a concept of the world or the real which is capable of accounting for the replication of reality within itself.*[21]

Our theories of the world as such are part of the world. Our system(s) of belief are not transcendent entities occupying a deontological space thoroughly distinguished from the ontological space best described in the language of physics. We firmly believe that the 'deflated' image of Hegel

does not suffice. *The fetishism of quantification and of the logical form prevailing in much of contemporary philosophical discourse is characterized by a lack of reflection on its constitution.* It is our aim to dismantle this lack and to argue that we are in need of a twenty-first-century Post-Kantian Idealism which would, of course, not be geographically restricted. The era of *German* Idealism is over, but the era of Post-Kantian Idealism has just begun (with neo-Hegelianism as its first necessary error).

CHAPTER ONE

The Mythological Being of Reflection – An Essay on Hegel, Schelling, and the Contingency of Necessity

Markus Gabriel

Anything we encounter in the world and to which we are capable of referring by some singular term, i.e. anything to which we concede existence, is part of a certain domain. Renaissance paintings belong to a different domain than our own feelings and mental states. National states belong to a different domain than physical particles or, let's say, the flora and fauna of the Amazons. So, if what we call the 'world' or the 'universe' is some kind of totality, then we must agree it is primarily a totality made up of sub-sets, of domains of objects. It cannot simply be the totality of elements (say space-time particles) because it is an essential feature of the world to be accessible under various descriptions. Any attempt to reduce the world to *one* object domain, i.e. any variety of a naïve ontic monism, necessarily fails because it cannot account for its own theory-building process, its own operation of singling out a sub-set of the world and arranging its elements in a particular (and therefore contingent) manner. To overcome this *irresolvable* logical disjunction it would have to include the activity of presenting the elements within its elements, which is *impossible* as long as the elements are determined *within* a given domain, i.e. as long as they are proper elements.

If we say of something that it exists, we necessarily refer to some determinate object. Even elusive objects that exhibit vague predicates are

determinate objects in a higher-order sense: they are determined as indeterminate. This simple reflection apparently enables us to say that the world is made up of objects the determinacy of which is investigated in a suitable discourse quantifying over a relevant domain of objects.

However, the trouble with this whole train of thought is that it forgets to take account of the obvious fact that it always already refers to the domains of objects as higher-order-objects. The very discourse in which we are able to distinguish between domains generates a higher-order-domain of these domains. This regress necessarily comes to a halt once we reach the level of the domain of all domains, i.e. the proper concept of the world. At this point we are bound to accept some variety of *ontological monism*, i.e. the thesis that there is only one world (one ultimate domain of all domains), a thesis which runs contrary to *ontic monism* which picks out its preferred domain and defines it as the only really existing domain thereby drawing a sharp line between appearance (all other theories) and reality (the single true general theory). Ontological monism ultimately accommodates the different world-views within the world by tearing down the barrier between the so-called mind-independent external world and its representations in finite thinkers. Ontological monism draws on the fact that the various forms of representing the world occur *within* the world such that the world must be capable of an ontological doubling: it replicates itself within itself. Classical varieties of ontological monism (like those of Parmenides, Plato, and Plotinus, to name some examples) render this thought by claiming that *being and thought are one and the same*: being necessarily 'expresses' itself in thought, it becomes aware of itself.[1] Hegel seeks to reposition this ontological doubling by installing the doubling within a third term, i.e. within reflection. The doubling is always already an *inner* doubling. Being does not (contingently) manifest itself in finite thinkers but, conversely, depends on its doubling into being and appearance. Being ceases to be the name for the 'thing,' for the absolute supposed to be independent of our activity of referring to it. It becomes the proper name of a disjunction into being and appearance.

If to exist is to exist as an object within a domain, i.e. if existence presupposes determinacy, then the domain of all domains cannot exist. Otherwise it would be an object within a domain and therefore it would not be the domain of all domains because we would have formed a higher-order domain of all domains containing the supposed domain of all domains.

In other words, there is no way to refer to the domain of all domains within ordinary (propositional) language. Ordinary (propositional) language presupposes substances, i.e. objects that can be referred to by singular terms (such as 'dog,' the 'Mona Lisa,' 'Rome' etc.).[2] However, the domain of all domains and, hence, the world cannot be referred to by a singular term lest it loses its ontological status of being the world. If the world is not an object we can talk about, then how do we manage to understand the line of thought with which I am opening this chapter? Did I not refer to the world for the last five paragraphs?

One immediately feels troubled by the thought that the ultimate domain within which everything takes place is not itself a place, but the proper void itself. One undergoes a vertiginous experience beautifully rendered by Victor Pelevin in his novel *Buddha's Little Finger*. In an ironically philosophical discussion with a character named Chapaev (obviously an allusion to Vasily Ivanovich Chapayev, the famous Red Army Commander during the Russian Civil War) the protagonist Pyotr Voyd (*sic!*) realizes that the domain of all domains 'is not really a place.' Confronted with the question where the universe is, Pyotr understands that it is nowhere.[3]

Our relation to objects, i.e. intentionality, is ultimately exposed to nothingness, as Heidegger put it.[4] However, this nothingness is the world itself. If the world itself does not exist, then how can we believe that the domains included within the world can exist? Is there any way to avoid *ontological nihilism*, that is, the claim that nothing really exists because everything takes place nowhere and hence does not take place at all?

As we shall see in the course of this chapter, the fact that language fails vis-à-vis an all-encompassing nothingness releases creative energies which eventually overturn nothingness: this is why there is something rather than nothing. Nothing becomes something in our constant activity of naming the void. To be more precise, the void is of course not even the void, for 'the void' is but another singular term within the chain of signifiers. If there is no way to refer to *the* void, that is to say if there is no way to gain access to any sort of transcendence, then we cannot even refer to the void by describing it *as* the void. The 'void' precedes, transcends, outreaches (or whichever way you want to name this relation which is not a proper relation between two terms) any *apophantic environment*, it cannot be captured within any *sphere of intelligibility* or *cosmological model* as I call it.[5]

The difference between language and the paradoxical domain of all domains (traditionally dealt with under the name of 'the absolute') generates discourse. Discourses select one object domain rather than another with the aim of discovering what is the case in a particular domain. However, by selecting one domain rather than another, they generate the absolute by triggering its withdrawal. Any attempt to determine our position within the world and therefore any attempt to catch up with the world in language generates a set of background (objective) certainties in Wittgenstein's sense, a set of inaccessible presuppositions governing discourse. Whenever we try to determine the presuppositions governing a discourse about some object domain or other, we *ipso facto* generate higher-order presuppositions governing our meta-discourse to the effect that we are never capable of formulating any fully self-transparent meta-language.[6] Nevertheless, discourse needs to stabilize its preconditions incessantly in order to defend itself against the ongoing threat of absolute indeterminacy.

The threat of absolute indeterminacy is the origin of the mythological narrations of the origin of the world. All such narrations attempt to articulate the conditions of possibility of a language by transposing language's internal difference between itself and the absolute (i.e. between form and content) on to some natural order which is supposed to determine language from its outside. In this context Wittgenstein writes that any doxastic system, i.e. any system of beliefs, creates a background 'mythology' or a 'world-picture.'[7] There is no way to transcend a given mythology without generating another one. This is why all language (including Wittgenstein's own 'form of presentation (*Darstellungsform*)' includes a mythology: 'A whole mythology is deposited in our language.'[8]

Heidegger, too, refers to the inviolability of world-pictures as the *sine qua non* of determinacy in his *The Age of the World-Picture*. In our age of the world-picture, the mythological conditioning of our experience hides itself behind *the mythology of de-mythologization*. The world seems to be fully disenchanted; we have bypassed traditional societies by giving up values based on authority, etc. This story is one of the cornerstones of our mythology that believes in scientific, manipulatory rationality's capacity to transcend historicity. It does blind itself to the possibility that the very era of the world as picture ready to be manipulated might itself be a world-picture, namely the world-picture of the world-picture.

As Schelling, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein agree, reflection is inevitably bound to a set of finite, discursive expressions of itself generating imaginary frameworks, mythologies. *Those frameworks are usually not reflected and cannot be fully reflected: any attempt to achieve such a totalizing reflection simply generates another myth, a different imaginary, another image which will sooner or later hold us captive.*[9] Incompleteness cannot be overcome because it is a condition of possibility of determinacy and therefore – paradoxically – of completion. In this sense, Schelling, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein argue that there is no ultimate meta-theory, no standpoint outside of the limits of language.

And yet, many philosophers – such as Hegel or Badiou in our times – believe themselves capable of expressing the 'absolute form of presentation.'[10] Even though reflection in Hegel also fails to the extent that it discovers that it depends on natural and spiritual developments within the sphere of the finite, Hegel nevertheless claims to uncover *'truth as it is without veil and in its own absolute nature.'*[11] To be sure, Hegel is not willing to admit this failure of reflection. Even if one can argue (as I will in fact do) that it is *entailed* by his account of reflection, this failure is lost on Hegel himself, because he associates the insistence on the failure with romantic defiance that in his eyes stubbornly insists on incompleteness.

The aim of this chapter is systematic and not historical in nature. I do not venture to repeat what Schelling and Hegel said in a different language. I do not even believe that this is possible. There is no such thing as Schelling's or Hegel's philosophy *out there* in the texts ready to be discovered by the historian of philosophy. Such a view of the relation between the text and its meaning is predicated on a variety of naïve hermeneutical and metaphysical presuppositions I fortunately do not share. Philosophical ideas are not out there like stones, they are discursively created. Philosophy is a thoroughly creative business, an insight carried out by Nietzsche and Deleuze in an irreducible manner. This also holds for the ideas we extract from the classical texts of the various traditions of philosophy. Any reading of a philosophical text rather repeats the text in the Deleuzian sense of 'repetition': it retroactively generates a minimal difference in our understanding, which is why understanding always entails understanding differently. Or, to borrow Gadamer's famous phrase, 'it is enough to say that we understand in *a different way, if we understand at all.*'[12]

Given that I will reconstruct the outlines of Schelling's critique of Hegel, it seems important to indicate that Schelling's critique is barely

known, let alone philosophically appreciated in the context of Anglophone philosophy. Whereas Hegel's philosophy is enjoying an ever better reputation due to the prospects of its pragmatist and semantic revival, Schelling remains largely marginal. Despite some recent efforts in the German literature on Schelling beginning with the path-breaking work of Wolfram Hogrebe on *Predication and Genesis*, Schelling's variety of ontological monism has the bad reputation of being untranslatable into contemporary terms.[13] This is why there have been only a few attempts to reconstruct the later Schelling's critique of Hegel.[14] However, most writers tend to dismiss Schelling's criticism as shallow or beside the point concentrating on his admittedly superficial discussion of Hegel's system in his lectures *On the History of Modern Philosophy*.[15] Yet, this approach misses the richer material and deep insights spread throughout Schelling's late philosophy, i.e. throughout his Munich and Berlin Lectures on the *Philosophy of Mythology* and the *Philosophy of Revelation*.[16]

Manfred Frank has convincingly argued that the difference between Schelling and Hegel ultimately lies in their different conceptions of the relation between being and reflection.[17] Whereas Hegel claims that being is an aspect (*Moment*) of reflection which eventually becomes fully transparent within the root-and-branch self-referential Notion, Schelling maintains that reflection depends on and is thus necessarily secondary to what he calls 'unprethinkable being (*unvordenkliches Seyn*).'[18] In other words, Schelling stresses the fact that reflection necessarily indicates the brute fact of existence, which is *per se* inexplicable (indeterminable) in logical terms. Reflection is therefore by no means the unconditional. It ultimately depends on 'that which is unequal to itself (*das sich selbst Ungleiche*),'[19] a form of dependence Schelling also refers to under the heading of 'the uncanny principle.'[20] This uncanny principle expresses itself in the various disguises of mythology from ancient (Egyptian, Greek, Indian, etc.) mythology to contemporary ideology based on the scientific imaginary.

It is precisely in this sense that we must understand the importance of mythology in Schelling's critique of Hegel. Mythology denominates the brute fact of existence of a logical space, which cannot be accounted for in logical terms. It deals with sub-semantical (a-semic) energies organizing our field of experience by establishing links between the elements of experience, which, as a matter of fact, only become elements of experience after the links have been established. The elements are therefore

generated retroactively: once (a) logical space is established, it will automatically be able to discern elements within its reach.

Schelling's point thus resembles an observation of Badiou's: the values of logical variables (and therefore existence from a logical point of view) cannot be determined by those variables themselves. Whether there *really* are horses, stones, or elephants cannot be determined with sole recourse to our concepts. However, even if there is no logically consistent way to refer to logic's ontological conditions, this does not necessarily entail the absoluteness of reflection. In order to make sense of objectivity at all, we need to admit that there has to be something that cannot be absorbed in reflection's closure upon itself: *any account of objectivity that tries to exclude fallibility from its notion of truth is indefensible*.

Any similarity between Schelling and Badiou comes to a definite end once we consider Badiou's thoroughly Platonist identification of mathematics and ontology. Indeed, in opposition to Badiou's idea of an absolute discourse (which is based on set-theory) Schelling argues for a mythological heteronomy of reflection. For Schelling reflection bears an indelible mythological remainder (*Rest*): it has a mythological origin it can never fully get rid of. In other words Schelling claims that every theory-building process that attempts to get hold of its own preconditions necessarily misfires. And this necessary failure is due to the very nature of reflection.[21]

Moreover, reflection is inapt to grasp itself because it always already accesses itself under a certain description, that is to say, within the reach of one field of sense among others. Reflection's belatedness (which I just attempted to put into words), however, cannot be described without thereby misfiring again. There is no ultimate exposition of reflection's finitude for any such exposition implies a paradoxical claim to infinity.[22]

Reflection is always already the result of a determinate framework whose determinacy is not in turn the result of reflection. Being precedes reflection because reflection is based on an experience Wolfram Hogrebe coined the 'trauma of God (*Gottesschock*).'[23] This trauma takes place as soon as consciousness aspires to get a hold on itself. In this act of self-constitution it loses itself because it becomes an other to itself. This other returns in the form of the Gods and haunts consciousness throughout its history.

In order to examine Schelling's critical re-evaluation of the essence of reflection, i.e. of its mere 'being there,' one should begin with a systematic reconstruction of Hegel's competing claim, namely that nothing exists

outside of that theory-building process which Hegel envisages under the heading of 'reflection.' For Hegel, Being is but an aspect of reflection, its blind spot or remainder. Being is the effect of reflection's incapacity to fully reflect itself. If by 'being' we understand that which is in-itself, that which we discover in truth-apt discourse, then we have to learn the crucial lesson of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, that the in-itself is only in-itself for us. *We* determine being over against reflection such that being for us turns out to be a coagulation of reflection. If we go on to claim that there must be being prior to reflection, this in-itself again is in-itself for us. Reflection thereby divides itself in being and reflection in such a manner that it tends to be unaware of this very operation in order to secure its very being. Closer analysis, however, reveals that reflection never encounters anything but itself such that it is 'the *movement of nothing to nothing, and so back to itself.*'[24]

For Hegel, being is thus never unexplainable; if you think you cannot understand reality, it is because you are not reflecting properly! Surprises are only the result of a false reflection. Reflection attempts to take possession of its own preconditions by constantly appropriating them. Reflection in Hegel, therefore, radicalizes the project of modern subjectivity to include being within the limits of representation. Like in Kant, Reinhold, and the early Fichte, being is reduced to being posited within the coordinates of representation. Kant's oft-quoted claim that 'being is not a real predicate' is backed up by his concept of being as the 'position of a thing.'[25] *To be is to be posited as an object of (possible) experience.* Whether there actually is something outside of the field of experience, that is, something that transcends the bounds of sense, can neither be affirmed nor denied because we have no means to substantiate any transcendent ontological commitment.[26] The coordinates of representation determine what there can be: 'we then assert that the conditions of the *possibility of experience* in general are likewise the conditions of the *possibility of the objects of experience*, and that for this reason they have objective validity in a synthetic *a priori* judgment.'[27] For Kant this means that the '*a priori* conditions of a possible experience in general are at the same time conditions of the possibility of objects of experience.'[28]

The modern subject poses itself as unhampered self-reflection thereby ruling out the threat of heteronomy, let alone theonomy. And yet, as both Schelling and Hegel point out, it cannot properly account for the fact of its own existence. In effect, the very idea of a free-floating

solipsistic ego constructing the world out of nothing turns out to be intrinsically incoherent as soon as we realize that the subject itself becomes part of the world, part of the very nothingness it supposedly has to transform into a world. The subject itself is part of the world it constructs out of nothing because it is *represented* within the context of the epistemological theory accounting for the objectivity of experience. The allegedly unconditioned subject constitutes and, therefore, conditions itself by *asserting* its position as unconditioned subject.

The subject reduces itself to one representation among all others in the very activity of its self-directed cognition. It thus misses itself in the act of grasping itself. To put it with Wittgenstein: 'where *in* the world is a metaphysical subject to be found? You will say that this is exactly like the case of the eye and the visual field. But really you do *not* see the eye. And nothing *in the visual field* allows you to infer that it is seen by an eye.'[29]

Unsurprisingly, the problem of reflection plays an important role in film (theory): in principle, it is impossible to see the actual camera that shoots the movie. Even if a camera is shown in a movie (which is a standard self-referential trope of cinema) and even if the camera that shoots a scene is seen in a mirror, we do not see the actual camera when we see it in a movie. The camera in a movie is just as little the camera that shoots the movie as the mental image of an elephant is an elephant. The actual apparatus enabling the appearance of the world of a movie cannot appear within the world of a movie.

Dieter Henrich, Manfred Frank, and Dieter Sturma, among others, have argued that the dilemma of self-directed cognition can be solved if we adequately account for the primacy of an original non-conceptual self-awareness preceding reflective self-cognition. The early idealist master-concept of 'intellectual intuition' seems to sustain this position.[30] Yet, as Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel soon realized, the postulate of an intellectual intuition does not help because it is itself formulated in a discursive, non-intuitive language, i.e. within the range of a theory. The alleged immediacy and original unity of self-awareness is mediated by the underlying duplicity of subject and object presupposed in every theory that is not thoroughly self-referential. And even if a theory ever managed to become downright self-referential, it would still presuppose an internal rupture. And this means that immediacy only becomes salient when it is lost, for it is lost in the very act of talking, thinking, and theorizing about it. It is displaced: instead of remaining in the position of the original unity

preceding the sphere of conceptual division (of judgment), it turns into an empty promise of transcendence, i.e. into a postulate as Hegel convincingly argued against Fichte in the *Difference Essay*. The subject enters the realm of the ought (of 'Sollen') as a consequence of its decision to grasp itself. It *ought* to be something it has not yet become, it has a pre-discursive grasp of its lost unity that it tries to exhibit within the world. We might say that the subject feels the 'urge' ('Trieb,' 'Sehnen') to become part of the world, to manifest itself within the world, just like cinema since the 1960s and 1970s has been compelled to experiment with the possibility of creating a world whose elements represent the very act of creation.

Hegel's crucial point is that any supposed reality transcending the conceptually mediated realm of differentiality is only a side-effect of conceptual mediation, an expression of reflection's misfired attempt to grasp itself. Žižek aptly recapitulates this when he writes that according to Hegel

> non-conceptual reality is something which emerges when notional self-development gets caught in an inconsistency, and becomes non-transparent to itself. In short, the limit is transposed from the exterior to the interior: there is Reality because, and in so far as, the Notion is inconsistent, does not coincide with itself.[31]

The standard reading of the early Fichte and the early Schelling sees them entangled in *the paradox of nihilism* famously diagnosed by Jacobi: either the subject is nothing determinate, some transcendent paradoxical vanishing point, or it is itself an object among others. If it is nothing determinate, then we cannot grasp it at all, not even as unconditioned without thereby determining it. If it is something determinate, then it completely dissolves into its own products. Given that the world of objects is determined as the purely causal realm of space and time (in Kant) or even as nothingness compared to the creative subject (in Fichte and German Romanticism) the ego annihilates itself in the very act of its self-determination as purely creative center. That is, as soon as the creative center on which determinacy is supposed to hinge is determined (be it as the indeterminable creative center) it is lost. It can either become a part of the determinate world-order it creates by objectifying itself or it can seek refuge in an everlasting denial of its objectivity, thereby losing any determinacy, even that of being indeterminate.[32]

The transcendence of the ego remains ambiguous precisely because it can never be claimed. We have to eradicate any firm belief in the

possibility of grasping the absolute as some stable principle. Instead we have to practice the deconstruction of conceptual mediation – what Fichte calls 'the destruction of the concept (*Vernichtung des Begriffs*)'[33] – a practice (in principle incompletable) anticipating the postmodern situation of endless deferral. The absolute thereby becomes the activity of deferring. Fichte's point is not the eradication of any belief in the possibility of grasping the absolute (the in-itself), but the brilliant insight that the absolute is the deferral itself. The distortion of the absolute in the medium of conceptual relativity is the absolute itself. Fostering this insight Fichte avoids the trap of reification by establishing a *methodological* instead of an *ontic* monism. He argues that the absolute's unity consists in the very activity of presenting its absence. It is hence not itself something absent, transcendent or hidden but the blind spot of every presentation as such. It only manifests itself in the withdrawal which must not be hypostatized as the withdrawal of something pre-existing the withdrawal. The withdrawal constitutes a space in which the thing in its elusiveness might appear.

The modern subject is entangled in a set of paradoxes of reflection. This situation became explicit in Hegel's and Schelling's theories of second-order reflection of reflection which should be read as an attempt to overcome Kant's and the earlier Fichte's object-directed theorizing. Kant and Fichte still work with a concept of reflection modeled after the Cartesian paradigm wherein thought is opposed to (material) being. The subject turns her gaze inwards in order to experience her radical alterity from the external world. Despite themselves, Kant and Fichte are committed to the assumption of a primarily cognitive subject which is practical (ethical) because its cognitive powers are limited. The primacy of the practical is not assumed from the outset but turns out to be the consequence of the necessary finitude of knowledge. Hegel and Schelling, however, convincingly argued that the gap constituting the Kantian and Fichtean primacy of practice cuts deeper than the subject's activity of distinguishing itself from the world. It affects reflection as an ontological and not only as an epistemological operation. For them finitude is thus an ontological event.

In the first part of this chapter I shall argue that Hegel uncovers the dialectic of modern subjectivity in the 'appearance' chapter of his *Logic of Essence* and that he also offers a solution to the epistemological dilemma of the modern subject. Nevertheless, I will also argue that Hegel himself

falls prey to the dialectic of modern subjectivity because he fails to apply his own reflection on finitude to itself. The very finitude of reflection laid out in his discussion of reflection is dissolved into the lucidity of the Notion. Hegel thereby ultimately loses track of the finitude he himself discovers in his revolutionary thesis that 'Being is illusory being (*das Sein ist Schein*).'[34]

In the second part of my chapter, I will then reconstruct the outlines of Schelling's late *Philosophy of Mythology*. Here, Schelling argues that the 'idea' ('Idee') is a result of the subject's forgetfulness of its paradoxical origin. The 'idea' is the realm of intelligibility. Contrary to the tradition of absolute autonomy, Schelling insists that the subject does not generate itself and thereby insists on the 'thrownness' characteristic of our being-in-the-world. On top of that, Schelling also maintains that the subject's determining activity is itself determined by the unattainable *withdrawal of the event* of being, which Schelling calls the 'unprethinkable being.' Yet, unlike Heidegger, Schelling locates the primordial withdrawal of the event in *mythology*. The indispensability of a mythology constitutive of intelligibility as such can never be rendered fully transparent by reflection, thinking, or poetry.

For Schelling, being thus turns into the fragmentary history of mythological images and narratives, or otherwise put: *being turns out to be dionysian*. In fact I shall argue that the process of mythology Schelling envisages under the name of 'Dionysos' still endures. The work that Heidegger and Wittgenstein are trying to do when talking about 'world-picture' and 'mythology' respectively amounts to developing the conceptual tools necessary for a theory of the mythological being of contemporary reflection.

The indispensability of constitutive mythology does not preclude thinking the absolute, as Meillassoux claims, but rather allows us to absolutize relativity. The absolutization of relativity does not add up to a simple-minded relativism asserting that everything (including this statement) is relative. On the contrary, it asserts that everything is relative to an absolute, to something which cannot be relativized, not even to the relation of knowledge. Meillassoux is therefore mistaken when he ascribes 'correlationism' to the thinkers we will deal with herein, i.e. the claim that nothing can precede the circle of reflection's identification with being.[35] In the third part of this chapter I shall argue against Meillassoux' claim that contingency is necessary replacing it by the even stronger assertion that *necessity is contingent*. In my view, the

contingency of necessity, i.e. higher-order contingency, is the adequate modal category of a new (philosophy of) mythology.

1. THE APPEARANCES – HEGEL ON REFLECTION

Before I can get to Hegel's solution of the deadlock of modern subjectivity, it is necessary to prepare the ground for the following discussion. In this context, we will see how Hegel actually understood the problem of the subject (raised by Descartes, Hume, and Kant) much more precisely than his predecessors.

Fichte's philosophy chiefly investigates the conditions of possibility of appearance. Consequently, the later Fichte develops the outlines of a theory of 'absolute appearance,' i.e. of 'an appearance beneath which there is no substantial Being.'[36] Fichte incessantly reflects on and makes us aware of the fact that every assertion contained in his own theory (and in any theory for that matter) is only the sclerotic, reified objectivation of a theory-building process called the 'actual deed (*Tathandlung*).' To be sure, any analysis of Hegel's chapter on 'Appearance' in his *Science of Logic* should bear this in mind since it is to a great extent the result of Hegel's grappling with the dialectic of Fichte's philosophy. Here Hegel unveils the internal dialectic of reflection's attempt to become absolute.

It is characteristic for modern philosophy to define thought as the essence of the world. According to the modern stance of reflection we could just as well be completely sealed off from the world, eternally caught up in an unfulfilled desire to encounter the world. The modern answer to the question of the veridicality of determinacy from Descartes onwards has it that even if we do not know whether there is an *external* world, we are still aware of the intentional structure of representation (i.e. of the existence of an *internal* world). In effect, Descartes is known for having argued for an epistemological asymmetry between the mental and the external world; an asymmetry between thought and flesh which actually enables us to affirm with absolute certainty that there are representings, i.e. that there is representational purport, without thereby knowing that the success conditions of that very purport are ever fulfilled.[37] So even if we cannot know what is real, we can at least know

that 'the whole world is inside our head.' This is what I call the *modern stance of reflection*.

It is quite remarkable to see contemporary cinema rediscovering the dream-like structure of experience and substituting it for the interminable ironical self-denial of postmodern fragmentation. Postmodernism (in the totality of its aesthetic and philosophical expressions) refrained from asserting any metaphysical position. On the contrary, contemporary cinema is widely characterized by the return of metaphysics. If we assume that contemporary art/film actually reflects something we could call the contemporary general 'state of mind,' then we have to accept that we are again searching for a more plausible, a more digestible, a more bearable answer to our lack of certainty about the world and its meaning.

Many movies are shot in a transcendent light, a phenomenon Raoul Eshelman describes as 'theistic creation.'[38] A variety of recent examples may illustrate this general tendency, in particular *The Chumscrubber* (2005), directed by Arie Posin, and Francis Ford Coppola's new movie *Youth without Youth* (2007) which is based on a mysticism-driven novel by Mircea Eliade.

At the end of *The Chumscrubber*, a point of view transcending the dream-like reality of suburban America is achieved in symbolic drawings of a blue dolphin. The Mayor Michael Ebbs at some point of the story discovers his artistic energies which identify him with the theist creator of the suburban universe. He feels a sudden urge to fill up walls with pictures of blue dolphins, which literally represent the structure of the city (whose mayor he is) as we can see in the final shot of the movie from a God's eye point of view. We can interpret this as the expression of a longing for a mystical unity, for the hidden harmony of all finite things (blue is always a symbol for transcendence, like the blue flower of romanticism; Picasso's blue period; *Blue Velvet;* Wallace Stevens' *The Man with the Blue Guitar*, etc.). This idea is also conveyed in Charlie Kaufman's *Synecdoche, New York* (2008). Here, the mystical unity turns out to be a synecdoche, an infinite interlacing of imaginary strata of the protagonist's fragmentary life. Despite the turbulent rupture we experience in our personal life and despite the utter contingency of the roles we play, there ultimately is a background in front of which we enact our lives.

Contemporary cinema returns to metaphysical harmony after postmodern turmoil. Yet, we must not forget that this 'new harmony' may very well be the reflection of capitalism's monistic self-assertion after

1989, i.e. after postmodernism's fragmentary, relativistic vision of the world. The harmony is therefore necessarily fractured, torn apart and instilled with irony like in David O. Russell's *I Heart Huckabees* (2004), in which two forces compete for the hero's salvation from capitalism's *bellum omnium contra omnes*: metaphysical harmony with the universe (symbolized by the 'Buddhist' practices of Bernard and Vivian) and French existentialism (represented by Caterine Vauban) in the sense of an aggressive, hedonistic attitude which affirms finitude beyond the need for a metaphysical refuge. The movie somehow points out the fact that it is not self-sufficient, that it is conditioned by the differentiality suppressed by its ultimately violent harmony.

In Coppola's *Youth without Youth* the distinction between dream and reality is transgressed. The protagonist, a seventy-year-old Rumanian orientalist, is rejuvenated after being struck by a lightning. As his new, younger self, he rejoins his lost and strangely reborn fiancée who had left him because he devoted his whole life to discovering the origin(s) of language. His resurrected fiancée happens to be the reincarnation of an ancient Indian, native Sanskrit female philosopher whose soul mysteriously regresses back to the origin of language such that the professor gains access to prehistoric material through the soul of his beloved. It seems fairly obvious that the return of the fiancée and the (sexual) rejuvenation of the Rumanian professor just take place in his fantasy while he is dying in the hospital. Everything which happens after the lightning seems to be purely phantasmagoric. At the end of his journey through time and space, the protagonist returns to Rumania and tells Shuang-Tse's philosophical allegory of the king and the butterfly in which a king is not sure whether he is a butterfly dreaming he is a king or the other way around.

Without going into the details of interpretation of the abovementioned movies, at least one thing seems clear: Descartes' dream problematic is still haunting us, however naturalistic we wish to be . . . One reason for this is that the naturalistic, scientific world-view paradoxically engenders its own impossibility. It leads into epistemological skepticism by relying on scientific procedures in order to get a grasp on the whole. By asserting that everything which is the case is natural (in the sense of being the case in the universe described by the best scientific theory), it defines thought on the basis of an inductive construction of reality. If there is no wholesale truth but only scientific results, this is itself a whole-sale truth,

a very bold and uncritical metaphysical assertion on top of that. Be this as it may, one should also note that this eternal recurrence of the Cartesian dream problematic in popular culture, art, and epistemology seems to be missing an important philosophical point, which became predominant in modern philosophy and was explicitly accounted for in Kant and his idealist successors, a point we ought to recollect, namely the *problem of the internal world* ensuing from the problem of the external world.

In the course of modern philosophy from Descartes through empiricism to Kant, the concept of substance preceding or transcending the subject's grasp got lost. At some point, in particular in Hume, the self threatened to dissolve into a bundle of representations because it also lost its substantial status as a unitary soul. The idea behind this development is simple, yet it is missed by most of the contemporary debate about dream and reality and accordingly about the problem of the external world: if the self represents itself, it *ipso facto* becomes a dream-like experience, i.e. an appearance of itself. The problem is therefore not so much that the phenomenal world might be an illusion, a dream-like construction of an omnipotent solipsistic ego. Whatever you think about transcendental solitude, at least it promises a primordial satisfaction of narcissism's imaginary position. The real problem of the external world lies in the fact that it entails an even more radical problem, namely the problem of the internal world only implicitly at work in empiricism and finally made explicit by Kant and his successors.

The problem of the external world arises out of a certain interpretation of our intentional grasp of the world. If our relation to determinate objects in the world, i.e. our relation to substances, is conceptually mediated and, therefore, presupposes the possibility of getting it right *or* wrong, then we cannot rule out for any supposed representation of a substance that we are misled by its appearances. If we can only grasp a substance through its modes then we can never guarantee that the collection of ideas which we believe to inhere in a certain substance actually belong together. Now, if we relate to ourselves and our position within the meshwork of potentially true beliefs, i.e. if we have beliefs about ourselves, we *eo ipso* assume a position towards ourselves in which we might get it wrong.

The self becomes an object among others as soon as it is drawn within the sphere of representation. Kant developed this problem in his

First Critique and his argument is as plain as it is striking. If the self was a substance, our cognitive access to it would have to be the grasp of a substance. Yet, our cognitive access to any substance is fallible insofar as it has to *represent* the substance in question. Even if we represent ourselves, the represented self is not identical with the representing self given that the subject of experiencing is never identical with any possible object of experience. Whatever the object of our scrutiny may be, it has to become an object among others whereby it is determined as such in a wider context. Intentional correlates, i.e. objects of experience, generally are determined in the wider framework of a world-view, a meshwork of mutually inclusive or exclusive conceptual mediations.

> [T]he intentionality, the objective purport, of perceptual experience in general – whether potentially knowledge yielding or not – depends [. . .] on having the world in view, in a sense that goes beyond glimpses of the here and now. It would not be intelligible that the relevant episodes present themselves as glimpses of the here and now apart from their being related to a wider world view.[39]

According to Kant, the very idea of the world requires that the world be completely determined, i.e. made up of things the properties of which can be expressed as predicates in judgments. The activity of judging, however, cannot be grasped by a determinate predicate because it generates judgments, i.e. predicate-functions in the first place. The generating activity of coordinating elements in judgments is not itself an element of judgment, or – to use Lacanian terms – the subject of enunciation is never identical with the subject of the enunciated. In fact, the former is not even a part of the world because the world is only the result of the synthesizing activity of judging. The determinacy of the world hinges thus on the synthesizing activity of 'the logical I' which can never become part of the world. The constituting principle of experience cannot itself be experienced.

Emphasizing this insight, Kant reduces the former Cartesian self to the state of a factor X of determination, to an *indeterminate condition of possibility of determinacy*. In the strict sense, it is not even determined as an ego but only as 'this I or He or It (the thing) which thinks.'[40] The constituting activity of experience is as a result put out of reach. We have no grasp of that which constitutes our world even though it is we who perform said constitution. The uncanny stranger begins to pervade the sphere of the

subject, threatening its identity from within. Kant is thus one of the first to become aware of the intimidating possibility of total semantic schizophrenia inherent in the anonymous transcendental subjectivity as such. The subject is itself the space in which something might appear, Heidegger's 'open space (*offene Stelle*).' For this reason, it cannot itself appear on the stage of its world-picture. The self therefore becomes an appearance. The subject assumes the paradoxical position of the proper void, the zero which becomes the One once it enters the sphere of representation without ever being able to fill out its internal gap between its determination (One) and its void (the zero).

For Kant the uncanny structure of the self's elusiveness, i.e. the subject's nothingness, ultimately opens a space for consolation and hope: if, in principle, we cannot figure out who or what we really are (our substance), we are at least entitled to behave *as if* we dwelled in an intelligible realm of pure freedom ruled by God . . . Of course, nobody really took this option seriously in a literal sense. If Kant were indeed right with his epistemological claim of finitude, i.e. if we could not know anything about the in-itself, then the in-itself might have any or no structure whatsoever. The truth about the in-itself could appear as far-fetched as any possible science-fiction scenario or literary experiment enacts it. Under strictly Kantian premises there is no suitable reason for transcendental optimism; and certainly not the moral one Kant has in mind. In a post-Schopenhauer-Nietzsche-Marx-Kierkegaard-Freud world we would be quite naïve to assume that the subject really might be a disembodied pure spirit striving for moral perfection in the face of the protestant God of conscience and duty.

Be this as it may, Kant is nevertheless right that the blind spot of reflection, the indefinite space of our ignorance, cannot be made transparent in reflection. This is why it refers us to the dimension of *the ethical* in a precise sense: the ethical indeed designates the space we inhabit qua decision-processing agents, a blank space which cannot have any positive substance apart from the ethical substance we bestow on it. It is precisely this aspect that corresponds to Hegel's notion of the ethical substance in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

In the wake of later nineteenth-century philosophy, subjectivity was taught the important lesson that ignorance is not necessarily iterative, i.e. that we are not ignorant about our ignorance. The field of ignorance is rather occupied by the coordinates of our desire: we desire precisely

that which we do not know. Ignorance and desire are two faces of the same coin. As Žižek points out,

> ignorance is *not* a sufficient reason for forgiveness since it conveys a hidden dimension of *enjoyment*. Where one doesn't (want to) know, in the blanks of one's symbolic universe, one enjoys, and there is no Father to forgive, since these blanks escape the authority of the Name-of-the-Father.[41]

This idea also lies at the bottom of Schelling's most original thesis according to which 'Will is primal Being (*Wollen ist Urseyn*).'[42] The point is that the Kantian intelligible world does not guarantee the stability of the phenomenal world. On the contrary, in its elusiveness it rather destabilizes the allegedly law-like totality of appearance, the symbolic order. Any proper insight into the paradoxical finitude of knowledge entails that the very assumption of an elusive in-itself is an expression of the libidinal instability of the coordinates of the phenomenal world. This is a lesson to be learned from Schelling as much as from David Lynch.[43] This willingness to explore and even to embrace the uncanniness of existence grounded in its libidinal instability is certainly what makes Schelling extraordinarily contemporary.

Yet not only Schelling, but also already Fichte clear-sightedly diagnosed the problem of the internal world in *The Vocation of Man* and freed it from Kant's enlightenment optimism. If the representing sphere, the self or ego, were indeed a substance, i.e. some given stable item open to become the object of a theory, it would paradoxically turn out to be completely elusive. Whenever we were to believe to have it in view, it would already have withdrawn. This problem famously referred to as 'Fichte's original insight' by Dieter Henrich entails, as I have been saying, that modern epistemology is not so much characterized by the problem of the *external* world, as many believe, but rather by the problem of the *internal* world.[44] Given that the representing sphere, the subject, self or ego, qua substance is itself part of the world (the world being made up of thinking and extended substance), reality turns out to be a dream of a dream. As Fichte writes,

> all reality is transformed into a fabulous dream, without there being any life the dream is about, without there being a mind which dreams; a dream which hangs together in a dream of itself.[45]

The represented representing sphere, i.e. the subject qua substance, is itself subject to the skeptical hypotheses developed in modern epistemology. It is epistemologically no better off than any other entity to be encountered in the world. That which seemed to be relieved from paradox, i.e. the unequivocal unitary thinking substance, proves to be as much of an illusion as the so-called external world. This also motivates Pyotr Voyd's passionate question: 'is it my inflamed consciousness that creates the nightmare, or is my consciousness itself a creation of the nightmare?'[46]

More generally, there is a serious philosophical issue as to how to distribute essence and illusion, the essential and the inessential, as Hegel puts it. The problem with the essential and the inessential is that the essential is determined over against the inessential without reflecting the constituting act separating the essential from the inessential. The essential simply seems to be essential. The whole point is that the essence or, otherwise put, reality, cannot be opposed to appearance or illusion. Illusion itself occurs within reality because reality only consists in its being determined over against illusion. Reality is not *out there*, but the result of an operation which distinguishes illusion and reality. Without this distinction, the term 'reality' does not make sense.

We only understand that there is truth and reality because we are constantly confronted with dissent: given that we do not agree on all matters, we know that there are subject matters (truths) to agree upon. However, that truth only becomes salient in discourse does not mean that the referents of true statements are mere by-products of discourse. It only means that we do not have any immediate access to any particular way the world is apart from our cognitive access to it. Now, our cognitive access to the world only functions if we presuppose a certain set of access conditions suitable for the object domain over which we quantify in order to ascribe the correct predicates to that which appears within the domain we are interested in. As any profound encounter with skeptical paradoxes teaches us, there is no way to guarantee the truth-conditions of a certain discourse about a determinate object domain (that is: objectivity) and the truths about objects within that domain at the same time. The truth-conditions we draw on exist on a different logical layer than the objects the truth about which we want to discover. This amounts to a weak distinction between the *transcendental* and the *empirical*: the very framework (the discourse) constituting determinacy for an object domain by defining what it is to belong to the object domain,

i.e. the domains 'count-as-one' (Badiou), is not itself an object within the domain. There is nothing wrong with calling the objects 'empirical' and the domain 'transcendental' as long as we do not presuppose that we can ever grasp an object from nowhere. There is no view from nowhere because it would not be a view. Determinacy presupposes negation and the very negativity constitutive of ontological as much as epistemological determinacy entails the finitude of discourse.[47]

Appearance or illusion and reality both emerge within reality to the effect that we have to come to terms with the idea defended by Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel that reality is nothing but the process of its own reduplication. Reality or essence is not one relatum in a relation, say the totality of mind-independent objects extended in space and time, but that which splits itself up in appearance and reality. That which splits itself up in such a way is what Hegel addresses under the heading of 'essence.' Reality essentially splits itself up, thereby producing representations of itself.

If we want to safeguard the absolute from being drawn into the sphere of relativity, we have to install it at the heart of relativity. Given that we must not oppose it to the relative (for this would establish a relation between the relative and the absolute), we must find a way for the absolute to manifest itself within the relative without thereby becoming relative. One way to achieve this is ontological monism according to which representation (the internal world) is itself part of the (external) world. We do not look at the world from outside but inhabit it from within. This entails that the world simply cannot be reduced to being the natural realm of necessity but has to be compatible with the outburst of various fields of sense within itself. The world creates images of itself in the activity of our creation of images of the world. Our world pictures are not cheap copies of what there really is because they are an essential aspect of what there really is.

Žižek succinctly renders the step from Kant to German Idealism in the following way: if 'the gap which separates the pure multiplicity of the Real from the appearing of a "world" whose co-ordinates are given in a set of categories which predetermine its horizon is the very gap which, in Kant, separates the Thing-in-itself from our phenomenal reality – that is, from the way things appear to us as objects of our experience,' then the question becomes: 'how does the gap between the pure multiplicity of being and its appearance in the multitude of worlds arise? *How does being*

appear to itself?'[48] Kant starts off from the assumption that the in-itself cannot be known because our access to it is mediated by a complex conceptual apparatus. In simple structuralist parlance Kant claims that we do not have any immediate access to the signified (and *a fortiori* to the real thing) without always already being caught up in the potentially misleading infinite cobweb of signifiers. The signifying chain and the rules whereby it is established and maintained simply do not allow for any act of happy-face transcendence.

The problem with this story (obviously leading from Kant to postmodernism in all its varieties) is that it takes as given a blind spot of reflection Hegel calls in question: if we cannot transcend the phenomenal world *ex hypothesi* then what makes us believe that there is a noumenal world, an it-itself, after all? Is the in-itself not ultimately reduced to a friction-guaranteeing *ersatz*-substance? If being is prior to judgment then we cannot assert anything determinate about it, not even that we cannot assert anything determinate about it! In other words, if the in-itself were inaccessible then it would not even be inaccessible. This is why one needs non-propositional resources if one still wants to safeguard transcendence from Hegel's dialectical criticism of reflection.

The chapter on 'illusion/appearance (*Schein*)' in the *Science of Logic* begins with the path-breaking assertion that 'Being is illusory being (*das Sein ist Schein*).'[49] Illusory being or appearance 'is all that still remains from the sphere of being (*der ganze Rest, der noch von der Sphäre des Seins übriggeblieben ist*).'[50] Illusion appears to be a pure void, 'the negative posited as negative,'[51] whereby it is distinguished from the in-itself. As Hegel explicitly states, this structure can be found in ancient skepticism's concept of the phenomena as much as in Kant's concept of the phenomenal world.[52] Even though Hegel's claim that the phenomenon of skepticism and the phenomenal world in Kant share the same structure is highly disputable, his key point is clear: if we distinguish between the things as they are in themselves (the essence: reality) and the things we apprehend according to the forms of our understanding (appearances), what guarantees that the in-itself is not itself part of the appearances? How can we be so sure that the in-itself is not some higher-order illusion, a mere simulacrum? What if the system of appearances just produces certain interferences which look like acts of real transcendence?

A famous philosophical example at hand is the so-called 'Trendelenburg gap' in Kant's *Transcendental Aesthetics*.[53] Trendelenburg correctly

diagnosed the following mistake in Kant's argumentation. If space and time are pure forms of intuition, they are indispensable forms for our apprehension of things. However, if we apprehend things in a certain form (or under a certain description), this does not entitle us to the claim that the things themselves exhibit this very form. Wearing my blue sunglasses and, therefore, seeing the Empire State Building in a blue manner does not make it blue. Yet, if I constantly wore blue sunglasses, I might encounter a lot of objects which actually were blue whereas others might, in reality, be red or white without me ever being in a position to draw a distinction between blue and red objects on the basis of sense-perception alone. If Kant is right, then we cannot strip our space and time glasses off in order to see the things as they are in themselves.[54] And yet, he explicitly asserts that the things in themselves are *not* in space and time which is an illegitimate act of transcendence.

> Space does not represent any property of things in themselves, nor does it represent them in their relation to one another. That is to say, space does not represent any determination that attaches to the objects themselves, and which remains even when abstraction has been made of all the subjective conditions of intuition. [. . .] It is, therefore, solely from the human standpoint that we can speak of space, of extended things, etc. If we depart from the subjective condition under which alone we can have outer intuition, namely, liability to be affected by objects, the representation of space stands for nothing whatsoever.[55]

Here Kant simply claims too much by making a metaphysical assertion about the things in themselves. He is tricked by appearances into the attempt to transcend them. In fact, any such attempt at transcendence is misleading in precisely this way. If our knowledge is restricted to our epistemic, social, or whatever conditioning, then there is no straightforward way of embracing this finitude given that any specific assertion about finitude amounts to an illegitimate act of transcendence. We cannot draw the boundaries of our finitude without thereby either undoing them or drawing a fictional boundary within our finitude between our finitude and some infinite item.

In this sense, as theorists of finitude we are in no better epistemological position than a thermometer. Thermometers can tell the difference between 80° Fahrenheit and 95° Fahrenheit. However, they do not in themselves register the difference between telling the difference between

temperatures and telling the difference between Picasso and Botticelli or between 1 AM and 2 PM. Thermometers carve up reality in a certain way without being in any position to access their own conditioning as thermometers. If the subject consisted of a determinate set of access conditions opening up a world of things to it, then it could not access these access conditions without further ado. This is why Kant introduces the infinite *intuitus originarius* in order to get a grip on our finitude via a mythological story of finitude's other.[56] However, all the stories he goes on to tell about the realm of freedom's internal structure, etc. are results of illegitimate acts of transcendence whereby our finitude is determined in a certain way. Kant's standpoint is therefore and despite himself *super-human*. His analysis of our access conditions simply generates a non-human framework, an intelligible realm, laid out in his texts. His own *position of enunciation* is strangely exempted from the *enunciated position* whereby he creates a split between the noumenal and the phenomenal that he then ascribes to the human realm as such. The way he accesses this split, his way of uncovering it, necessarily presents it under a certain description *ipso facto* distorting it.

Hegel generally concludes that any theoretical setting in which some in-itself is distinguished from its appearance, from its for-us, is a case of the structure he labels 'essence' and he adds the further reflection that *essence* is itself nothing but the gap within which the distinction between appearance and reality occurs. His crucial point is that the distinction between appearance and reality, between the inessential and the essential, is necessarily reflected into itself: the inessential really occupies the position of the essential precisely because it places the essential at our disposal. The inessential mediates the essential in such a way that the essential becomes the inessential. The essential is only placed at our disposal by error and dissent which means that it is contingent on the inessential which thereby assumes primacy over the essential.

A similar insight is conveyed by Nietzsche's and Heidegger's diagnosis of Platonism as the ultimate origin of European nihilism. Platonism's degradation of the sensible realm (the inessential) in favor of its underlying organizational principles (the essential) masks the very reflective operation by which the underlying organizational principles are constituted. As a matter of fact, they are only available to *epistêmê* in the latter's desire for transcendence. Platonism is inspired by an attempt at transcendence without reflecting on the finitude of this intention.

Transcendence is not a matter of fact but always depends on the act and direction of transcending. The way transcendence is achieved is prescribed by the elements' structure of appearance. Appearance seems to be organized in such a manner that it betrays some underlying, elementary reality. The elements which seem to reveal a hidden essence retroactively generate the hidden essence. The degradation of the sensible realm (i.e. nihilism) thus amounts to a reversal of itself: it pretends to cling to the essence of things instead of leading a life of appearances and yet it essentially leads a life of appearances based on a denial, namely on the denial of appearances. It therefore annihilates itself and becomes an aggressive force of civilization in the name of the 'true nature' of things.

Hegel makes this dialectic explicit by claiming that appearance itself does indeed have being or reality, namely in the very other it posits as its underlying hidden essence.

> Illusory being is the negative that has a being, but in an *other*, in its negation, it is a non-self-subsistent being which is in its own self-sublated and null. As such, it is the negative returned into itself, non-self-subsistent being as in its own self not self-subsistent. This *self-relation* of the negative or of non-self-subsistent being is its *immediacy*; it is an *other* than the negative itself; it is its determinateness over against itself; or it is the negation directed against the negative. But negation directed against the negative is purely *self*-related negativity, the absolute sublating of the determinateness itself.[57]

Appearance is the non-self-subsistent being in itself, or otherwise put: appearance is the essence of 'self-relating negativity,' the remainder of which is Being. Being thus is nothing but the remainder of appearance, its very being there. In Hegel's vocabulary 'Being' designates the paradoxical subsistence of the non-self-subsistent structure of appearance. Being is therefore not a hidden essence, reality as it is in itself or anything like that, but the contingent being there of appearance.

The move Hegel prescribes for reflection therefore consists in the 'negation of negation.' The first negation is the positing of the essence over against the mere appearances, the phenomenal world. The One is opposed to the multiplicity of being, the innocent origin to the sinful, fallen world, etc. However, this negation of the appearances is the very kernel of appearance. The immediacy of appearances, the alleged 'fact' that they are deceitful, is already a redoubling of appearances. They

thereby exhibit the structure of reflection, i.e. the 'movement of nothing to nothing, and so back to itself,' a structure Hegel designates as 'becoming in essence':

> Consequently, becoming is essence, its reflective movement, is the *movement of nothing to nothing, and so back to itself.* The transition, or becoming, sublates itself in its passage; the *other* that in this transition comes to be, is not the non-being of a being, but the nothingness of a nothing, and this, to be the negation of a nothing, constitutes being. Being only *is* as the movement of nothing to nothing, and as such it is essence; and the latter does not *have* this movement *within it*, but is this movement as a being that is itself absolutely illusory, pure negativity, outside of which there is nothing for it to negate but which negates only its own negative, which latter *is* only in this negating.[58]

In other words, reflection is absolute negativity and, therefore, freedom.[59] It is the activity of establishing autonomy by dismantling the beyond, i.e. the very movement of Hegelian philosophy. Hence Henrich is right in claiming that the *Logic of Essence* defines the dialectical operations characteristic of the Hegelian enterprise as such.[60] Being is no longer opposed to becoming as it is in the Platonic tradition: on the contrary, it is explicitly identified with the becoming of essence (and ultimately with the universality of the Notion).[61]

One of Hegel's most brilliant insights is that being is 'absolute illusion.' The idea behind this is an application of the Hegelian principle of inversion by self-reference: philosophical dichotomies like identity and difference, universal and particular, appearance and reality, law and crime are applied to themselves in such a manner that the implicit hierarchy between the terms is inverted, the result of which is 'contradiction' in Hegel's sense. Contradiction arises once we realize that all 'reflective determinations (*Reflexionsbestimmungen*)' replicate the matrix of reflection's negation of negation. We come to understand that 'in its self-subsistence [the self-subsistent determination of reflection] excludes from itself its own self-subsistence': 'The self-subsistent determination of reflection that contains the opposite determination, and is self-subsistent in virtue of the inclusion, at the same time also excludes it; in its self-subsistence, therefore, it excludes from itself its own self-subsistence.'[62] Reflection-in-itself and reflection-into-another coincide and by this means reveal their common ground, what Hegel captures with his

wordplay on 'zu-Grunde-gehen,' i.e. return to the ground by destruction. The firm identity of the terms related in reflection reveals their ground, namely the absolute, self-relating negativity of reflection. The essence as ground turns out to be *'a positedness, something that has become (ein Gesetztsein, ein Gewordenes).'*[63]

If transcendence is to be achieved against Hegel's strictly speaking atheistic closure of immanence upon itself, one has indeed to look for traces of something which escapes reflection. As we will see later, Hegel's own form of expression falls short of the content it attempts to express. Hegel does not achieve any absolute closure of form. There is no logical 'absolute form,' as Hegel believes, precisely because reflection in its all-embracing claim to positivity cannot sufficiently reflect its being conditioned by a process which is not always already reflexive.

The reflection of being and the being of reflection do not coincide because there is no self-sufficient medium of expression, no possible identity of the position of enunciation (Fregean 'sense') and of the Thing or states of affairs (Fregean 'reference'). We can only attain the Thing in its conceptual disguises, i.e. under a certain description, without ever making sure once and for all that the Thing is there. For even the designator 'Thing' is part of the field of sense: *language is its own minimal difference.*

Hegel's master-thought is conveyed by his logic of reflection. Whatever we refer to as the One – that true referent or meaning of our expressions that is supposedly distorted by the propositional structure of judgment – is in point of fact only a side-effect of the movement of absolute negativity. There is no originary abiding One. 'Substance becomes subject' designates Hegel's epoch-shifting move beyond transcendent metaphysics: the subject's substance is only retroactively posited by the process of the subject's self-constitution. This process necessarily misfires if we conceive of it in terms of some underlying metaphysical reality manifesting itself. The history of philosophy text-book version of Hegel according to which absolute spirit is some God-like super-mind steering the course of events until Hegel emerges and assumes the role of the mouthpiece of the super-mind thereby even overcoming Jesus Christ's confused expression of the absolute spirit etc., ignores Hegel's concept of *manifestation.* Hegel's point indeed is that 'the determination of spirit is manifestation (*die Bestimmtheit des Geistes ist die Manifestation*).'[64] It is crucial to remark that 'manifestation' here does not refer to some representational

structure, i.e. to a manifestation of something which is ontologically prior to its manifestation. As Hegel writes, spirit does not reveal *'some thing*, but its very mode and meaning is this revelation (*nicht* Etwas [. . .], *sondern seine Bestimmtheit und Inhalt ist dieses Offenbaren selbst*).'[65] Hegel calls this structure of revealing (which reveals nothing but the fact that there is nothing besides, prior to, or beyond this revealing) 'revealing in the notion (*Offenbaren im Begriffe*)' and 'creating (*Erschaffen*)' respectively.[66] Subjectivity is, thus, a radical instance of ontological genesis: it consists in its positing itself, in generating a field of sense, and in this sense a world to be inhabited.[67] This process has no external foothold in a transcendent realm but rests solely on and in itself.

In this vein, Hegel radicalizes Kantian autonomy on the conceptual level. We are not only autonomous beings whose being bound by rules consists in our acceptance of those rules as guiding. The real abyss of our freedom is reflection. *Whatever we encounter in the world is framed by a wider context which is not itself encountered in the world.* However, the wider context defines the rules of entry into our world. The elements to be accounted for in truth-apt cognition and discourse are determined by the wider context of reflection which is usually not reflected in those elements. This is why they appear as not posited, as simply being out there. Hegel reflects on the conditioning of experience and concludes that it precludes transcendence even in its mitigated Kantian sense of the inaccessible thing in itself, the 'unknown something.'

> In the sphere of being, there *arises* over against being as an *immediacy*, non-being, which is likewise an *immediacy*, and their truth is *becoming*. In the sphere of essence, we have first essence opposed to the unessential, then essence opposed to illusory being, that is, to the unessential and to illusory being as the remainder of being. But both essence and illusory being, and also the difference of essence from them derive solely from the fact that essence is at first taken as an *immediate*, not as it is in itself, *namely*, not as an immediacy that *is* as pure mediation or absolute negativity. The first immediacy is thus only the *determinateness* of immediacy. The sublating of this determinateness of essence, therefore, consists simply and solely in showing that the unessential is only illusory being and that the truth is rather that essence contains the illusory being within itself in its infinite immanent movement that determines its immediacy as negativity and its negativity as immediacy, and thus the reflection of itself within itself. Essence in this its self-movement is *reflection*.[68]

In this passage Hegel draws a distinction between *essence's being something determinate* and the *determinacy of essence*. The idea behind this distinction is that essence should not be referred to in the objective mode: it is not something determinate or *out there*, as it were. Essence does not exist as an entity among others which is disclosed to reflection. Such a view of essence (of the in-itself) would entail a fallback to the sphere of being. The in-itself does not exist independent of our activity of conceptualizing it. It is a pure *ens rationale*, the result of our penetrating the 'veil' of appearances. In other words, essence comes close to being (Seyn) in the peculiar Heideggerian sense. It is the very ontological difference between essence and appearance which may be interpreted in different ways throughout the history of being (Seyn) or reflection. In this context, it is, of course, absolutely crucial to insist that Heidegger is not talking about some Being independent of our access to it (which would be metaphysics). The history of Being is not the history of mistaken identifications of the One beyond discourse. Heideggerian Being is therefore not pre-, but post-Hegelian. Heidegger is far from falling back behind Hegelian reflection. He rather tries to radicalize it so as to eradicate any firm belief into Being as a transcendent agency revealing itself in history. Despite the theological ring of Heidegger's formulations, he protests against theology in a particularly modern gesture of fighting ontotheology, a gesture Gadamer calls his 'raising one's hands against God (*Handaufheben gegen Gott*).'[69] In this vein, Heidegger famously asserts 'that *theology is a positive science and as such, therefore, is absolutely different from philosophy*.'[70] In particular, he explicitly fights any identification of his project with *Christian* theology, an opposition he never gave up. Even in the *Contributions'* resurrection of the 'last God' he unambiguously declares that what he refers to as 'God' is 'totally other over against gods who have been, especially over against the Christian God.'[71]

Being is the name for the fact that the movement of reflection *generates* determinacy. On the level of reflection we understand that we generate the discursive frameworks which open up a certain domain of determinate objects for and of a discourse. Discourses generate a set of norms-in-context which lay out input- and output-rules.[72] They define the framework of a discourse and thereby create a domain of objects.

This operation can be reconstructed in simple system-theoretic terms. Whenever we refer to some object, we draw a distinction between the object, the domain to which it belongs (which determines it as such-and-such a type of object), and a set of other domains over against which the object domain we picked out is determined. *Determinacy presupposes negation*. However, the very activity of making determinacy work, i.e. the activity of selecting, cannot itself be something determinate. As Castoriadis puts it, 'the activity of formalization is itself not formalizable.'[73] If determinacy is the result of some ontological decision as to how to pick out objects, then this decision cannot itself be determinate. *Ontological genesis* therefore is prior to determinacy.

The ultimate framework within which the event of determinacy takes place can be called 'absolute negativity,' because it is the domain of all domains within which determinacy occurs as the result of some ontological decision or other. Yet, this domain cannot itself be determined. It is the very freedom of the One as operation which cannot be counted as one. As soon as a distinction is drawn, reflection generates a blind spot so that there necessarily is something which cannot be accounted for in reflection. However, this something does not exist. It is no mysterious item or super-item like in classical ontotheology. Hegel rightly insists that the blind spot of reflection is part and parcel of reflection as such. That which cannot be accounted for in reflection is the Notion itself which for Hegel is the activity of putting logical space together. The deficiency of traditional formal logic (and contemporary logic for that matter) consists in its incapability to account for the genesis of the framework it calls upon within the framework. The 'hardness of the logical "must"' seems to foreclose any pre-logical energy. If we ascribe necessity to some truth or other within the domain of propositions, we forget that the constitution of the domain is itself contingent. Any framework relative to which necessity can be claimed presupposes the discipline of rules and therefore of rule-following practices in order to make sense for finite creatures like us. Therefore, anything to which we concede necessity is higher-order contingent, because the framework to which it owes its determinacy cannot itself be necessary. To put it differently: at some point or other we encounter a brute decision – the decision constitutive of rationality – which itself is neither rational nor reasonable. This groundlessness adds up to an experience of contingency which cannot itself be described as necessary without thereby creating another contingent

framework. Contingency is thus a condition of possibility of necessity. The ultimate contingency of world-constitution is pre-logical in view of the fact that the domain of logic or logical space is only one domain among others.[74]

In this sense, the traditional epistemology of logical space (that is, the discipline of logic) simply presupposes that the order of logical concepts can be represented in logical thought. Logical forms seem to ground rationality. Hegel objects against formal logic that its logical space presupposes conditions exceeding its resources of expression. In this objection, however, Hegel is not admitting a pre-logical domain. That is, for Hegel what is pre-logical with regard to formal logic is logical with regard to his all-encompassing form of reflection which he identifies with Logos. Hegel's introduction of movement (genesis) into the realm of logic is meant to achieve a logical account of that which is pre-logical in order to make sure that even the allegedly pre-logical is governed by Logos. The motor of this theory of Logos is the Notion which is but the name for the activity of putting the system of categories together and thinking them through. This way, Hegel ultimately fails because he is not in possession of pre-logical tools. He thereby contradicts his own methodological requirement that form and content must become identical in logical thought. Given that there can be no fully logical expression of that which antecedes the expressive resources of logic, we need to find a form corresponding to the pre-logical content constitutive of the domain of Logos.

> The pure Notion is the absolutely infinite, unconditioned and free. It is here, at the outset of the discussion which has the Notion for its *content*, that we must look back once more at its genesis. *Essence* is the *outcome of being*, and the Notion the *outcome* of essence, therefore also of being. But this becoming has the significance of a self-*repulsion*, so that it is rather the *outcome* which is the *unconditioned* and *original*. *Being*, in its transition into essence, has become an *illusory being* or a *positedness*, and *becoming* or transition into an *other* has become a positing; and conversely, the *positing* or reflection of essence has sublated itself and has restored itself as a being that is *not posited*, that is *original*. The Notion is the interfusion of these moments, namely, qualitative and original being is such only as a positing, only as a return-into-self, and this pure reflection-into-self is a sheer *becoming-other* or *determinateness* which, consequently, is no less infinite, self-relating *determinateness*.

> Thus the Notion is, in the first instance, the *absolute self-identity* that is such only as the negation of negation or as the infinite unity of the negativity with itself. This *pure relation* of the Notion to itself, which is this relation by positing itself through negativity, is the *universality* of the Notion.[75]

The absolute self-identity of the Notion does not imply that the Notion exerts a metaphysical agency beyond the phenomenal world. The Notion's substance is its utter substancelessness. Hence, the Notion is *universal* which basically means that there is nothing outside of logical space. Yet, logical space itself is not a substance but a constant movement, the famous 'Bacchanalian revel' from the preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.[76] Even according to Hegel, the only guarantee of stability is therefore the complete instability (substancelessness) of the domain of all domains, the Notion which can thus be said to be 'universal.' The Notion consequently is Hegel's preferred candidate for the domain of all domains which commits him to a denial of a pre-logical space outside of his reflection.

Hegel's assertion that being ultimately amounts to nothing other than the universality of the Notion means that there cannot be anything outside of logical space. Logical space does not exist; it is not an entity, but a continuous manifestation of actuality. If we want to render this claim of absolute immanence in a language different from Hegelese, we could say that the appearance of something as existent outside of a theory-building process or a discourse and ready to be represented by true statements emerging within discourse is itself a discursive appearance. There is no metaphysical hyper-theory; there is only a meta-theory which spells out the conditions for there not being metaphysical hyper-theories of the beyond. Accordingly, Hegel's *Science of Logic* is not designed to form an ultimate hyper-theory which transcends discursive finitude, but on the contrary investigates into the nature of determinacy or finitude. To be sure, Hegel says such things as 'the finite sublates itself by virtue of its own nature, and passes over, of itself, into its opposite.'[77] But this does not mean that the *movement* of sublation ever terminates in a final *statement* of sublation. The finite only transcends itself into another finite position.

Being, for Hegel, is 'wholly *abstract, immediate relation to self*, is nothing else than the abstract moment of the Notion, which moment is abstract

universality.'[78] Among other things, Hegel seems to have Hölderlin's 'Judgment and Being' in mind which can be read as an attempt to overcome Kant's restriction of thinking to judgment, i.e. his identification of objectively contentful thought with propositional thought partially retracted in the *Third Critique*. Commenting on Kant and Fichte, Hölderlin defines judgment as 'the original separation of object and subject which are most deeply united in intellectual intuition, that separation through which alone object and subject become possible, the arche-separation.'[79] Indeed, Kantian epistemology can be read as an attempt to display the realm of the arche-separation, the realm of discursive finitude in terms of the subject-object dichotomy. This is why Kantian semantics hinges on the concept of meaning qua 'relation to the object (*Beziehung aufs Objekt*).'[80] The Kantian enterprise consists in analyzing the conditions under which we are capable of referring to objects which potentially differ from our actual representations of them. In other words, Kant defines objectivity in terms of subjectivity: the domain of objects accessible to our understanding (i.e. the world of appearances) is defined in terms of our access conditions. That which precedes the arche-separation and therefore the totality of our access conditions to what *is*, cannot be grasped by us. Hölderlin's concept of being as opposed to judgment nevertheless hints at what *is*, at what antecedes (but does not transcend!) the arche-separation.

> *Being* – expresses the connection between subject and object. Where subject and object are united altogether and not only in part, that is, united in such a manner that no separation can be performed without violating the essence of what is to be separated, there and nowhere else can be spoken of *Being proper*, as is the case with intellectual intuition.[81]

Of course, Hölderlin instantly remarks that Being proper cannot be the value of any logical variable, that it is not even identical with itself or, more precisely, that it cannot be conceptualized as identity without thereby subjecting it to the laws of propositional thought. Nevertheless, he does not seem to be aware of the fact that the very separation between being and judgment is a repetition of the arche-separation. Thereby, Being itself loses its original status. In order to solve this problem Hölderlin later created a new mythology in the expressive medium of

poetry which disrupts the establishment of purely object-directed, truth-only cognition in order to *show* what cannot be *said*, i.e. in order to show 'the essence of what is to be separated' by means of a non-propositional form of expression.

Still, Hegel's objection holds against any attempt to transcend logical space with the help of assertions (positive or negative). As long as we *refer* to being as to some extraordinary domain or as to that which precedes judgment we simply reenact the universality of the Notion.

> *Being* as the wholly *abstract, immediate relation to self*, is nothing else than the abstract moment of the Notion, which moment is abstract universality. This universality also effects what one demands of being, namely, to be *outside* the Notion; for though this universality is moment of the Notion, it is equally the difference, or abstract judgment, of the Notion in which it opposes itself to itself . . . A philosophizing that in its view of being does not rise above sense, naturally stops short at merely abstract thought, too, in its view of the Notion; such thought stands opposed to being.[82]

The alleged arche-separation between subject and object really amounts to the separation between being and judgment (thought) which only occurs within thought. Thought alienates itself from itself, an act through which it objectifies its innermost conditions of possibility. For Hegel, there is consequently no Being prior to reflection. In his own way, he follows Kant's path at this point. In the 'Transcendental Dialectic' of the *First Critique* Kant introduced the concept of 'transcendental subreption'[83] in the context of his destruction of the ontological proof of the existence of God. According to Kant, the ontological proof mistakes the conditions of our access to any determinate world-order for this world-order itself. He suggests that the ontological proof confuses the '*distributive* unity of the empirical employment of the understanding' with the '*collective* unity experience as a whole,'[84] an operation Kant calls 'transcendental subreption.'[85] Transcendental subreption consists in the confusion of judgment and being, in misrepresenting the conditions for there being anything accessible to cognition (i.e. the conditions of determinacy) by hypostatizing them into some determinate object (i.e. God or any other determinate representation of the absolute). Transcendental subreption amounts to a dialectic in Kant's sense, that is to say to a 'logic

of illusion.'[86] In the context of his own 'logic of illusion,' Hegel invalidates any attempt to ground reflection on something prior or transcendent to reflection in a way comparable to Kant's approach in the 'Transcendental Dialectic'.

However, Hegel radicalizes Kant's seesaw notion of the thing in itself which, on the ontic level, clearly denotes an entity (or set of entities) capable of affecting sensibility which, on the ontological level, equally clearly evaporates into a pure X, an explanatory factor only introduced to 'ensure friction.'[87] Hegel (like Fichte) opts for the radical view according to which there is no way to transcend the absolute immanence of reflection. Though he agrees with Kant that illusion is unavoidable he radicalizes this insight: if illusion is unavoidable, then there is no ultimate criterion which distinguishes the phenomenal and illusory from the noumenal and real for the precise reason that the criterion has to appear. For Kant, transcendental subreption is hypostatization, it phenomenalizes the noumenal. Hegel, on the contrary, argues that the phenomenalization of the noumenal is not only unavoidable, a flaw of human nature, but that it is rather constitutive of the noumenal (which only persists in its phenomenalization as the whole *Phenomenology of Spirit* argues).

As a matter of fact, this is meaning of the term 'phenomenology' in Fichte's *Science of Knowing* 1804, a revolutionary set of lectures in which he first introduced the notion of absolute knowing and tied it to the impossibility of achieving transcendence. The later Fichte's name for the sphere of absolute immanence is 'being' which, therefore, does not entail any break with transcendental philosophy but its outmost realization: being is only accessible in judgments which entails that we cannot even assume that there might be 'something' which precedes judgment. For how are we to make sure that there really is being prior to judgment, some original unity, without thereby always already dragging it into the sphere of judgment? There seems, hence, no straightforward way to *assert* the difference of being from judgment without *ipso facto* canceling the very distinction in question. In other words, if we want to make sense of an outside of reflection we need to find a different mode of expression than assertion. One way to motivate the move from the propositional to the non-propositional is to argue that the propositional (qua open region) is always already opened by the non-propositional.

2. THE UNPRETHINKABLE BEING OF MYTHOLOGY – SCHELLING ON THE LIMITS OF REFLECTION

The logical space of reflection is part of a wider domain which is ultimately only accessible in the mode of *mythopoiesis*. In this mode, reflection is capable of confronting its finitude and of having an experience of being which is not yet sutured to the expressive restrictions of logical reflection. I am aware that the recourse to the concept of 'myth' runs counter to contemporary philosophy's prevailing ideology, i.e. *scientism*. The expressive dimension of the natural sciences (however mathematizable they turn out to be) is restricted to one historical register among others. We have to be way more serious about incompleteness than scientism suggests: there is no complete theory of the universe precisely because there is no such thing as *the* universe accessible to our description. Our cognition is necessarily restricted to one or other cosmological model.

A simple example from the philosophy of 'collecting' might illustrate this.[88] Let's say you perceive three elements x1, x2, and x3 in a specific region (for example three cubes with different colors: a blue, a red, and a white cube). Now you ask yourself how many objects there are in the region. The easy answer would, of course, be three. This way, you build the set A: {x1, x2, x3}. Yet, we clearly know that there are objects composed of other objects (and we might suspect there may very well be only composite objects). The three cubes might be one object. Also, any two cubes might be one object. It might look reasonable for someone to connect the red and the blue cube and to oppose them to the white cube. Someone else could also divide the objects into geometrical parts of a particular size and count those. Let's call any arrangement of objects in the region which we first considered as a collection of three cubes a 'universe': we can then generalize and assert that the various schemes of counting the objects in a certain region are 'cosmological models.' On the basis of this example, it now appears straightforward that there are infinitely many ways of collecting objects, of arranging them. Even if there was a region which contained a finite set of elements, we could still arrange the finite set of elements in indefinitely many ways (at least in more ways than there are 'original' elements). Those ways which Nelson Goodman famously labelled 'versions' cannot be totalized because any attempt to build the set of all versions (of all cosmological models) would itself create a higher-order cosmological model of the versions to

the effect that it would invariably generate the possibility to do so otherwise.[89]

This does not only hold for the red, white, and blue cube universe, but for what we ordinarily refer to as the 'universe' qua *singulare tantum*. The trouble with this, however, does not so much lie in the possibility of describing the universe in various ways, but in the self-referential insight that the very description according to which there are various descriptions of the universe qua *singulare tantum* is itself yet another description – but of what?

In other words, contingency, the constant possibility of being other, cannot be eliminated on any layer of reality accessible to our understanding, including *this* one. Nietzsche nicely sums this insight up in his concept of 'the new infinite' in *The Gay Science*:

> But I should think that today we are at least far from the ridiculous immodesty that would be involved in decreeing from our corner that perspectives are permitted only from this corner. Rather has the world become 'infinite' for us all over again, inasmuch as we cannot reject the possibility that *it may include infinite interpretations*?[90]

Let's say that *contingency* is the possibility-to-be-other of a certain arrangement of elements. Accordingly, *necessity* is the impossibility-to-be-other of a certain arrangement of elements. Necessary statements or statements about necessity presuppose the availability and stability of a given framework relative to which a set (of elements) can legitimately be said to consist of relations between its elements that could not be otherwise. For example, true arithmetical statements, i.e. arithmetical theorems are necessary in this sense. Yet, even if there are as many necessary statements as there are mathematical theorems and scientifically recordable facts, the frameworks themselves within which this necessity is recorded are not thereby made necessary. We are always confronted with the higher-order problem as to how to determine the necessity or contingency of a given framework which allows for necessary statements. If we are to assert that a given framework F is necessary then we *ipso facto* have to rely on another framework F* which allows for the quantification over frameworks. Whenever we record the existence of a framework and thereby quantify over a certain object domain, we generate a set of background assumptions (axioms) which ascertain the conditions for there being an object in the relevant domain. These assumptions are

never accessible within a given framework unless a meta-language is introduced, and this meta-language is itself 'threatened' by contingency.

If you call the *realm of necessity* 'reason' or 'rationality' it is obvious why Kant assumes that everything which we can make sense of (i.e. the phenomenal world) is fully determined within an ultimate 'horizon' he calls the world.[91] This horizon is the *omnitudo realitatis*, the totality of all possible (non-contradictory) predicates. In Kant, to be real amounts to being representable in the sense of being perceivable. Everything which is real is either something perceivable (everything which can be met with in space and/or in time is part of the perceivable) or a condition of perceivability (such as space and time themselves). Reality consists hence in a relation to *possible experience*.

For Kant reality (*Realität, Sachheit*) is the result of 'transcendental affirmation'[92] which affirms that there are determinate objects which Kant calls 'things.'[93] Ultimately, transcendental affirmation consists in building the set of all possible things by creating the idea of a totality of predicates. This totality of predicates provides us with the 'material (*Stoff*)'[94] of cognition; it is the name for the materiality of cognition, its being confronted with given material in all its contentful operations (i.e. cognitions). If we postulate that everything that *is* is determined in a wider framework to which it belongs, we can easily generalize and form the *'idea of an all of reality, omnitudo realitatis.'*[95] As Kant suggests, 'all true negations are nothing but limitations – a title which would be inapplicable, were they not thus based upon the unlimited, that is, upon, the All.'[96]

When Schelling speaks of the 'idea of being (*Idee des Seyenden*),' also addressed as the 'figure of being (*Figur des Seyenden*)' or 'the blueprint of being (*das Seyende im Entwurf*),'[97] he makes implicit reference to Kant's concept of the 'idea.' Before we can move from Kant to Schelling, however, we need to introduce another modification of the Kantian concept of complete determinacy in order to fully understand the impact of Schelling's ground-breaking assertion that the idea (the realm of necessity, including the necessity of contingency) is itself contingent. We have to take on board the insight that the Kantian totality of predicates (his concept of the world) should be re-interpreted along the lines of Nietzsche's new infinite: *there is no consistent set of all predicates or all things because the concept of a thing as much as the way we record predicates and delineate the semantic rules which make them meaningful depend on a prior decision*

to choose a framework F rather than (say) G. If I assert that the dogs in the park in front of my window are barking, I refer to a determinate scene. The determinacy (and the meaning) of the scene hinges on various parameters such as my (typically unconsidered) decision to rely on ordinary sense-perception to determine what is going on around me, my exclusion of far-fetched hypotheses (which, of course, might be relevant) such as the possibility that somebody might be playing his favorite record of 'the barking dogs' or a secret agent playing a record of barking dogs because all the dogs in the park have gone mute due to a strange virus which the government does not want us to know about, etc. I also decide against infinitely many other (paranoid, scientific, or what have you) ways of conceptualizing the scene in the park (which under some description or other would not even be a scene in a park). The relative consistency of our everyday arrangement of and engagement with things presupposes that we blind ourselves to infinitely more possibilities and actual matters of fact than we allow to be explicitly processed in the form of information within our preferred field of sense. In other words, *we have to take account of the fact that the indefinitely comprehensive manifold of data exceeds the discursively available, finite information.*

The very fact just stated (which Kant inadequately captures with his distinction between the manifold of sensibility and the conceptually structured appearances) is itself not capable of referring to the multiplicity it envisages. The multiplicity which exceeds the discursively available, finite information is, to be sure, not even a multiple. We should not try to comprehend that which precedes the activity of concept-mongering creatures in terms of a result of concept-mongering. The trouble is that 'to think is to identify.'[98] This is why we can only agree to some extent with Badiou's assumption of an inconsistent multiplicity supposedly prior to discursively available, finite structures. When Badiou writes 'Being must be already-there; some pure multiple, as multiple of multiples, must be presented in order for the rule to then separate some consistent multiplicity, itself presented subsequently by the gesture of the initial presentation,'[99] he does not seem to be aware of the worrisome situation he himself creates. The 'pure multiple' or even the term 'inconsistent multiplicity' is not capable of capturing that which precedes consistency, because multiplicity is already the result of a synthesis, it presupposes the existence of consistency and can, therefore, not precede it.

For this reason, Schelling locates *total* inconsistency which is not even a multiple at the basis of consistency by introducing his concept of 'that which is unequal to itself (*das sich selbst Ungleiche*).'[100] Of course, one could easily try to annex this inconsistency to a set-theoretical ontology à la Badiou by looking back on Frege's account of the empty set, for example. According to Frege, '0 is the Number which belongs to the concept "not identical with itself".'[101] Yet, reference to contradictory concepts (under which nothing can fall) is not the only way to introduce the empty set. One can also define the empty set as the set of all American presidents born before 384 BC or the set of all female unicorns wearing police uniforms and living on Alpha Centauri, etc. Set-theory does not therefore necessarily lend itself to an insight into the paradoxical conditions of determinacy or anything similar. The empty set can be defined on the basis of every contradictory concept. Interestingly enough, Frege happily embraces contradictions, because he believes,

> these old friends are not as black as they are painted. To be of any use is, I admit, the last thing we should expect of them . . . All that can be demanded of a concept from the point of view of logic and with an eye to rigour of proof is only that its boundaries should be sharp, so that we can decide definitely about every object whether it falls under that concept or not.[102]

Be this as it may, Badiou is certainly right when he states that 'the being of consistency is inconsistency,'[103] that is, if we add that this follows from the distinction between a given (finite) structure and the new infinite which provides us with the endless task of making sense of the world under always different descriptions which will never add up to a fully coherent picture of totality. We can accept this point so long as we do not then go on to determine that which is unequal to itself in any such way as to access it under a definite description.

As one can learn from Schelling, this enterprise is paradoxical and leads to an insight into the impossibility of carrying it out in any determinate framework, whether it be set-theory of poetry. Nonetheless, this impossibility does not render the enterprise meaningless. It rather confronts us with the utter contingency and groundlessness of our ways of giving meaning to that which is unequal to itself. In other words, the world cannot prescribe how to conceptualize it because it is compatible with more than one description and there is no ultimate meta-language

in which it is possible to specify the totality of truth-conditions for any discourse whatsoever. At some point or other we run out of grounds and encounter the groundlessness of grounding: 'at the foundation of well-founded belief lies belief that is not founded.'[104]

It is important to bear in mind that the 'world,' the 'domain of all domains,' 'that which is unequal to itself,' 'unprethinkable Being,' 'the absolute,' etc., are always already part of the cobweb of predicates. This means that inconsistency is not a state of affairs, a primordial nameless tohubohu in the beginning happily waiting to be ordered by the divine word. It rather co-originates with logical space as such. As soon as there is something determinate, the paradoxical indeterminate conditions of determinacy are retroactively generated: everything determinate is therefore determined to collapse at some point in time or other.

If determinacy presupposes negation, then we are justified in applying the procedure of determining something by negation to the totality of what there is. In the most boring universe, there would at least be two things: one thing and the space it occupies. If the thing were not distinguishable from the space it inhabits, it would not be determined because in the world of the One there is nothing else over against which to determine the single object existing in the *singleton universe*.[105] Even if we think of the empty set, that which it contains, , is still distinguished from { }. There is still the distinction between the set and its elements, even if there are no elements. Žižek pithily captures this point as he suggests,

> reflection, to be sure, ultimately always fails – any positive mark included in the series could never 'successfully' represent/reflect the empty space of the inscription of marks. It is, however, *this very failure as such which 'constitutes' the space of inscription*. The 'place' of the inscription of marks is *nothing* but the void opened by the failure of the re-mark. [. . .] *the very act of reflection as failed constitutes retroactively that which eludes it*.[106]

That which eludes our grasp (however we name it) is nothing substantial; it does not even exist (a preservable insight of the apophatic tradition). In this sense there is no ontological secret apart from the secret that the secret does not exist. Even though Hegel did indeed stress this point in his reading of the concept of 'revelation,' he nonetheless underestimates the power of inconsistency. Whatever the prospects for a reading of Hegel in terms of a philosophy of finitude and contingency, it is

after all obvious that Hegel in the long run proves to be too optimistic regarding the expressive resources of his dialectics. In a particularly presumptuous passage in the introduction to his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Hegel writes (full of sadistic enjoyment):

> Man, because he is Spirit, should and must deem himself worthy of the highest; he cannot think too highly of the greatness and power of his mind, and, with this belief, nothing will be so difficult and hard that it will not reveal itself to him. The Being of the universe, at first hidden and concealed, has no power which can offer resistance to the search for knowledge; it has to lay itself open before the seeker – to set before his eyes and give for his enjoyment, its riches and depths.[107]

Hegel's identification of being and reflection – his thesis that being is but the remainder of reflection and that it is ultimately nothing but the universality of the Notion – draws on a distorted vision of the Kantian thing-in-itself and its successor notion in Hölderlin and Schelling, namely 'being.' Hegel wrongly believes that 'being' in Hölderlin and Schelling designates an entity or state of affairs which precedes reflection. What Hölderlin and Schelling envisage, however, is not an entity which underlies reflection. They do not intend to substantialize being nostalgically returning to ancient metaphysics. Being is rather supposed to be the name of the *union of form and content* which only manifests itself in phenomena which cannot be made fully transparent (such as aesthetic experience in Hölderlin and the blind theonomy of mythological consciousness in Schelling). The very distinction between form and content underpins Hölderlin's and Schelling's insight that the space of ignorance (the possibility to be other) infinitely exceeds the realm of knowledge. Only in the experience of the elusiveness of the unity of form and content are we capable of a 'prescience' (*Ahnung*) of the unknown something which makes a unity of form and content possible.[108] This truly Kantian 'unknown something' is not just a self-inflicted blind spot of reflection but the space of marks, the domain of domains, which every reflection, even the Hegelian one, inhabits. Being is therefore not identical with the being at the beginning of the Hegelian enterprise of positing the presuppositions of determinacy. It never fully manifests itself in the form of a being which is nothing: it cannot be dissolved into determinate being (*Dasein*) as Hegel believes because otherwise the possibility of anything to be other would be eliminated *a priori*.

Of course, any thought which refers to the unknown something seems to entail a semantic antinomy due to the limits of its own expressibility: if it is expressed, then it does not express the content it claims to have grasped. However, this antinomy only arises if we restrict language to its function of expressing propositions. This is exactly what Hölderlin and Schelling try to avoid with their recovering of a sub-semantical (a-semic) dimension preceding discourse. Any form of expression is finite insofar as it already relies on the availability of a referential use of language.[109]

In his almost entirely unknown essay 'Another Deduction of the Principles of Positive Philosophy' (*Andere Deduction der Principien der positiven Philosophie*), Schelling advances the question of whether the being of logical space can be conceived of as contingent, having in mind the problem of facticity or groundlessness. If being is contingent, it has to have the possibility to be otherwise: 'The question is, hence, whether this unprethinkable Being absolutely does not allow for a contradistinction, which could alter it, over against which it would, therefore, prove to be contingent.'[110] It is important to refer to Schelling's formulation. 'Es fragt sich also, ob . . .,' which means both 'The question is, whether . . .' and, literally, 'It [namely unprethinkable Being!] asks itself, whether . . .' In other words, our question as to the necessity or contingency of unprethinkable Being is an ontological event. The possibility to be otherwise which is implicit in our understanding of being changes the ontological structure of unprethinkable Being, or more precisely, it gives it an ontological structure in the first place. This way, blind necessity (which is not even a proper modality) suddenly and *for no reason* becomes self-awareness: reason is established and sense is made of some non-sensical being there (*cogitatur*). Unprethinkable Being ceases to be unprethinkable Being as soon as thought is established. In Schellinguian terms, unprethinkable Being turns into the first potency.

The term 'unprethinkable Being' *prima facie* refers to that which cannot not be thought as not existing, which we must, despite appearances, not confuse with the God of ontotheology. Schelling rather insists that *the unprethinkable Being is not God*, because it is not capable of anything. Insofar as it is pure actuality, it is fully impotent. The modal-logical principle that actuality entails possibility does not yet hold for the actuality of unprethinkable Being which precedes the establishment of possibility. It is merely 'that, which, however early we come, is already there (*das, so früh wir kommen, schon da ist*).'[111] It is nothing but the name for *the*

facticity of reason: reason (and thought) cannot ground themselves. Yet, in which sense could the pure actuality, the mere being there of reason be contingent? After all, are facticity and contingency not different concepts?[112]

Schelling's answer is as simple as it is bewildering: the necessity of the unprethinkable Being, i.e. the very necessity of the *necessario existens*[113] is contingent because it depends on the existence of something contingent. *The necessity of the necessario existens can only be ascertained after contingency is established.* The *assessment* of necessity presupposes the availability of judgments which can only exist as soon as there are concept-mongering creatures whose very core is contingency. The realm of judgment is that of the duality of the true and the false which opens up the space for contingency. In other words, being only *becomes* necessary as a result of the retroactive causality of reason. This entails that we have to ask ourselves a question Hegel, in Schelling's eyes, tends to foreclose:

> The whole world lies, so to speak, in the nets of the understanding or of reason, but the question is *how* exactly it got into those nets, since there is obviously something other and something *more* than mere reason in the world, indeed there is something which strives beyond these barriers.[114]

The necessity of being qua starting-point of reflection is only the result of reflection's activity of establishing a thoroughgoing order of identity and difference, an activity which, in principle, is not capable of presenting itself within the cobweb of totality that it sets up. This is why Castoriadis correctly points out against the traditional equation of being with determinacy (which he believes to be a tenet of Hegelian ontology) that determinacy is the result of 'ontological genesis,' a process which cannot be accounted for in terms of an always already established order of things.

The yet unmediated facticity of the unprethinkable Being cannot rule out the 'possibility of another being (*Möglichkeit eines anderen Seyns*).'[115] Facticity and contingency are compatible in this instance. In the case of unprethinkable Being, facticity is pure unmediated actuality, the primordial being there, or 'Dasein,'[116] we encounter in our relation to the world and to ourselves. This entails that facticity can neither rule out nor anticipate the possibility of another being, contingency, without *ipso facto* transcending itself. Contingency is therefore itself contingent. It can neither be ruled out *a priori* nor is its appearing determined by some

given absolute origin of things. Facticity is not an origin in the sense of a principle. At most, it is a 'non-ground (*Ungrund*),' as Schelling famously puts it in the *Freedom Essay*.[117]

The non-ground is pure facticity. And yet the precedence of the non-ground cannot even be spelled out in terms of logical or ontological priority without thereby determining that which cannot be determined. The very indeterminacy Schelling refers to under the heading of 'absolute indifference' has to be such that its indifference can only be realized in difference. Indifference only lies in difference or to be precise: indifference only manifests itself in the process of a differentiation. In other words, the non-ground, the unprethinkable Being is that which eludes any distinction and, at the same time, makes all distinctions possible by making possibility possible. It is the facticity which turns out to be contingent necessity, a necessity established retroactively by the existence of some apophantic environment or other. Once there are object domains, there necessarily is a domain of all domains (which does not entail that there is a set of all domains in the sense of a fixed totality). That which 'precedes' all distinctions can only be there without any possibility of ever fully becoming mediated. It always retreats to the background, it slips away under our grasp precisely because we want to grasp it, a situation Novalis succinctly rendered in an oft-quoted aphorism: 'everywhere we seek the unconditioned (*das Unbedingte*), but find only things (*Dinge*).'[118]

The 'unprethinkable existing'[119] is Schelling's expression for facticity. Due to the contingent existence of apophantic environments or spheres of intelligibility, facticity turns into contingency. The very contingency of a given framework transforms its starting point, its 'terminus a quo,'[120] into something contingent. This lets us discern Schelling's subcutaneous influence on Blumenberg who uses the distinction between *terminus ad quem* and *terminus a quo* in his own criticism of the one-sided Enlightenment rejection of myth.[121] Blumenberg's notion of the 'absolutism of reality' which has to be overcome by the work of logos in both the form of myth and of science corresponds to Schelling's unprethinkable Being. Just like Schelling, Blumenberg postulates an 'intentionality of consciousness without an object,'[122] i.e. anxiety (*Angst*), which precedes the fragile stability of symbolic practices distancing the object from consciousness so as to let it grasp its own contingency. What Blumenberg does not sufficiently point out, however, is that the alleged 'status

naturalis'[123] of existential anxiety threatens to be a projection of the uneasiness of modernity onto prehistoric man which would itself be just another myth. Blumenberg's way of picturing the absolutism of reality, of giving a face to the unprethinkable, does not at all do justice to the elusiveness which is at stake.

For this reason, Schelling's account of facticity which is always to be transformed into contingency in order for determinacy to possibly take place is more sophisticated than Blumenberg's account of myth suggests. Schelling draws on the observation that every assertion transforms the yet-to-be determined fact of the matter from something merely actual into something potentially different from the way we grasp it. The world we grasp is not necessarily identical with the world as it is in itself. As soon as there are concept-mongering creatures, the world itself changes from mere actuality into something accessible to understanding. As this process of transformation – ontological genesis – takes place within the world, the world itself changes from facticity, mere actuality, to potentiality. It opens up a space within itself between itself and its being represented, desired, etc. As Schelling writes, 'for the very reason that the potency [i.e. possibility, M.G.] did not precede the unprethinkable Being, it could not be *overcome* in the act of this unprethinkable existing. But thereby an ineliminable contingency is posited in this very unprethinkable existing.'[124]

As we saw in the first part of this chapter, Hegel believes that there is nothing which precedes logical space. According to Hegel, the unprethinkable Being is the very being of the Notion itself which supersedes facticity and proves to be 'absolute necessity.'[125] Hegel would be right in objecting against Hölderlin and Schelling if their conceptions of the unprethinkable Being were restricted to a metaphysical account of the domain of all domains and therefore operated within the absolute immanence of reflection. What Hölderlin and Schelling attempt to articulate, however, is motivated by an *experience of elusiveness*. There simply are phenomena which cannot be made fully transparent within the domain of Logos without thereby being reducible to a logical act of self-alienation. Contra Hegel, the very existence of intelligibility owes itself to a process it cannot account for. This is the point of introducing the indeterminate conditions of determinacy into logical space. If there are experiences of elusiveness which cannot be overcome, then logical space must have properties which point to a dimension which is not logical.

As a matter of fact, Hegel's unmitigated logocentricism is incapable of accommodating certain unwelcome pre-logical phenomena it tries to reduce to clumsy attempts at expressing logical forms. This leads him to reinstall the ancient method of *allegory* in the context of his actual philosophy of mythology and religion respectively.[126] For Hegel, religion expresses the absolute content (i.e. the absolute) in the finite form of representation. This assumption licenses the use of the method of allegory: religious representations 'say something else' (*allo agoreuein*) than what appears at their surface. For example, the Christian dogma of trinity is *really* about mediation, the death of God (i.e. of Christ) *really* signifies the auto-destruction of transcendence, etc. Religion uses images, metaphors, parables, etc. in order to express a mystery which does not exist. The true mystery is to understand that there has never been a mystery apart from the mystery that people believed in, a mystery which turns out to be an error, necessary for the eventual resurgence of truth as it is in truth.

This method of interpreting myths has already been extensively employed by ancient philosophers in late antiquity. Yet, the allegorical method is, of course, not restricted to ancient interpreters of myths but is employed by every theory of mythology which presupposes that the myths are *really* about something which they do not explicitly address. All theories of mythology which subject myths to an interpretation which presupposes a difference between form and content are allegorical: this is the dominant mode of thinking about mythology. For example, a simple-minded psychoanalytic reading of mythology would be allegorical to the extent that it simply projected psychoanalytical patterns onto a mythological story.

A sophisticated modern case of an allegorical interpretation of mythology is Lévi-Strauss' *Mythologiques*. According to Lévi-Strauss mythology consists of mythemes, elements which structure native thought and which add up to myths in a full-fledged sense. The job of the structuralist theory of mythology consists in making the mythemes explicit and re-describing the way(s) in which they are arranged such that one eventually achieves an understanding of the binary oppositions structuring a given field of sense. Mythos is thereby reduced to logos, to an arrangement of elements according to a law, a count-as-one. With structuralist optimisim Lévi-Strauss explicitly sets himself about 'to prove that there is a kind of logic in tangible qualities, and to demonstrate the operation

of that logic and reveal its laws.'[127] To be sure, Lévi-Strauss operates on the basis of the highly reflected methodological assumption that his 'book itself is a myth: it is, as it were, the myth of mythology.'[128] And yet, the structuralist paradigm he draws on presupposes that mythology is governed by a syntax, a 'natural logic.'

In a truly ingenious manner, Schelling objects that any allegorical interpretation that attempts to translate mythology into a different language thereby misses the point of the mythological form of expression. Myths are not faulty efforts of expressing a logical truth, they rather enact the very *unity of sense of being*, of content and form.

> Because mythology is not something that emerged artificially, but is rather something that emerged naturally – indeed, under the given presupposition, with necessity – *form* and *content*, *matter* and *outer appearance*, cannot be differentiated in it. The ideas are not first present in another form, but rather they emerge only in, and thus also at the same time with, this form. [. . .] In consequence of the necessity with which the *form* emerges, mythology is thoroughly actual – that is, everything in it is thus to be understood as mythology expresses it, not as if something else were thought, something else said. Mythology is not *allegorical*; it is *tautegorical*.[129]

Schelling's concern is to safeguard the sense of mythology against Logos' project of absolutizing itself in the form of reflection. *Reflection is limited precisely because it is engendered by mythology and not the other way around.* Schelling thus advances the thesis that mythology makes language possible: 'One is almost tempted to say: language itself is only faded mythology; what mythology still preserves in living and concrete differences is preserved in language only in abstract and formal differences.'[130] Attention should be paid to Schelling's carefully chosen expression: 'one is almost tempted to say,' which indicates that he is aware of the difficulties of expressing something which precedes language. It cannot be *claimed* that language is faded mythology without resorting to a metaphorical register, without creating a mythology of language.

Whereas Hegel tried to uncover the necessity of the *content* of mythology (of art, religion, history, etc.), Schelling insists on the necessity of the *form* of representation which cannot be sidestepped: 'the form appears as a necessary and to that extent reasonable one.'[131] There is no absolute content prior to the mythological form. Any absolute content arises out

of the mythological process rather than preceding it. The whole process is therefore 'substantiated from bottom up,'[132] in its actuality it is 'independent of thinking and willing.'[133] Hence, there is no transcendent guarantor, no God, organizing the mythological process. God is nothing but the name for an as-yet unfulfilled 'promise,'[134] the promise of a 'pure self' as Schelling puts it.[135] This pure self can only be realized through an insight into the necessity of a form which disrupts the alleged absoluteness of self-consciousness. The self-constitution of consciousness and its attempt to grasp itself as comprehending both form and content generates heteronomy. Consciousness becomes dependent on itself which is expressed for consciousness in the form of Gods reigning over it.

Schelling here anticipates Freud's diagnosis of the structure of 'animism' (Freud's term for the mythological consciousness): animism projects the mental apparatus (the internal world) onto the external world in such a manner that it makes itself blind to this very operation. Animism is a 'mythopœic consciousness'[136] which objectifies the internal world and its emotional ambivalence thereby creating a realm of demons and Gods. Freud's important discovery is, nevertheless, not restricted to his claim that the 'savages' project their emotional ambivalence onto their environment but that 'civilized,' neurotic consciousness is partially subject to the same hallucinatory attitude towards the world.

> The projection outwards of internal perceptions is a primitive mechanism, to which, for instance, our sense perceptions are subject, and which therefore normally plays a very large part in determining the form taken by our external world. Under conditions whose nature has not yet been sufficiently established, internal perceptions of emotional and intellective processes can be projected outwards in the same way as sense perceptions; they are thus employed for building up the external world, though they should by rights remain part of the *internal* world.[137]

Self-consciousness (and therefore autonomy) is therefore deeply heteronomical: it only realizes itself through becoming its own other on which it depends. Consciousness is thus not original but the result or 'end of nature.'[138] Self-consciousness' attempt to ground itself is the very origin of its alienation from nature. Of course, by 'nature' Schelling does not understand the object of science (in our sense of the term). Nature rather refers to the 'transcendental past' of the *Ages of the World*, the primordial

being which is not yet bound by reason. Nature is consequently not what is given beforehand, that which is always already there anyway, but the very cause of an absolute estrangement, of existential *Angst*.[139]

> Whoever sees in mythology only what is opposed to our usual concepts to such extent that mythology appears to him as it were unworthy of all consideration, especially of all philosophical consideration, he had better consider that nature hardly still evokes amazement for the thoughtless person and for one dulled by the habit of what he sees every day, but that we can think to ourselves very well a spiritual and ethical disposition for which nature would have to appear just as amazing and strange as mythology, and no less unbelievable. Whoever would be accustomed to living in a high spiritual or moral ecstasy could easily ask, if he directed his look back onto nature: what is the purpose of this stuff, uselessly lavished for fantastic form in the mountains and cliffs?[140]

Mythology exhibits all features of a strange 'event,' a term Schelling himself frequently uses.[141] The very 'historicity'[142] of mythology indicates 'the fact, the event, which you have to think to yourself in the concept!'[143] Mythology is an unprethinkable event in the sense that there is no reason (no thought) anterior to mythology which could transform it into a reasonable product. In its brute meaninglessness, it is the foundation of meaning, even of the meaning of meaninglessness. There is no purely logical space which can be freed from all myths and metaphors as even the notion of 'logical space' obviously serves as a metaphor to delineate the 'boundless sphere' of rationality, to give us a picture in which we can recognize ourselves.[144]

The crucial thought is that, despite itself, logocentricism is based on a mythology. By opposing logos to myth it surreptitiously admits its dependence on myth. Blumenberg, therefore, is right in stressing the fact that Hegel's closure of reflection upon itself is only expressible in the form of mythology. When Hegel speaks about the '*circle of circles*,'[145] the 'Bacchanalian revel,'[146] or the 'Eleusinian mysteries,'[147] and so on in order to elucidate the gesture of logos' closure upon itself, he himself makes use of the mythological unity of form and content.[148] In this sense, Hegel does not transcend being towards reflection. Reflection rather implodes into being, it replicates the matrix of the unity of sense and being in the form of its own expression. This is why Hegel's *Science of Logic*

creates a new mythology, the 'mythology of reason' thereby (I suppose, unwittingly) continuing the project of the *Oldest System-Program of German Idealism*, with its famous call-to-arms: 'We must have a new mythology, but this mythology must be in the service of the ideas, it must become a mythology of *reason*.'[149]

Schelling insists that Hegel is not capable of overcoming mythology precisely because he reads logical contents into the form of mythology instead of self-consciously creating a new mythology. Hegel presupposes that there is an ultimate rational (that is dialectical) form of expression in which form and content coincide, that is an absolute 'phrase establishment' in Lyotard's sense.[150] However, he is unwilling to concede that mythology or art has reached this absolute form of expression because for him mythology and art are restricted to the form of representation. Nevertheless, does Hegel himself not make use of representations? Is his extensive use of metaphors, wordplays, etc. not itself an aesthetic expression?

> Philosophical concepts are not supposed to be merely general categories; they should be actual, determinate essentialities [*Wesenheiten*]. And the more they are, the more they are endowed by the philosopher with actual and individual life, then the more they appear to approach poetic figures, even if the philosopher scorns every poetic wordings: here the poetic idea is included in philosophical thought and does not need to come to it from outside.[151]

We have to insist that there is a boundary within language which is not imposed on it, namely the boundary between sense and reference in Frege's sense: the semantic organization of meaning, i.e. the order of words, is not identical with the ontological order of things. Of course, this distinction is drawn within language and yet it is a real distinction, a distinction we experience as the finitude of assertions in general and knowledge-claims in particular: by accepting any version of the classical distinction between sensing and perceiving, between what is there and what we say about what is there, between form and content, etc. we *ipso facto* replicate on unprethinkable Being.

There is no ultimate way of undoing contingency, of eliminating the paradoxes of the domain of all domains. Conceptual lucidity (reason) is a very limited sphere of intelligibility, even if reason's imaginary position attempts to assimilate everything. And yet, it is not capable of assimilating

its own facticity without transforming it into contingency. Reason operates under the precondition that there are modalities. It presupposes that there is a distinction between necessity and contingency. However, this very distinction cannot be applied to the facticity of unprethinkable Being. It is the indifference of necessity and contingency because it cannot be made sense of at all. It is the primordial non-sense of existence which cannot be made intelligible in terms of a meaningful (either contingent or necessary) arrangement of states of affairs, for any such arrangement presupposes the availability of the possibility to be otherwise which is not available to unprethinkable Being.

Schelling's crucial anti-Hegelian move is to identify unprethinkable Being with mythology. This way he escapes the Hegelian objection that unprethinkable Being amounts to nothing more than a reassertion of the beginning of the *Science of Logic*. Mythology is the brute fact of our thrownness into a meshwork of beliefs, into a belief-system which is only accessible from within. The project of achieving a survey of the belief-system we inhabit necessarily engenders a metaphorical use of language. Foundationalists, like Descartes, describe our belief-system as an edifice: it is supposed to be a building resting on foundations and so on, whereas coherentists or pragmatist holists (like Quine) tend to use organic metaphors or talk of fields of force.[152] If we try to access our belief-system from without, we can only do so by entertaining a belief about our belief-system. Let's say that our belief-system is a set B: {B1, . . . , Bn}. If we entertain any particular belief about our belief-system we just add another belief to the set which hence alters it. Therefore, we cannot build the set of all beliefs without thereby transgressing it. For this reason, even whole-hearted rationalists like Descartes at some point or other seek refuge in metaphors in order to entertain their allegedly self-sufficient thoughts about thought. As Samuel Johnson has already remarked in his correspondence with Berkeley: 'it is scarce possible to speak of the mind without a metaphor.'[153]

At this point, we need to introduce a distinction unknown to Schelling, that is the distinction between *constitutive* and *regulative mythology*.[154] Constitutive mythology opens up the space of reasons by defining a set of certainties which allow us to interact with a limited object domain. It rests on some conceptual preference or other which allows us to refer to determinate objects at all. Regulative mythology, on the contrary, is the rather common phenomenon we know as 'myth': it consists of tales

of Gods and heroes whereby a community defines itself (or whatever function one prefers to grant to regulative mythology). Whereas regulative mythology makes use of specific metaphors, symbols, personae, and the like, constitutive mythology bases itself on 'absolute metaphors' in Blumenberg's sense. For Blumenberg, absolute metaphors are '*fundamental stocks* of philosophical language [. . .], "transfers" which cannot be retrieved within the sphere of proper meaning, within logicity.'[155] They 'cannot be broken down to conceptualities.'[156] The project of dismantling myths always produces 'remaining stocks (*Restbestände*).'[157]

Blumenberg's examples of absolute metaphors often stem from the tradition of negative theology (in particular, that of Nicolaus Cusanus). However, his claim can be reconstructed without a particular reference to theology if we simply investigate any language-use which pretends to either be able to refer to the domain of all domains in a particular language or to say something about the totality of beliefs. The metaphysical use of language always creates a framework of supposedly basic concepts which turn out to be metaphors which cannot be translated into a purely conceptual language. A very straightforward example is the concept 'object' and its philosophical cognates such as 'physical' or 'mathematical' or 'ordinary object.' As Stanley Cavell has pointed out, the modern (post-Cartesian) concept of an 'object' presupposes the availability of a 'generic object,' that is the availability of run-of-the-mill examples suggesting that the world can be itemized in such a manner that we can make sense of simple cases of knowledge.[158] The concept of an 'object' is surrounded by a large mythology, in which the subject is a candidate for a pure spectator of the world, itself not belonging to the extended substance, a 'mirror of nature' (Rorty), etc. If we structure our experience along the axis of the subject-object dichotomy we come to see the world in a certain light which is not *natural* in the sense of necessary and inevitable. For this reason, the concept of an 'object' (and the concept of the 'natural') belongs to a constitutive mythology, one which defines being as representation, i.e. the nowadays obviously prevailing mythology of 'technique' in Heidegger's sense of the term.

Constitutive mythologies open up a world. In this sense, Hesiod has to be granted the status of an ultimate meta-mythologist when he describes the origin of the Gods (and therefore of his own mythology) as 'Chaos.'[159] 'Chaos' (from chaskô, 'to gape,' 'to yawn') means an opening, a gape within which something might appear. Schelling rightly stresses the

importance of Chaos because it refers to 'the *expanse* (from χάω, χαίνω),' to 'that which still stands open to everything, that which was unfilled, thus the *space empty* of all matter.'[160] However, most modern philosophical interpreters of Hesiod's Chaos did not attend to the exact wording of Hesiod's verse, to wit, 'verily at the first Chaos came to be [Χάος γένετ'].' Hesiod does not say that Chaos *was* at the beginning, but that it *came to be*.[161]

The crucial lesson to be learned from Hesiod thus cuts even deeper than Schelling suspected. For Hesiod does not only start the ontological genesis of determinacy (the theogony) with a yawning opening, but reflects on the fact that the opening is itself always already part of the mythological narrative. The opening is derivative because it belongs to the chain of signifiers, it is accessed from within a regulative mythology. Consequently, Hesiod does not write a single word about that from which Chaos originates.

Wittgenstein clearly has constitutive mythology in mind when he refers to 'the inherited background against which I distinguish between true and false.'[162] He explicitly suggests that 'the propositions describing this world-picture might be part of a kind of mythology. And their role is like that of rules of a game; and the game can be learned purely practically, without learning any explicit rules.'[163] Examples he gives for a 'proposition' belonging to his mythological framework are 'my body has never disappeared and reappeared again after an interval,'[164] 'every human being has a brain, [. . .] there is an island, Australia, of such-and-such a shape, [. . .] I had great-grandparents, [. . .] the people who gave themselves out as my parents really were my parents, etc.'[165] Other examples clearly show Wittgenstein's ideology-critical approach, which he avows in the preface to his *Philosophical Remarks* where he opposes the spirit of the 'vast stream of European and American civilization in which all of us stand. That spirit expresses itself in an onwards movement, in building ever larger and more complicated structures.'[166] Wittgenstein's use of mythology is critical in the sense that it creates a distance towards the modern techno-centric and bureaucratic world-view. Wittgenstein is far from being a scientistic philosopher precisely because he points out that there is no world-picture without pictures which 'hold us captive.'

> Men have judged that a king can make rain; *we* say this contradicts all experience. Today they judge that aeroplanes and the radio etc. are means for the closer contact of people and the spread of people.[167]

The concept of 'experience' employed by Wittgenstein is decisive. 'Experience' is a system of beliefs governed by rules which define what can belong to the system and what has to be excluded. The way we first become acquainted with the system cannot yet be determined by the system's rules. This is why experience cannot tell us to judge by experience. Our use of experience is always already governed by rules which constitute experience and which are, therefore, not results of experience.

> But isn't it experience that teaches us to judge like *this*, that is to say, that it is correct to judge like this? But how does experience *teach* us, then? *We* may derive it from experience, but experience does not direct us to derive anything from experience. If it is the *ground* of our judging like this, and not just the cause, still we do not have a ground for seeing this in turn as a ground.[168]

According to Wittgenstein, then, our epistemic commerce with the world is mythological in a precise sense: we always already find ourselves thrown into a mythology, i.e. a systematic web of beliefs which enables us to determine respective scenes of our lives as, say philosophical lectures, divine services, dinners with friends, marriages, scientific investigations, etc. We are acquainted with a web of beliefs, i.e. with our mythology, by typical images and by the anticipation of patterns of behavior codified by these images. Our scenic knowledge of acquaintance with the world is mythological, i.e. non-propositional and non-scientific. It is pre-scientific and yet basic, because it opens up the possibility of orientation. Without a mythology that helps us to re-identify scenes of our lives, we would not be able to lead a human life at all. Mythology, for Wittgenstein, therefore is something natural or 'animal,' as it were; of course, this claim deserves another self-reflective displacement, one which Wittgenstein does not entertain. For him it simply is an expression of the mere being there, the ungrounded facticity of life.

> You must bear in mind that the language-game is so to say something unpredictable. I mean: it is not based on grounds. It is not reasonable (or unreasonable).
>
> It is there – like our life.[169]

Wittgenstein's recourse to life and nature serves a similar, mitigating function as in Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature*. It is meant to make sure

that language-games work, because they are embedded in a wider (animal, natural-historic, and evolutionary) context which secures the practical functioning of the language-game without itself being grounded. It is the way we latch onto the world, a way made possible by the world itself which we inhabit. Qua sentient creatures, we are part of nature which justifies a claim to *mitigated naturalism*, that is to a *naturalism of second nature*. The obvious trouble with all this is that it is an attempt to transcend finitude and substitute nature for mythology. This very operation takes place in reflection which is not capable of simply letting nature into its absolute circularity, as Hegel aptly pointed out. Wittgenstein himself creates a new mythology, dictated by an explicit *will* to power. His philosophy is meant to hold us captive and to substitute some world-picture for another.

> I want to regard man here as an animal; as a primitive being to which one grants instinct but not ratiocination. As a creature in a primitive state. Any logic good enough for a primitive means of communication needs no apology from us. Language did not emerge from some kind of ratiocination.[170]

He declares an intention to regard man as an animal. In general, the language-games he invents in his ethnological thought experiments serve as a picture-generating device. They are part of Wittgenstein's new mythology which appears to make implicit reference to Marx's and Nietzsche's naturalization of man. Nonetheless, despite its welcome alignment with the modern project of absolute immanence, mitigated naturalism simply ignores the finitude of reflection and the logic of presuppositions. It ventures to identify the real, to identify it with nature in the sense of that which drives human beings' ultimately blind doings. However, we must not forget 'the ultimate impossibility of drawing a clear distinction between deceptive reality and some firm positive kernel of the Real: every positive bit of reality is a priori suspicious, since (as we know from Lacan) the Real thing is ultimately another name for the void.'[171]

What we can learn from Wittgenstein's use of 'mythology' in *On Certainty* and elsewhere is that there is a constitutive use of mythology. Mythology and world-picture are aligned in a perspicuous manner so as to give the term 'mythology' a clearly constitutive meaning in order to distinguish it from 'mythology' in its regulative use, that is in the ordinary sense of the word. Nevertheless, Wittgenstein does not explicitly

draw the consequence for his own reflection which looms large in Schelling's *Philosophy of Mythology*, namely that there is no purely scientific (in the sense of non-mythological) vantage point. This is why we need to combine Schelling and Wittgenstein.

To be sure, mythology is only *opposed* to propositional, knowledgeable, or scientific discourse as long as we choose the vague concept of modern science as the hinge on which our world-picture turns. Given Wittgenstein's careful remarks on the hinges on which the language-game turns, it is possible to equate them with constitutive mythology in the sense defended here. Our mythological being-in-the-world consists in the fact that we have to impose limits of discourse in order to organize our experience at all. This imposition of limits is not itself a rational act which we can be held fully responsible for. At some point or other we run out of means to justify our justificatory practices. Precisely because there always is a groundless ground which can never fully be identified, that is to say, because there is unprethinkable Being, mythology takes place. This leads Schelling to his claim that at the beginning unprethinkable Being first assumes the shape of some '*unprethinkable* God'[172] taking hold of consciousness.

Without going into historical details, it is possible to distinguish at least three manifestations of constitutive mythology, three successive stages of mythology's immanent metamorphosis: *theonomy*, *ontonomy*, and *autonomy*. Obviously, theonomy is the shape of mythological consciousness Schelling envisages with his concept of mythology as theogony. It is suggested by the common usage of the term 'mythos' in the sense of a 'fable' or a 'story about Gods and heroes and their relation to mankind.' In its opposition to logos, mythos seems to be restricted to such a theonomical shape of consciousness. Yet, if one takes a look at the Pre-Socratic foundation of ontonomy, in particular in the Eleatics, it is obvious that God (or the Gods) is simply replaced by Being without losing its functional status. The functional space God(s) used to occupy is simply redistributed. That which is always already there anyway, that which is not up to us, turns from God into Being; even the Gods are thusly thrown. This is what I call 'ontonomy.' Finally, the myth of modernity assumes the form of autonomy. Being is reduced to thought, authority to reason, tradition to creation, community to the individual, the universal to the particular, etc. Modernity assumes the shape of an irreversible reversal of traditional hierarchies.

Even if we are in favor of autonomy – which alone is compatible with radical, fully immanent democracy – it ultimately betrays a sophisticated variety of heteronomy: it stands in need of absolute metaphors and of specific pictures in order to undo its contingency, at the same time admitting that contingency cannot and must not be undone. Autonomy needs to present the existence of its framework in such a manner that it appears necessary, scientifically justifiable, mathematizable, quantifiable, etc. Thus, the still-by-no-means resolved trouble with autonomy is that it is subject to the *dialectic of enlightenment*. Autonomy inscribes itself within the tradition of giving meaning to the world, of creating a constitutive mythology. It creates regulative mythologies which are manifested as the rules which govern our epistemic commerce with the scientifically adjusted world-order. Yet, those regulative mythologies hide the practice of meaning-constitution which grounds the commitment to down-to-earth disenchantment. However, this amounts itself to an *ethos* which cannot be justified scientifically and which, nevertheless, imposes itself upon each and every member of society (including those societies yet to submit to or yet to be conquered by the scientific world-view).

> For the scientific temper, any deviation of thought from the business of manipulating the actual, any stepping outside of the jurisdiction of existence, is no less insane and self-destructive than it would be for the magician to step outside the magic circle drawn for his incantation; and in both cases violation of the taboo carries a heavy price for the offender.[173]

In their radical gesture of the disenchantment of disenchantment, Adorno and Horkheimer go so far as to maintain that 'enlightenment is totalitarian as only a system can be.'[174] According to them

> enlightenment is mythical fear radicalized. The pure immanence of positivism, its ultimate product, is nothing other than a form of universal taboo. Nothing is allowed to remain outside, since the mere idea of the 'Outside' is the real source of fear.[175]

This way, scientific positivism reduces all events to a mere repetition of some basic combinatory principles which are, in any case, devoid of existential meaning. However, this very assertion itself creates a new mythology. It betrays the will of creating a world in which the human does not need to take place and it is a way of suppressing the human

need for meaning by creating a meaning in disguise in the form of a scientifically justified adoption of utter meaninglessness. The assertion that there is no meaning, that the world is ultimately nothing but a function of particles (or waves or whatever candidate one prefers) in space and time itself generates comfort and meaning. The German philosopher Wolfram Hogrebe in his keynote adress at the *XXI. German Congress of Philosophy* recently described this phenomenon of attempting to articulate ourselves and meaning out of the world as the unwitting construction of a 'cold home (*kalte Heimat*).'

It is striking that most of contemporary philosophy tends to subscribe to scientism without ever reflecting on the awesome potential of its ideological misuse. Scientism is dangerous because it belongs to a mythology which wants to assert its full autonomy without recognizing any limits. Everything which seems to be external to it, is declared to be non-sensical. While it is of course true that we cannot undercut the modern stance of autonomy by *ad hoc* re-introducing God or Gods into our world-picture, this does not necessarily entail a commitment to scientism. Perhaps contrary to the hyperbolic contemporary philosophical scene, there are indeed many paths between scientism's wish for a *mathesis universalis* and obscurantism. And we only need to recall the mythological foundation of science, the use of absolute metaphors constitutive of the elimination of meaning from the *res extensa* in Descartes, for instance, in order to understand that secularization is (at least, partly) a theological project.[176] And there is no way to fully get rid of heteronomy because we are not in a position to make sure that any description actually matches the metaphysical properties of the domain of all domains, the world, because any concept of the world is only a 'regulative idea' in Kant's sense, a horizon thrown up by our activities of handling the world; the domain of all domains cannot be given to any position.

I must stress that I am far from promulgating obscurantism or a cheap relativism according to which it is just as good to believe that the sun is many millions of years old as to believe that it has been manufactured by some super-mind some thousand years ago. Any philosophy of mythology which adopts an affirmative stance towards mythos needs to balance out two tendencies: *monism*, on the one hand, and *skepticism* or nihilism on the other. Monism would be the thesis that there *really* is only mythology: it would be a metaphysical claim about the nature of *all* belief-systems to the effect that due to the heteronomous nature of their

foundations, all statements within belief-systems, that is, all beliefs are mythological. We must temper this monistic tendency in order to prevent beliefs from what Crispin Wright identifies as *leaching*.[177] The leaching problem is roughly this: if every framework allowing for meaningful statements consists of a set of axiomatic propositions such that every meaningful statement within the framework can be described as an element in a chain of inference always beginning with an axiom, that is to say, if we adopt a deductive view of the relation between frameworks and statements, then all beliefs indeed turn out to be mythological if the frameworks are. However, not all frameworks consist of a denumerable set of axiomatic propositions. The hinges around which language-games turn are necessarily fuzzy, they are the indeterminate conditions of determinacy. As Wittgenstein repeatedly points out, there are no sharp boundaries between empirical and *a priori* propositions on the foundational level. The framework 'propositions' cannot be determined without *ipso facto* generating another mythology in the background: in attempting to account for the mythological conditions of a belief system A^1, we merely generate a higher-order discourse, meta-belief-system A^2, which has its own hinges and background. For this very reason, it is simply impossible to defend a dogmatic monism about mythology.

However, (non-Pyrrhonian) skepticism or nihilism also amounts to a dogmatic claim, namely the dogmatic claim that there is no way to evaluate the mythology of a world-picture at all because this itself simply generates another mythological picture which holds us captive. Even if it is true that ideology-critique is always threatened by ideology, this does not entail that it is always ideological. If the concept of mythology is supposed to do some critical and theoretical work at all, we have to steer a course between monism and nihilism.

My explicit aim is to set up a new mythology, namely *the mythology of mythology*. In this, my project does not differ from that of any other modern philosopher, if by 'mythology' we understand the creation of concepts (such as: 'mythology') which exhibit and perform the finitude of concept-mongering activities. This *assertion of finitude* is not dogmatic in that it draws on a *ladder-theory*: axioms of determinacy are only set up in order to invert them. In the very moment of inversion, in which we discover the indeterminacy of that which was introduced as determinate, we experience the elusiveness of the domain of all domains we, despite its elusiveness, constantly inhabit. This is why philosophy deep

down in its essence qua groundlessly creative activity always amounts to an encounter with ourselves, to an existential project. It cannot be reduced to a science, that is if we restrict science to an activity which presupposes the negation of existential involvement.

In other words, the *decision* to grasp the constitutive elusiveness of the conditions of possibility of (epistemo- and onto-logical) determinacy and to refer to it in terms of the mythology of a domain of all domains is *ethical*. In this regard, Fichte was right when he said that the philosophy one chooses depended on one's character. However, for him there were only two types of philosophy, idealism and materialism (criticism and dogmatism), and, naturally, he believed that the materialist is simply a bad person.

It is important to highlight the fact that philosophy before Nietzsche was not capable of fully realizing the insight into *the ethical nature of metaphysics*. Even the most pluralist philosophers (like the romantics) were not prepared to admit of infinitely many frameworks, therefore were resistant to the availability of *micro-metaphysics* (psychology in Nietzsche's and Kierkegaard's sense): we need to draw attention to the fact that the inversion of the unconditioned into conditioned experience takes place in every second of our conscious lives. One could even claim that *life* is this very process of objectifying itself, an idea most clearly (albeit on a *macro*-metaphysical scale) defended by Schopenhauer with his distinction between the world as will and as representation.

To be sure, Schlegel's concept of the infinite and the necessity of its artistic (versus scientific) expression comes closest to Nietzsche's revolutionary introduction of the new infinite. In his *Talk on Mythology*, where he defends the idea of a new mythology, he aptly claims that

> physics cannot conduct an experiment without hypothesis, and every hypothesis, even the most limited, if systematically thought through, leads to hypotheses of the whole, and depends on such hypotheses even if without the conscious knowledge of the person who uses them.[178]

Accordingly, if we expand the notion of a hypothesis we can go as far as Wittgenstein and say that *we* do not fashion but rather that we *are* our hypotheses: that is to say, our *lives* express themselves in the way we objectify the unconditioned, in and as the world we inhabit. Our lives consist in taking many things for granted which is not a cognitive

shortcoming but the condition of possibility of determinacy. As Wittgenstein writes, 'my *life* consists in my being content to accept many things.'[179] If *the only way* to confer meaning on statements is to blindly accept certain things, then this acceptance cannot be seen as an irrational shortcoming. It rather enables rationality without itself being rational.

It is crucial to draw another distinction at this point, namely a distinction between *objectification* and *reification*. Art is capable of objectifying life, of presenting a picture of our being-in-the-world in which we recognize ourselves. It is capable of rendering the 'spirit' of a life-form, of an epoch, of a typical life in our century, of an atmosphere, etc. In the arrangement of colors and tones, it shows us the multifarious possibilites of the synthesizing activity we implicitly adhere to. Philosophy and psychoanalysis in their connatural constant effort of making *It* explicit, of confronting the unconscious, also objectify the unconditioned (even by using the very concepts 'unconditioned,' 'unconscious,' etc.). Objectification as such can therefore not be the problem. Without objectification, the domain we have in view could not even be manifested, because it consists only in its withdrawal. The withdrawal could not occur if we did not constantly attempt to objectify It, to make It legible. The withdrawal thus presupposes objectification in order to take place.

However, mythologies highly susceptible to ideology *reify* the unconditioned over and above objectifying it. They present it (It, the absolute, the unconditioned) in such a manner that the elusiveness and finitude of discourse as such is excluded. And yet they are not aware of this operation. On the contrary, they speak the language of total transparency and unlimited feasibility. *Cum grano salis*, this is what Kant has in mind when he criticizes ontotheology for transforming the idea of a totality of predicates (the ultimate condition of determinacy) into an ideal, into something unattainable which is always already there anyway, independent of our activity of relating to it as to a condition of possibility of experience.

> This ideal of the *ens realissimum*, although it is indeed a mere representation, is first *realised*, that is, made into an object, then *hypostatised*, and finally, by the natural progress of reason towards the completion of unity, is, as we shall presently show, *personified*. For the regulative unity of experience is not based on the appearances of themselves (on sensibility alone), but on the connection of the manifold through the *understanding* (in an apperception); and consequently the unity of the supreme reality and the complete determinability (possibility) of all things seems to lie in a supreme understanding, and therefore in an *intelligence*.[180]

Reification mistakes its own activity of setting up its world (in the sense of a framework in which determinate things can appear) for the activity of something external to it to the effect that the world appears as the given *par excellence*. The essence of reification is not simple objectification (which is inherent in language itself or, better, is expression itself) but rather the objectification of objectification, i.e. the objectification of the contingent activity of objectifying as necessary. Reification denies the paradoxes and antinomies which lie at the basis of determinacy and accredits itself the capacity to investigate into the conditions of possibility of determinacy (of meaning, truth, etc.) with, for example, the means of natural science; scientism is but one mode of reification.

Scientism is a standpoint of alienation: that which is of our own making afflicts us in the disguise of something natural. It is crucial here to insist that 'nature' itself is a historical concept. The modern concept of nature as the totality of space-time-particles governed by necessary laws of nature is the result of a historical shift in the self-explication of living creatures. In his *The Phenomenon of Life*, Hans Jonas has forcefully argued that the concept of nature which underlies modern scientistic materialist monism is committed to a thoroughgoing 'ontology of death.'[181] The experience of death as the inevitable effect of life assumes center stage in modern materialism which defines itself in opposition to any sort of anthropomorphism, animism, or panvitalism. Even if animism as an ontology itself is the result of a reification of life and therefore not much better off than modern materialism, it nonetheless contains a grain of truth.[182] Animism objectifies the world-creating activity of objectification which is life itself. *Life* objectifies itself, it realizes itself in animal bodies which in turn are capable of manifesting expressions. The inwardness of life is only realized in its outward manifestations, an idea which plays an essential role in Hegel's *Philosophy of Subjective Spirit*. Life is not a mysterious spiritual quality but the activity of expression, of objectification. This is why objectification as such cannot be the culprit of alienation. *Reification is the problem and it begins where reflection denies access to itself.* Animism and materialism are both guilty of reifying life because they are not

aware of their respective constitutive mythology as such. They rather regard their constitution as something extraneous, prescribed by the nature of the *cosmos* (animism) or by nature qua causally closed totality of physical objects (materialism).

This is why the concept of 'mythology,' my mythology of mythology, can be used as an ideology-critical tool. It is meant to secure the standpoint of an *unrestricted higher-order contingency*. Ultimately, we are not capable of objectifying the conditions of possibility of objectivity. And yet, we create images of those conditions, works of art, science, religion, philosophy, etc. which function to transcend the given limits of determinacy and, by doing so, make their contingency visible. Science is not inextricably tied to its ideological interpretation as an ultimate form of presentation and ontological truth. It need not be interpreted as presupposing modern materialism and its background mythology. We can be scientists without buying into the totalizing gesture of scientism. Scientism's attempt to identify the world with only one possible set of descriptions denies the contingency of choice (despite the important role decisionism played in logical positivism and even in Quine), the will which figures and configures itself in the creation of frameworks and the appearance of objects within these frameworks.

This might be the appropriate place for insisting on the distinction between *ontic* and *ontological creation*. According to ontic creation (which is commonly, although improperly associated with the term 'idealism'), we would literally create the objects of experience, a claim which is indeed absurd. We do not create the *objects* of experience but rather horizons of *objectivity*.[183] Ontological creation consists in the creation of frameworks within which objects might then appear. Ontological frameworks are like echo-sounders. They set up a standard for registering objects under a certain description. By no means does this entail that we create objects, certain features of which are registered by the echo-sounders. Nevertheless, there is no way for us to access objects without objectivity; objects come to be objects by means of objectification.

Mythology necessarily arises when we push reflection to its limits. It is only harmful when ideological use is made of it. It can also serve the just ends of radical democracy which does not admit necessary natural conditions at the basis of its laws, an idea perspicuously expressed in contemporary (Hegelian) accounts of normativity in the work of Robert Pippin, Robert Brandom, and others. The insistence on normativity as

opposed to nature equals a commitment to radical democracy: authority depends on recognition and is not derived from nature (or God) anymore. However, we should not forget that the nature-norm distinction arises itself out of an opposition to a myth, to the 'myth of the given.' Instead of ridding itself of mythology, it creates a new mythology, a new preferred set of metaphors (score-keeping, games, logical space, etc.) which depict the contingency of our world-picture. Qua determinate negation of mythology, the enlightement normative picture of concepts unavoidably inherits mythological features. The absolute metaphors constitutive of autonomy's self-explication furnish expressive resources which condition the modern experience of autonomous normativity. Autonomous normativity therefore betrays its own heteronomy in the use of metaphors which can never be fully sublated.

With evidently Hegelian ardor, Jean Hyppolite criticizes Schelling's use of metaphors and myths for being based on a one-sided conception of the infinite which posits the infinite or absolute as some thing transcending reflection.

> Schelling's philosophy, which makes use of the dialectic in order to dissolve the finite, and which claims to induce in us the conditions of this intellectual intuition that makes us transcend the human and coincide with the source of all productivity, is a philosophy that overcomes all reflection. And it is a philosophy that turns out to be incapable of understanding conceptually how the finite can emerge from the infinite, how difference can appear at the heart of the Absolute. It can only make use of images, only use analogies, myths, or symbols. This type of philosophy, which refers to intuition, is characterized by the fact that it communicates only by breaking through conceptual language and by substituting the image for the concept.[184]

What Hyppolite misses is that Schelling does not refer to intuition at all. Even the concept of intellectual intuition which he employed in his earlier philosophy is not reducible to the immediacy of intuition in the Hegelian sense of the term. If Schelling 'breaks through conceptual language' his aim is to show the limits of conceptual language which are, however, not external to conceptual language. Aesthetic experience, for example, can only be described in conceptual language to a limited extent. The experience of the inexhaustibility of aesthetic experience, the experience of the fact that the work of art in its materiality cannot be

reduced to one description among others, is not restricted to our exposure to art. On the contrary, it is the very experience of being a sentient being gifted with conceptual capacities enabling us to transcend a given sensory episode and relate it to a wider world-view. We understand that the world offers more data than we can ever process as information, i.e. as accessible under a certain description. And yet, this insight arouses paradoxes because it confronts us with the non-identical. That which precedes or exceeds a given framework and, indeed, all frameworks cannot be adequately accounted for within a single framework. When *we* refer to 'It' in whatever language, we necessarily miss It. However, even though it slips away under our conceptual grasp, it can be conceptually demonstrated that there is some event, something but we don't know what, a Kantian 'unknown something' which manifests itself and answers to our echo-sounders.

> All our representations are, it is true, referred by the understanding to some object; and since appearances are nothing but representations, the understanding refers them to a *something*, as the object of sensible intuition. But this something, thus conceived, is only the transcendental object; and by that is meant a something=X, of which we know, and with the present constitution of our understanding can know, nothing whatsoever . . . This transcendental object cannot be separated from the sensible data, for nothing is then left through which it might be thought. Consequently it is not in itself an object of knowledge, but only the representation of appearances under the concept of an object in general – a concept which is determinable through the manifold of these appearances.[185]

Schelling makes use of metaphors and myths in order to give us a picture of our finitude. He does not claim to have a special faculty of intellectual intuition which reveals some utterly inaccessible truth to him. He simply maintains that our creation of frameworks is supplied by energies which are not part of the meshwork of reason. Every alleged totality is, therefore, a non-All (pas-tout) in the Lacanian sense: by defining itself it is incapable of defining the activity of definition.

In his *Beyond the Limits of Thought* Graham Priest renders this problem in terms of a paradox of transcendence and closure. There is no way to exclude something from a totality, say from language or thought *überhaupt*, without *ipso facto* including it thereby deferring transcendence

once more.[186] The field of objectivity cannot be closed because it is constituted. Given that the constitution itself can never fully be manifested within the constituted due to its elusive (finite and contingent) nature we always engender paradoxes when we run against the limits of language.

Non-conceptual language is thus a necessary means of showing that which cannot be said in ordinary propositional language, but nevertheless needs to be said in some way or other if we want to make sense of our finitude. It is necessary in order to make us aware of the ultimate contingency of necessity, of the fact that necessity can only be claimed within a given framework which is itself the contingent result of the (onto-)logical genesis of determinacy. The assertion of the finitude of language does not imply that there is something beyond language. We only experience a certain elusiveness when language tries to ground itself. As Bataille puts it: 'what is nevertheless paradoxical is that I spoke about the unknown, a singular possibility of knowledge begins here. Of course, the unknown cannot be given to me as an object, as a thing, I cannot hypostatize it. In other words, I cannot know the unknown. I have only *really* spoken about myself.'[187]

Reflection is contingent upon a form of presentation. Every form of presentation is contingent and thus entails its own possibility to be other. *What can be said, can be said otherwise.* The creative energy manifesting itself in a determinate set of philosophical categories cannot be fully sublated. And this is the 'depth of contingency.'[188]

3. THE CONTINGENCY OF NECESSITY

We begin to feel, or ought to, terrified that maybe language (and understanding, and knowledge) rests upon very shaky foundations – a thin net over an abyss.

Stanley Cavell

Quentin Meillassoux has recently argued for *the necessity of contingency*: it could not be otherwise than that everything could be otherwise. His goal is to prove that the only necessity is that of contingency: it is necessary

that there be no necessary being. His decision to introduce the necessity of contingency is partly based on his criticism of the return of religion in our times. According to Meillassoux, the 'religionizing [*enreligement*] of reason,'[189] which takes place today and which ultimately originates from the unleashing of new ideological energies within global capitalism after 1989, hinges on a mistaken conception of the 'omnipotence of chaos.'[190] If we draw the limits of knowledge in such a way as to create a zone of ignorance, then the temptation arises to furnish this zone with divine omnipotence. If we allow for the conception of a transcendent God beyond any reasonable approach, dwelling in the unknowable beyond, then we risk losing the certainty of contingency which actually lies at the basis of democracy. For politics as such presupposes the unconditional acknowledgment of contingency thus ruling out any natural or divine foundation of order as such.[191] According to this argument, the only possible way in which religion can be philosophically appreciated (as Badiou and Žižek have argued in their respective reading of St. Paul) is in its potential capacity to offer a counterpart, i.e. in its critical stance towards all established orders (to *this* world) and hence in its potential political function. In other words, religion can only be tolerated by politics to the extent that it does not undermine contingency. But to see religion as a political voice among other voices in this way presupposes the successful overcoming of ontotheology.

Meillassoux resolutely fights the metaphysics constitutive of certain religious strands in contemporary politics that threaten to undo radical democracy. In a (in spite of himself) Hegelian vein, he argues that we need to take a strong conception of the absolute and the corresponding notion of absolute knowing on board in order to fight 'enreligement' with enlightenment. Just like Hegel, he makes the case that the dogmatic assertion of the unknowable entails the petrifaction of the political status quo: *if we cannot know anything about the absolute, if it might even be contradictory and paradoxical to such an extent that it eludes any conceptual, even apophatic grasp, then we cannot hinder the temptation to project the power bonds which constitute the status quo onto the absolute.*

Radical democracy consists in the acknowledgment of the fact that 'a necessary entity is impossible,'[192] as Meillassoux puts it. This affirmation functions to deny any natural basis for (political) action. The way power relations are organized is never backed up by any non-human entity that lies behind them and grounds them. That much should indeed have

been the lesson of the history of philosophy since the nineteenth-century revolution of philosophical reflection from Hegel and Marx to Nietzsche. The way the world is is not justified by anything that lies behind or beyond it. And even if there were transcendence, we could not have any access to a transcendent entity. *Transcendence in the sense of a transcendent entity (and not, for example in the sense of Lévinas' claim that transcendence is our relation to another person and, therefore, always already social) is strictly speaking unattainable.*

To this degree I fully agree with Meillassoux's crucial assertion that 'the absolute is the absolute impossibility of a necessary being.'[193] We need to dispose of any remainder of a metaphysics of necessary being(s) in order to make sense of the utter contingency of our *being here*. Being here (*Hiersein*) is not identical with being there (*Dasein*).[194] By the term 'being here' I designate the utter contingency of unrestricted immanence. Only contingency in the most radical sense is compatible with democracy's denial of the relevance of absolute truth for politics. Only if we can make sense of our contingency can we really argue about the constitution of our community without making reference to a stable item transcending the decision-making of the community. We hence need to acknowledge,

> that there is no reason for anything to be or to remain thus and so rather than otherwise, and this applies as much to the laws that govern the world as to the things of the world. Everything could actually collapse: from tress to stars, from stars to laws, from physical laws to logical laws; and this not by virtue of some superior law whereby everything is destined to perish, but by virtue of the absence of any superior law capable of preserving anything, no matter what, from perishing.[195]

Case in point of what Meillassoux describes is the current crises of financial markets. Everything could collapse; the order (or at least the apparent order) only continues as long as the decisions that uphold it are not abused by the ravenous appetite of the ruling (monetary) class. *Everything could always collapse*. This is not only true of financial markets, but it is an expression of life itself: *life can only establish itself over against death and thereby confronts itself with the utter non-sense of death in the fragile establishment of sense*. The profile of life is defined by the possibility of death.

It is a Paulinian truth that the self-assertion of structure (law) always triggers its transgression because the specification of limits generates a

domain beyond the limits. This dialectic is also the grain of truth in Schmitt's account of the state of exception: any structure and, therefore, any state creates its own state of exception which is needed in order for it to be determined from within against its internal without. This does not mean that the other beyond the limits of the state necessarily exists. Dialectics does not yield an ontological proof of the existence of weapons of mass destruction or anything of that sort. However, the acceptance of the finitude of any state qua structure helps to embrace contingency as the only honest modality of democracy.

The dialectic just sketched can be viewed as a manifestation of the instability of structure as such. All structures (including higher-order intelligible structures such as theories and consciousness, etc.) are part of the world which is why the world is chaotic and contradictory: if the world is not only the object of theories but if it contains those theories (after all, theories are not transcendent) and if there are contradictory theories and a variety of perspectives on the world, then the world itself is a paradoxical unity which contradicts itself. The unity of the world is unstable and ever-changing, because it depends on the plurality of frameworks within which its unity can appear. Truth can only take place under the premises of dissent, difference, and misunderstanding.

Political philosophy always draws on a theory of order. Given that order is the result of an establishment of determinacy, the ontology of reflection I have developed in the first two parts of this chapter has obvious consequences for a political philosophy. The dimension of the political is only available under the condition of *logos*, as Aristotle notoriously pointed out. Logos, i.e. language in the sense of truth-apt discourse, opens up a realm of contingency. It defines a domain of possibility, because it generates the distinction between the true and the false: whatever is meaningfully asserted is either true or false (or has another truth-value depending on your preferred logical system). The crucial point is that the political only takes place as soon as the possibility of rearrangement becomes manifest. And this manifestation takes place in discourse. Discourse generates a variety of universes of discourse, a plurality of object domains, as Aristotle was well aware of. For this reason, his metaphysics bears on his political philosophy: being qua being is only manifested in the possibility and actuality of dissent that is the very manifestation of *logos*. This is why *logos* can still mean

'structure' in general in Aristotle. It is not only epistemological, but ontological as well.

The unity of the world is a presupposition of the inconsistent multiplicity of manifest structures. They are inconsistent precisely because they are part of a wider context that encompasses them. This wider context cannot itself be structurally realized without *ipso facto* ceasing to be what it is: the horizon within which the manifold takes place, a horizon which does not itself take place within the world, a horizon which does not even exist. If we call this horizon 'substance' and everything determinate manifested within it 'structure,' it is undemanding to understand why all structures bear an indivisible remainder within them. The very substance of the world, which unites the manifold, finite structures into the contradictory unity of the *polemos* of determinacy, cannot itself be structurally realized. It is therefore the proper void or, to be more precise, it is not even the void in the sense of a paradoxical elusive object. The substance of the world is substanceless. It is not something determinate, but the blank space which is a presupposition of determinacy. For this reason, democracy is a manifestation of the world's elusiveness.[196] It goes hand in hand with an ontology of substancelessness.

The void is the substanceless substance of the world and, hence, it cannot simply be dismissed for being paradoxical. Without this paradox, which sustains the perpetual struggle between substance and structure (the real and the ideal in the post-Kantian sense of the terms), determinacy could not take place. This explanation of the determinacy of structure relegates us thus to substance which stands for the background relating all structures to all others in the meshwork of relations of identity and difference. This background cannot become a determinate object of inquiry lest it moves to the foreground such that another background is generated.[197] The substance is hence not something substantial in the sense of some sacrosanct stable unity. It is like the Lacanian Real or Heideggerian Being, a rupture within the symbolic order which only exists in the momentary breakdown of order.

As liberating and welcome as Meillassoux's avowal of instability and contingency appears at the first glance, he nevertheless gives away part of his insight by backing it up with a claim to necessity. Despite his actual commitment to absolute contingency he believes there must be an ultimate law, a *principle* of unreason that necessarily governs the autonormalization of chaos. In the vein of Badiou's ontology, Meillassoux

clings to the identification of ontology and mathematics, which explains his return to the Cartesian absolute. The thing-in-itself not only exists according to Meillassoux, but it is a substance the properties of which are all primary, i.e. mathematizable qualities.[198]

In his polemics against correlationism, as he calls it, Meillassoux argues that the Kantian redefinition of objectivity in terms of (inter-)subjectivity disqualifies the truth predicate operative in ancestral statements, i.e. in statements which describe temporally indexed states of affairs supposed to have occurred before the event of the human (consciousness, language, representation, subjectivity, etc.). The only argument he presents against correlationism in favor of metaphysical realism relies on the truth predicate in ancestral statements. Yet, there is no need to restrict the debate with idealism (which appears to be Meillassoux's real enemy) to the truth predicate operative in a particular domain. Perhaps one should engage in the realism-antirealism debate instead of tying the weaknesses of correlationism to ancestral statements alone. Perhaps one would better consider the most sophisticated arguments against metaphysical realism presented by Putnam or the systematic elaboration of a theory of objectivity in terms of a plurality of truth predicates propounded by Crispin Wright in his *Truth and Objectivity* which presents a sophisticated account of antirealism.[199] Instead of this, Meillassoux commits himself to a rather naïve sort of objectivism, even if it is for the just cause of fighting creationism and its ilk.

Bataille relates a famous meeting between A. J. Ayer, Merleau-Ponty, Ambrosino, and himself on the night of January 11, 1951.[200] On this occasion, the topic of the debate was the ancestral proposition 'that the sun existed before man.'[201] Back in those days, Bataille could still ascertain that 'there is a sort of abyss between French philosophers and English philosophers, which isn't there between French philosophers and German philosophers.'[202] This alliance between French and German philosophy seems to have come to an end if we consider Badiou's and Meillassoux' new scientism as well as a large part of contemporary German philosophers whose work chiefly consists in an unoriginal (and fortunately widely neglected) attempt to imitate Anglophone analytic philosophy. The prevailing ideology among those philosophers is a vague naturalism or scientism that endows 'science' with the magical power of *getting It right*. However, it should be the cause of extreme astonishment if the philosophers referred to as correlationists by Meillassoux, such as

Kant, Husserl, and Heidegger were not capable of understanding that the sun has existed before man. Neither idealism nor phenomenology is an ontic theory according to which the existence of human beings is the efficient cause of the existence of particular objects such as the sun, the Milky Way, or Niagara Falls. That there are epistemological conditions of possibility of experience or even ontological conditions of possibility of determinacy *überhaupt* is a second-order claim of reflection. This is fully compatible with *internal realism*: as soon as a framework is fixed, it allows for reference and therefore ordinary truth (and falsity) to take place. Meillassoux' critique of correlationism simply misses the distinction between ontic (first-order) and ontological (reflective) theorizing. In order to repudiate correlationism, he would have to show that the ontological claim according to which the in-itself is only in-itself for us entails ontic non-sense. Yet, he does not even distinguish the various layers of reflection and theorizing, a shortcoming very common in the debate about idealism, constructivism, etc.[203]

At the same time that Bataille discusses ancestral statements and indeed asserts that they are not literally true, he also establishes a differently motivated alliance between French and German philosophy which is not defined on the epistemological basis of correlationism alone. In general, he does not plainly refer to a continental commitment to ontic idealism but goes on to describe a 'curiosity about the unknown domain'[204] which manifests itself in an experience of nonknowledge Bataille characterizes as 'uneasiness.'[205] He writes, 'it seems to me [. . .] that the fundamental question is posed only from that moment on, when no formula is possible, when we listen in silence to the absurdity of the world.'[206] This sense of uneasiness is repressed by the scientific attitude and by the respective ideology prevailing in most departments of philosophy in the Western world. However, without this sense of uneasiness, anxiety, Sartrean *nausée*, or Wittgensteinian paradox philosophy does not exist. No wonder that scientists in philosophy limit their research to the undoing of philosophy proper.

Science ultimately serves the existential project of making the human being at home in the world. It constantly reduces the 'absolutism of reality' (Blumenberg) by availing itself of means to substitute the familiar for the unfamiliar in such a manner that it transforms directionless anxiety into object-directed fear. This still holds despite the oft-lamented loss of meaning (of teleology, animism, etc.) associated with the alleged

modern disenchantment of nature. Science defines a domain of knowability, of stable objects that resist the human experience of elusiveness, of death, of the impossible, and of the insatiable longing for transcendence (which is a manifestation of the death drive).[207] This experience is, of course, not geographically restricted as Bataille's alliance between France and Germany suggests. Poe in defending himself against the charges of 'Germanism' already correctly stated in 1840 'that terror is not of Germany [and of France, we might add], but of the soul.'[208]

The uneasiness at the bottom of language that Bataille tries to give voice to is the experience of language as such, i.e. the experience of contingency. Semantically gifted creatures are capable of referring to the world in such a manner that they generate possibilities, such as the possibility of getting it right or wrong. Language discloses a dimension of possibility and therefore of contingency. A particularly convincing account of this has been given by Cavell in his *The Claim of Reason*. Cavell insists on the standpoint of nonknowledge in Bataille's sense, repeatedly pointing out that there is a truth in skepticism, the mortal enemy of scientism and naturalized epistemology. Cavell writes, 'our relation to the world as a whole, or to others in general, is not one of knowing.'[209] Language opens up the space of contingency, of possible assertions. Without this possibility, the actuality, let alone necessity of anything would not be salient or not even available. In other words, language unfolds the unity of Being into the modalities, thereby generating a space of marks within which determinacy then takes place.

Scientism transgresses the boundaries of knowledge. It objectifies our activity of objectification, i.e. it reifies our concept-mongering practices and bases itself on a disavowal of finitude. This decision is an expression of the human wish to deny humanity in order to achieve absolute knowledge and thereby mastery. Scientism requires an inconsistent, because indeterminate view from nowhere. This is why Thomas Nagel's classic diagnosis still holds: to be human is to oscillate between the subjective and the objective, between the world *sub specie humanitatis* and the world in so far as it is not of our own making.[210] But there is no straightforward way of transcending discourse. In other words: the domain we refer to as the objective is itself the objective *sub specie humanitatis*. Ancestral statements are no exception. They serve the goal of designing a world without mythology. Yet, the recourse to ancestrality is only appealing because it responds to the mythological consciousness. As Cavell notes, 'myths

generally will deal with origins that no one can have been present at,'[211] that is, with ancestral statements. Hence, ancestrality is downright mythological.

Against scientism we should side with philosophers such as Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Bataille, and Cavell who manage to verbalize contingency without disavowing it at the same time. And there is no need to fear that contingency throws us back to creationism. Scientism (which is not science, but the *faith* in science, the *enreligement* of science!) and creationism are equally prejudiced mythologies serving ideological goals. Of course, creationism is a paranoid world-picture. It rests on thoroughly naïve assumptions about science and on a hermeneutics of the Holy Scriptures whose stupidity has hardly ever been outmatched. Scientism, on the other hand, neglects the role reflection plays in the constitution of determinacy and tries to make mankind feel at home in the world by telling us that we can finally stop searching for a meaning outside of the meanings of the realist propositions of science. That is, scientism too rests on the somewhat naïve belief that science does not need to justify its ultimate grounds, because it believes them to be as 'evident' as they are 'objective' and 'material,' but without asking itself 'who' is actually determining them as being evident.

If we don't want to lose track of the contingency we are ineradicably confronted with (in the soul, as humans, etc.), we need a remedy against both ideologies. And, unlike Meillassoux, I insist that this remedy is finitude. Only the reflective analysis of finitude initiated by Descartes and continued by Kant and all his successors (including Wittgenstein and Heidegger) can secure the validity of science for the object domains relevant for science, on the one hand, and the total invalidity of creationism, on the other hand. Fortunately, many philosophers, such as Quine and Bachelard, assist us in this task in that they make explicit the ontological commitments of science and the contingency of the decisions that lie at the basis of scientific inquiry.

The mythological being of reflection reflects our own contingency. Ultimately, language only talks about itself. There is no way to guarantee that we ever get It right without generating a new mythology that creates a community of reflection. The community of reflection contests that transcendence could ever assume a determinate shape. This is why the acceptance of finitude and contingency decisively opposes the 'enreligement' of reason.

To sum up, neither creationism nor scientism can escape the fact that they are based upon a completely unstable soil, which I have been calling here a 'mythology.' The question we need to ask ourselves is whether or not this also holds for philosophical discourse. In effect before coming to conclusions, there is at least one objection which I need to fend off in order to make my argument for the indispensability (and radical inevitability) of mythology more convincing. The objection says that in emphasizing the contingency associated with the paradoxes of the domain of all domains we are rendered incapable of distinguishing between the *contingency* of the realm of reason as such and the *arbitrariness* of a particular reason, or a particular practice of giving and asking for reasons. If we unrestrictedly ascertain the possibility-to-be-other of everything, are we not committing ourselves to a non-sensical and irrational overgeneralization of arbitrariness?

In order to address this problem and to motivate a distinction between contingency and unlimited arbitrariness (threatening to destroy determinacy *überhaupt*), it is crucial to bear in mind that the contingency of reflection is always already a higher-order contingency. I do not claim that a particular set of necessary statements is *really* contingent. My claim is rather that necessity can only be assessed within a determinate object domain and that the existence of a discourse quantifying over a determinate object domain hinges on contingent parameters. If it is indeed the case (as I have argued throughout this whole chapter) that local determinacy presupposes conditions which are indeterminate for the domain in question and if this also holds for the domain of all domains (whose paradoxical 'existence' we have to presuppose in order to make sense of the existence of a multitude of mutually determined object domains), then necessity always hinges on the contingent stability of a particular framework. As soon as this framework becomes the object of further scrutiny, another higher-order framework is created which, in turn, brings along a trail of indeterminacy and so on *ad transfinitum*.

We are conditioned to always go on in a certain, determinate way as long as we are recognized as members of a particular community. In this chapter, I have tried to argue that the community I take myself to belong to should continue to be a community of free reflection defining itself on the basis of an unrestricted acknowledgment of contingency. Nature will not guarantee that radical democracy will prove to be our future. It is threatened all the time by the human need to dispose of the human

condition, i.e. by our need to transcend contingency and ground it in some stable item.

The ultimate higher-order contingency of frameworks and therefore of determinacy as such, is not identical with arbitrariness. It is rarely optional for us to really choose between applying this or that framework to a particular situation. As a matter of fact, we cannot even apply any framework to a particular situation without already having the situation in view, which presupposes the prior application of a framework. When Wittgenstein, for example, considers that knowledge might be 'related to a decision,'[212] he does not mean a selection, but rather something far more decisive, namely that the decision is always already made: 'If someone says that he will recognize no experience as proof of the opposite, that is after all a *decision*. It is possible that he will act against it.'[213] This is why we need to side with Blumenberg's re-appropriation of Gehlen's concept of *institutions*.[214] Institutions are objectifications of the way we go about our world and they are handed on to us without ever being stable items. Due to the diachronic change of the way we go about our world which takes place in the history of thought and language, institutions change but they are always changed from within. Even revolutions rely on institutions in this sense because they also presuppose a way to do things on a basic level (revolutionaries still brush their teeth and clothe themselves, etc.). Even revolutions are determinate negations and not just natural events like Tsunamis. Otherwise they could not be justified (after or before the fact). It is important to stress that mythology is bound to institutions and that it is not up to the free imagination of individual thinkers or seers.

This is why our relation to institutions is one of 'thrown projection (*geworfener Entwurf*),' as Heidegger famously pointed out. And yet, we institute frameworks all the time by identifying particular scenes of our lives. Our being-in-the-world is the realization of a *creatio continua*. It is synthetic in Kant's sense of the term, a putting together of elements, rearrangements of meanings and things without which determinacy (and the minimal mental sanity of human everydayness) could not even get off the ground. This is precisely what both scientism and creationism misrepresent: committing transcendental subreption, they mistake the activity of reflection for someone else's activity, which is, to say the least, a paranoid stance . . .

The dogmatic reassertion of the Cartesian absolute runs the risk of allying itself with the ideological gesture of the blatant and ill-motivated

naturalism of our time which believes that materialism equals the reduction of all events to ultimately necessary arrangements of space-time particles. Apart from its ridiculous anti-modernist disavowal of the ontological uncertainty (and fundamental contingency) discovered by quantum physics, the fetishism of scientific determinacy commonly taken for granted in contemporary main-stream analytic philosophy reflects the ontology of our financial markets, i.e. the assumption of the omnipotence of quantification. With Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel we could even venture the hypothesis that contemporary naturalism is the expression of 'the "perverse" way of thinking' heading towards an 'anal-sadistic universe' in which all differences are reduced to a mere rearrangement of (excremental) matter.

> In the universe [of the pervert, M.G.] I am describing, the world has been engulfed in a gigantic grinding machine (the digestive tract) and has been reduced to homogeneous (excremental) particles. Then all is equivalent. The distinction between 'before' and 'after' has disappeared, as, too, of course, has history. Only quantities are taken into account, as in the case of the fetishist who told me: 'I can't see why the Jews complain so much. They suffered six million dead, but the Russians suffered twenty!'[215]

Surely, Meillassoux is very far from being a naturalist in this tradition. Nevertheless, he comes close to the ideological gesture of reinstalling necessity. Like Schelling, Blumenberg, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and many others (he would not like to associate with), Meillassoux rightly emphasizes the absolutism of reality, i.e. the facticity of the '*glacial* world that is revealed to the moderns, a world in which there is no longer any up or down, centre or periphery, nor anything else that might make of it a world designed for humans.'[216] However, he does not take the fact into account that the 'glacial world' is not a fact, but itself a world-picture designed by humans for human purposes, a metaphor as Nietzsche would put it. What Meillassoux ultimately neglects or disavows is that the hypothesis of a meaningless world (or at least of something which cannot be reduced to being an element within the chain of signifiers) serves the function of justifying a radical democracy that would upset his desire to position himself after finitude, or, what is the same, after the community. If God (that is to say, his representatives on earth) does not dictate politics any more, then we are left alone with the community.

The metaphysical solitude of the community would be threatened by God which is why God (the father) had to be eliminated: in the same vein, scientism must be extirpated.

As Freud speculates in *Totem and Taboo*, his most mythological text, the murder of the father is 'the great crime which was the beginning of society and of the sense of guilt.'[217] The 'great crime' at the bottom of modernity is its suppression of the 'longing for the father,'[218] the longing for *something* to fill the hollow that, as Nietzsche famously said, we devised ourselves. Unlike Freud, I do not believe that the great crime literally took place 'in the inconceivably remote past.'[219] The very notion of 'crime' already presupposes the symbolic order which is, however, only established by 'crime.' The 'great crime' without which no symbolic order could be established can, hence, not yet be determined as a crime unless we illegitimately retroject the structure of the symbolic order. But the mythology Freud creates may help us better understand what Schelling designated as 'mythological consciousness,' a shape of consciousness which still manifests itself in our relation towards the world as such (the domain of all domains). And yet, we still need to deconstruct the need for the transcendent father, the determinate absolute which guarantees stability, even the seductive stability of instability Meillassoux so convincingly argues for in his daringly original treatise.

In his book *Fashionable Nihilism: A Critique of Analytic Philosophy*, Bruce Wilshire defends classical metaphysics against the analytic disavowal of the paradoxical presence of the domain of all domains.[220] He reminds us that philosophy in its proper form is 'an activity the ultimate aim of which is to keep us open to the unencompassable, the domain of what we don't know we don't know.'[221] This is what Bataille had in mind when he opposed the 'uneasiness' of French and German (nowadays called 'Continental') philosophy to Ayer's attitude (priding itself with the name of analytic, that is, not geographically restricted philosophy). This uneasiness can never be fully sublated (or sublimated); it is the indivisible remainder of fuzziness that attaches to meaning as such. To be a creature gifted with language is to be exposed to contingency. It is only 'natural' that we attempt to make sense of the senseless facticity we confront by naming it, thereby achieving the distance necessary for contingency to have a liberating effect. However, we must never give in to the ideological gesture of reifying objectification.

For this reason, I have defended the contingency of necessity throughout this chapter. We need to acknowledge the finitude of expression and the ineliminable contingency of all frameworks in order to confront our own being here. We must avow this finitude, for the position outside or after finitude is not available to us: we must avow finitude precisely because, as Bataille says, 'the essential is inavowable.'[222] Once we have been through the process of the ladder-theory we come to understand that the world is made by us – an insight which gives us an important device for criticizing ideology. The mythology of mythology creates a universe of discourse enabling us to confront contingency and to embrace the task of sublimation without believing that the stability of the culture (and community) of contingency is backed up by either 'Nature' or 'God.' *We are alone*. Mythology can assist us in coming to an end with this attempt at making sense of contingency in terms of the mythological being of reflection: 'Since it has no interest in definite beginnings or endings, mythological thought never develops any theme to completion: there is always something left unfinished.'[223]

Hence, the ladder-theory I have developed in this chapter ultimately gives voice to its own contingency. It becomes *reflective contingency* because it is meant to express the contingency of reflection. Reflection could not have taken place. It just so happened that the world became entangled in the web of reason. As soon as a realm of reason is established, it can only be maintained by reason. However, reason is finite: it generates its own preconditions retroactively. Fortunately, contingency is not a lamentable fact about our 'nature,' but the proper name for the chance of expression. If it did not exist, there would not even be a world. As soon as there is a world, the simulation of determinacy takes place. It conceals the utter contingency of determinacy which is nevertheless constantly manifested in the fact that everything takes place nowhere. Because *the world does not exist*, it is always up to us to negotiate our various decisions as to how to overturn nothingness – as long as the evanescent flickering of semantic fields within nothingness endures.

CHAPTER TWO

Discipline between Two Freedoms – Madness and Habit in German Idealism

Slavoj Žižek

The 'antagonism' of the Kantian notion of freedom (as the most concise expression of the antagonism of freedom in bourgeois life itself) does not reside where Adorno locates it (the autonomously self-imposed law means that freedom coincides with self-enslavement and self-domination, that the Kantian 'spontaneity' is *in actu* its opposite, utter self-control, thwarting of all spontaneous impetuses), but, as Robert Pippin put it, '*much more on the surface.*'[1] For Kant as for Rousseau, the greatest moral good is to lead a fully autonomous life as a free rational agent, and the worst evil subjection to the will of another. However, Kant has to concede that man does not emerge as a free mature rational agent spontaneously, through his/her natural development, but only through the arduous process of maturation sustained by harsh discipline and education which cannot but be experienced by the subject as imposed on his/her freedom, as an external coercion. Pippin continues:

> Social institutions both to nourish and to develop such independence are necessary and are consistent with, do not thwart, its realization, but with freedom understood as an individual's causal agency this will always look like an external necessity that we have good reasons to try to avoid. This creates the problem of a form of dependence that can be considered constitutive of independence and that cannot be understood as a mere compromise with the particular will of another or as a

separate, marginal topic of Kant's dotage. *This* is, in effect, the antinomy contained within the bourgeois notions of individuality, individual responsibility . . .[2]

One can effectively imagine here Kant as an unexpected precursor on Foucault's thesis, from his *Discipline and Punish*, of the formation of the free individual through a complex set of disciplinary micro-practices – and, as Pippin does not hesistate to point out, this antinomy becomes even more hyperbolic in Kant's socio-historical reflections, focused on the notion of 'unsocial sociability': what is Kant's notion of the historical relation between democracy and monarchy if not this same thesis on the link between freedom and submission to educative dependence applied to the historical process itself? In the long term (or in its notion), democracy is the only appropriate form of government; however, because of the immaturity of people, conditions for a functioning democracy can only be established through a non-democratic monarchy which, through the exertion of its benevolent power, educates people to political maturity. And, as expected, Kant does not fail to mention the Mandevillean rationality of the market in which each individual's pursuit of his/her egotistic interests is what works best (much better than direct altruistic work) for the common good. At its most extreme, this brings Kant to the notion that human history itself is a deployment of an inscrutable divine plan, within which we mortals are destined to play a role unbeknownst to us. Here, the paradox grows even stronger: not only is our freedom linked to its opposite 'from below,' but also 'from above,' i.e., not only can our freedom arise only through our submission and dependence, but our freedom as such is a moment of a larger divine plan – our freedom is not truly an aim-in-itself, it serves a higher purpose.

A way to clarify – if not resolve – this dilemma would have been to introduce some further crucial distinctions into the notion of 'noumenal' freedom itself. That is to say, upon a closer look, it becomes evident that, for Kant, discipline and eduction do not directly work on our animal nature, forging it into human individuality: as Kant points out, animals cannot be properly educated since their behavior is already predestined by their instincts. What this means is that, paradoxically, in order to be educated into freedom (qua moral autonomy and self-responsibility), *I already have to be free* in a much more radical, 'noumenal,' even monstruous, sense. The Freudian name for this monstrous freedom, of course,

is the death drive. It is interesting to note how philosophical narratives of the 'birth of man' are always compelled to presuppose a moment in human (pre)history when (what will become) man, is no longer a mere animal and simultaneously not yet a 'being of language,' bound by symbolic Law; a moment of thoroughly 'perverted,' 'denaturalized,' 'derailed' nature which is not yet culture. In his anthropological writings, Kant emphasized that the human animal needs disciplinary pressure in order to tame an uncanny 'unruliness' which seems to be inherent to human nature – a wild, unconstrained propensity to insist stubbornly on one's own will, at any cost. It is on account of this 'unruliness' that the human animal needs a Master to discipline him: discipline targets this 'unruliness,' not the animal nature in man.

In Hegel's *Lectures on Philosophy of History*, a similar role is played by the reference to 'negroes': significantly, Hegel deals with 'negroes' before history proper (which starts with ancient China), in the section entitled 'The Natural Context or the Geographical Basis of World History': 'negroes' stand there for the human spirit in its 'state of nature,' they are described as a kind of perverted, monstrous child, simultaneously naïve and extremely corrupted, i.e. living in the pre-lapsarian state of innocence, and, precisely as such, the most cruel barbarians; part of nature and yet thoroughly denaturalized; ruthlessly manipulating nature through primitive sorcery, yet simultaneously terrified by the raging natural forces; mindlessly brave cowards . . .[3] This in-between is the 'repressed' of the narrative form (in this case, of Hegel's 'grand narrative' of world-historical succession of spiritual forms): not nature as such, but the very break with nature which is (later) supplemented by the virtual universe of narratives. According to Schelling, prior to its assertion as the medium of the rational Word, the subject is the 'infinite lack of being [*unendliche Mangel an Sein*],' the violent gesture of contraction that negates every being outside itself. This insight also forms the core of Hegel's notion of madness: when Hegel determines madness to be a withdrawal from the actual world, the closing of the soul into itself, its 'contraction,' the cutting-off of its links with external reality, he all too quickly conceives of this withdrawal as a 'regression' to the level of the 'animal soul' still embedded in its natural environs and determined by the rhythm of nature (night and day, etc.). Does this withdrawal, on the contrary, not designate the severing of the links with the *Umwelt*, the end of the subject's immersion into its immediate natural environs, and is it,

as such, not the founding gesture of 'humanization'? Was this withdrawal-into-self not accomplished by Descartes in his universal doubt and reduction to cogito, which, as Derrida pointed out in his 'Cogito and the history of madness,'[4] also involves a passage through the moment of radical madness?

This brings us to the necessity of the Fall: what the Kantian link between dependence and autonomy amounts to is that the Fall is unavoidable, a necessary step in the moral progress of man. That is to say, in precise Kantian terms: The Fall is the very renunciation of my radical ethical autonomy; it occurs when I take refuge in a heteronomous Law, in a Law which is experience as imposed on me from the outside, i.e., the finitude in which I search for a support to avoid the dizziness of freedom is the finitude of the external-heteronomous Law itself. Therein resides the *difficulty of being a Kantian*. Every parent knows that the child's provocations, wild and 'transgressive' as they may appear, ultimately conceal and express a demand, addressed at the figure of authority, to set a firm limit, to draw a line which means 'This far and no further!' thus enabling the child to achieve a clear mapping of what is possible and what is not possible. (And does the same not go also for hysteric's provocations?) This, precisely, is what the analyst refuses to do, and this is what makes him so traumatic – paradoxically, it is the setting of a firm limit which is liberating, and it is the very absence of a firm limit which is experienced as suffocating. *This* is why the Kantian autonomy of the subject is so difficult – its implication is precisely that there is nobody outside, no external agent of 'natural authority,' who can do the job for me and set me my limit, that I myself have to pose a limit to my natural 'unruliness.' Although Kant famously wrote that man is an animal which needs a master, this should not deceive us: what Kant aims at is not the philosophical commonplace according to which, in contrast to animals whose behavioral patterns are grounded in their inherited instincts, man lacks such firm coordinates which, therefore, have to be imposed on him from the outside, through a cultural authority. Kant's true aim is rather to point out how *the very need of an external master is a deceptive lure*: man needs a master in order to conceal from himself the deadlock of his own difficult freedom and self-responsibility. In this precise sense, a truly enlightened 'mature' human being is a subject who *no longer needs a master*, who can fully assume the heavy burden of defining his own limitations. This basic Kantian (and also Hegelian) lesson

was put very clearly by Chesterton: 'Every act of will is an act of self-limitation. To desire action is to desire limitation. In that sense every act is an act of self-sacrifice.'[5]

The lesson here is thus in the very precise sense a Hegelian one: the external opposition between freedom (transcendental spontaneity, moral autonomy, and self-responsibility) and slavery (submission, either to my own nature, its 'pathological' instincts, or to external power) *has to be transposed into freedom itself*, as the 'highest' antagonism between the monstrous freedom qua 'unruliness' and the true moral freedom. However, a possible counter-argument here would have been that this noumenal excess of freedom (the Kantian 'unruliness,' the Hegelian 'Night of the World') is a retroactive result of the disciplinary mechanisms themselves (along the lines of the Paulinian motif of 'Law creates transgression,' or of the Foucauldian topic of how the very disciplinary measures that try to regulate sexuality generate 'sex' as the elusive excess), the obstacle thereby creates that which it endeavors to control.

Are we then dealing with the closed circle of a process of positing one's own presuppositions? Our wager is that the Hegelian dialectical circle of positing presuppositions, far from being a closed one, generates its own opening and thus the space for freedom.

1. THE HEGELIAN HABIT

In the shift from Aristotle to Kant, to modernity with its subject as pure autonomy, the status of habit changes from organic inner rule to something mechanic, the opposite of human freedom: freedom cannot ever become habit(ual), if it becomes a habit, it is no longer true freedom (which is why Thomas Jefferson wrote that, if people are to remain free, they have to rebel against the government every couple of decades). This eventuality reaches its apogee in Christ, who is 'the figure of a pure event, the exact opposite of the habitual.'[6]

Hegel provides here the immanent corrective to the Kantian modernity. As Catherine Malabou notes, Hegel's *Philosophy of Spirit* begins with the study of the same topic that *Philosophy of Nature* ends with: the soul and its functions. This redoubling provides a clue to how Hegel conceptualizes the transition from nature to spirit: 'not as a sublation, but as a

reduplication, a process through which spirit constitutes itself in and as a *second nature*.'[7] The name for this second nature is *habit*. So it is not that the human animal breaks with nature through the creative explosion of spirit, which then gets 'habituated,' alienated, turned into a mindless habit: the reduplication of nature in 'second nature' is primordial, that is, it is only this reduplication that opens up the space for spiritual creativity.

Perhaps, this Hegelian notion of habit allows us to account for the cinema-figure of zombies who drag themselves slowly around in a catatonic mood, but persisting forever: are they not figures of pure habit, of habit at its most elementary, prior to the rise of intelligence (of language, consciousness, and thinking)?[8] This is why a zombie par excellence is always someone whom we knew before, when he was still normally alive – the shock for a character in a zombie-movie is to recognize the former best neighbor in the creeping figure tracking him persistently. (Zombies, these properly un-canny (*un-heimlich*) figures are therefore to be opposed to aliens who invade the body of a terrestrial: while aliens look and act like humans, but are really foreign to human race, zombies are humans who no longer look and act like humans; while, in the case of an alien, we suddenly become aware that the one closest to us – wife, son, father – is an alien, was colonized by an alien, in the case of a zombie, the shock is that this foreign creep is someone close to us.) What this means is that at the most elementary level of our human identity, *we are all zombies*, and our 'higher' and 'free' human activities can only take place insofar as they are founded on the reliable functioning of our zombie-habits: being-a-zombie is a zero-level of humanity, the inhuman/mechanical core of humanity. This, of course, is Hegel's analysis of habit. The shock of encountering a zombie is not the shock of encountering a foreign entity, but the shock of being confronted by the disavowed foundation of our own humanness.[9]

Hegel conceives habit as unexpectedly close to the logic of what Derrida called *pharmakon*, the ambiguous supplement which is simultaneously a force of death and a force of life. Habit is, on the one hand, the dulling of life, its mechanization (Hegel characterizes it as a 'mechanism of self-feeling'[10]): when something turns into a habit its vitality is lost and we just mechanically repeat it without being aware of it. Habit thus appears to be the very opposite of freedom: freedom means creative choice, inventing something new, in short, precisely *breaking with (old) habits*.

Think about language, whose 'habitual' aspect is best emphasized by standard ritualized greetings: 'Hello, how are you? Nice to see you!' – we don't really mean it when we say it, there is no living intention in it, it is just a 'habit' . . .

On the other hand, Hegel emphasizes again and again that there is no freedom without habit: habit provides the background and foundation for every exercise of freedom. Let us, again, take language: in order for us to exercise the freedom in using language, we have to get fully accustomed to it, habituated (in)to it, i.e., we have to learn to practice it, to apply its rules 'blindly,' mechanically, as a habit: only when a subject externalizes what he learns into mechanized habits, is he 'open to be otherwise occupied and engaged.'[11] Not only language, a much more complex set of spiritual and bodily activities have to be turned into a habit in order for a human subject to be able to exert his 'higher' functions of creative thinking and working – all the operations we are mindlessly performing all the time, walking, eating, holding things, etc., have to be learned and turned into a mindless habit. Through habits, a human being transforms his body into a mobile and fluid means, the soul's instrument, which serves as such without us having to focus consciously on it. In short, through habits, *the subject appropriates his body*, as Alain points out in his commentary to Hegel:

> When freedom comes it is in the sphere of habit. [. . .] Here the body is no longer a foreign being, reacting belligerently against me; rather it is pervaded by soul and has become soul's instrument and means; yet at the same time, in habit the corporeal self is understood as it truly is; body is rendered something mobile and fluid, able to express directly the inner movements of thought without needing to involve thereby the role of consciousness or reflection.[12]

More radically even, for Hegel, living itself (leading a life) is for us, humans, something we should learn as a habit, starting with birth itself. Recall how, seconds after birth, the baby has to be shaken and thereby reminded to breath – otherwise, it can forget to breath and die . . . Effectively, as Hegel reminds us, a human being can also die of a habit: 'Human beings even die as result of habit – that is, if they have become totally habituated to life, and spiritually and physically blunted.'[13] Nothing thus comes 'naturally' to human being, including walking and seeing:

> The form of habit applies to spirit in all its degrees and varieties. Of all these modifications, the most external is the determination of the individual in relation to space; this, which for man means *an upright posture*, is something that by his will he has made into a habit. Adopted *directly, without thinking*, his upright stance continues through the persistent involvement of his will. Man stands upright only because and insofar as he wants to stand, and only as long as he wills to do so without consciousness of it. Similarly, to take another case, the act of *seeing*, and others like it, are concrete habits which combine in a single act the multiple determinations of sensation, of consciousness, intuition, understanding, and so forth.[14]

Habit is thus 'depersonalized' willing, a mechanized emotion: once I get habituated to standing, I will it without consciously willing it, since my will is embodied in the habit. In a habit, presence and absence, appropriation and withdrawal, engagement and disengagement, interest and disinterest, subjectivization and objectivization, consciousness and unconsciousness, are strangely interlinked. Habit is the un(self)consciousness necessary for the very functioning of consciousness:

> in *habit* our consciousness is at the same time *present* in the subject-matter, *interested* in it, yet conversely *absent* from it, *indifferent* to it; [. . .] our Self just as much *appropriates* the subject-matter as, on the contrary, it draws away from it; [. . .] the soul, on the one hand, completely pervades its bodily activities and, on the other hand, *deserts* them, thus giving them the shape of something *mechanical*, of a merely natural effect.[15]

And the same goes for my emotions: their display is not purely natural or spontaneous, we learn to cry or laugh at appropriate moments (recall how, for the Japanese, laughter functions in a different way than for us in the West: a smile can also be a sign of embarrassment and shame). The external mechanization of emotions from the ancient Tibetan praying wheel which prays for me to today's 'canned laughter' where the TV set laughs for me, turning my emotional display quite literally into a mechanic display of the machine, is thus based in the fact that emotional displays, including the most 'sincere' ones, are already in themselves 'mechanized.' However, the highest level (and, already, self-sublation) of a habit is *language* as the medium of thought: in it, the

couple of possession and withdrawal is brought to extreme. The point is not only that, in order to 'fluently' speak a language, we have to master its rules mechanically, without thinking about it; much more radically, the co-dependence of insight and blindness determines the very act of understanding: when I hear a word, not only do I immediately abstract from its sound and 'see through it' to its meaning (recall the weird experience of becoming aware of the non-transparent vocal stuff of a word – it appears as intrusive and obscene . . .), but I have to do it if I am to experience meaning.

If, for Hegel, (1) man is fundamentally a being of habits, and (2) if habits actualize themselves when they are adopted as automatic reactions which occur without a subject's conscious participation, and, finally, (3) if we locate the core of subjectivity in its ability to perform intentional acts, to realize conscious goals, then, paradoxically, the human subject is at its most fundamental a 'disappearing subject.'[16] Habit's 'unreflective spontaneity'[17] accounts for the well-known paradox of *subjectively choosing an objective necessity*, of *willing what unavoidably will occur*: through its elevation into a habit, a reaction of mine which was first something imposed on me from outside, is internalized, transformed into something that I perform automatically and spontaneously, 'from inside':

> If an external change is repeated, it turns into a tendency internal to the subject. The change itself is transformed into a disposition, and receptivity, formerly passive, becomes activity. Thus habit is revealed as a process through which man ends by *willing* or choosing what came to him from outside. Henceforth the will of the individual does not need to oppose the pressure of the external world; the will learns gradually to want what is.[18]

What makes habit so central is the temporality it involves: having a habit involves a relationship to future, since habit is a way which prescribes how I will react to some events in the future. Habit is a feature of economizing the organism's forces, of building a reserve for the future. That is to say, in its habits, subjectivity 'embraces in itself its future ways of being, the ways it will become actual.'[19] This means that habit also complicates the relationship between possibility and actuality: habit is *stricto sensu* the *actuality of a possibility*. What this means is that habit belongs to the level of virtuality (defined by Deleuze precisely as the actuality of the

possible): habit is actual, a property (to react in a certain way) that I fully possess here and now, and simultaneously a possibility pointing towards future (the possibility/ability to react in a certain way, which will be actualized in multiple future occasions).

There are interesting conceptual consequences of this notion of habit. Ontologically, with regard to the opposition between particular accidents and universal essence, habit can be designed as the 'becoming-essential of the accident':[20] after an externally caused accident repeats itself, it is elevated into the universality of the subject's inner disposition, i.e., into a feature that belongs to and defines his inner essence. This is why we cannot ever determine the precise beginning of a habit, the point at which external occurrences change into habit – once a habit is here, it obliterates its origin and it is as if it was always already here. The conclusion is thus clear, almost Sartrean: man does not have a permanent substance or universal essence; he is in his very core a man of habits, a being whose identity is formed through the elevation of contingent external accidents/encounters into an internal(ized) universal habit. Does this mean that only humans have habits? Here, Hegel is much more radical and he accomplishes a decisive step further and leaves behind the old topic of nature as fully determined in its closed circular movement versus man as a being of openness and existential freedom: 'for Hegel, nature is always *second nature*.'[21] Every natural organism has to regulate the exchange with its environs, the assimilation of the environs into itself, through habitual procedures that 'reflect' into the organism, as its inner disposition, its external interactions.

2. THE AUTO-POIESIS OF THE SELF

The ontological consequences of this (self-)reflection of the external difference into inner difference are crucial. In one of the unexpected encounters of contemporary philosophy with Hegel, the 'Christian materialist' Peter van Inwagen developed the idea that material objects like automobiles, chairs, computers, etc. simply *do not exist*. A chair is not effectively, for itself, a chair: all we have is a collection of 'simples' (i.e. more elementary objects 'arranged chairwise,' so, although a chair functions as a chair, it is composed of a multitude (wood pieces, nails,

cushions . . .)) which are, in themselves, totally indifferent towards this arrangement. There is, *stricto sensu*, no 'whole' a nail is here a part of. It is only with organisms that we have a Whole. Here, the unity is minimally 'for itself'; parts effectively interact.[22] As it was developed already by Lynn Margulis, the elementary form of life, a cell, is characterized precisely by such a minimum of self-relating, a minimum exclusively through which the limit between Inside and Outside that characterize an organism can emerge. And, as Hegel put it, thought is only a further development of this For-itself.

In biology, for instance, we have, at the level of reality, only bodily interacting. 'Life proper' emerges only at the minimally 'ideal' level, as an immaterial event which provides the form of unity of the living body as the 'same' in the incessant change of its material components. The basic problem of evolutionary cognitivism – that of the emergence of the ideal life-pattern – is none other than the old metaphysical enigma of the relationship between chaos and order, between the Multiple and the One, between parts and their whole. How can we get 'order for free,' that is, how can order emerge out of initial disorder? How can we account for a whole that is larger than the mere sum of its parts? How can a One with a distinct self-identity emerge out of the interaction of its multiple constituents? A series of contemporary researchers, from Lynn Margulis to Francisco Varela, assert that the true problem is not how an organism and its environs interact or connect, but, rather, the opposite one: how does a distinct self-identical organism emerge out of its environs? How does a cell form the membrane which separates its inside from its outside? The true problem is thus not how an organism adapts to its environs, but how it is that there is something, a distinct entity, which must adapt itself in the first place. And, it is here, at this crucial point, that today's biological language starts to resemble, quite uncannily, the language of Hegel. When Varela, for example, explains his notion of autopoiesis, he repeats, almost verbatim, the Hegelian notion of life as a teleological, self-organizing entity. His central notion, that of a loop or bootstrap, points towards the Hegelian *positing of the presuppositions*:

> Autopoiesis attempts to define the uniqueness of the emergence that produces life in its fundamental cellular form. It's specific to the cellular level. There's a circular or network process that engenders a paradox: a self-organizing network of biochemical reactions produces

> molecules, which do something specific and unique: they create a boundary, a membrane, which constrains the network that has produced the constituents of the membrane. This is a logical bootstrap, a loop: a network produces entities that create a boundary, which constrains the network that produces the boundary. This bootstrap is precisely what's unique about cells. A self-distinguishing entity exists when the bootstrap is completed. This entity has produced its own boundary. It doesn't require an external agent to notice it, or to say, 'I'm here.' It is, by itself, a self-distinction. It bootstraps itself out of a soup of chemistry and physics.[23]

The conclusion to be drawn is thus that the only way to account for the emergence of the distinction between the 'inside' and 'outside' constitutive of a living organism is to posit a kind of self-reflexive reversal by means of which – to put it in Hegelese – the One of an organism as a Whole retroactively 'posits' as its result, as that which it dominates and regulates, the set of its own causes (i.e. the very multiple process out of which it emerged). In this way – and only in this way – an organism is no longer limited by external conditions, but is fundamentally self-limited – again, as Hegel would have articulated it, life emerges when the external limitation (of an entity by its environs) turns into self-limitation. This brings us back to the problem of infinity: for Hegel, true infinity does not stand for limitless expansion, but for active self-limitation (self-determination) in contrast to being-determined-by-the-other. In this precise sense, life (even at its most elementary, as a living cell) is the basic form of true infinity, since it already involves the minimal loop by means of which a process is no longer simply determined by the Outside of its environs, but is itself able to (over)determine the mode of this determination and thus 'posits its presuppositions.' Infinity acquires its first actual existence the moment a cell's membrane starts to functions as a self-boundary.

Back to habits: because of the virtual status of habits, to adopt a (new) habit is not simply to change an actual property of the subject; rather, it involves a kind of reflexive change, a change of the subject's disposition which determines his reaction to changes, i.e., a change in the very mode of changes to which the subject is submitted: 'Habit does not simply introduce mutability into something that would otherwise continue without changing; it suggests change within a disposition, within its

potentiality, within the internal character of that in which the change occurs, which does not change.'[24] This is what Hegel means by self-differentiation as the 'sublation' of externally imposed changes into self-changes, of external into internal difference. Only organic bodies self-differentiate themselves: an organic body maintains its unity by internalizing an externally imposed change into habit to deal with future such changes.

If, however, this is the case, if all (organic, at least) nature already is second nature, in what, then, does the difference between animal and human habits consist? Hegel's most provocative and unexpected contribution concerns this very question of the genesis of *human* habits: in his *Anthropology* (which opens *Philosophy of Spirit*) we find a unique 'genealogy of habits' reminding us of Nietzsche. This part of *Philosophy of Spirit* is one of the hidden, not yet fully exploited, treasures of the Hegelian system, where we find the clearest traces of what one cannot but name the dialectical-materialist aspect of Hegel: the passage from nature to (human) spirit is here developed not as a direct outside intervention of Spirit, as a direct intervention of another dimension disturbing the balance of the natural circuit, but as the result of a long and tortuous 'working through' by means of which intelligence (embodied in language) emerges from natural tensions and antagonisms.[25] This passage is not direct, i.e., Spirit (in the guise of speech-mediated human intelligence) does not directly confront and dominate biological processes – Spirit's 'material base' forever remains the pre-symbolic (pre-linguistic) habit.

So how does habit itself arise? In his genealogy, Hegel conceives habit as the third, concluding, moment of the dialectical process of the Soul, whose structure follows the triad of notion – judgment – syllogism. At the beginning, there is Soul in its immediate unity, in its simple notion, the 'feeling soul': 'In the sensations which arise from the individual's encounter with external objects, the soul begins to awaken itself.'[26] The Self is here a mere 'sentient Self,' not yet a subject opposed to objects, but just experiencing a sensation in which the two sides, subject and object, are immediately united: when I experience a sensation of touch, this sensation is simultaneously the trace of the external object I am touching and my inner reaction to it; sensation is a Janus-like two-faced entity in which subjective and objective immediately coincide. Even in later stages of the individual's development, this 'sentient Self' survives

in the guise of what Hegel calls 'magical relationship,' referring to phenomena that, in Hegel's times, were designated with terms like 'magnetic somnambulism' (hypnosis), all the phenomena in which my Soul is directly – in a pre-reflexive, non-thinking way – linked to external processes and affected by them. Instead of bodies influencing each other at a distance (Newtonian gravity), we have spirits influencing each other at a distance. Here, the Soul remains at the lowest level of its functioning, directly immersed in its environs. (What Freud called the 'oceanic feeling,' the source of religious experience, is thus for Hegel a feature of the lowest level of the soul.) What the Soul lacks here is a clear self-feeling, a feeling of itself as distinguished from external reality, which is what happens in the next moment, that of judgment (*Urteil* – Hegel mobilizes here the wordplay of *Urteil* with *Ur-Teil*, 'primordial divide/division'):

> The sensitive totality is, in its capacity as an individual, essentially the tendency to distinguish itself in itself, and to wake up to the *judgment in itself*, in virtue of which it has *particular* feelings and stands as a *subject* in respect of these aspects of itself. The subject as such gives these feelings a place as *its own* in itself.[27]

All problems arise from this paradoxical short-circuit of the feeling of Self becoming a specific feeling among others, and, simultaneously, the encompassing container of all feelings, the site where all dispersed feelings can be brought together. Malabou provides a wonderfully precise formulation of this paradox of the feeling of Self:

> Even if there is a possibility of bringing together feeling's manifold material, that possibility itself becomes part of the objective content. The form needs to be the content of all that it forms: subjectivity does not reside in its own being, it 'haunts' itself. The soul is possessed by the possession of itself.[28]

This is the crucial feature: possibility itself has to actualize itself, to become a fact, or, the form needs to become part of its own content (or, to add a further variation on the same motif, the frame itself has to become part of the enframed content). The subject is the frame/form/horizon of his world *and* part of the enframed content (of the reality he observes), and the problem is that he cannot see/locate himself within his own frame: since all there is is already within the frame, the frame as

such is invisible – or, as the early Wittgenstein put it: 'Our life has no end in just the way in which our visual field has no limits' (TLP 6.4311). Like the field of vision, life is finite, and, for that very reason, we cannot ever see its limit. In this precise sense, 'eternal life belongs to those who live in the present' (ibid.): precisely because we are *within* our finitude, we cannot step out of it and perceive its limitation. The possibility of locating oneself within one's reality has to remain a possibility: however, and herein resides the crucial point, this possibility itself has to actualize itself *qua possibility*, to be active, to exert influence, *qua possibility*.

There is a link to Kant here, to the old enigma of what, exactly, Kant had in mind with his notion of 'transcendental apperception,' of self-consciousness accompanying every act of my consciousness (when I am conscious of something, I am thereby always also conscious of the fact that I am conscious of this)? Is it not an obvious fact that this is empirically not true, that I am not always reflexively aware of my awareness itself? The way interpreters try to resolve this deadlock is by way of claiming that every conscious act of mine can be potentially rendered self-conscious: if I want, I always can turn my attention to what I am doing. This, however, is not strong enough: the transcendental apperception cannot be an act that never effectively happens, that just could have happened at any point. The solution of this dilemma is precisely the notion of virtuality in the strict Deleuzian sense, as the actuality of the possible, as a paradoxical entity the very possibility of which already produces/has actual effects. One should oppose Deleuze's notion of the virtual to the all-pervasive topic of virtual reality: what matters to Deleuze is not virtual reality, but *the reality of the virtual* (which, in Lacanian terms, is the Real). *Virtual reality* in itself is a rather miserable idea: that of imitating reality, of reproducing its experience in an artificial medium. The *reality of the virtual*, on the other hand, stands for the reality of the virtual as such, for its real effects and consequences. Let us take an attractor in mathematics: all positive lines or points in its sphere of attraction only approach it in an endless fashion, never reaching its form – the existence of this form is purely virtual, being nothing more than the shape towards which lines and points tend. However, precisely as such, the virtual is the Real of this field: the immovable focal point around which all elements circulate. Is not this Virtual ultimately the Symbolic as such? Let us take symbolic authority: in order to function as an effective authority, it has to remain not-fully-actualized, an eternal threat.

This, then, is the status of the Self: its self-awareness is as it were the actuality of its own possibility. Consequently, what 'haunts' the subject is his inaccessible noumenal Self, the 'Thing that thinks,' an object in which the subject would fully 'encounter himself.' (Hume drew a lot – too much – of mileage out of this observation on how, upon introspection, all I perceive in myself are my particular ideas, sensations, emotions, never my 'Self' itself.) Of course, for Kant, the same goes for every object of my experience which is always phenomenal, i.e., inaccessible in its noumenal dimension. However, with the Self, the impasse is accentuated: all other objects of experience are given to me phenomenally, but, in the case of subject, I cannot even get a phenomenal experience of me – since I am dealing with 'myself,' in this unique case, phenomenal self-experience would equal noumenal access, i.e., if I were to be able to experience 'myself' as a phenomenal object, I would thereby *eo ipso* experience myself in my noumenal identity, as a Thing.

The underlying problem here is the impossibility the subject faces in trying to objectivize himself: the subject is singular *and* is the universal frame of 'his world,' i.e., every content he perceives is 'his own'; so how can the subject include himself (count himself) into the series of his objects? The subject observes reality from an external position, and is simultaneously part of this reality, without ever being able to attain an 'objective' view of reality with himself in it. The thing that haunts the subject is *himself* in his objectal counterpoint, qua object. Hegel writes:

> the subject finds itself in contradiction between the totality systematized in its consciousness, and the particular determination which, in itself, is not fluid and is not reduced to its proper place and rank. This is mental derangement (*Verrücktheit*).[29]

We must read this passage in a very precise way. Hegel's point is not simply that madness signals a short-circuit between totality and one of its particular moments, a 'fixation' of totality in this moment on account of which the totality is deprived of its dialectical fluidity – although some of his formulations may appear to point in this direction. (Is paranoiac fixation not such a short-circuit in which the totality of my experience gets non-dialectically 'fixated' onto a particular moment, the idea of my persecutor?) The 'particular determination which, in itself, is not fluid' and resists being 'reduced to its proper place and rank' is *the subject himself*, more precisely: the feature (signifier) that re-presents him (holds

his place) within the structured ('systematized') totality, and since the subject cannot ever objectivize himself, the 'contradiction' is here absolute.[30] With this gap, the possibility of madness emerges – and, as Hegel puts it in proto-Foucauldian terms, madness is not an accidental lapse, distortion, 'illness' of human spirit, but something which is inscribed into individual spirit's basic ontological constitution: to be a human means to be potentially mad.

> This interpretation of insanity as a necessarily occurring form or stage in the development of the soul is naturally not to be understood as if we were asserting that *every* mind, *every* soul, must go through this stage of extreme derangement. Such an assertion would be as absurd as to assume that because in the Philosophy of Right crime is considered as a necessary manifestation of the human will, therefore to commit crime is an inevitable necessity for *every* individual. Crime and insanity are *extremes* which the human mind *in general* has to overcome in the course of its development.[31]

Although not a factual necessity, madness is a formal possibility constitutive of human mind: it is something whose threat has to be overcome if we are to emerge as 'normal' subjects, which means that 'normality' can only arise as the overcoming of this threat. This is why, as Hegel puts it a couple of pages later, 'insanity must be discussed before the healthy, intellectual consciousness, although it has that consciousness for its *presupposition*.'[32] Hegel evokes here the relationship between the abstract and the concrete: although, in the empirical development and state of things, abstract determinations are always already embedded in a concrete Whole as their presupposition, the notional reproduction/deduction of this Whole has to progress from the abstract to the concrete: crimes presuppose the rule of law, they can only occur as their violation, but must be nonetheless grasped as an abstract act that is 'sublated' through the law; abstract legal relations and morality are *de facto* always embedded in some concrete totality of Customs, but, nonetheless, the *Philosophy of Right* has to progress from the abstract moments of legality and morality to the concrete Whole of Customs (family, civil society, state). The interesting point here is not only the parallel between madness and crime, but the fact that madness is located in a space opened up by the discord between actual historical development and its conceptual rendering, i.e., in the space which undermines the vulgar-evolutionist

notion of dialectical development as the conceptual reproduction of the factual historical development which purifies the latter of its insignificant empirical contingencies. Insofar as madness *de facto* presupposes normality, while, conceptually, it precedes normality, one can say that a 'madman' is precisely the subject who wants to 'live' – to reproduce in actuality itself – the conceptual order, i.e., to act as if madness also *effectively* precedes normality.

We can see, now, in what precise sense habits form the third, concluding, moment of this triad, its 'syllogism': *in a habit, the subject finds a way to 'possess itself,'* to stabilize its own inner content in 'having' as its property a habit, i.e., not a positive actual feature, but a virtual entity, a universal disposition to (re)act in a certain way. Habit and madness are to be thought together: habit is the way to stabilize the imbalance of madness.

3. EXPRESSIONS THAT SIGNIFY NOTHING

Another way to approach this same topic is via the relationship between soul and body as the Inner and the Outer, of their circular relationship in which body expresses the soul and the soul receives impressions from the body – the Soul is always already embodied and the Body always already impregnated with its Soul:

> What the sentient self finds within it is, on the one hand, the naturally immediate, as 'ideally' in it and made its own. On the other hand and conversely, what originally belongs to the central individuality [. . .] is determined as natural corporeity, and is so felt.[33]

So, on the one hand, through feelings and perceptions, I internalize objects that affect me from outside: in a feeling, they are present in me not in their raw reality, but 'ideally,' as part of my mind. On the other hand, through grimaces, etc., my body immediately 'gives body' to my inner Soul which thoroughly impregnates it. However, if this were to be the entire truth, then man would have been simply a 'prisoner of his state of nature' (67), moving in the close loop of absolute transparency provided by the mutual mirroring of body and soul. (Physiognomy and phrenology remain at this level, as well as today's New Age ideologies enjoining us to express/realize our true Self.) What happens with the

moment of 'judgment' is that the loop of this closed circle is broken – not by the intrusion of an external element, but by a self-referentiality which twists this circle into itself. That is to say, the problem is that, 'since the individual is at the same time only what he has done, his body is also the expression of himself which he has himself produced.'[34] What this means is that the process of corporeal self-expression has no pre-existing referent as its mooring point: the entire movement is thoroughly self-referential, it is only through the process of 'expression' (externalization in bodily signs) that the expressed Inner Self (the content of these signs) is retroactively created – or, as Malabou puts it concisely: 'Psychosomatic unity results from an auto-interpretation independent of any referent.'[35] The transparent mirroring of the Soul and the Body in the natural expressivity thus turns into total opacity:

> If a work signifies itself, this implies that there is no 'outside' of the work, that the work acts as its own referent: it presents what it interprets at the same moment it interprets it, forming one and the same manifestation. [. . .] The spiritual bestows form, but only because it is itself formed in return.[36]

What this 'lack of any ontological guarantee outside the play of significations'[37] means is that the meaning of our gestures and speech acts is always haunted by the spirit of irony: when I say A, it is always possible that I do it in order to conceal the fact that I am non-A. Hegel refers to Lichtenberg's well-known aphorism: 'You certainly act like an honest man, but I see from your face that you are forcing yourself to do so and are a rogue at heart.'[38] The ambiguity is here total and undecidable, because the deception is the one that Lacan designates as specifically human, namely the possibility of lying in the guise of truth. Which is why it goes even further than the quote from Lichtenberg – the reproach should rather be: 'You act like an honest man in order to convince us that you mean it ironically, and thus to conceal from us the fact that you really *are* an honest man!' This is what Hegel means in his accurate claim that, 'for the individuality, it is as much its countenance as its mask which it can lay aside':[39] in the gap between appearance (mask) and my true inner stance, the truth can be either in my inner stance or in my mask. What this means is that the emotions I perform through the mask (false persona) that I adopt can in a strange way be more authentic and truthful than what I really feel in myself. When I construct a false image

of myself which stands for me in a virtual community in which I participate (in sexual games, for example, a shy man often assumes the screen persona of an attractive promiscuous woman), the emotions I feel and feign as part of my screen persona are not simply false: although (what I experience as) my true self does not feel them, they are nonetheless in a sense 'true.' What if, deep in myself, I am a sadist pervert who dreams of beating other men and raping women; in my real-life interaction with other people, I am not allowed to enact this true self, so I adopt a more humble and polite persona – is it not that, in this case, my true self is much closer to what I adopt as a fictional screen-persona, while the self of my real-life interactions is a mask concealing the violence of my true self?

Habit provides the way out of this predicament – how? Not as the subject's 'true expression,' but by putting the truth in 'mindless' expression – recall Hegel's constant motif that truth is in what you *say*, not in what you *mean* to say. Exemplary is here the enigmatic status of what we call 'politeness': when, upon meeting an acquaintance, I say, 'Glad to see you! How are you today?', it is clear to both of us that, in a way, I 'do not mean it seriously' (if my partner suspects that I am really interested, he may even be unpleasantly surprised, as though I were aiming at something too intimate and of no concern to me – or, to paraphrase the old Freudian joke, 'Why are you saying you're glad to see me, when you're *really* glad to see me!?'). It would nonetheless be wrong to designate my act as simply 'hypocritical,' since, in another way, I *do* mean it: the polite exchange does establish a kind of pact between the two of us; in the same sense as I do 'sincerely' laugh through the canned laughter (the proof of it being the fact that I effectively do 'feel relieved' afterwards). This brings us to one of the possible definitions of a madman: the subject who is unable to enter this logic of 'sincere lies,' so that, when, say, a friend greets him 'Nice to see you! How are you?', he explodes: 'Are you really glad to see me or are you just pretending it? And who gave you the right to probe into my state?'

In Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, Orlando is passionately in love with Rosalind who, in order to test his love, disguises herself as Ganymede and, as a male companion, interrogates Orlando about his love. She even takes on the personality of Rosalind (in a redoubled masking, she pretends to be herself, i.e., to be Ganymede who plays to be Rosalind) and persuades her friend Celia (also disguised as Aliena) to marry them in a

mock ceremony. In this ceremony, Rosalind literally feigns to feign to be what she is: truth itself, in order to win, has to be *staged* in a redoubled deception – in a homologous way to *All's Well* in which marriage, in order to be asserted, has to be consummated in the guise of an extramarital affair.

The same overlapping of appearance with truth is often at work in one's ideological self-perception. Recall Marx's brilliant analysis of how, in the French Revolution of 1848, the conservative-republican Party of Order functioned as the coalition of the two branches of royalism (orleanists and legitimists) in the 'anonymous kingdom of the Republic.'[40] The parliamentary deputees of the Party of Order perceived their republicanism as a mockery: in parliamentary debates, they all the time generated royalist slips of tongue and ridiculed the Republic to let it be known that their true aim was to restore the kingdom. What they were not aware of is that they themselves were duped as to the true social impact of their rule. What they were effectively doing was to establish the conditions of bourgeois republican order that they despised so much (by for instance guaranteeing the safety of private property). So it is not that they were royalists who were just wearing a republican mask: although they experienced themselves as such, it was their very 'inner' royalist conviction which was the deceptive front masking their true social role. In short, far from being the hidden truth of their public republicanism, their sincere royalism was the fantasmatic support of their actual republicanism – it was what provided the passion to their activity. Is it not, then, that the deputees of the Party of Order were also *feigning to feign* to be republicans, be what they really were?

Hegel's radical conclusion is that the sign with which we are dealing here, in corporeal expressions, 'in truth signifies nothing (*in Wahrheit nichts bezeichnet*).'[41] Habit is thus a strange sign which 'signifies the fact that it signifies nothing.'[42] What Hölderlin put forward as the formula of our destitute predicament, of an era in which, because gods have abandoned us, we are 'signs without meaning,' acquires here an unexpected positive interpretation. And we should take Hegel's formula literally: the 'nothing' in it has a positive weight, i.e., the sign which 'in truth signifies nothing' is what Lacan calls *signifier*, that which represents the subject for another signifier. The 'nothing' is the void of the subject itself, so that the absence of an ultimate reference means that absence itself is the ultimate reference, and this absence is the subject itself. This is why

Malabou writes: 'Spirit is not that which is expressed by its expressions; it is that which originally terrifies spirit.'[43] The dimension of haunting, the link between spirit qua the light of Reason and spirit qua obscene ghosts, is crucial here: spirit/Reason is forever, by a structural necessity, haunted by the obscene apparitions of its own spirit.

> The human being is this night, this empty nothing, that contains everything in its simplicity – an unending wealth of many representations, images, of which none belongs to him – or which are not present. This night, the interior of nature, that exists here – pure self – in phantasmagorical representations, is night all around it, in which here shoots a bloody head – there another white ghastly apparition, suddenly here before it, and just so disappears. One catches sight of this night when one looks human beings in the eye – into a night that becomes awful.[44]

Again, one should not be blinded by the poetic power of this description, but read it precisely. The first thing to note is how the objects which freely float around in this 'night of the world' are *membra disiecta*, partial objects, objects detached from their organic Whole – is there not a strange echo between this description and Hegel's description of the negative power of Understanding which is able to abstract an entity (a process, a property) from its substantial context and treat it as if it has an existence of its own? – 'that the accidental as such, detached from what circumscribes it, what is bound and is actual only in its context with others, should attain an existence of its own and a separate freedom – this is the tremendous power of the negative.'[45] It is thus as if, in the ghastly scenery of the 'night of the world,' we encounter something like *the power of Understanding in its natural state*, spirit in the guise of a *proto-spirit* – this, perhaps, is the most precise definition of horror: when a higher state of development violently inscribes itself in the lower state, in its ground/presupposition, where it cannot but appear as a monstrous mess, a disintegration of order, a terrifying unnatural combination of natural elements. With regards to today's science, where do we encounter its horror at its purest? When genetic manipulations go awry and generate objects never seen in nature, freaks like goats with a gigantic ear instead of a head or a head with one eye, meaningless accidents which nonetheless touch our deeply repressed fantasies and thus trigger wild interpretations. The pure Self as the 'inner of nature' (a strange expression, since, for Hegel, nature, precisely, *has no*

interior: its ontological status is that of externality, not only externality with regard to some presupposed Interior, but externality with regard to itself) stands for this paradoxical short-circuit of the super-natural (spiritual) in its natural state. Why does it occur? The only consistent answer is a *materialist* one: *because spirit is part of nature*, and can occur/arise only through a monstrous self/affliction (distortion, *derangement*) of nature. Therein resides the paradoxical materialist edge of cheap spiritualism: it is precisely because spirit is part of nature, because spirit does not intervene into nature already constituted, ready-made somewhere else, but has to emerge out of nature through its derangement, that there is no spirit (Reason) without spirits (obscene ghosts), that spirit is forever haunted by spirits.

It is from this standpoint that one should (re)read Sartre's deservedly famous description of the waiter in a café who, with exaggerated theatricality, performs the clicheic gestures of a waiter and thus 'plays at being a waiter in a café' from his *Being and Nothingness*:

> His movement is quick and forward, a little too precise, a little too rapid. He comes toward the patrons with a step a little too quick. He bends forward a little too eagerly; his voice, his eyes express an interest a little too solicitous for the order of the customer. Finally there he returns, trying to imitate in his walk the inflexible stiffness of some kind of automaton . . .[46]

Does Sartre's underlying ontological thesis that 'the waiter in the café can not be immediately a café waiter in the sense that this inkwell *is* an inkwell' not point forward towards Lacan's classic thesis that a madman is not only a beggar who thinks he is a king, but also a king who thinks he is a king? One should be very precise in this reading: as Robert Bernasconi pointed out in his commentary, Sartre's thesis is here much more refined than a simple point about *mauvaise foi* and self-objectivization (in order to cover up – or escape from – the void of his freedom, a subject escapes into a firm symbolic identity). What Sartre does show is how, through the very exaggeration in his acting as a waiter, through his very over-identification with the role of the waiter, the waiter in question signals his distance from it and thus asserts his subjectivity. True, this French waiter

> plays at being a waiter by acting like an automaton, just as the role of a waiter in the United States, by a strange inversion, is to play at acting

like one's friend. However, Sartre's point is that, whatever game the waiter is called upon to play, the ultimate rule that the waiter follows is that he must break the rules, and to do so by following them in an exaggerated manner. That is to say, the waiter does not simply follow the unwritten rules, which would be obedience to a certain kind of tyranny, but, instead, goes overboard in following those rules. The waiter succeeds in rejecting the attempt to reduce him to nothing more than being a waiter, not by refusing the role, but by highlighting the fact that he is playing it to the point that he escapes it. The waiter does this by overdoing things, by doing too much. The French waiter, instead of disappearing into the role, exaggerates the movements that make him something of an automaton in a way that draws attention to him, just as, we can add, the quintessential North American waiter is not so much friendly as overfriendly. Sartre uses the same word, *trop*, that we saw him using in *Nausea* to express this human superfluity.[47]

And it is crucial to supplement this description with its symmetrical opposite: one is *truly* identified with one's role precisely when one does not 'over-identify' with it, but accompanies one's playing the role, following its rules, with small violations or idiosyncrasies destined to signal that, beneath the role I am playing, there is a real person who cannot be directly identified with it or reduced to it. In other words, it is totally wrong to read the waiter's behavior as a case of *mauvaise foi*: his very exaggerated acting opens up, in a negative way, the space for his authentic self, since its message is 'I am not what I am playing to be.' The true *mauvaise foi* consists precisely in embellishing my playing a role with idiosyncratic details – it is this 'personal touch' which provides the space of false freedom, allowing me to accommodate myself to my self-objectivization in the role I am playing. (So what about those rare and weird moments in an American cafeteria where we suddenly suspect that the waiter's friendliness is genuine?)[48]

4. HABITS, ANIMAL AND HUMAN

And this brings us back to our starting question: the change from animal to properly human habit. Only humans, spiritual beings, are haunted by spirits – why? Not simply because, in contrast to animals, they have

access to universality, but because this universality is for them *simultaneously necessary and impossible*, i.e., a problem. In other words, while, for human subjects, the place of universality is prescribed, it has to remain empty, it cannot ever be filled in by its 'proper' content. The specificity of man thus concerns the relationship between universal essence and its accidents: for animals, accidents remain mere accidents; only a human being posits universality as such, relates to it, and can therefore reflectively elevate accidents into universal essence. This, after all, is why man is a 'generic being' (Marx): to paraphrase Heidegger's definition of *Dasein*, man is a being for which its genus is for itself a problem: 'Man can "present the genus" to the degree that habit is the unforeseen element of the genus.'[49]

This formulation opens up an unexpected link to the notion of *hegemony* as it was developed by Ernesto Laclau: there is forever a gap between the universality of man's genus and the particular habits which fill in its void; habits are always 'unexpected,' contingent, an accident elevated to universal necessity. The predominance of one or another habit is the result of a struggle for hegemony, for which accident will occupy the empty place of the universality. That is to say, with regard to the relationship between universality and particularity, the 'contradiction' in the human condition – a human subject perceives reality from the singular viewpoint of subjectivity and, simultaneously, perceives himself as included into this same reality as its part, as an object in it – means that the subject has to presuppose universality (there is a universal order, some kind of 'Great Chain of Being,' of which he is a part), while, simultaneously, it is forever impossible for him to entirely fill in this universality with its particular content, to harmonize the Universal and the Particular (since his approach to reality is forever marked – colored, twisted, distorted – by his singular perspective). Universality is always simultaneously *necessary* and *impossible*.

Let me begin with Ernesto Laclau's concept of hegemony which provides an exemplary matrix of the relationship between universality, historical contingency, and the limit of an impossible Real – one should always keep in mind that we are dealing here with a distinct concept whose specificity is often missed (or reduced to some proto-Gramscian vague generality) by those who refer to it. The key feature of the concept of hegemony resides in the contingent connection between intra-social differences (elements *within* the social space) and the limit that separates

society itself from non-society (chaos, utter decadence, dissolution of all social links). The limit between the social and its exteriority, the non-social, can only articulate itself in the guise of a difference (by mapping itself onto a difference) between elements of social space. In other words, radical antagonism can only be represented in a distorted way, through the particular differences internal to the system; external differences are always already also internal, and, furthermore, that the link between the two is ultimately contingent, the result of political struggle for hegemony.

The standard anti-Hegelian counter-argument here is, of course: but is this irreducible gap between the Universal (frame) and its particular content not what characterizes the Kantian finite subjectivity? Is not the Hegelian 'concrete universality' the most radical expression of the fantasy of full reconciliation between the Universal and the Particular? Is its basic feature not the self-generation of the entire particular content out of the self-movement of universality itself? Against this common reproach, one should insist on how Laclau's notion of hegemony is effectively close to the Hegelian notion of 'concrete universality' in which the specific difference overlaps with the difference constitutive of the genus itself, as in Laclau's hegemony in which the antagonistic gap between society and its external limit, non-society (the dissolution of social link), is mapped onto an intra-social structural difference. Laclau himself rejects the Hegelian 'reconciliation' between Universal and Particular on behalf of the gap that forever separates the empty/impossible Universal from the contingent particular content that hegemonizes it. If, however, we take a closer look at Hegel, we see that – insofar as every particular species of a genus does not 'fit' its universal genus – when we finally arrive at a particular species that fully fits its notion, the very universal notion is transformed into another notion. No existing historical shape of State fully fits the notion of State – the necessity of dialectical passage from State ('objective spirit,' history) into Religion ('absolute spirit') involves the fact that the only existing State that effectively fits its notion is a religious community – which, precisely, is no longer a State. Here we encounter the properly dialectical paradox of 'concrete universality' qua historicity: in the relationship between a genus and its subspecies, one of these subspecies will always be the element that negates the very universal feature of the genus. Different nations have different versions of soccer; Americans do not have soccer, because 'baseball *is* their soccer.'

See also Hegel's famous claim that modern people do not pray in the morning, because reading the newspaper *is* their morning prayer. In the same way, in the disintegrating socialism, writers and other cultural clubs did act as political parties. Perhaps, in the history of cinema, the best example is the relationship between western and sci-fi space operas: today, we no longer have 'substantial' westerns, because space operas *occupied their place*, i.e. space operas *are* today's westerns. So, in the classification of westerns, we would have to supplement the standard subspecies with space opera as today's non-western stand-in for western. Crucial is here this intersection of different genuses, this partial overlapping of two universals: western and space opera are not simply two different genres, they *intersect*, i.e. in a certain epoch, space opera becomes a subspecies of western (or, western is 'sublated' in space opera) . . . In the same way, 'woman' becomes one of the subspecies of man, Heideggerian *Daseinsanalyse* one of the subspecies of phenomenology, 'sublating' the preceding universality.

The impossible point of 'self-objectivization' would have been precisely the point at which universality and its particular content would have been fully harmonized – in short, where there would have been no struggle for hegemony. And this brings us back to madness: its most succinct definition is that of a *direct* harmony between universality and its accidents, of the cancellation of the gap that separates the two – for a madman, the object which is my impossible stand-in within objectal reality loses its virtual character and becomes its full integral part. – In contrast to madness, habit avoids this trap of direct identification by way of its virtual character: the subject's identification with a habit is not a direct identification with some positive feature, but the identification with a disposition, with a virtuality. Habit is the outcome of a struggle for hegemony: it is *an accident elevated to 'essence,' to universal necessity*, i.e., made to fill in its empty place.

CHAPTER THREE

Fichte's Laughter

Slavoj Žižek

Whenever we are dealing with an 'official' progressive succession of philosophers, the truly interesting thing is to consider how a philosopher who was, according to this 'official' line, 'overcome' or 'completed' by his successor(s), reacts to his successor(s). Say, how does (or would) Plato react to Aristotle, or Wagner to Nietzsche, or Husserl to Heidegger, or Hegel to Marx?[1]

The most intriguing case of this 'rebellion of the vanquished' takes place in German Idealism, where each of the 'predecessors' in the 'official' line of progress – Kant-Fichte-Schelling-Hegel(-late Schelling) – reacted to the critique or interpretation of his work by his successor. While Fichte claimed to finally accomplish Kant's philosophy with his *Wissenschaftslehre* Kant's disparaging remarks about Fichte are well-known: he rejected as meaninglessly tautological the very term *Wissenschaftslehre* ('doctrine about knowledge'). Fichte's 'subjective idealism' is then followed by Schelling's philosophy-of-identity, which supplements the transcendental-subjective genesis of reality with philosophy of nature; Fichte bitterly rejected this 'supplement' as a misreading of his *Wissenschaftslehre*, as one can read in their correspondence. Of course, Schelling himself did not hesitate to retort that Fichte radically changed his position as a reaction to Schelling's critique. Hegel's 'overcoming' of Schelling is a case in itself: Schelling's reaction to Hegel's idealist dialectic was so strong and profound that more and more it is counted as the next (and concluding) step in the inner development of German Idealism.[2]

Schelling's first and decisive break out of the constraints of his early philosophy-of-identity is his *Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom* from 1809, to which Hegel reacted in his (posthumously published) lectures on the history of philosophy with a brief and ridiculously inadequate dismissal which totally misses the point of Schelling's masterpiece: what is today considered one of the highpoints of the entire history of philosophy appears to Hegel as an insignificant, minor, and obscure essay. No wonder, then, that the topic among today's Hegel-scholars is rather: what would have been Hegel's rejoinder to Schelling's critique of dialectics as a mere 'negative philosophy'? Among others, Dieter Henrich and Frederick Beiser have tried to reconstruct a Hegelian answer.

What is the philosophical status of these 'retroactive' rejoinders? It is all too easy to claim (in the postmodern vein of the 'end of the grand narratives') that they bear witness to the failure of every general scheme of progress: they do not so much undermine the underlying line of succession (from Kant to late Schelling) as, rather, bring forth its most interesting and lively moment, the moment when, as it were, a thought rebels against its reduction to a term in the chain of 'development' and asserts its absolute right or claim. Sometimes, such reactions are mere outbursts of a helpless disorientation; sometimes, they are themselves the true moments of progress. That is to say, when the Old is attacked by the New, this first appearance of the New is as a rule flat and naïve – the true dimension of the New arises only when the Old reacts to the (first appearance of) the New. Pascal reacted from a Christian standpoint to scientific secular modernity, and his 'reaction' (his struggling with the problem of how one can remain a Christian in the abyssal new conditions of the secular scientific universe) tells us much more about modernity than its direct partisans. Or, in the history of cinema, it was the silent directors resisting sound, from Chaplin to Eisenstein, who brought to light the truly shattering dimension of sound cinema. The true 'progress' emerges from the reaction of the Old to the progress. True revolutionaries are always reflected conservatives.

1. FROM FICHTE'S *ICH* TO HEGEL'S SUBJECT

Arguably the most interesting case of such a retroactive rejoinder is Fichte's late philosophy, in which he (implicitly or explicitly) answers his

critics, primarily Schelling: this response is most audible in Fichte's shift from the self-positing I to the asubjective divine Being as the ultimate ground of all reality. Here is Günter Zöller's succinct description of this basic shift in Fichte's doctrine from the Jena period (1794–1799) to the Berlin period (1799–1814): in the Jena period,

> the I, in its capacity as absolute I, had functioned as the principle of all knowledge. After 1800, the I provides the form (Ichform: 'I-form'), of knowledge as such. The ground is now no longer identified with the I qua absolute I but with something absolute prior to and originally independent of the I (Seyn, 'Being,' or Gott, 'God'). By contrast, the I qua I-form is the basic mode for the appearance of the absolute, which does not appear itself and as such.[3]

One should be very precise in reading this shift: it is not simply that Fichte 'abandons' the I as the absolute ground, reducing it to a subordinate moment of the trans-subjective Absolute, to a mode or form of appearance of this Absolute. If anything, it is only now (after Jena) that Fichte correctly grasped the basic feature of the I: I is 'as such' a split of the Absolute, the 'minimal difference' of its self-appearing. In other words, the notion of I as the absolute ground of all being secretly but unavoidably 'substantivizes' the subject, it reduces subject to substance.

Fichte is, however, not able to clearly formulate this insight and his limitation is discernible in the wrong answer he gives to the crucial question: to whom does the Absolute appear in the I-form? Fichte's answer is: to (subjective) appearance, to the subject to whom the Absolute appears. What he is not able to assert is that, in appearing to the subject, the Absolute also appears to itself, i.e., that the subjective reflection of the Absolute is the Absolute's self-reflection.

The key text is here the *Wissenschaftslehre* from 1812 in contrast to the Jena versions of *Wissenschaftslehre* from 1794–1799. In these early versions, Fichte's strategy is the standard subjective-idealist procedure of critically denouncing the 'reified' notion of objective reality, of things existing out there in the world of which the subject is also part: one should dispel this necessary illusion of independent objective reality by way of deploying its subjective genesis. Here, the only Absolute is the activity of spontaneous self-positing of the absolute I: the absolute I designates the coincidence of being and acting [*Tat-Handlung*], or, simply put, *it is what it does*. In 1812, however, Fichte takes a further step

back: 'it is no longer the absoluteness of the things that is unveiled as an unavoidable illusion, but the absoluteness of the I itself.'[4] The self-positing of the I is itself an illusory appearance, an 'image' of the only true Absolute, the trans-subjective immovable absolute Being ('God'). Already back in the 1790s, Madame de Stael's reaction upon hearing about Fichte's self-positing absolute I was that it is like Baron Münchhausen who lifted himself out of the swamp by pulling himself up by his hair: it is as if the late Fichte accepted this critique, conceding that the self-reflecting I is a chimera floating in the air, which has to be grounded in some firm, positive Absolute. The critical analysis has thus to accomplish a further step back: first from objective reality to the transcendental I, then from the transcendental I to the absolute Being. The I's self-positing is an image of the divine Absolute, not the Absolute itself:

> the Absolute appears, as life teaches us. The appearance of the Absolute means that it appears as the Absolute. Since determinacy comes with negation, the Absolute must bring forth its own opposite, a non-Absolute, to be able to appear as the Absolute. This non-Absolute is the Absolute's appearance. The appearance is also that to which the Absolute appears. Thus, the Absolute can appear to the appearance only if at the same time its opposite, namely the appearance, appears to the appearance as well. There is no appearing of the Absolute without an appearing of the appearance to itself, that is, without reflectivity of the appearance. Since the Absolute appears necessarily, the self-reflection of the appearance is necessary too.[5]

A double mediation has to be accomplished here. If, in the appearing of the Absolute, the Absolute appears as the Absolute, this means that the Absolute has to appear as absolute in contrast to other 'mere' appearances: so there must be a *cut* in the domain of appearances, a cut between 'mere' appearances and the appearance through which the Absolute itself transpires. In other words, the gap between appearance and true Being must inscribe itself into the very domain of appearing.

But what this reflexivity of appearing means is that the Absolute also exposes itself to the danger of merely 'appearing' to be the Absolute – the appearing *of* the Absolute turns into the (misleading, illusory) appearing *to be* the Absolute. Is (from a materialist standpoint, of course) the entire history of religion not the history of such false appearances of the Absolute? At this level, 'the Absolute' *is* its own appearing, i.e., an

organization of appearances that evokes the mirage that there is, hidden behind it, an Absolute which appears (shines through it). Here, the illusion effectively is no longer to mistake appearing for being, but to mistake being for appearing: the only 'being' of the Absolute is its appearing, and the illusion is that this appearing is a mere 'image' behind which there is a transcendent true Being. So when Fichte writes 'every error without exception consists in mistaking images for being. The *Wissenschaftslehre* has for the first time pronounced how far this error extends through showing that being is only in God,'[6] he misses the error which is the exact opposite of mistaking images for being (i.e. of taking as the true being what is effectively only its image), namely the error of mistaking being for images (i.e., of taking as merely an image of the true being what is effectively the true being itself). At this level, one should thus accept the Derridean theological conclusion: 'God' is not an absolute Being persisting in itself, it is the pure virtuality of a *promise*, the pure appearing of itself. In other words, the 'Absolute' beyond appearances coincides with an 'absolute appearance,' an appearance beneath which there is no substantial Being.

The second half of this double mediation is thus: if the Absolute is to appear, appearing itself must appear to itself as appearing, and Fichte conceives this self-appearing of appearance as subjective self-reflection. Fichte is right to endorse a two-step critical approach (first from the object to its subjective constitution, then the meta-critical deploying of the genesis of the abyssal mirage of subject's self-positing). What he gets wrong is the nature of the Absolute that grounds subjectivity itself: the late Fichte's Absolute is an immovable transcendent in-itself, external to the movement of reflection. What Fichte cannot think is the 'life,' movement, and mediation in the Absolute itself: what he misses is how, precisely, the Absolute's appearing is not a mere appearance, but a self-actualization, a self-revelation, of the Absolute. This immanent dynamics does *not* make the Absolute itself a subject, but it inscribes subjectivization into its very core.

What Fichte was not able to grasp is the speculative identity of these two extreme poles (pure absolute Being and the appearance appearing to itself): the I's self-positing reflexivity is, quite literally, the 'image' of the Absolute as self-grounded Being. Therein resides the objective irony of Fichte's development: Fichte, *the* philosopher of subjective self-positing, ends up reducing subjectivity to a mere appearance of an immovable absolute in-itself. The proper Hegelian reproach to Fichte is thus not

that he is too 'subjective,' but, on the contrary, that he is unable to really think substance also as subject: the shift of his thought towards the asubjective Absolute is not a reaction to his earlier excessive subjectivism, but a reaction to his inability to formulate the core of subjectivity.

Hegel's true novelty can be seen apropos the standard designation of the post-Kantian development as forming the triad of Fichte's 'subjective' idealism, Schelling's 'objective' idealism, and Hegel's 'absolute' idealism. The designation of Schelling's *Identitätsphilosophie* as 'objective' idealism is, however, deceiving: the whole point of his *Identitätsphilosophie* is that subjective idealism (transcendental philosophy) and objective idealism (philosophy of nature) are two approaches to the Third, the Absolute beyond or beneath the duality of spirit and nature, of subject and object, underlying them both and manifesting itself in both of them. (Late Fichte does something similar when he passes from the transcendental I to the divine Being as the absolute ground of all reality.) In this sense, it is meaningless to call Hegel's philosophy 'absolute idealism': his point is precisely that there is no need for a third element, the medium or ground, beyond subject and object-substance. We start with objectivity, and the subject is nothing but the self-mediation of objectivity. When, in Hegel's dialectics, we have a pair of opposites, their unity is not a third, an underlying medium, but one of the two: a genus is its own species, or, a genus ultimately has only one species, which is why specific difference coincides with the difference between genus and species.

We can thus globally discern three positions: *metaphysical*, *transcendental*, and *speculative*. In the first one, reality is simply perceived as existing out there, and the task of philosophy is to analyze its basic structure. In the second one, a philosopher investigates the subjective conditions of possibility of objective reality, its transcendental genesis; in the third one, subjectivity is re-inscribed into reality, but not simply reduced to a part of objective reality. That is, while the subjective constitution of reality, the split that separates the subject from the in-itself, is fully admitted, this very split is transposed back into reality as its kenotic self-emptying (to use the Christian theological term, as Hegel does). Appearance is not reduced to reality, the very process of appearance is conceived from the standpoint of reality, so that the question is not 'How, if at all, can we pass from appearance to reality?', but 'How can something like appearance arise in the midst of reality? What are the conditions for reality to appear to itself?'

Hegelian *reflection* is thus the opposite of the transcendental approach that reflexively regresses from the object to its subjective conditions of possibility. Even philosophy after the 'linguistic turn' remains at this transcendental level, deploying the transcendental dimension of language, i.e., how language, the horizon of possible meaning sustained by language in which we dwell, functions as the transcendental condition of possibility of all our experience of reality. Here, then, 'signified falls into the signifier,' i.e., signified is an effect of the signifier, it is accounted for in the terms of the symbolic order as its transcendentally constitutive condition.[7] What dialectical reflection adds to this is another reflexive twist, which grounds the very subjective-transcendental site of enunciation in the 'self-movement' of the Thing itself: here, 'signifier falls into the signified,' the act of enunciation falls into the enunciated, the sign of the thing falls into the thing itself. How do we proceed when we are challenged to explain the meaning of a term X to someone who, while more or less fluent in our language, doesn't know this specific term? We engage in proposing a vast series of synonyms, paraphrases, descriptions of situations where this term would fit . . . In this way, through the very failure of our endeavor, we circumscribe an empty place, the place of the right word, precisely the word we are trying to explain. So at some point, after our paraphrases fail, all we can do is to conclude skeptically: 'In short, it is X!' Far from functioning as a simple recognition of failure, this turn can generate an effect of insight: that is, if through our failed paraphrase we have successfully circumscribed the *place* of the term to be explained. At this point, as Lacan would have put it, 'signifier falls into the signified,' the term becomes part of its own definition.

This brings us to the formal definition of subject: a subject tries to articulate ('express') itself in a signifying chain, this articulation fails, and by means and through this failure, the subject emerges: the subject is the failure of its signifying representation – this is why Jacques Lacan writes the subject of the signifier as $, as 'barred.' Consider, for instance, a love letter: the very failure of the writer to formulate his declaration in a clear and efficient way, his oscillations, the letter's fragmentation, etc., can in themselves be the proof (perhaps the necessary and the only reliable proof) that the professed love is authentic – here, the very failure to deliver the message properly is the sign of its authenticity. If the message is delivered in a smooth way, it arouses suspicions that it is part of a well-planned approach, or that the writer loves himself, the beauty of his

writing, more than his love-object, i.e., that the object is effectively reduced to a pretext for engaging in the narcissistically satisfying activity of writing. It is a little bit like the old musical mono-recordings: the very cracking sounds that filter and disturb the pure reproduction of the human voice generate the effect of authenticity, the impression that we are listening to (what once was) a real person singing, while the very perfection of modern recordings with all their Dolby effects etc. strangely de-realizes what we hear. This is why the 'enlightened' New Age individual who extols us to fully realize/express our true Self cannot but appear as its opposite, as a mechanical, depthless, subject who blindly repeats his/her mantra.

What this means is that the dialectical reversal is, at its most radical, the shift of the predicate into the position of subject. Let us clarify this key feature of the Hegelian dialectic apropos the well-known male-chauvinist notion of how, in contrast to man's firm self-identity, 'the essence of woman is dispersed, elusive, displaced'; the thing to do here is to move from this claim that the essence of woman is forever dispersed, to the more radical claim that this dispersion/displacement as such is the 'essence of femininity.' This is what Hegel deployed as the dialectical shift in which the predicate itself turns into the subject: 'I found the essence of femininity.' 'But one cannot find it, femininity is dispersed, displaced . . .' 'Well, this dispersion *is* the essence of femininity . . .'

And 'subject' is not just an example here, but the very formal structure of it: subject 'as such' is a subjectivized predicate; subject is not only always already displaced, etc., it *is* this displacement. The supreme case of this shift constitutive of the dimension of subjectivity is that of supposition. Lacan first deployed the notion of the analyst as the 'subject supposed to know' which arises through transference (supposed to know what (?) the meaning of the patient's symptoms). However, he soon realizes that he is dealing with a more general structure of supposition in which a figure of the Other is not only supposed to know, but can also believe, enjoy, cry and laugh, or even *not* know for us (from the Tibetan praying mills to TV canned laughter). This structure of presupposition is not infinite: it is strictly limited, constrained by the four elements of the discourse (S1, the master-signifier; S2, the chain of knowledge; a, the surplus-enjoyment; $, the subject): S1 – subject supposed to believe; S2 – subject supposed to know; a – subject supposed to enjoy . . . and what about $? Do we get a 'subject supposed to be subject'? What would

this mean? What if we read it as standing for the very structure of supposition: it is not only that the subject is supposed to have a quality, to do or undergo something (to know, enjoy . . .) – the subject itself is a supposition, i.e., the subject is never directly 'given' as a positive substantial entity, we never directly encounter it, it is merely a flickering void 'supposed' between the two signifiers. (We encounter here again the Hegelian passage from subject to predicate: from the subject supposed to . . . to the subject itself as a supposition.) That is to say, what, precisely, is a 'subject'? Let us imagine a proposition, a statement – how, when, does this statement get 'subjectivized'? When some reflexive feature inscribes into it the subjective attitude (for example, a love letter is subjectivized when the writer's turmoil and oscillation blurs the message) – in this precise sense, a signifier 'represents the subject for another signifier.' The subject is the absent X that has to be supposed in order to account for this reflexive twist, for this distortion. And Lacan here *goes all the way*: the subject is not only supposed by the external observer-listener of a signifying chain, it is *in itself a supposition*. The subject is inaccessible to itself as Thing, in its noumenal identity, and, as such, it is forever haunted by itself as object: what are all Doppelganger figures if not figures of myself as an object that haunts me? In other words, not only others are a supposition to me (I can only suppose their existence beneath the reflexive distortion of a signifying chain), I myself am no less a supposition to myself: something to be presumed (there must be an X that 'I am,' the 'this I or He or It (the thing) which thinks,' as Kant put it), and never directly accessed. Hume's famous observation that, no matter how close and deep I look into myself, all I will find there are specific ideas, particular mental states, perceptions, emotions, etc., never a 'Self,' misses the point: this non-accessibility to itself as an object is constitutive of being a 'self.'

2. ABSOLUTE AND APPEARANCE

This reversal-towards-itself is the key dialectical moment. For Hegel, if the Idea cannot adequately represent itself, if its representation is distorted/deficient, then this distortion simultaneously signals a limitation/deficiency of the Idea itself. And, in order to get at the speculative core

of Hegelian dialectics, one should make a step further: not only does the universal Idea always appear in a distorted/displaced way; this Idea is *nothing other than* the distortion/displacement, the self-inadequacy, of the particular with regard to itself – in strict homology with the move from the subject supposed to . . . to subject itself as a supposition. One could even claim that this reversal as such, formally, *defines* subjectivity: substance appears in phenomena, while a subject is *nothing but* its own appearance. (And one can multiply these formulas: the universal is *nothing but* the inadequacy, the non-identity, of the particular to/with itself; the essence is *nothing but* the inadequacy of the appearance to itself, etc.) This does not mean that the subject is the stupid tautology of the Real ('things just are what they seem to be, the way they seem to be'), but, much more precisely, that the subject is nothing but its own appearing, the appearing reflected-into-itself,[8] the paradoxical torsion in which a thing starts to function as a substitute *for itself*.

We encounter the Hegelian 'oppositional determination (*gegensätzliche Bestimmung*)', for example, in the prominent figure of the gay basher raping a homosexual, where homophobia encounters itself in its oppositional determination, i.e., tautology (self-identity) appears as the highest contradiction.[9] A further example is provided by the extreme case of interpassivity, when I tape a movie instead of simply watching it on TV, and when this postponement takes a fully self-reflected form: worrying that there will be something wrong with the recording, I anxiously watch TV while the tape is running, just to be sure that everything is alright with the recording, so that the film will be there on the tape, ready for a future viewing. In this case, the paradox is that I do indeed watch a film, even very closely, but in a kind of suspended state, without really following it – all that interests me is that everything is really there, that the recording is alright. Do we not find something similar in a certain perverse sexual economy in which I perform the act only in order to be sure that I can in future really perform the act: even if the act is, in reality, indistinguishable from the 'normal' act done for pleasure, as an end-in-itself, the underlying libidinal economy is totally different.

Watching a movie appears here as its own oppositional determination – in other words, the structure is that of the Mobius strip: if we progress far enough on one side, we reach our starting point again (watching the movie, a gay sex act), but on the obverse side of the band. Lewis Carroll was therefore right: a country *can* serve as its own map insofar as the

model/map is the thing itself in its oppositional determination, i.e., insofar as an invisible screen ensures that the thing is not taken to be itself. In this precise sense, the 'primordial' difference is not between things themselves, also not between things and their signs, but between the thing and the void of an invisible screen which distorts our perception of the thing so that we do not take the thing for itself. The movement from things to their signs is not that of replacement of the thing by its sign, but that of the thing itself becoming the sign of – not another thing, but – *itself*, the void in its very core. And the same goes for the relationship of masking. In December 2001, Argentinians took to the streets to protest against the current government, and especially against Cavallo, the economy minister. When the crowd gathered around Cavallo's building, threatening to storm it, he escaped wearing a mask of himself (sold in costume shops so that people could mock him by wearing his mask). It thus seems that at least Cavallo did learn something from the widely spread Lacanian movement in Argentina – the fact that a thing is its own best mask. And is this also not the ultimate definition of the divinity – god also has to wear a mask of himself? Perhaps 'god' is the name for this supreme split between the absolute as the noumenal Thing and the absolute as the appearance of itself, for the fact that the two are the same, that the difference between the two is purely formal. In this precise sense, 'god' names the supreme contradiction: god – the absolute irrepresentable Beyond – has to appear as such. Along the same lines, recall the scene from Spike Lee's formidable *Bamboozled*, in which black artists themselves blacken their faces in the style of Al Johnson: perhaps, wearing a black mask is the only strategy for them to appear white (i.e. to generate the expectation that the 'true' face beneath their black mask is white). In this properly Lacanian deception, wearing a black mask is destined to conceal the fact that we *are* black – no wonder, then, that the effect of discovering black under black, when they rinse off their masks, is shocking. Perhaps as a defense against this shock, we nonetheless spontaneously perceive their 'true' face beneath the mask as more black than their mask, as if attesting to the fact that the blackening of their face is a strategy of their assimilation into the white culture . . .[10]

Recall the scene, from *Vertigo*, of Scottie's and Judy's initial evening date (at Ernie's again, as with Madeleine), with the couple seated at a table opposite each other, obviously failing to engage in a meaningful conversation. All of a sudden, Scottie's gaze gets fixed on some point

behind Judy, and we see that it is a woman vaguely similar to Madeleine, dressed in the same gray gown. When Judy notices what attracted Scottie's gaze, she is, of course, deeply hurt. The crucial moment here is when we see, from Scottie's point-of-view, the two of them in the same shot: Judy on the right side, close to him, the gray woman to the left, in the background. Again, we get the vulgar reality side-by-side with the ethereal apparition of the ideal. The split from the shot of Midge and the portrait of Carlotta is here externalized onto two different persons: Judy right here and the momentary spectral apparition of Madeleine – with the additional irony, missed by Scottie, that the vulgar Judy really *is* the Madeleine for whom he is desperately seeking among fleeting appearances of strangers. The brief moment when Scottie is deluded into thinking that what he sees is Madeleine is the moment at which the Absolute appears: it appears 'as such' in the very domain of appearances, in those sublime moments when a supra-sensible dimension 'shines through' in our ordinary reality. When Plato dismisses art as the 'copy of a copy,' when he introduces three ontological levels (ideas, their material copies, and copies of these copies), what gets lost is that the Idea can only emerge in the distance that separates our ordinary material reality (second level) from its copy. When we copy a material object, *what* we effectively copy, what our copy refers to, is never this particular object itself but its Idea. It is similar with a mask which engenders a third reality, a ghost in the mask which is not the face hidden beneath it. In this precise sense, the Idea is the appearance *as* appearance (as Hegel and Lacan put it): the Idea is something that *appears* when reality (the first-level copy/imitation of the Idea) is itself copied. It is that which in the copy is more than the original itself. It is against this background that one should grasp the Kafkaesque claim from Hegel's *Aesthetics* that a portrait of a person can be more like the individual than the actual individual himself: what this implies is that the person itself is never fully 'itself,' that it does not coincide with its Idea. No wonder that Plato reacted in such a panicky way against the threat of art: as Lacan pointed out in his Seminar XI, art (as the copy of a copy) does not compete with material objects as 'direct,' first-level copies of the Idea; rather, it competes with the supra-sensible Idea itself.

In one of Agatha Christie's stories, Hercule Poirot discovers that an ugly nurse is the same person as a beauty he met on a trans-Atlantic voyage: she merely put on a wig and obfuscated her natural beauty.

Hastings, Poirot's Watson-like companion, sadly remarks how, if a beautiful woman can make herself appear ugly, then the same can also be done in the opposite direction – what, then, remains in man's infatuation beyond deception? Does this insight into the unreliability of the beloved woman not announce the end of love? Poirot answers: 'No, my friend, it announces the beginning of wisdom.' Such a skepticism, such an awareness of the deceptive nature of feminine beauty, misses the point, which is that feminine beauty is nonetheless absolute, an absolute which appears: no matter how fragile and deceptive this beauty is at the level of substantial reality, what transpires in/through in the moment of Beauty is an Absolute – there is more truth in the appearance than in what is hidden beneath it. Therein resides Plato's deep insight: Ideas are not the hidden reality beneath appearances (Plato was well aware that this hidden reality is that of ever-changing corruptive and corrupted matter); Ideas are nothing but the very form of appearance, this form as such – or, as Lacan succinctly rendered Plato's point: the Suprasensible is appearance as appearance. For this reason, neither Plato nor Christianity are forms of Wisdom – they are both anti-Wisdom embodied.

What this means is that in conceiving art, we should return without shame to Plato. Plato's reputation suffers because of his claim that poets should be thrown out of the city – a rather sensible advice, judging from my post-Yugoslav experience, where ethnic cleansing was prepared by poets' dangerous dreams (the Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic being only one among them). If the West has the industrial-military complex, we in the ex-Yugoslavia had a poetic-military complex: the post-Yugoslav war was triggered by the explosive mixture of the poetic and the military component. So, from a Platonic standpoint, what does a poem about the holocaust do? It provides its 'description without place': in renders the Idea of holocaust.

Recall the old Catholic strategy to guard men against the temptation of the flesh: when you see in front of you a voluptuous feminine body, imagine how it will look in a couple of decades – the dried skin, sagging breasts . . . (Or, even better, imagine what lurks now already beneath the skin: raw flesh and bones, inner fluids, half-digested food and excrements . . .) Far from enacting a return to the Real destined to break the imaginary spell of the body, such a procedure equals the escape from the Real, the Real which announces itself in the seductive appearance of the naked body. That is to say, in the opposition between the spectral

appearance of the sexualized body and the repulsive body in decay, it is the spectral appearance which is the Real, and the decaying body which is reality – we take recourse to the decaying body in order to avoid the deadly fascination of the Real which threatens to draw us into its vortex of jouissance.

In *All's Well That Ends Well*, Shakespeare provided a breathtakingly refined insight into such a redoubling of appearance. Count Bertram, who on the King's orders was forced to marry Helen, a common doctor's daughter, refuses to live with her and consummate the marriage, telling her that he will agree to be her husband only if she removes the ancestral ring from his finger and bears his child; at the same time, Bertram tries to seduce the young and beautiful Diana. Helen and Diana concoct a plan to bring Bertram back to his lawful wife. Diana agrees to spend the night with Bertram, telling him to visit her chamber at midnight; there, in darkness, the couple exchange their rings and make love. However, unknowingly to Bertram, the woman with whom he spent the night was not Diana but Helen, his wife. When they are later confronted, he has to admit that both of his conditions for recognizing the marriage are met. Helen removed his ancestral ring and bears his child. What, then, is the status of this bed-trick? At the very end of Act III, Helen herself provides a wonderful definition:

> Why then to-night / Let us assay our plot; which, if it speed, / Is wicked meaning in a lawful deed / And lawful meaning in a wicked act, / Where both not sin, and yet a sinful fact:/But let's about it.

We are effectively dealing both with a 'wicked meaning in a lawful deed' (what can be more lawful than a consummated marriage, a husband sleeping with his wife? And yet the meaning is wicked: Bertram thought he is sleeping with Diana) and a 'lawful meaning in a wicked act' (the meaning – Helen's intention – is lawful, to sleep with her husband, but the act is wicked: she deceives her husband, who does it thinking he is cheating on her). Their affair is 'not sin, and yet a sinful fact': not sin, because what happened is merely a consummation of marriage; but a sinful fact, something that involved intentional cheating from both partners. The true question here is not merely whether 'all's well that ends well,' whether the final outcome (nothing wrong effectively happened, and the married couple is reunited, the marriage bond fully asserted) cancels the sinful tricks and intentions, but a more radical one: what if

the rule of law can only be asserted through wicked (sinful) meanings and acts? What if, in order to rule, the law has to rely on the subterranean interplay of cheatings and deceptions? This, also, is what Lacan aims at with his paradoxical proposition *il n'y a pas de rapport sexuel* (there is no sexual relationship): was not Bertram's situation during the night of love the fate of most married couples? You make love to your lawful partner while 'cheating in your mind,' fantasizing that you are doing it with another partner. The actual sex-relationship has to be sustained by this fantasmatic supplement.

One can imagine a variation of Shakespeare's plot in which this fantasmatic dimension would have been even more palpable, a variation along the lines of the Jewish story of Jacob who fell in love with Rachel and wanted to marry her; his father, however, wanted him to marry Leah, Rachel's elder sister. In order that Jacob will not be tricked by the father or by Leah, Rachel taught him so that that he would recognize her at night in bed. Before the sexual event, Rachel felt guilty towards her sister, and told her what the signs were. Leah asked Rachel what will happen if he recognizes her voice. So the decision was that Rachel will lie under the bed, and while Jacob is making love to Leah, Rachel will make the sounds, so he won't recognize that he's having sex with the wrong sister . . .[11] So we can also imagine, in Shakespeare, Diana hidden beneath the bed where Helen and Bertram are copulating, making the appropriate sounds so that Bertram will not realize that he is not having sex with her, her voice serving as the support of the fantasmatic dimension.

From the Lacanian perspective, what then is appearance at its most radical? Imagine a man having an affair about which his wife doesn't know, so when he is meeting his lover, he pretends to be on a business trip or something similar; after some time, he gathers the courage and tells the wife the truth that, when he is away, he is staying with his lover. However, at this point, when the front of happy marriage falls apart, the mistress breaks down and, out of sympathy with the abandoned wife, avoids meeting her lover. What should the husband do in order not to give his wife the wrong signal? How not to let her think that the fact that he is no longer so often on business trips means that he is returning to her? He has to fake the affair and leave home for a couple of days, generating the wrong impression that the affair is continuing, while, in reality, he is just staying with some friend. This is appearance at its purest: it occurs not when we put up a deceiving screen to conceal the

transgression, but when we fake that there is a transgression to be concealed. In this precise sense, fantasy itself is for Lacan a semblance: it is not primarily the mask which conceals the Real beneath, but, rather, the fantasy of what is hidden behind the mask. So, for instance, the fundamental male fantasy of the woman is not her seductive appearance, but the idea that this dazzling appearance conceals some imponderable mystery.

3. THE FICHTEAN WAGER

What are the philosophical roots of Fichte's error with regard to the status of appearing? Let us return to the early Fichte (of the Jena period) who is usually perceived as a radical subjective idealist: there are two possible descriptions of our reality, 'dogmatic' (Spinozean deterministic materialism: we are part of reality, submitted to its laws, an object among others, our freedom is an illusion) and 'idealist' (the subject is autonomous and free, as the absolute I it spontaneously posits reality); reasoning alone cannot decide between the two, the decision is *practical*, or, to quote his famous dictum, which philosophy one chooses depends on what kind of man one is. Of course, Fichte passionately opts for idealism . . . However, a closer look quickly makes clear that this is *not* Fichte's position. Idealism is for Fichte not a new positive teaching that should replace materialism, but – to quote Peter Preuss's perspicuous formulation –

> merely an intellectual exercise open to anyone who accepts the autonomy of theoretical reason. Its function is to destroy the current deterministic dogma. But if it were now itself to become a theoretical understanding of reality it would be every bit as bad. While human life is no longer seen as a mere natural event it would now be seen as a mere dream. We would be no more human in the one understanding than the other. In the one understanding I am the material to which life happens as an event, in the other I am the uninvolved spectator of the dream which is my life. Fichte finds each of these to be equal cause for lament. No, the task is not to replace one theoretical philosophy with another one, but to get out of philosophy altogether.

> Philosophical reason is not autonomous, but has its foundation in practical reason, i.e., the will. [. . .] Fichte is widely misunderstood as opting for idealism over realism. [. . .] neither realism (of whatever kind) nor idealism (of whatever kind) yields knowledge, theoretical understanding of reality. Both yield unacceptable nonsense if taken to their final conclusions. And precisely this yields the valuable conclusion that the intellect is not autonomous. The intellect, to function properly as part of a whole human being, must relate to the activity of that being. Human beings do contemplate and try to understand reality, but not from a standpoint outside the world. Human beings are in the world and it is as agents in the world that we require an understanding of the world. The intellect is not autonomous but has its foundation in our agency, in practical reason or will.[12]

How does the will provide this foundation?

> [. . .] in an act of faith it transforms the apparent picture show of experience into an objective world of things and of other people. [. . .] faith indicates a free (i.e., theoretically unjustifiable) act of mind by which the conditions within which we can act and use our intellects come to be for us.[13]

Fichte's position is thus not that a passive observer of reality chooses determinism, and an engaged agent idealism: taken as an explanatory theory, idealism does not lead to practical engagement, but to the passive position of being the observer of one's own dream (reality is already constituted by me, I only have to observe it like that, i.e., not as a substantial independent reality, but as a dream). Both materialism and idealism lead to consequences that make practical activity meaningless or impossible. In order for me to be practically active, engaged in the world, I have to accept myself as a being 'in the world,' caught in a situation, interacting with real objects which resist me and which I try to transform. Furthermore, in order to act as a free moral subject, I have to accept the independent existence of other subjects like me, as well as the existence of a higher spiritual order in which I participate and which is independent of natural determinism. Accepting all this is not a matter of knowledge: it can only be a matter of *faith*. Fichte's point is thus that the existence of external reality (of which I myself am a part) is not a matter of theoretical proofs, but a practical necessity, a necessary

presupposition of me as an agent intervening into reality, interacting with it.

The irony is that Fichte comes here uncannily close to Nikolai Bukharin, a die-hard dialectical materialist who, in his *Philosophical Arabesques* (one of the most tragic works in the entire history of philosophy, a manuscript written in 1937, when he was in the Lubyanka prison, awaiting execution), tries to bring together for the last time his entire life-experience into a consistent philosophical edifice. The first crucial battle that he confronts is the one between the materialist assertion of the reality of the external world and what he calls the 'intrigues of solipsism.' Once this key battle is won, once the life-asserting reliance on the real world liberates us from the damp prison-house of one's fantasies, one can breathe freely, one only has to draw all the consequences of this first key result. The mysterious feature of the book's first chapter in which Bukharin confronts this dilemma, is its tension between form and content: although, at the level of content, Bukharin adamantly denies that we are dealing here with a choice between two beliefs or primordial existential decisions, the whole chapter is structured like a dialogue between a healthy but naïve materialist and Mephistopheles, standing for the 'devil of solipsism,' a 'cunning spirit' which 'drapes itself into an enchantingly patterned cloak of iron logic, and it laughs, poking out its tongue.'[14] 'Curling his lips ironically,' Mephistopheles tempts the materialist with the idea that, since all we have directly access to are our subjective sensations, the only way we can pass from here to the belief into some external reality which exists independently of our sensations is by way of a leap of faith, 'a salto vitale (as opposed to salto mortale).'[15] In short, Mephistopheles, the 'devil of logic,' tries to seduce us into accepting that the independent external reality is a matter of faith, that the existence of 'holy matter' is the fundamental dogma of the 'theology' of dialectical materialism. After a series of arguments (which, one has to admit, although not all totally devoid of philosophical interest, are irredeemably marked by the pre-Kantian naïvety), Bukharin concludes the chapter with the ironic call (which, nonetheless, cannot conceal the underlying despair): 'Hold your tongue, Mephistopheles! Hold your dissolute tongue!'[16] (In spite of this exorcism, devil continues to reappear throughout the book – see the first sentence of chapter 12: 'After a long interval, the demon of irony again makes his appearance.'[17]) As in Fichte, external reality is

a matter of faith, of breaking the deadlock of theoretical sophistry with a practical *salto vitale*.

Where Fichte is more consequent than Bukharin is in his awareness that there is an element of *credo quia absurdum* in this leap: the discord between our knowledge and our ethico-practical engagement is irreducible, one cannot bring them together in a complete 'world view.' Fichte thus radicalizes Kant who already conjectured that the transcendental I in its 'spontaneity' occupies a third space between phenomena and noumenon itself: the subject's freedom/spontaneity, though, of course, it is not the property of a phenomenal entity, so that it cannot be dismissed as a false appearance which conceals the noumenal fact that we are totally caught in an inaccessible necessity, is also not simply noumenal. In a mysterious subchapter of his *Critique of Practical Reason* entitled 'Of the Wise Adaptation of Man's Cognitive Faculties to His Practical Vocation,' Kant endeavors to answer the question of what would happen to us if we were to gain access to the noumenal domain, to the *Ding an sich*:

> 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. [. . .] Thus most actions conforming to the law would be done from fear, few would be done from hope, none from duty. The moral worth of actions, on which alone the worth of the person and even of the world depends in the eyes of supreme wisdom, would not exist at all. The conduct of man, so long as his nature remained as it is now, would be changed into mere mechanism, where, as in a puppet show, everything would gesticulate well but no life would be found in the figures.[18]

In short, the direct access to the noumenal domain would deprive us of the very 'spontaneity' which forms the kernel of transcendental freedom: it would turn us into lifeless automata, or, to put it in today's terms, into 'thinking machines.' The implication of this passage is much more radical and paradoxical than it may appear. If we discard its inconsistency (how could fear and lifeless gesticulation coexist?), the conclusion it imposes is that, at the level of phenomena as well as at the noumenal level, we – humans – are a 'mere mechanism' with no autonomy and freedom: as phenomena, we are not free, we are a part of nature, a 'mere mechanism,' totally submitted to causal links, a part of the nexus of

causes and effects, and as noumena, we are again not free, but reduced to a 'mere mechanism.' (Is what Kant describes as a person that directly knows the noumenal domain not strictly homologous to the utilitarian subject whose acts are fully determined by the calculus of pleasures and pains?) Our freedom persists only in a space *in between* the phenomenal and the noumenal. It is therefore not that Kant simply limited causality to the phenomenal domain in order to be able to assert that, at the noumenal level, we are free autonomous agents: we are only free insofar as our horizon is that of the phenomenal, insofar as the noumenal domain remains inaccessible to us. (Kant's own formulations are misleading, since he often identifies the transcendental subject with the noumenal I whose phenomenal appearance is the empirical 'person,' thus shirking from his radical insight into how the transcendental subject is a pure formal-structural function beyond the opposition of the noumenal and the phenomenal.) Kant formulated this deadlock in his famous statement that he had to limit knowledge in order to create space for faith. Along the same lines,

> Fichte's philosophy ends in total cognitive skepticism, i.e., in the abandonment of philosophy proper, and looks for wisdom instead to a kind of quasi-religious faith. But he thinks that this is not a problem, since all that matters is practical: to produce a world fit for human beings, and to produce myself as the person I would be for all eternity.[19]

The limitation of this position resides in Kant's and Fichte's inability to think positively the ontological status of this autonomous-spontaneous subject who is neither phenomenal nor noumenal (this is already Heidegger's reproach in *Being and Time*: traditional metaphysics cannot think the ontological status of *Dasein*). Hegel's solution is the transposition of the epistemological limitation into an ontological fact: the void of our knowledge corresponds to a void in being itself, to the ontological incompleteness of reality.

This transposition enables us to throw a new light on the Hegelian definition of freedom as 'conceived necessity': the consequent notion of subjective idealism compels us to invert this thesis and to conceive necessity as (ultimately nothing but) conceived freedom. The central tenet of Kant's transcendental idealism is that it is the subject's 'spontaneous' (i.e. radically *free*) act of transcendental apperception that changes the confused flow of sensations into 'reality,' which obeys necessary laws.

Even clearer is this point in moral philosophy: when Kant claims that moral Law is the *ratio cognoscendi* of our transcendental freedom, does he not literally say that necessity is conceived freedom? That is to say, the only way for us to get to know (to conceive) our freedom is via the fact of the unbearable pressure of the moral Law, of its *necessity*, which enjoins us to act against the compulsion of our pathological impulses. At the most general level, one should posit that 'necessity' (the symbolic necessity that regulates our lives) relies on the abyssal free act of the subject, on his contingent decision, on what Lacan calls the 'point de capiton', the 'quilting point' which magically turns confusion into a new order. This freedom that is not yet caught in the cobweb of necessity, is it not the abyss of the 'night of the world'?

For this reason, Fichte's radicalization of Kant is consistent, not just a subjectivist eccentricity. Fichte was the first philosopher to focus on the uncanny contingency in the very heart of subjectivity: the Fichtean subject is not the overblown Ego = Ego as the absolute Origin of all reality, but a finite subject thrown, caught, in a contingent social situation forever eluding mastery.[20] The *Anstoß*, the primordial impulse that sets in motion the gradual self-limitation and self-determination of the initially void subject, is not merely a mechanical external impulse: it also points towards another subject who, in the abyss of its freedom, functions as the challenge [*Aufforderung*] compelling me to limit/specify my freedom, i.e. to accomplish the passage from the abstract egotist freedom to concrete freedom within the rational ethical universe – perhaps this intersubjective *Aufforderung* is not merely the secondary specification of the *Anstoß*, but its exemplary original case. It is important to bear in mind the two primary meanings of 'Anstoß' in German: check, obstacle, hindrance, something that resists the boundless expansion of our striving, and an impetus, stimulus, something that incites our activity. *Anstoß* is hence not simply the obstacle the absolute I posits to itself in order to stimulate its activity so that, by overcoming the self-posited obstacle, it asserts its creative power, like the games the proverbial perverted ascetic saint plays with himself by inventing ever new temptations and then, in successfully resisting them, confirming his strength. If the Kantian *Ding an sich* corresponds to the Freudian-Lacanian Thing, *Anstoß* is closer to *objet petit a*, to the primordial foreign body that 'sticks in the throat' of the subject, to the object-cause of desire that splits it up: Fichte himself defines *Anstoß* as the non-assimilable foreign body that causes the subject

division into the empty absolute subject and the finite determinate subject, limited by the non-I.

Anstoß thus designates the moment of the 'run-in,' the hazardous knock, the encounter of the Real in the midst of the ideality of the absolute I: there is no subject without *Anstoß*, without the collision with an element of irreducible facticity and contingency – 'the I is supposed to encounter within itself something foreign.' The point is thus to acknowledge 'the presence, within the I itself, of a realm of irreducible otherness, of absolute contingency and incomprehensibility . . . Ultimately, not just Angelus Silesius's rose, but every *Anstoß* whatsoever ist ohne Warum.'[21] In clear contrast to the Kantian noumenal *Ding* that affects our senses, *Anstoß* does not come from the outside, it is *stricto sensu* ex-timate: a non-assimilable foreign body in the very core of the subject – as Fichte himself emphasizes, the paradox of *Anstoß* resides in the fact that it is simultaneously 'purely subjective' and not produced by the activity of the I. If *Anstoß* were not 'purely subjective,' if it were already the non-I, part of objectivity, we would fall back into 'dogmatism,' i.e. *Anstoß* would effectively amount to no more than a shadowy remainder of the Kantian *Ding an sich* and would thus bear witness to Fichte's inconsequentiality (the commonplace reproach against Fichte); if *Anstoß* were simply subjective, it would present a case of the subject's hollow playing with itself, and we would never reach the level of objective reality, i.e. Fichte would effectively be a solipsist (another commonplace reproach against his philosophy). The crucial point is that *Anstoß* sets in motion the constitution of 'reality': at the beginning is the pure I with the non-assimilable foreign body in its heart; the subject constitutes reality by way of assuming a distance towards the Real of the formless *Anstoß* and conferring on it the structure of objectivity. What imposes itself here is the parallel between the Fichtean *Anstoß* and the Freudian-Lacanian scheme of the relationship between the primordial Ich (*Ur-Ich*) and the object, the foreign body in its midst, which disturbs its narcissistic balance, setting in motion the long process of the gradual expulsion and structuration of this inner snag, through which (what we experience as) 'external, objective reality' is constituted.

If Kant's *Ding an sich* is not Fichte's *Anstoß*, what is their difference? Or, to put it in another way: where *do* we find in Kant something announcing Fichte's *Anstoß*? One should not confuse Kant's *Ding an sich* with the 'transcendental object,' which (contrary to some confused and

misleading formulations found in Kant himself) is not noumenal but the 'nothingness,' the void horizon of objectivity, of that which stands against the (finite) subject, the minimal form of resistance that is not yet any positive determinate object that the subject encounters in the world. Kant here uses the German expression *Dawider*, what is 'out there opposing itself to us, standing against us.' This *Dawider* is *not* the abyss of the Thing, it does not point to the dimension of the unimaginable, but is, on the contrary, the very horizon of openness towards objectivity within which particular objects appear to a finite subject.

In the middle of David Fincher's *Fight Club* (1999), there is an almost unbearably painful scene, worthy of the weirdest David Lynch moments, which serves as a kind of clue for the film's final surprising twist. In order to blackmail his boss into continuing to pay him even after he quits working, the hero throws himself around the man's office, beating himself bloody before the building's security officers arrive. In front of his embarrassed boss, the narrator thus enacts upon himself the boss's aggression towards him. The only similar case of self-beating is found in *Me, Myself and Irene*, in which Jim Carrey beats himself up – here, of course, in a comic (although painfully exaggerated) way, as one part of a split personality pounding the other part. In both films, the self-beating begins with the hero's hand acquiring a life of its own, escaping the hero's control – in short, turning into a partial object, or, to put it in Deleuze's terms, into an organ without a body (the obverse of the body without an organ). This provides the key to the figure of the double with whom, in both films, the hero is fighting: the double, the hero's Ideal-Ego, a spectral/invisible hallucinatory entity, is not simply external to the hero – its efficacy is inscribed within the hero's body itself as the autonomization of one of its organs (hand). The hand acting on its own is the drive ignoring the dialectic of the subject's desire: drive is fundamentally the insistence of an undead 'organ without a body,' standing, like Lacan's lamella, for that which the subject had to lose in order to subjectivize itself in the symbolic space of the sexual difference.

This is the 'Kantian' reason why a double causes such anxiety: the double *is* directly the object-Thing that the subject noumenally is. In Wolfgang Petersen's thriller *Shattered* (1991), Tom Berenger barely survives a car accident: when, weeks later, he awakens in the hospital, with his face and body patched up by plastic surgery, he has total amnesia concerning his identity – he cannot remember who he is, although all

the people around him, including a woman who claims to be his wife, treat him as the head of a rich corporation. After a series of mysterious events, he goes to an abandoned warehouse where he was told that, in a barrel full of oil, the corpse of the person he had killed is hidden. When he pulls the body's head out of the liquid, he stiffens in consternation – the head is *his own*.[22] This horror of encountering oneself in the guise of one's double, outside oneself, is the ultimate truth of the subject's self-identity: in it, the subject encounters itself as an object.

Jean-Paul's (Richter's) *Titan* is a properly Romantic parody ('deconstruction' even) of Fichte: he fully developed how the non-I is the I's double, i.e., a part of the I active (in the guise of) as I's passivity, not the I's real opposite. (What this means is that the Fichtean 'I is I' should be read as a Hegelian infinite judgment whose 'truth' is the coincidence of opposites ('I is non-I').) It is with regard to this topic of the double that Fichte belongs to the aftermath of the Kantian revolution: the scope of this revolution can be discerned precisely through the sudden change in the perception of the theme of the double in literature. Till the end of eighteenth century, this theme mostly gave rise to comic plots (two brothers who look alike are seducing the same girl; Zeus seducing Amphitrion's faithful wife disguised as Amphitrion, so that, when Amphitrion unexpectedly returns home, he encounters himself leaving his bedroom, etc.); all of a sudden, however, in the historic moment which exactly fits the Kantian revolution, the topic of the double becomes associated with horror and anxiety – encountering one's double or being followed and persecuted by him is the ultimate experience of terror, it is something which shatters the very core of the subject's identity.

The horrifying aspect of the theme of the double thus has something to do with the emergence of the Kantian subject as pure transcendental apperception, as the substanceless void of self-consciousness which is not an object in reality. What the subject encounters in the guise of his double is himself as object, i.e. his own 'impossible' objectal counterpoint. In the pre-Kantian space, this encounter was not traumatic, since the individual conceived of himself as a positive entity, an object within the world. – Another way to make the same point is to locate in my double, in the encountered object which 'is' myself, the Lacanian *objet petit a*: what makes the double so uncanny, what distinguishes it from other inner-worldly objects, is not simply its resemblance to me, but the fact that he gives body to 'that which is in myself more than myself,' to

the inaccessible/unfathomable object that 'I am,' i.e. to that which I forever lack in the reality of my self-experience . . .

In 'Le prix du progres,' one of the fragments that conclude *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer quote the argumentation of the nineteenth- century French physiologist Pierre Flourens against medical anaesthesia with chloroform: Flourens claims that it can be proven that the anaesthetic works only on our memory's neuronal network. In short, while we are butchered alive on the operating table, we fully feel the terrible pain, but later, after awakening, we do not remember it . . . For Adorno and Horkheimer, this, of course, is the perfect metaphor of the fate of Reason based on the repression of nature in itself: his body, the part of nature in the subject, fully feels the pain, it is only that, due to repression, the subject does not remember it. Therein resides the perfect revenge of nature for our domination over it: unknowingly, we are our own greatest victims, butchering ourselves alive . . . Is it not also possible to read this as the perfect fantasy scenario of the subject witnessing oneself as object?

4. *ANSTOß* AND *TAT-HANDLUNG*

So, to recapitulate, *Anstoß* is formally homologous to the Lacanian *objet a*: like a magnetic field, it is the focus of the I's positing activity, the point around which this activity circulates, yet it is in itself entirely insubstantial, since it is created-posited, generated, by the very process which reacts to it and deals with it. It is as in the old joke about the conscript who pleaded insanity in order to avoid military service; his 'symptom' was to compulsively examine every paper at his reach and exclaim 'That's not it!'; when he is examined by the military psychiatrists, he does the same, so the psychiatrists finally give him a paper confirming that he is released from military service. The conscript reaches for it, examines it, and exclaims: 'That's it!' Here, also, the search itself generates its object. Therein resides the ultimate paradox of the Fichtean *Anstoß*: it is not immediately external to the circular movement of reflection, but an object which is posited by this very circular (self-referential) movement. Its transcendence (absolute impenetrability, impossibility to be reduced to an ordinary represented object) coincides with its absolute immanence.

Is *Anstoß*, then, immanent or transcendent? Does it 'suscite/disturb' the I from the outside, or is it posited by the I itself? In other terms: do we have (ideally) first the pure Life of the self-positing I, which, then, posits the obstacle? If it is transcendent, we have the finite subject limited by *Anstoß* (be it in the form of the Kantian Thing-in-itself, or in the form, today much more acceptable, of intersubjectivity, of another subject as the only true Thing, as the ethical *Anstoß*); if it is immanent, we get the boring perverse logic of the I which posits an obstacle in order to overcome it . . . So the only solution is: absolute simultaneity/overlapping of self-positing and obstacle, i.e., the obstacle is the excremental 'reject' of the process of self-positing, it is not so much posited as ejected, excreted/secreted, as the obverse of the activity of self-positing. In this sense, *Anstoß* is the transcendental *a priori* of positing, that which incites the I to endless positing, the only non-posited element. Or, in Lacanese, following Lacan's logic of 'non-All': the (finite) I and the non-I (object) limit each other, while, at the absolute level, there is nothing which is not I, the I is illimited, and for that reason non-All – the *Anstoß* is that which makes it non-All.

Sylvain Portier clearly formulated this crucial point: 'if we are trying to account for the "limit," one should be careful never to represent it in an objective, or, rather, objectivized way.'[23] The standard version according to which Kant was still aware of the necessity to presuppose an external X that affects us when we experience sensations, while Fichte closed the circle of transcendental solipsism, misses the point, the finesse of Fichte's argumentation: Fichte dispenses with the thing-in-itself not because he posits the transcendental subject as an infinite Absolute, but precisely on account of the transcendental subject's finitude – or, to quote Wittgenstein again: 'Our life has no end in just the way in which our visual field has no limits.'[24] As I noted above, precisely because we are *within* our finitude, we cannot step out of it and perceive its limitation. This is also what Fichte aims at when he emphasizes that one should not conceive the transcendental I as a closed space surrounded by another external space of noumenal entities.

The same point can be made very clearly in the terms of Lacan's distinction between the *subject of the enunciated* and the *subject of the enunciation*: when I directly posit-define myself as a finite being, existing in the world among other beings, at the level of enunciation, of the position from which I speak, I already objectivize the limit between myself

and the rest of the world, i.e., I adopt the infinite position from which I can observe reality and locate myself in it; on the contrary, the only way for me to truly assert my finitude is to accept that my world is infinite, since I cannot locate its limit *within* it. (This is also what makes Fichte's notion of *Anstoß* so difficult: *Anstoß* is not an object *within* the represented reality, but the stand-in, within reality, of what is outside reality.) As Wittgenstein points out, this is also the problem with death: death is the limit of life which cannot be located *within* life – and it is only a true atheist that can fully accept this fact, as it was made clear by Ingmar Bergman in his great manifesto for atheism, which he develops precisely apropos his most 'religious' film, *The Seventh Seal*:

> My fear of death was to a great degree linked to my religious concepts. Later on, I underwent minor surgery. By mistake, I was given too much anesthesia. I felt as if I had disappeared out of reality. Where did the hours go? They flashed by in a microsecond. Suddenly I realized, that is how it is. That one could be transformed from being to non-being – it was hard to grasp. But for a person with a constant anxiety about death, now liberating. Yet at the same time it seems a bit sad. You say to yourself that it would have been fun to encounter new experiences once your soul had had a little rest and grown accustomed to being separated from your body. But I don't think that is what happens to you. First you are, then you are not. This I find deeply satisfying. That which had formerly been so enigmatic and frightening, namely, what might exist beyond this world, does not exist. Everything is of this world. Everything exists and happens inside us, and we flow into and out of one another. It's perfectly fine like that.[25]

There is thus a truth in Epicurus' apparently common argument against the fear of death (there is nothing to fear: while you are still alive, you are not dead, and when you are dead, you do not feel anything): the source of the fear of death is the power of imagination; death as an event is the ultimate anamorphosis – in fearing it, we experience a non-event, a non-entity (our passage to non-being), as an event.

Ernesto Laclau developed how, in an antagonistic relationship, external difference coincides with internal difference: the difference that separates me from other entities around me and thus guarantees my identity, simultaneously cuts into my identity, making it flawed, instable, truncated.[26] One should bring this tension up to the full dialectical

identity of the opposites: the condition of possibility of identity is at the same time its condition of impossibility, the assertion of self-identity is based on its opposite, on an irreducible remainder that truncates every identity.

And this is why Fichte is right in claiming that the arch-model for all identity is I = I, the subject's identity with itself – the formal-logical notion of (self)identity comes second, it has to be grounded in the *transcendental* logical notion of the self-identity of the I. When Fichte emphasizes that the absolute I is not a fact (*Tatsache*), but a deed (*Tathandlung*), that its identity is purely and thoroughly processual, it means precisely that the subject is the result of its own failure to become subject: I try to fully actualize myself as subject, I fail (to become subject), and this failure *is* the subject (that I am). *Only* in the case of the subject do we get this full coincidence of failure and success, of identity as grounded in its own lack; in all other cases, there is the appearance of a substantial identity that precedes or underlies processuality. And the point of Fichte's critique of realist 'dogmatism' is the transcendental-ontological priority of this pure processuality of the I over every substantial entity: every appearance of substantial identity has to be accounted for in the terms of transcendental genesis, as the 'reified' result of the pure I's processuality. The passage from I = I to the delimitation between the I and the non-I is thus the passage from immanent antagonism to external limitation that guarantees the identity of the opposed poles: the pure self-positing I does not simply divide itself into the posited non-I and the finite I opposed to it, it posits the non-I and the finite I as mutually limiting opposites in order to resolve the immanent tension of its processuality.

The claim that the limitation of the subject is simultaneously external and internal, that the subject's external limit is always its internal limitation, is, of course, developed by Fichte into the main thesis of his 'absolute transcendental idealism': every external limit is the result of an internal self-limitation. This is what Kant does not see: for him, the thing-in-itself is directly the external limit of the phenomenal field constituted by the subject, i.e., the limit that separates the noumenal from the phenomenal is not the transcendental subject's self-limitation, but simply its external limit. Does, however, all this endorse the standard reading according to which Fichte marks the passage to transcendental absolute idealism in which every external limit of subjectivity is co-opted, re-inscribed as a moment of the subject's infinite self-mediation/

self-limitation? Maybe we should read the thesis as the claim that every limit of the subject is (grounded in) the subject's self-limitation in conjunction with the overlapping of external with internal limitation. This would account for the shifting of the accent of the subject's 'self-limitation' from subjective to objective genitive: it is not about the 'limitation of the self' in the sense that the subject is the full agent and master of its own limitation, encompassing its limits into the activity of its self-mediation, but the 'limitation of the self' in the sense that the external limitation of the self truncates from within the very identity of the subject. It was (again) Portier who clearly spelled out this point:

> What the I, insofar as it is precisely the 'absolute I,' is not, that is to say, the 'non-I' itself, is thus (for the I) absolutely nothing, a pure nothingness or, as Fichte himself put it, a kind of 'non-being'. [. . .] we should thus take care not to represent to ourselves the non-I as an other level than that of the I: outside the 'transcendental field' of the positing I, there is truly nothing but the absence of all space, in other words, the non-level, the void that is proper to the non-I.[27]

What this means is that, since there is nothing outside the (self)positing of the absolute I, the non-I can only emerge – can only be posited – as correlative to the I's non-positedness: the non-I is nothing but the non-positedness of the I. Or, translated into terms closer to our common experience: since, in Fichte's absolute egological perspective, all positing activity is the activity of the I, when the I encounters the non-I as active, as objective reality exerting active pressure on the I, actively resisting it, this can only be the result of the I's own passivity: the non-I is active only insofar as I render myself passive and thus let it act back upon me. (With regard to Fichte's intense ethico-practical stance this means that, whenever I succumb to the pressure of circumstances, I *let myself* be determined by this pressure – I am determined by external causes only insofar as I let myself be determined by them, i.e., my determination by external causes is never direct, it is always mediated by my acquiescing to them.) Therein resides, for Fichte, the fatal flaw of Kant's thing-in-itself: insofar as the Kantian Thing is conceived as existing independently of the I and, as such, exerting pressure on it, we are dealing with an activity in the non-I to which no passivity in the I itself corresponds – and this is what is for Fichte totally unthinkable, a remainder of metaphysical dogmatism. – This brings us to the topic of the subject's finitude: only in

Fichte, the *a priori* synthesis of the finite and the infinite is the finitude of the positing I:

> the I, that is to say, the 'act of reflection-into-itself,' always has to 'posit something absolute outside itself,' all the while recognizing that this entity can only exist 'for it,' that is to say, relatively to the finitude and the precise mode of intuition of the I.[28]

Fichte thus resumes the basic insight of the philosophy-of-reflection, which is usually formulated in a critical mode: the moment the subject experiences itself as redoubled in reflection, caught in oppositions, etc., it has to relate its own split/mediated condition to some presupposed Absolute inaccessible to it, set up as the standard the subject tries to rejoin. The same insight can also be made in more common-sense terms: when we humans are engaged in a turmoil of activity, it is a human propensity to imagine an external absolute point of reference which provides orientation and stability to our activity. What Fichte does here is that, in the best tradition of transcendental phenomenology, he reads this constellation in a purely immanent way: we should never forget that this Absolute, precisely insofar as it is experienced by the subject as the presupposition of its activity, is actually posited by it, i.e., can only exist 'for it.' Two crucial consequences follow from such an immanent reading: first, the infinite Absolute is the presupposition of a finite subject, its specter can only arise within the horizon of a finite subject experiencing its finitude as such. Second consequence: this experience of the gap that separates the subject from the infinite Absolute is inherently practical, it is what pushes the subject to incessant activity. Seidel perspicuously concludes[29] that, with this practical vision, Fichte also opens up the space for a new radical despair: not only my personal despair that I cannot realize the Ideal, not only the despair that reality is too hard, but a suspicion that the Ideal is *in itself* invalidated, that it simply is not worth it.

5. DIVISION AND LIMITATION

One can see now the absolutely central role of the notion of limitation in Fichte's entire theoretical edifice: in contrast to dogmatic realism which posits the substantial non-I as the only true and independent agency, as

well as to the 'idealist realism' à la Descartes or Leibniz, for whom the only true reality is the one of the monadic spiritual substance, and all activity of the non-I is a mere illusion, for Fichte, the relationship of the I and the non-I is one of mutual limitation. Although this mutual limitation is always posited *within* the absolute I, the key point is *not* to conceive this I in a realist way, as a spiritual substance which 'contains in itself everything,' but as an abstract, purely transcendental-ideal, a *medium* in which the I and the non-I delimit themselves mutually. It is not the absolute I which is '(the highest) reality'; the I itself, on the contrary, only acquires reality through/in its real engagement with the opposing force of the non-I which frustrates it and limits it – there is no reality of the I outside its opposition to the non-I, outside this shock, this encounter of an opposing/frustrating power (which, in its generality, encompasses everything, from the natural inertia of one's own body to the pressure of social constraints and institutions upon the I, not to mention the traumatic presence of *another* I). Depriving the I of the non-I equals depriving it of its reality. The non-I is thus primordially not the abstract object (*Objekt*) of the subject's distanced contemplation, but the object as *Gegenstand*, what stands there against me, as an obstacle to my effort. As such, the subject's passivity when facing an object that frustrates its practical effort of positing, its thetic effort, is properly pathetic, or, rather, pathic.[30] Or, to put it in yet another way, the subject can only be frustrated/thwarted, it can only experience the object as an obstacle, insofar as it is itself oriented towards outside, 'pushing' outside in its practical effort.

So, within the (absolutely positing) I, the (finite) I and the non-I are posited as divisible, limiting each other – or, as Fichte put it in his famous formula: 'I oppose in the I a divisible non-I to the divisible I.' Jacobi was thus in a way right when, in a unique formula from his famous letter to Fichte, he designated the latter's *Wissenschaftslehre* as a 'materialism without matter': the 'pure consciousness' of the absolute I within which the I and the non-I mutually delimit each other effectively functions as the idealist version of matter in abstract materialism, i.e., as the abstract (mathematical) space endlessly divided between the I and the non-I.

Nowhere are the proximity and, simultaneously, the gap that separates Fichte from Hegel more clearly discernible than in the difference that separates their respective notions of limitation. What they both share is the insight into how, paradoxically, far from excluding each other, limitation and true infinity are two aspects of the same constellation.

In Hegel, the overlapping of true infinity and self-limitation is developed in the notion of self-relating: in true infinity, the relation-to-other coincides with self-relating – this is what, for Hegel, defines the most elementary structure of life. As I pointed out above, a series of contemporary researchers in biology, from Lynn Margulis to Francisco Varela, assert that the true problem is not how an organism and its environs interact or connect, but, rather, the opposite one: how does a distinct self-identical organism emerge out of its environs? How does a cell form the membrane which separates its inside from its outside? The true problem is thus not how an organism adapts to its environs, but how it is that there is something, a distinct entity, which must adapt itself in the first place.

However, in Fichte the link between infinity and limitation is thoroughly different from Hegel: the Fichtean infinity is 'acting infinity,'[31] the infinity of the subject's practical engagement. Although an animal obviously can also be frustrated by objects/obstacles, it does not experience its predicament as *stricto sensu* limited, it is not aware of its limitation, since it is simply constrained by/into it. But man does experience his predicament itself as frustratingly limited, and this experience is sustained by his infinite striving to break out of it. In this way, man's 'acting infinity' is directly grounded in his experience of his own finitude. Or, to put it in a slightly different way, while an animal is simply/immediately limited, i.e., while its limit is external to it and thus invisible from within its constrained horizon (if an animal were to speak, it would not be able to say 'I am constrained to my small poor world, unaware of what I am missing'), man's limitation is 'self-limitation' in the precise sense that it cuts from within into his very identity, frustrating it, 'finitizing' it. It is as if the objects/obstacles that frustrate man's efforts undermine man's identity from within, preventing him – not only from 'becoming the world,' but – from becoming *himself*. *This* is the (often overlooked) other side of Fichte's basic thesis on how 'I oppose in the I a divisible non-I to the divisible I': the fact that the limit between the I and the object/obstacle falls within the I does not only entail the triumphant conclusion that the I is the encompassing unity of itself and its objective other; it also entails the much more unpleasant and properly traumatic conclusion that the object/obstacle cuts into my very identity, making it finite/frustrated.

This crucial insight enables us to approach what some interpreters perceive as *the* problem of Fichte: how to pass from the I to the non-I as

an in-itself that has a consistency outside the I's reflexive self-movement? Does the I's circular self-positing hang in empty air such that it cannot really ground itself? Was it not already Madame de Stael who, as we mentioned above, after Fichte explained her the I's self-positing, snapped back: 'So you mean that the absolute I is like Baron Münchhausen who saved himself from drowning in a swamp by way of grabbing his hair and pulling himself up by his own hands?' Pierre Livet[32] proposed an ingenious solution. He suggests, since there *must* be a kind of external point of reference for the I (without it, the I would simply collapse into itself), and since this point nonetheless cannot be directly external to the I (any such externality would amount to a concession to the Kantian Thing-in-itself that impedes the I's absolute self-positing), there is only one consistent way out of this deadlock: to ground the circular movement of reflexivity in itself – not by way of pulling the impossible Münchhausen trick in which the founded X retroactively provides its own foundation, but by way of referring to *another* I. In this way, we get a point of reference which is external to a singular I, which the latter experiences as an opaque impenetrable kernel, yet which is nonetheless *not* foreign to the reflexive movement of (self)positing, since it is merely *another* circle of such (self)positing. (In this way, Fichte can ground the *a priori* necessity of intersubjectivity.)

One cannot but admire the elegant simplicity of this perspicuous solution which calls to mind the Lacanian-Freudian notion of the neighbor as the impenetrable traumatic Thing. However, perspicuous as it is, this solution nonetheless does not work: it leaves out of consideration the fact that the I's relating to the object, in a strict formal sense of transcendental genesis, precedes the I's relating to another I: the primordial Other, the Neighbor qua Thing, is *not* another subject. The *Anstoß* which awakens (what will have been) the subject out of its pre-subjective status is an Other, but not the Other of (reciprocal) intersubjectivity.

6. THE FINITE ABSOLUTE

We can see now the fatal flaw of the dismissal of Fichte as the extreme point of German Idealism, as idealism 'at its worst.' According to this commonplace, Hegel is the moment of madness, the dream of a 'system

of absolute nowing' . . . but, as the saying goes, he nonetheless brings much concrete, historical, material, valuable insights on history, politics, culture, aesthetics. Fichte, on the contrary, as an early crazy version of Hegel, is *only* madness (see Bertrand Russell in his *History of Western Philosophy*). Even Lacan in passing refers to the radical position of solipsism as a madness advocated by no wise man . . . And even those who praise Fichte see in his thought an extreme formulation of modern subjectivity. As a matter of fact, upon a fast reading of Fichte, it cannot but appear so: Fichte starts with I = I, the I's self-positing; then we pass to not-I; then . . . pure abstract ratiocinations, supported by ridiculous references to mathematics and argumentation, oscillating between weird jumps and poor common-sense.

However, the paradox is that, as in Kant, Schelling, and in all of German Idealism, what appears an abstract speculation becomes substantial insight the moment we relate it to our most concrete experience. For example, when Fichte claims that 'it is because the absolute/ideal self is posited by the finite self that the opposing of the non-self occurs,' this makes sense as a speculative description of the finite subject's concrete practical engagement: when I (finite subject) 'posit' an ideal/unattainable practical goal, the finite reality outside me appears as 'not-self,' as an obstacle to my goal to be overcome, transformed. In the wake of Kant this is Fichte's 'primacy of practical reason': the way I perceive reality depends on my practical project – no project, no obstacles, my cognitive recognition of reality around me is always conditioned/colored by my practical project. The obstacle is not an obstacle to me as an entity, but to me as engaged in realizing a project: 'if my ideal as a health professional is to save lives, then I will begin to see in my patients the things I need to be concerned about: I will begin to see "things" such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol levels, etc.'[33] Or, an even more perspicuous example: 'If [. . .] I am a rich capitalist being driven through a slum district in my air-conditioned limousine, I do not see the poverty and misery of the local inhabitants. What I see is people on welfare who are too lazy to work, etc.'[34] Sartre was thus effectively Fichtean when, in a famous passage from *Being and Nothingness*, he claimed that

> whatever may be the situation in which he finds himself, the for-itself must wholly assume this situation with its peculiar coefficient of adversity, even though it be insupportable. Is it not I who decides the

coefficient of adversity in things and even their unpredictability by deciding myself?[35]

The weird-sounding syntagm 'coefficient of adversity' belongs to Gaston Bachelard, who reproached Husserl's phenomenology with ignoring the inertia of objects resisting subjective appropriation in its notion of noematic objectivity as constituted by the transcendental subject's noetic activity. While conceding the point about the inertia of the in-itself, the idiocy of the real, Sartre points out, in a Fichtean way, that one experiences this inertia of the Real as adversity, as an obstacle, only with regard to our determinate projects:

> my freedom to choose my goals or projects entails that I have also chosen the obstacles I encounter along the way. It is by deciding to climb this mountain that I have turned the weakness of my body and the steepness of the cliffs into obstacles, which they were not so long as I was content simply to gaze at the mountain from the comfort of my chair.[36]

It is only this primacy of the practical which provides the key to the proper understanding of how Fichte reduces the perceived thing to the activity of its perceiving, i.e., of how endeavors to generate the (perceived) thing out of the perceiving. From this phenomenological standpoint, the in-itself of the object is the result of the long arduous work by means of which the subject learns to distinguish, within the field of its representations, between the mere illusory appearance and the way the appearing thing is itself. The in-itself is thus also a category of appearing: it is not the immediacy of the thing independently of how it appears to us, but the most mediated mode of appearing – how?

The I transfers a certain quantum of reality outside itself, it externalizes part of its activity in a non-I which is thereby 'posited as non-posited,' i.e., it appears as 'independent' of the I. Fichte's paradox is here that 'it is the I's finitude [. . .] and not its reflexivity proper, which renders necessary the different modalities of the objectivization of the non-I to which this I relates itself':[37] to put it in somewhat simplified terms, the I is caught in its self-enclosed circle of objectivizations not because he is the infinite ground of all being, but precisely because he is finite. The key point not to be missed is hence the paradoxical link between infinity (in the sense of the absence of external limitation) and finitude: every

limitation has to be self-limitation not because the I is an infinite divine ground of all being, but precisely because of its radical finitude: as such, as finite, it cannot 'step on its own shoulder' (or, it cannot 'jump over its own shadow') and perceive its own external limitation. Portier is fully justified in speaking about the '"circle" of the finite absolute Knowing':[38] finitude and infinity are no longer opposed: it is our very encounter of the obstacle (and thus brutal awareness of our finitude) that, simultaneously, makes us aware of the infinity within ourselves, of the infinite duty that haunts us in the very core of our being.

The standard reproach according to which Fichte cannot deduce the necessity of the 'shock,' i.e., of encountering the obstacle which triggers the subject's activity, thus simply misses his point: this 'shock' *has* to arise 'out of nowhere' because of the subject's radical finitude – it stands for the intervention of the radical Outside which, as such, by definition cannot be deduced (if it were to be possible to deduce it, we would be back at the metaphysical subject/substance which generates its entire content out of itself):

> Fichte's stroke of genius resides undoubtedly in the fact that he makes out of the inevitable lack that pertains to his categorical deduction, not the weakness, but the supreme force of his system: the fact that Necessity can only be deduced from the practical point of view is itself (theoretically and practically) necessary.[39]

It is here, in this coincidence of contingency and necessity, of freedom and limitation, that we effectively encounter the 'acme of Fichte's edifice':[40] in this 'shock,' impact, of the non-I onto the I, described by Fichte as simultaneously 'impossible' and 'necessary.' At this point, finitude (being constrained by an Other) and freedom are no longer opposed, since it is only through the shocking encounter of the obstacle that I becomes free.

This is why, for Fichte, it is the infinite I, not the non-I, which has to 'finitize' itself, to appear as the (self)limited I, to split itself into the absolute I and the finite I opposed to non-I. What this means is that, as Portier put it in a wonderfully concise way, 'every non-I is the non-I of an I, but no I is the I of a non-I.'[41] This, however, does not mean that the non-I is simply internal to the I, the outcome of its self-relating – one should be very precise here: over and above the standard 'dogmatic' temptation to conceive the I as part of the non-I, as part of objective

reality, there is a much more tricky and no less 'dogmatic' temptation of transcendental realism itself, of hypostasizing the absolute I into a kind of noumenal meta-Subject/Substance which engenders the finite subject as its phenomenal/empirical appearance. In this case, there would be no truly 'real' objects: the objects would be ultimately mere phantom-objects, specters engendered by the absolute I in its circular playing with itself. This point is absolutely crucial, if we are to avoid the notion of Fichte as the ridiculous figure of an 'absolute idealist': the absolute I is not merely playing with itself, positing obstacles and then overcoming them, all the time secretly aware that he is the only player/agent in the house. The absolute I is *not* the absolute real/ideal ground of everything; its status is radically *ideal*, it is the ideal presupposition of the practically engaged finite I as the only 'reality' (since, as we have seen, the I becomes 'real' only through its self-limitation in encountering the obstacle of the non-I). This is why Fichte is a moralist idealist, an idealist of infinite duty: freedom is not something that substantially co-exists with the I, it is something that has to be acquired through arduous struggle, through the effort of culture and self-education – the infinite I is nothing but the process of its own infinite becoming.

This brings us to Fichte's solution of the problem of solipsism: although, at the level of theoretical observation of reality, we are passive receivers, while, at the level of practice, we are active, we intervene, impose our project onto the world, one cannot overcome solipsism from a theoretical standpoint, but only from the practical one: '/if/ no effort, /then/ no object.'[42] As a theoretical I, I can easily imagine myself as a sole monad caught in the ethereal, non-substantial, cobweb of my own phantasmagorias, while the moment I engage in practice, I have to struggle with the object's resistance – or, as Fichte himself put it: 'The coercion on account of which belief in reality imposes itself is a moral coercion, the only one possible for a free being.'[43] Or, as Lacan expresses the same thought much later, ethics is the dimension of the Real, the dimension in which imaginary and symbolic balances are disturbed. This is why Fichte can and has to reject the Kantian solution of the dynamic antinomies: if we resolve them in the Kantian way, by simply allocating each of the two opposed theses to a different level (phenomenally we are caught into necessity, while noumenally we are free), we obfuscate the fact that it is the very phenomenal reality which is the world in which we struggle for freedom, into which we intervene with free acts. This is also why Fichte can

avoid Kant's already-mentioned deadlock from his *Critique of Practical Reason*, where Kant endeavors to answer the question of what would happen to us if we were to gain access to the noumenal domain, to the thing-in-itself: we would have been mere puppets deprived of freedom . . . Fichte allows us to clarify this confusion which arises if we insist on the opposition between the noumenal and the phenomenal: the I is not a noumenal substance, but the pure spontaneity of self-positing; this is why its self-limitation does not need a transcendent God who manipulates our terrestrial situation (limiting our knowledge) in order to foster our moral growth – one can deduce the subject's limitation in a totally immanent way.

Interpreters like to emphasize the radical break, 'paradigm-shift,' between Kant and Fichte; however, Fichte's focus on the subject's finitude compels us to acknowledge a no less radical break between Fichte and Schelling. Schelling's idea (shared also by the young Hegel) has it that Fichte's one-sided subjective idealism should be supplemented by objective idealism, since it is only this two-sided approach that gives us a complete image of the absolute Subject-Object. What gets lost in this shift from Fichte to Schelling is Fichte's unique standpoint of the subject's finitude (this finitude determines Fichte's basic attitude towards reality as an engaged-practical one: the Fichtean synthesis can only be given as practical effort, as endless striving). In Fichte, the synthesis of the finite and the infinite is given in the infinite effort of the finite subject, and the absolute I itself is a hypo-thesis of the 'thetic' practical-finite subject, while for Schelling, the original datum is the Absolute qua indifference of the subject-object, and the subject as opposed to the object emerges as the *Abfall*, falling-off, from the Absolute, which is why rejoining the Absolute is for Schelling no longer a matter of the I's practical effort, but a matter of the aesthetic submerging into the Absolute's indifference which equals the subject's self-overcoming. In other words, from Fichte's standpoint, Schelling regresses to the pre-Kantian 'idealist realism': his Absolute is again the noumenal absolute entity, and all finite/delimitated entities are its results/fall-offs. For Fichte, on the contrary, the status of the Absolute (the self-positing I) remains thoroughly transcendental-ideal, it is the transcendental condition of the finite I's practical engagement, its hypo-thesis, never a positively-given *ens realissimum*.

It is precisely because, for Fichte, the status of the Absolute remains transcendental-ideal, that he remains faithful to the basic Kantian insight

that time and space are *a priori* forms of sensibility; this prohibits any naïve-Platonic notion of the finite/material/sensual reality as the secondary 'confused' version of the intelligible/noumenal true universe – for Kant (and Fichte), material reality is *not* a blurred version of the true noumenal kingdom, but a fully constituted reality of its own. In other words, the fact that time and space are *a priori* forms of sensibility means that what Kant called 'transcendental schematism' is irreducible: the orders/levels of sensibility and intelligibility are irreducibly heterogeneous, one cannot deduce from the categories of pure reasons themselves anything about material reality.

Fichte's position with regard to the status of nature nonetheless remains the radicalized Kantian one: if reality is primordially experienced as the obstacle to the I's practical activity, this means that nature (the inertia of material objects) exists only as the stuff of our moral activity, that its justification can only be practical-teleological, not speculative. This is why Fichte rejects all attempts at a speculative philosophy of nature. No wonder, then, that Schelling, the great practitioner of the philosophy of nature, ridiculed Fichte: if nature can only be justified teleologically, this means that air and light exist only so that moral individuals can see each other and thus interact . . . Well aware of the difficulties such a view poses to our sense of credibility, Fichte replied with sarcastic laughter:

> They reply to me, the air and the light a priori! Dream therefore about it ha!ha!ha! [. . .] laugh then with us, hahaha! – hahaha! – air and light a priori: cream pie ha!ha!ha! air and light a priori! Cream pie ha!ha!ha! [. . .] And so on to infinity.[44]

The weird nature of this outburst of laughter resides in the fact that it is the very opposite of the common-sense laughter at the philosopher's strange speculations, i.e., of the laughter whose exemplary case is the bad taste joke against the philosopher-solipsist: 'Let him hit with his head into a hard wall and he will soon discover if he is alone in the world, hahaha!' Here, the philosopher-Fichte laughs at the common-sense argument that air and light are obviously not here just to enable our moral activity – they just *are* out there, if we act or not . . . Fichte's laughter is all the more strange since it is similar to the traditional realist philosopher's direct reference to obvious reality as the best argument against abstract speculations – when Diogenes the Cynic was confronted

with the Eleatic proofs of the non-existence of movement, he simply raised and moved his middle finger, or so the story goes . . . In another version, he simply stood up and started to walk; however, according to Hegel, when one of the students present applauded the master for this proof that movement exists, Diogenes beat him up – immediate reality doesn't count in philosophy, only conceptual thinking can do the job of demonstration. What, then, could Fichte's laughter mean, since he laughs not from the standpoint of common-sense realism (which tells us that movement exists as well as that air and light are *out there* independently of our activity), but rather laughs *at* this standpoint? The key to the answer is (as is often the case with philosophers who hide the crucial formulation in a footnote or as a secondary remark) squeezed between the brackets – here is Fichte's crucial explanation of the non-I:

> (According to the usual opinion, the concept of the non-self is merely a general concept which emerges through abstraction from everything represented [*allem Vorgestellten*]. But the shallowness of this explanation can easily be demonstrated. If I am to represent anything at all, I must oppose it to that which represents [the representing self]. Now within the object of representation [*Vorstellung*] there can and must be an X of some sort, whereby this object discloses itself as something to be represented, and not as that which represents. But that everything wherein this X may be is not that which represents but something to be represented, is something that no object can teach me; for merely to be able to posit something as an object, I have to know this already; hence it must lie initially in myself, that which represents, prior to any possible experience. – And this is an observation so striking that anyone who fails to grasp it and is not thereby uplifted into transcendental idealism, must unquestionably be suffering from mental blindness.)[45]

The logic of this argumentation may appear surprising to anyone not versed in German Idealism: it is precisely because there is something more in the non-Self, in the object, than the subject's representations (*Vorstellungen*), precisely because it cannot be reduced to a general, shared, feature abstracted from representations; it is precisely because it 'discloses itself as something to be represented, and not as that which represents,' that this surplus over my representations must lie *in me*, in the representing subject. (Kant already made the same point in his account of transcendental synthesis: how do we get from the confused

multitude of passive subjective impressions to the consistent perception of objective reality? By way of supplementing this subjective multitude with, again, the subject's act of transcendental synthesis . . .)

Seidel is thus fully justified in emphasizing that Fichte's non-I is to be read according to what Kant called 'infinite judgment.' Kant introduced the key distinction between *negative* and *infinite judgment*: the positive judgment 'the soul is mortal' can be negated in two ways, when a predicate is denied to the subject ('the soul is not mortal'), and when a non-predicate is affirmed ('the soul is non-mortal') – the difference is exactly the same as the one, known to every reader of Stephen King, between 'he is not dead' and 'he is un-dead.' The infinite judgment opens up a third domain which undermines the underlying distinction: the 'undead' is neither alive nor dead, it is precisely the monstrous 'living dead.' And the same goes for 'inhuman': 'he is not human' is not the same as 'he is inhuman' – 'he is not human' means simply that he is external to humanity, animal or divine, while 'he is inhuman' means something thoroughly different, namely the fact that he is neither human nor not human, but marked by a terrifying excess which, although it negates what we understand as 'humanity,' is inherent to being-human. And, perhaps, one should risk the hypothesis that this is what changes with the Kantian revolution: in the pre-Kantian universe, humans were simply humans, beings of reason, fighting the excesses of animal lusts and divine madness, while only with Kant and German Idealism the excess to be fought became absolutely immanent, the very core of subjectivity itself (which is why, with German Idealism, the metaphor for the core of subjectivity is Night, 'Night of the World,' in contrast to the Enlightenment notion of the Light of Reason fighting the darkness around). So, when in the pre-Kantian universe a hero goes mad, it means he is deprived of his humanity, i.e., the animal passions or divine madness took over, while with Kant, madness signals the unconstrained explosion of the very core of a human being. In precisely the same way, the Fichtean non-Self is not a negation of the predicate, but an affirmation of a non-predicate: it is not 'this is not a Self,' but rather 'this *is* a non-Self,' which is why one should translate it into English more often as 'non-Self' rather than 'not-Self.'[46] (More precisely: the moment we pass to Fichte's third proposition – the mutual delimitation/determination of Self and non-Self, the non-Self effectively turns into a *not*-Self, something.)

Fichte starts with the thetic judgment: I = I, pure immanence of Life, pure Becoming, pure self-positing, *Tat-Handlung*, the full coincidence of the posited with the positing. I am only through my process of positing myself, and I am nothing but this process – *this* is intellectual intuition, this mystical flow inaccessible to consciousness: every consciousness needs something opposed to itself. Now – here comes the key – the rise of non-I out of this pure flow is not (yet) a delimitation of the I: it is a pure formal conversion, like Hegel's passage from Being to Nothingness. *Both I and non-I are unlimited, absolute.* How, then, do we pass from the non-I to the object as not-I? Through *Anstoß*, this ex-timate obstacle. *Anstoß* is neither non-I (which comprises me) nor an object (which is externally opposed to me). *Anstoß* is neither 'absolutely nothing' nor something (a delimited object); it is (to refer to the Lacanian logic of suture, as it was deployed by Miller in his classical text) nothing *counted* something (in the same way as the number one is zero counted as one). The distinction between form and content on which Fichte insists so much is crucial here: as to its content, *Anstoß* is nothing; as to its form, it is (already) something – it is thus 'nothing in the form of something.' This minimal distinction between form and content is already at work in the passage from the first to the second thesis: A = A is the pure form, the formal gesture of self-identity, the self-identity of a form with itself; non-Self is its symmetrical opposite, a formless content. This minimal reflexivity is also what makes the passage from A = A (I = I) to the positing of non-self necessary: without this minimal gap between form and content, the absolute Self and the absolute non-Self would simply and directly overlap.

In the preface to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant contends that 'all possible speculative knowledge of reason is limited to mere objects of experience. But our further contention must also be duly borne in mind, namely, that though we cannot know these objects as things in themselves, we must yet be in position at least to think them as things in themselves; otherwise we should be landed in the absurd conclusion that there can be appearance without anything that appears.'[47] Is this not exactly the Hegelian-Lacanian thesis? Is the Suprasensible which is 'appearance qua appearance' not precisely an appearance in which nothing appears? Or, as Hegel put it in another passage of his *Phenomenology*, beyond the veil of appearances there is only what the subject puts there.[48] This is the secret of the Sublime that Kant was not

ready to confront. And, back to Fichte, is the *Anstoß* not precisely such an appearance without anything that appears, a nothing which appears as something? This is what makes the Fichtean *Anstoß* uncannily close to the Lacanian *objet petit a*, the object-cause of desire, which is also a positivization of a lack, a stand-in for a void.

Some decades ago, Lacan provoked reactions of ridicule when he stated that the meaning of phallus is the square of –1 – but it was already Kant who compared the thing-in-itself as *ens rationis* to a 'square root of a negative number.'[49] It is insofar as we apply this comparison also to Fichte's *Anstoß* that the Kantian distinction between what we can only think and what we can know assumes all its weight: we can only think the *Anstoß*, we cannot know it as a determinate object-of-representation.

7. THE POSITED PRESUPPOSITION

To recapitulate, Fichte's attempt to get rid of the thing-in-itself follows a very precise logic and intervenes at a very precise point of his critique of Kant. Let us recall that, for Kant, the Thing is introduced as the X that affects the subject when it experiences an object through its senses: the Thing is primarily the source of sensual affections. If, then, we are to get rid of the Thing, it is absolutely crucial to show how the subject can affect itself, how it can act upon itself, not only at the intelligible level but also at the level of (sensual) affections – the absolute subject must be capable of temporal auto-affection.

For Fichte, this I's 'sentimental auto-affection' by means of which the subject experiences its own existence, its own inert given character, and thus relates to itself (or, rather, is for itself) as passive, as affected, is the ultimate foundation of all reality. This does not mean that all reality, all experience of the other as inert/resisting, can be reduced to the subject's self-experience; it means that it is only the subject's passive self-relation which opens the subject up to experience otherness.

Therein culminates Fichte's entire effort, in the deployment of the notion of the subject's 'sensual auto-affection' as the ultimate synthesis of the subject and the object. If this is feasible, then there is no longer the need to posit, behind the transcendental I's spontaneity, the unknowable 'noumenal X' that the subject 'really is': if there is genuine self-affection,

then the I is also able to fully *know* itself, i.e, we no longer have to refer to a noumenal 'I or He or It (the thing) which thinks' as Kant does in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. And, thereby, we can also see how Fichte's urgency to get rid of the thing-in-itself is linked to his focus on the ethico-practical engagement of the subject as grounded in the subject's freedom: if the subject's phenomenal (self)experience is just the appearance of an unknown noumenal substance, then our freedom is merely an illusory appearance and we are really like puppets whose acts are regulated by an unknown mechanism. As I pointed out, Kant was fully aware of this radical consequence – and, perhaps, the entire Fichte can be read as an attempt to avoid this Kantian impasse.

But, one may ask, does this assertion of the subject's capacity to get to fully know itself not contradict Fichte's very focus on the subject as practically engaged, struggling with objects/obstacles that frustrate its endeavor, which necessarily makes the subject finite? Is it not that only an infinite being can fully know itself? The answer is that the Fichtean subject is precisely the paradoxical conjunction of these two features, of finitude and freedom, since its infinity itself (the infinite striving of its ethical engagement) is an aspect of its finite condition.

The key is here again provided by Fichte's notion of the mutual delimitation of subject and object, of Self and non-Self: every activity posited in/as the object only insofar as the Self is posited as passive; and this positing of the Self as passive is still an *act* of the Self, its self-limitation. I am only a passive X affected by objects insofar as I (actively) posit myself as a passive recipient – Seidel ironically calls this the 'law of the conservation of activity': 'when reality (activity) is canceled in the self, that quantum of reality (activity) gets posited in the non-self. If activity is posited in the non-self, then its opposite (passivity) is posited in the self: I (passively) see the (actively) blooming apple.' However, this can only happen 'because I (actively) posit passivity in my-self so that activity may be posited in the non-self. [. . .] The non-self cannot act upon my consciousness unless I (actively, that is, freely) allow it to do so.'[50]

Kant already prefigured this in his so-called incorporation thesis: causes only affect me insofar as I allow them to affect me. This is why 'you can because you ought': every external impossibility (to which the excuse 'I know I must do it, but I cannot, it is impossible . . .' refers) relies on a disavowed self-limitation. Applied to the sexual opposition of the 'active' male and 'passive' female stance, this Fichtean notion of the

activity of the non-I as strictly correlative to the I's passivity brings us directly to Otto Weininger's notion of woman as the embodiment of man's fall: woman exists (as a thing out there, acting upon man, disturbing/perturbing his ethical stance, throwing him off the rails) only insofar as man adopts the stance of passivity. She is literally the *result* of man's withdrawal into passivity, so there is no need for man to fight actively woman – his adopting of an active stance automatically pulls the ground from woman's existence, since her entire being is nothing but man's non-being.

Here, the question emerges: 'Fichte asks himself whether the quantity (that is, the activity) of the self can ever equal zero (= 0), whether the self can ever be totally at rest, ever totally passive.' Fichte's answer is, of course, no: 'For the non-self has reality only to the extent that the self is affected by it; otherwise, as such, it has no reality at all [. . .]. I do not see anything I do not will to see.'[51] However, it is here that the way we read the exact status of the non-Self is crucial: if we read it in accordance with the Kantian infinite judgment, i.e., as a non-Self that *comprises* self itself (in the same way that the 'undead' comprises the dead), then, previous to positing objectivity, the constituting/constitutive gesture of Ich should be an immobilization, a withdrawal, a self-emptying of the non-Self, a self-reduction to zero, to a zero which *is* the Self; this reduction to zero opens up the space, literally, for I's activity of positing/mediating.

Fichte gets caught in a circle. His first proposition is: A = A, I = I, i.e., the absolute self-positing, the pure substanceless becoming, *Tat-Handlung*, 'intellectual intuition.' Then comes the second proposition: A = non-A, I = non-I, the self posits a non-self which is absolutely opposed to it – the absolute contradiction. Then comes the mutual limitation which resolves this self-contradiction, in its double form, practical (the Self posits the not-self as limited by the self) and theoretical (the self posits itself as limited by the not-self) – they are at the same level, divisible. (Note the finesse of Fichte's reflexive formulation: in theoretical form, the self posits itself as limited, it does not directly posit the object as limiting the self; in practical form, it posits the object as limited/determined by the self, it does not directly posit itself as limiting/forming the object.) – The ambiguity lies in the fact that 'the absolute self of the first principle is not something [. . .]; it is simply what it is.'[52] Only with delimitation,

> both are something: the not-self is what the self is not, and vice versa. As opposed to the absolute self (though, as will be shown in due course, it can only be opposed to it insofar as it is represented /by it/, not insofar as it is in itself), the non-self is absolutely nothing [*schlechthin Nichts*]; as opposed to the limitable self, it is a negative quantity.[53]

However, from the practical standpoint, the finite Self posits the infinite Self in the guise of the ideal of a unity of Self and not-Self, and, with it, the non-self as an obstacle to be overcome. We thus find ourselves in a circle: the absolute Self posits non-self and then finitizes itself by its delimitation; however, the circle closes itself, the absolute presupposition itself (the pure self-positing) returns as presupposed, i.e., as the presupposition *of* the posited, and, in this sense, as depending on the posited. Far from being an inconsistency, this is the crucial, properly speculative, moment in Fichte: the presupposition itself is (retroactively) posited by the process it generates.

So, perhaps, before dismissing him as the climactic point of subjectivist madness, we should give Fichte a chance.

Notes

Markus Gabriel/Slavoj Žižek

Introduction

1 Henrich (2008), p. 32.
2 Ibid.
3 See Kant's own brief sketch of the 'history of pure reason' at the end of the *First Critique*: Kant (2003), B880–884.
4 We thank Tom Krell (New York) for his various comments on the text and for his help with the preparation of this manuscript for publication.
5 This also accounts for the integration of skepticism into the motivation of the theoretical activity of Post-Kantian philosophy as such. See Gabriel (2007); Franks (2000), (2003), (2005).
6 Henrich (2008), p. 32.
7 This point is brilliantly argued in Brandom (2005).
8 Hegel (1977), §76. Miller (poorly) translates this as 'an exposition of how knowledge makes its appearance.'
9 To be sure, for the later Fichte and Schelling, this necessity turns out to be contingent on a higher order!
10 Henrich (2008), p. 52.
11 Ibid., p. 59.
12 Schelling (2006), p. 22.
13 Žižek (2006) offers an elaborate account of the notion of a 'parallax.'
14 Schulz (1975), p. 279.
15 My translation from the German: SW, X, 311: 'Betrachten wir den hier geforderten oder als möglich gezeigten Vorgang im Allgemeinen, so erscheint er als ein Vorgang der Umkehrung und zwar einer Umkehrung des Einen, des vorwirklichen Seyenden, des Prototyps aller Existenz, indem, was in diesem das Subjekt ist, –A, zum Objekt, was Objekt ist (+A), zum Subjekt wird. Dieser Vorgang kann daher die Universio genannt werden, das unmittelbare Resultat des Vorgangs ist das umgekehrte Eine – Unum versum, also Universum.'
16 Cf. Hegel (1977), §§155–165.
17 See his *magnum opus*: Schürmann (2003).
18 Calvino (1993).
19 For a corroboration of this point see also Gabriel (2009d).
20 At the very outset of philosophy, Plato also approached this non-All of the field of logos in his *Parmenides* – this is why *Parmenides* occupies a unique place between early and late Plato: a gap becomes visible here which Plato desperately tries to fill-in in his late dialogues. *Parmenides* is a proto-version of Hegel's logic, truly readable only retroactively, from the standpoint of Hegel's logic. Its 8 (or 9) hypotheses are the first version of the complete (and non-All: complete in the sense of 'no exception') set of categories, and, as in Hegel's logic, it is meaningless to ask which hypothesis is 'true' – 'true' is the conclusion (nothing exists . . .), which throws us back into the entire movement.
21 For an outline and explication of the various forms of naturalism operative in contemporary normativity-Hegelianism see my Gabriel (2007). There it is shown clearly that Hegel is not the naturalist Hegel many contemporary readers would like him to be.

Markus Gabriel

The Mythological Being of Reflection – An Essay on Hegel, Schelling, and the Contingency of Necessity

1 For a more comprehensive historical account of ontological monism see Gabriel (2009a).
2 See Brandom's argument that the ontology of substances is rooted in the usage of singular terms in Brandom (2000), chapter 4; Brandom (1994), pp. 360–404.
3 Pelevin (2001), pp. 139–141.

4 Heidegger (1997), p. 51: 'And what is it that we, from out of ourselves, allow to stand-against? It cannot be a being. But if not a being, the just a nothing [*ein Nichts*]. Only if the letting-stand-against of . . . is a holding oneself in the nothing can the representing allow a not-nothing [*ein nicht-Nichts*], i.e., something like a being if such a thing shows itself empirically, to be encountered instead of a within the nothing.'

5 Seen in this light, Badiou's concept of the void ultimately commits him (despite himself) to the void actually being *out there*. He does not leave cosmology behind, as he claims, but rather reasserts it with his recourse to an ontology of the void. Naming the void means displacing it. It has no proper name, not even 'the void.' For this reason, there can be no ontology of the void. It is nothing but a withdrawal that always forces us to yet another revocation of necessity.

6 I argue for the necessary incompleteness of 'metabasis,' i.e. of the activity of constructing meta-languages, in Gabriel (2008), pp. 209–215.

7 Wittgenstein (1969), §§93–97, 162, 167, 233, 262.

8 Wittgenstein (1979), p. 10e.

9 Wittgenstein (1953). Wittgenstein writes, 'a picture held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably' (PI, §115).

10 Badiou (2007), p. 30: 'Ontology, axiom system of the particular inconsistency of multiplicities, seizes the in-itself of the multiple by forming into consistency all inconsistency and forming into inconsistency all consistency. It thereby deconstructs any one-effect; it is faithful to the non-being of the one, so as to unfold, without explicit nomination, the regulated game of the multiple such that it is none other than the absolute form of presentation, thus the mode in which being proposes itself to any access.'

11 Hegel (1969), p. 50.

12 Gadamer (2004), p. 296.

13 Hogrebe (1989). I give an overview of the contemporary debate on Schelling in Gabriel (2005), pp. 271–301 as well as in Gabriel (2006b), §§1–3.

14 Michelle Kosch gives a good account of the relation between Kierkegaard's and Schelling's critique of Hegel; Kosch (2006). See also Matthews (2008), pp. 1–84, in particular, pp. 54–68 and Houlgate (1999). A good introduction is Bowie (1993).

15 See the excellent edition with translation, introduction and notes by Andre Bowie, Schelling (1994).

16 Some of the material is finally available in English. See Schelling (2007) and (2008).

17 Frank (1975). See also the discussion of this topic in Bowie (1994), pp. 23–35.

18 Schelling, F. W. J., *Sämmtliche Werke*, XIII, 353; XIV, 343, 347–351.

19 SW, X, 101, 309; SW, XIII, 230.

20 SW, XII, 649.

21 For a comprehensive reconstruction of this aspect of Schelling see Hay (2008).

22 See also Gabriel (2007) and Gabriel (forthcoming).

23 Hogrebe (2007b). A similar point is made by Bataille (2005).

24 Hegel (1969), p. 400.

25 Kant (2003), B626.

26 Ibid., A601/B629: 'Whatever, therefore, and however much, our concept of an object may contain, we must go outside it, if we are to ascribe existence to the object. In the case of objects of the senses, this takes place through their connection with some one of our perceptions, in accordance with empirical laws. But in dealing with objects of pure thought, we have no means whatsoever of knowing their existence, since it would have to be known in a completely *a priori* manner. Our consciousness of all existence (whether immediately through perception, or mediately through inferences which connect something with perception) belongs exclusively to the unity of experience; any [alleged] existence outside this field, while not indeed such as we can declare to be absolutely impossible, is of the nature of an assumption which we can never be in a position to justify.'

27 Ibid., pp. A158/B197.

28 Ibid., p. A111.

29 Wittgenstein (1961), prop. 5.633.

30 See Henrich (1967); Sturma (1985); Frank (1991).

31 Žižek (2008), p. XXIX.

32 In order to avoid the deadlock of reification the later Fichte in his 1804 lectures on *The Science of Knowing*, proposed the method of 'genesis (*Genetisieren*)' as opposed to 'facticity': whenever we believe to have grasped some seemingly original unity (an original fact,

therefore: 'facticity'), we must reflect on the fact that we necessarily missed the original unity. Fichte refers to this act of higher-order reflection on the constitution of a domain of facts in terms of a 'genesis.'

33 Fichte (2005), p. 42: 'If the absolutely inconceivable is to be manifest as solely self-substaining, then the concept must be annulled, but to be annulled, it must be posited, because the inconceivable becomes manifest only with the negation of the concept.'

34 Hegel (1969), p. 395.

35 Meillassoux (2008), pp. 3–7. In the second part of this chapter I will side with Meillassoux (and Schelling) arguing that we do indeed have to make sense of some *'absolute* outside' (p. 7). In my *Man in Myth* (*Der Mensch im Mythos* – Gabriel (2006b)) I already argued that Schelling's philosophy is concerned with *the absolute outside* (*absolutes Außerhalb*) *of reason* (p. 113 and the whole §9). However, *pace* Meillassoux, this does not entail the return to 'pre-critical' (*After Finitude*, p. 7) thinking he himself envisages.

36 See p. 126 in this volume.

37 This distinction has been elaborated by Brandom (1994), p. 72.

38 Eshelman (2008).

39 McDowell (1998), p. 435. It is remarkable that McDowell whose primary work is called *Mind and World* spends almost all of his conceptual effort analyzing the former while barely mentioning the latter.

40 Kant (2003), B404.

41 Žižek (2008), p. 2.

42 Schelling (2006), p. 21.

43 I elaborate on the relation between Schelling and Lynch in Gabriel (2009b). See also Žižek (2000).

44 In my *Skeptizismus und Idealismus in der Antike* (Gabriel (2009a)) I argue that ancient philosophy (*pace* Bernard Williams and Myles Burnyeat) is build on external world skepticism. What changes in modern philosophy after Descartes is that the subject gradually discovers that it cannot be a substance which entails a more radical problem of the internal world.

45 Fichte (1987), p. 64.

46 Pelevin (2001), p. 270.

47 In the vein of Nagel (1989) I argue for this in my recent book *An den Grenzen der Erkenntnistheorie*: Gabriel (2008).

48 Žižek (2008), p. LXXXV.

49 Hegel (1969), p. 395.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid.

52 In the chapter on 'illusory being' Hegel equates 'the phenomenon of skepticism' with 'the Appearance of idealism'; Hegel (1969), p. 396.

53 Trendelenburg (1867).

54 The metaphor of the glasses is, of course, due to Heinrich von Kleist. Cf. Kleist (1999), pp. 213–214 for his famous letter to Wilhelmine von Zenge from March 22, 1801.

55 Kant (2003), A26/B42.

56 Ibid., B72.

57 Hegel (1969), p. 398.

58 Ibid., p. 400.

59 See for example Hegel (2002), § 7.

60 See Henrich (1978), p. 228.

61 If we apply this to the paradoxical twists of contemporary French philosophy, in particular to the emergence of the 'event,' we can easily discern its (disavowed) Hegelian origin and its attempt to overcome Hegelian immanence in favor of either Messianic openness to the Other (Lévinas, Derrida) or of the event of Truth despite its apparent impossibility (Badiou). The thought of the event tries to think something which cannot be accounted for by reflection. If there is to be an event, it must surpass the limits of reflection.

62 Hegel (1969), p. 431.

63 Ibid., p. 434.

64 Hegel (1971), §383.

65 Ibid.

66 Ibid., §384.

67 See Castoriadis' notion of 'ontological genesis' or 'absolute creation' in Castoriadis (1997a), pp. 180, 190, 227.

68 Hegel (1969), p. 399.

69 Gadamer (1999), p. 1.

70 Heidegger (1998), p. 41.

71 Heidegger (1999), p. 283.

72 Crispin Wright has developed a very subtle account of the role of norms-in-context play in the constitution of discursive determinacy in Wright (2004a). For the Wittgensteinian origins of this idea see also Wright (2004b).

73 Castoriadis (1997b), p. 300.
74 Nancy makes a similar observation in *The Speculative Remark* when he investigates the sublation of the opening word of the Logic which cannot be a sublation in the yet-to-be established sense. Therefore, the first sublation is suppressed by Hegel, giving way to the always already of sublation. For this reason Nancy points out that 'the beginning of the *aufheben* is a voice, a language or a word, that is uttered and becomes more pronounced by itself, without origin and without grammar' (Nancy (2001), p. 34).
75 Hegel (1969), p. 601.
76 Hegel (1977), §47.
77 Hegel (1991), §81, Addition.
78 Hegel (1969), p. 706.
79 Hölderlin (1988), p. 37.
80 Kant (2003), B300.
81 Hölderlin (1988), p. 37.
82 Hegel (1969), pp. 706–707.
83 Kant (2003), B610–611; 647–648.
84 Ibid., A582–583/B610–611.
85 Kant (2003), A582–583/B610–611: 'If we [. . .] proceed to hypostatize this idea of the sum of all reality, that is because we substitute dialectically for the *distributive* unity of the empirical employment of the understanding, the *collective* unity of experience as a whole; and then thinking this whole [realm] of appearance as one single thing that contains all empirical reality in itself; and then again, in turn, by means of the above-mentioned transcendental subreption, substituting for it the concept of a thing which stands at the source of the possibility of all things, and supplies the real conditions for their complete determination.' Further, see Gabriel (2006b), § 5.
86 Kant (2003), A293/B349.
87 McDowell (1996), p. 18.
88 This notion goes back to Cavell, Stanley (2006). Cavell explicitly acknowledges his debt to Foucault's history of collecting in *The Order of Things*: 'We should be cautious in saying that with natural objects we know where the next specimen or part fits, whereas with the artifact we have to find where it fits best – cautious because of what we learn from work made most famous in Foucault's texts, especially *The Order of Things*, that knowledge grounded in classification is not a discovery derived from a clear accumulation of facts but itself required a set of intellectual/historical conditions in which a new conception of knowledge (or *episteme*) was possible in which a new counting, or order, of facts was made visible' (p. 269).
89 I am, of course, referring here to Goodman (1978).
90 Nietzsche (1974), §374.
91 Kant himself uses the metaphor of a horizon which later became prominent in the vein of Husserlian phenomenology. Kant (2003), A658/B686–687: 'The systematic unity, prescribed by the three logical principles, can be illustrated in the following manner. Every concept may be regarded as a point which, as the station for an observer, has its own horizon, that is, a variety of things which can be represented, and, as it were, surveyed from that standpoint. This horizon must be capable of containing an infinite number of points, each of which has its own narrower horizon; that is, every species contains subspecies, according to the principle of specification, and the logical horizon consists exclusively of smaller horizons (subspecies), never of points which possess no extent (individuals). But for different horizons, that is, genera, each of which is determined by its own concept, there can be a common horizon, in reference to which, as from a common centre, they can all be surveyed; and from this higher genus we can proceed until we arrive at the highest of all genera, and so at the universal and true horizon, which is determined from the standpoint of the highest concept, and which comprehends under itself all manifoldness– genera, species, and subspecies.'
92 Kant (2003), A574/B602–603.
93 Ibid., A575/B603.
94 Ibid.
95 Ibid., A576/B604.
96 Ibid.
97 SW, XI, 291, 313.
98 Adorno (1995), p. 5.
99 Badiou (2007), p. 48.
100 SW, X, 101, 309; SW, XIII, 230.
101 Frege (1950), p. 87 (§74).
102 Ibid.
103 Badiou (2007), p. 53.
104 Wittgenstein (1969), §253.

105 I further elaborate this point in Gabriel (2008), §§14–15.
106. Žižek (2008), p. 86.
107 Hegel (1974a), p. XIII.
108 This point is convincingly argued in Hogrebe (1996).
109 As Wittgenstein has argued in a similar vein in the *Tractatus*, there is no straightforward way of comparing language with the world without making use of language which entails that the conditions of possibility of reference cannot themselves be the objects of a reference. The conditions of possibility of reference are not themselves objects within the world and yet they are the objects of Wittgenstein's meta-discourse which, for this very reason, declares itself non-sensical at the peak of reflection; Wittgenstein (1961).
110 SW, XIV, 337.
111 SW, XIV, 341.
112 See Meillassoux (2008), pp. 39–42, 60. Meillassoux points out that classical correlationism (the *a priori* identification of being and thought, of being and being given to . . .) draws a distinction between '1. The intra-worldly contingency which is predicated of everything that can be or not be, occur or not occur, within the world without contravening the invariants of language and representation through which the world is given to us' and '2. The facticity of these invariants as such, which is a function of our inability to establish either their necessity *or* their contingency.' Meillassoux himself absolutizes facticity by stating a new 'principle of unreason': 'There is no reason for anything to be or to remain the way it is; everything must, without reason, be able not to be and/or be able to be other than it is.' This absolute facticity, however, has already been developed by Schelling with one important difference: Schelling argues for the ultimate contingency of necessity, including the necessity of contingency Meillassoux insists on.
113 SW, XI, 317; XIV, 346.
114 Schelling (1994), p. 147.
115 SW, X, 282; XIII, 263–278; XIV, 342–343.
116 SW, XIV, 354.
117 On the notion of 'non-ground' see Gabriel (2006a).
118 The English translation 'We *seek* the absolute everywhere, and only ever *find* things,' to be found in: Novalis (1997), p. 23. This translation, of course, completely misses the wordplay.

119 SW, XIV, 338.
120 SW, XIV, 341–342.
121 Blumenberg (1985a), p. 19.
122 Ibid., p. 4. Curiously, Blumenberg goes on to consider that 'intentionality – the coordination of parts into a whole, of qualities into an object, of things into a world – may be the "cooled off" aggregate condition of such early accomplishments of consciousness' (p. 21), whereby he primarily refers to 'attention' and 'affect'. The paradox, of course, consists in a conjunction of the two claims that (1) anxiety, i.e. a form of intentionality, triggers the development of attention and affect such that (2) intentionality as such is the 'cooled off' outcome of this process. In other words, intentionality cannot be the result of a process which presupposes a form of intentionality to get off the ground, in the first place. This paradox is an instance of Derridean *différance*. Like in Freud's *Totem and Taboo* or in Rousseau's theory of the social contract, that which is supposed to be established through a process (lawlike structures) is presupposed to be always already operative at the beginning. This is the interlacing of archeology and teleology, Derrida points out in Derrida (1967), pp. 168, 283, 326, 349sqq.
123 Ibid., p. 3.
124 SW, XIV, 338.
125 Hegel (1969), pp. 550–553.
126 Marx (1988), pp. 159–160, makes the same point as Schelling in his *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy in General*: 'If, however, the philosophy of religion, etc., is for me the sole true existence of religion then, too, it is only as a *philosopher of religion* that I am truly religious, and so I deny real religious sentiment and the really *religious* man. But at the same time I *assert* them, in part within my own existence or within the alien existence which I oppose to them – for this *is* only their *philosophic* expression – and in part I assert them in their distinct original shape, since for me they represent merely the apparent other-being, allegories, forms of their own true existence (i.e. of my *philosophical* existence) hidden under sensuous disguises.'
127 Lévi-Strauss (1979), p. 1.
128 Ibid., p. 12.
129 Schelling (2008), p. 136.
130 Ibid., p. 40.

131 Ibid., p. 153.
132 Ibid., p. 152.
133 Ibid., p. 135.
134 Ibid., pp. 120–121.
135 SW, XIII, 257.
136 Freud (1950), p. 96.
137 Ibid., p. 81.
138 Schelling (2008), pp. 144, 150.
139 See also Blumenberg's notion of the 'pluperfect' (*Vorvergangenheit*) in Blumenberg (1985a), p. 21: 'To speak of beginnings is always to be suspected of a mania for returning to origins. Nothing wants to go back to the beginning that is the point toward which the lines of what we are speaking of here converge. On the contrary, everything apportions itself according to its distance from that beginning. Consequently it is more prudent to speak of the "pluperfect" rather than of "origins." This pluperfect is not that of an omnipotence of wishes, which would have submitted to compromise with reality, as "realism," only after colliding with the hostility of what does not bow to wishes. There we can only imagine the single absolute experience that exists: that of the superior power of the Other.'
140 Schelling (2008), pp. 153–154.
141 See for example ibid., p. 126.
142 Ibid., p. 126.
143 Ibid., p. 126.
144 McDowell (1996), Lecture 2.
145 Hegel (1969), p. 842.
146 Hegel (1977), §47.
147 Ibid., §109.
148 Blumenberg argues that the idealistic project of autogenesis assumes the shape of a last myth. See Blumenberg (1985), pp. 265–270.
149 Bernstein (2002), p. 186.
150 See Lyotard's argumentation against the possibility of an absolute phrase regiment in Lyotard (1988).
151 Schelling (2008), p. 38. Schelling is making an implicit and critical reference to Hegel here. Hegel himself uses the term 'pure essentialities (Wesenheiten)' frequently. See, for example, Hegel (1969), p. 28.

152 Quine (1964), p. 42: 'The totality of our so-called knowledge or beliefs, from the most casual matters of geography and history to the profoundest laws of atomic physics or even of pure mathematics and logic, is a man-made fabric which impinges on experience only along the edges. Or, to change the figure, total science is like a field of force whose boundary conditions are experience.' See also his famous pragmatist claim that the concept of physical objects only differs from a belief in Homer's gods by degree, itself being a myth: 'For my part I do, qua lay physicist, believe in physical objects and not in Homer's gods; and I consider it a scientific error to believe otherwise. But in point of epistemological footing the physical objects and the gods differ only in degree and not in kind. Both sorts of entities enter our conception only as cultural posits. The myth of physical objects is epistemologically superior to most in that it has proved more efficacious than other myths as a device for working a manageable structure into the flux of experience.'
153 Berkeley (1998), p. 182.
154 I owe this distinction to discussions with Tom Krell.
155 Blumenberg (1998), p. 10.
156 Ibid., p. 12.
157 Ibid., p. 10.
158 This observation goes back to Cavell (1999), pp. 52–53. See also Conant (2004).
159 *Hesiod's Theogony* (1999), p. 116.
160 Schelling (2008), p. 30; see also p. 35.
161 Interestingly, Epicurus is said to have first been drawn to philosophy at the tender age of fourteen when his schoolteacher was not able to explain to him the origin of Chaos. See Sextus Empiricus (1936), pp. 18–19: 'For he who said "Verily first created of all was Chaos; thereafter / Earth broad-bosom'd, of all things the seat" is refuted by himself; for if someone asks him "from what did Chaos come into being?", he will have no answer. And this, as some say, was the reason why Epicurus took to philosophizing. For when still quite a youth he asked his schoolmaster, who was reading out the line "Verily first created of all was Chaos," what Chaos was created from, if it was created first. And when he replied that it was not his business, but that of the men called philosophers, to teach things of

that sort, "Well then," said Epicurus, "I must go off to them, if it is they who know the truth of things".'

162 Wittgenstein (1969), §94.

163 Ibid., §95.

164 Ibid., §101.

165 Ibid., §159.

166 Wittgenstein (1980), p. 7. The contingency of framework propositions is obvious when we consider Wittgenstein's insistence that nobody has ever been to the moon or could ever go to the moon: 'If we are thinking within our system, then it is certain that no one has ever been on the moon. Not merely is nothing of the sort ever seriously reported to us by reasonable people, but our whole system of physics forbids us to believe it' (Wittgenstein (1969), §108).

167 Wittgenstein (1969), §132.

168 Ibid., §130.

169 Ibid., §559.

170 Ibid., §475.

171 Žižek (2008), p. LXXIV.

172 Scheling (2008), p. 117.

173 Adorno/Horkheimer (2002), p. 19.

174 Ibid., p. 18.

175 Ibid., p. 11.

176 Blumenberg has spelled this out in *extenso* in both his *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (1985b) and *The Genesis of the Copernican World* (1989).

177 See Wright (2004) in particular pp. 207–209.

178 Schlegel (1968).

179 Wittgenstein (1969), §344.

180 Kant (2003), A584/B611, footnote.

181 See the first essay of Jonas (2001).

182 For a recent defense of 'animism' after disenchantment see Hogrebe (2007a).

183 I tried to spell this out in the wake of Brandom's distinction between sense-dependent and reference-dependent idealism in Gabriel (2008).

184 Hyppolite (1997), p. 95.

185 Kant (2003), A250–251.

186 Priest (1995).

187 Bataille (2004), p. 157. See also his similar remark in Bataille (2005), p. 123: 'I insist on the insulated nature of my language. It is through a brutal, *aggressive* negation that I designate *an experience that in itself is a negation of understanding*.'

188 Cavell (1999), p. 236.

189 Meillassoux (2008), p. 47.

190 Ibid., p. 66.

191 I agree with Rancière that democratic politics drawing on the 'presupposition of equality' at the same time presupposes 'the pure contingency of all order'. Cf. Rancière (1995), pp. 36–37, 48.

192 Meillassoux (2008), p. 67.

193 Ibid., p. 60.

194 Rilke uses 'being here' as a name for radical immanence in the *Duino Elegies*; see Rilke (1974). Cf. Seventh Elegy, vs. 39; Ninth Elegy, vs. 10.

195 Meillassoux (2008), p. 53.

196 Without going into details here, one can even venture to claim that globalization is the attempt of concealing the void by creating a world which disavows its contingency. The relation between the concept of the world and globalization has famously been analyzed by Nancy (2007).

197 Elsewhere I argued that this is the ontological message of Malevich's *Black Square*. See Gabriel/Halfwassen (2008), pp. 257–277.

198 Meillassoux (2008), p. 3: 'In order to reactivate the Cartesian thesis in contemporary terms, and in order to state it in the same terms in which we intend to uphold it, we shall therefore maintain the following: *all those aspects of the object that can be formulated in mathematical terms can be meaningfully conceived as properties of the object in itself.* All those aspects of the object that can give rise to a mathematical thought (to a formula or to digitalization) rather than to a perception or sensation can be meaningfully turned into properties of the thing not only as it is with me, but also as it is without me.'

199 Wright (1992).

200 'The Consequences of Nonknowledge', in Bataille (2004), pp. 111–118.

201 Ibid., p. 111.
202 Ibid., p. 112.
203 This is why I tried to motivate a revival of idealism in the sense of higher-order reflection as the proper domain of philosophy in Gabriel (2008) arguing against the analytic identification of idealism with ontic creationism. The crudest example of a misunderstanding of higher-order reflection and its relation to correlationism has recently been set forth by Paul Boghossian (2006) in his book *Fear of Knowledge: Against Relativism and Constructivism.*
204 Bataille (2004), p. 112.
205 Ibid., p. 113.
206 Ibid., p. 113.
207 Bataille (ibid., p. 157) speaks of 'the postulate of science': 'Without doubt, it is possible to live in the progressively known world, not to suffer given that one is waiting patiently for the progressive reduction of the unknown to the known. This is the postulate of science. Suffering only begins if the vanity of a reduction of the unknown to the known is revealed.'
208 Poe (1996), p. 129.
209 Cavell (1999), p. 45; see also p. 48.
210 See Nagel (1989).
211 Cavell (1999), p. 365.
212 Wittgenstein (1969), §362.
213 Ibid., §368.
214 See Gehlen (1956). I rely here on the convincing remarks in Robert M. Wallace's introduction to his translation of Blumenberg (1985a) in particular, pp. XXII–XXIII.
215 Chasseguet-Smirgel (1998), p. 128.
216 Meillassoux (2008), p. 155.
217 Freud (1950), p. 187.
218 Ibid., p. 183.
219 Ibid., p. 164.
220 Wilshire (2002).
221 Ibid., p. 16.
222 Bataille (2004), p. 79. I owe this parallel to Tom Krell.
223 Lévi-Strauss (1979), p. 6.

Slavoj Žižek

Discipline between Two Freedoms – Madness and Habit in German Idealism

1 Pippin (2005), p. 118.
2 Ibid., pp. 118–119.
3 See Hegel (1975), pp. 176–190.
4 See Derrida (1978).
5 Chesterton (1995), p. 45.
6 Malabou (2005), p. 117. (A work on which I rely here extensively.)
7 Ibid., p. 26.
8 I owe this observation to Caroline Schuster (Chicago).
9 There is, of course, a big difference between the zombie-like sluggish automated movements and the subtle plasticity of habits proper, of their refined know-how; however, these habits proper arise only when the level of habits is supplemented by the level of consciousness proper and speech. What the zombie-like 'blind' behavior provides is, as it were, the 'material base' of the refined plasticity of habits proper: the stuff out of which these habits proper are made.
10 Hegel (1971), §410, Remark.
11 Ibid.
12 Alain (1983), p. 200.
13 Hegel (2002), §151, Addition.
14 Hegel (1971), §410, Addition.
15 Ibid.
16 Malabou (2005), p. 75.
17 Ibid., p. 70.
18 Ibid., pp. 70–71.
19 Ibid., p. 76.
20 Ibid., p. 75.
21 Ibid., p. 57.
22 Inwagen (1990).
23 Varela (1996), p. 212.
24 Ravaisson (1984), p. 10.

25 Hegel makes this point clear in his *Logic*: 'The activity of thought which is at work in all our ideas, purposes, interests and actions is, as we have said, unconsciously busy /. . ./ [E]ach individual animal is such individual primarily because it is an animal: if this is true, then it would be impossible to say what such an individual could still be if this foundation were removed,' Hegel (1976), pp. 36–37.
26 Malabou (2005), p. 32.
27 Hegel (1971), §407.
28 Malabou (2005), p. 35.
29 Hegel (1971), §408.
30 Upon a closer look, it becomes clear that the Hegelian notion of madness oscillates between the two extremes which one is tempted to call, with reference to Benjamin's notion of violence, constitutive and constituted madness. First, there is the constitutive madness: the radical 'contradiction' of the human condition itself, between the subject as 'nothing,' as the evanescent punctuality and the subject as 'all,' as the horizon of its world. Then, there is the 'constituted' madness: the direct fixation to, identification with, a particular feature as an attempt to resolve (or, rather, cut short) the contradiction. In a way homologous with the ambiguity of the Lacanian notion of *objet petit a*, madness names at the same time the contradiction/void and the attempt to resolve it.
31 Hegel (1971), §408, Addition.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid., §401.
34 Hegel (1977), §310.
35 Malabou (2005), p. 71.
36 Ibid., p. 72.
37 Ibid., p. 68.
38 Hegel (1977), §322.
39 Ibid., §318.
40 See Marx (1978), p. 95.
41 Hegel (1977), §318.
42 Malabou (2005), p. 67.
43 Ibid., p. 68.
44 Hegel (1974b), p. 204. Further, in his *Encyclopaedia*, Hegel mentions the 'night-like abyss within which a world of infinitely numerous images and presentations is preserved without being in consciousness' (Hegel (1971) §453). Hegel's historical source is here Jacob Bohme.
45 Hegel (1977), §32.
46 Sartre (1957), p. 59.
47 Bernasconi (2006), p. 38.
48 Sartre also draws attention to a crucial distinction between this kind of 'playing a role' and a theatrical 'playing a role' where the subject merely imitates the gestures of a waiter for amusement of the spectators or as part of a stage performance: in clear opposition to the theatrical imitation, the waiter who 'plays being a waiter' *really is a waiter*. As Sartre put it, the waiter 'realizes' the condition of being a waiter, while an actor who plays a waiter on stage is 'irrealized' in his role; in linguistic terms, one can say that what accounts for this difference is the performative status of my acts: in the case of an actor, the performative 'efficiency' is suspended. A psychotic is precisely the one who doesn't see (or, rather, 'feel') this difference: for him, both the real waiter and the actor are just 'playing a role.'
49 Malabou (2005), p. 74.

Slavoj Žižek

Fichte's Laughter

1 As to this last example, there are attempts to reconstruct Hegel's answer to Marx's 'materialist reversal' of dialectics. Cf. Maker (1989). See also my own defense of Hegel against Marx in chapter 1 of Žižek (2006).
2 Walter Schulz's book *The Accomplishment of German Idealism in Schelling's Late Philosophy* advances just this thesis; see Schulze (1975).
3 Zoeller (2008), p. 55.
4 Brachtendorf (2008), p. 157.
5 Ibid. This shift can also be formulated as the one from positing to appearing: while in 1794, the I posits itself as positing itself, in 1812, 'the appearance appears to itself as appearing to itself. To appear, however, is an activity. Thus, the appearance appears to itself as being active through itself, or as a principle "from itself, out of itself,

through itself." Fichte concludes that, since the appearance is constituted by the act of appearing to itself, it conceives of its own existence (its "formal being") as grounded in itself. As soon as the appearance reflects on itself, it understands itself to exist through itself, that is, to be *a se*. But this cannot be true, as the *Wissenschaftslehre* demonstrates. Only one is in the sense of aseitas, namely the Absolute, so that appearance cannot truly be in this sense'; Ibid., p. 158.

6 Fichte (1971a), Vol. 10, p. 365.

7 A brief note should be added here. The partisans of 'discourse analysis' often rise against those who continue to emphasize the key structural role of the economic mode of production and its dynamics, with the reproach of 'vulgar Marxism' or, another popular catchword, 'economic essentialism': the insinuation is that such a view reduces language to a secondary instrument, locating real historical efficiency only in the 'reality' of material production. There is, however, a symmetrical simplification which is no less 'vulgar': that of proposing a direct parallel between language and production, i.e., of conceiving – in Paul de Man style – language itself as another mode of production, the 'production of sense.' According to this approach, in parallel with the 'reification' of productive labor in its result, the common-sense notion of speech as a mere expression of some pre-existing sense also 'reifies' sense, ignoring how sense is not only reflected in speech, but generated by it – it is the result of 'signifying practice,' as it was once fashionable to say . . . One should reject this approach as the worst case of non-dialectical formalism: it involves a hypostasis of 'production' into an abstract-universal notion which encompasses economic and 'symbolic' production as its two species, neglecting their radically different status.

8 This is why the Kantian transcendental I, its pure apperception, is a purely formal function which is neither noumenal nor phenomenal – it is empty, no phenomenal intuition corresponds to it, since, if it were to appear to itself, its self-appearance would be the 'thing itself,' i.e., the direct self-transparency of a noumenon. The parallel between the void of the transcendental subject ($) and the void of the transcendental object, the inaccessible X that causes our perceptions, is misleading here: the transcendental object is the void beyond

phenomenal appearances, while the transcendental subject already appears as a void.

9 See Pfaller (unpublished paper, 2002): 'What is substituted can also appear itself, in a 1:1 scale, in the role of the substitute – there only must be some feature ensuring that it is not taken to be itself. Such a feature is provided for by the threshold which separates the place of what is substituting from what is being substituted – or symbolizes their detachment. Everything that appears in front of the threshold is then assumed to be the ersatz, as everything that lies behind it is taken to be what is being substituted. There are scores of examples of such concealments that are obtained not by miniaturization but only by means of clever localization. As Freud observed, the very acts that are forbidden by religion are practiced in the name of religion. In such cases – as, for instance, murder in the name of religion – religion also can do entirely without miniaturization. Those adamantly militant advocates of human life, for example, who oppose abortion, will not stop short of actually murdering clinic personnel. Radical right-wing opponents of male homosexuality in the USA act in a similar way. They organize so-called "gay bashings" in the course of which they beat up and finally rape gays. The ultimate homicidal or homosexual gratification of drives can therefore also be attained, if it only fulfils the condition of evoking the semblance of a countermeasure. What seems to be "opposition" then has the effect that the x to be fended off can appear itself and be taken for a non-x.'

10 This gap can also be the gap which separates dream from reality: when, in the middle of the night, one has a dream about a heavy stone or animal sitting on one's chest and causing pain, this dream, of course, reacts to the fact that one has a real chest pain – it invents a narrative to account for the pain. However, the trick is not just to invent a narrative, but a more radical one: it can happen that, while having a chest pain, one has a dream of HAVING A CHEST PAIN – being aware that one is dreaming, the very fact of transposing the pain into the dream has a calming effect ('It is not a real pain, it is just a dream!').

11 Galit (2000).

12 Fichte (1987), pp. IX–XI.

13 Ibid., p. XI.

14 Bukharin (2005), p. 40.

15 Ibid., p. 41.
16 Ibid., p. 46.
17 Ibid., p. 131.
18 Kant (1956), pp. 152–153.
19 Fichte (1987), p. XII.
20 See Breazeadale (1995), pp. 87–114.
21 Ibid., p. 100.
22 The solution to the mystery: he is effectively not the husband, but the lover of the woman who claims to be his wife. When he barely survived the accident while driving the husband's car, with his face disfigured beyond recognition, the wife killed her husband, identified HIM as her husband and ordered the surgeons to reconstruct his face on the model of her husband's.
23 Portier (2005), p. 30.
24 Wittgenstein (1961), prop. 6.4311.
25 Bergman (1995), pp. 240–241.
26 See Laclau (1995).
27 Portier (2005), pp. 134, 136.
28 Ibid., p. 54.
29 Seidel (1993), pp. 116–117.
30 Portier (2005), p. 154.
31 Portier (2005), p. 158.
32 See Livet (1987).
33 Seidel (1993), p. 102.
34 Ibid., pp. 87–88.
35 Sartre (1957), p. 327.
36 Bernasconi (2006), p. 48.
37 Portier (2005), p. 222.
38 Ibid., p. 244.
39 Ibid., p. 230.
40 Ibid., p. 238.
41 Ibid., p. 253.
42 Ibid., p. 232.
43 Ibid., p. 224.
44 Fichte (1971b), pp. 478–479.
45 Quoted in Seidel (1993), pp. 50–51.
46 Ibid., p. 89.
47 Kant (2003), Bxxvi.

48 Hegel (1977), §165.
49 Kant, unedited reflection from 1785–1788, quoted in Freuler (1992), p. 223.
50 Seidel (1993), p. 104.
51 Ibid.
52 Ibid., p. 64.
53 Ibid., pp. 64–65.

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Index