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First Outline of a System of Theory: Schelling and the Margins of Philosophy, 1799–1815

1. Knowledge, Fluidity, Theory

NATURE, SCHELLING WRITES IN *AGES OF THE WORLD* (1815), “IS AN ABYSS of the past” (31).¹ Or as Hegel says, in work begun at Jena when he was still close to Schelling, nature is “an alien existence in which Spirit does not find itself,” “the Idea in the form of otherness,” as “the negative of itself” (3, 13).² Schelling’s phrase enigmatically conjoins discourses that are foreign to each other: nature, history, and ontology. What results is not natural science, or *Natur-philosophie*, a science fiction in which nature and spirit find themselves rather than being estranged in each other. One could call it “physiognomy,” a term used by Coleridge and his follower J. H. Green. Green defines physiognomy as a “history of nature” which, as “preface and portion of the history of man,” makes the “knowledge of nature” a “branch of self-knowledge” and a part of the history of self-consciousness.³ As physiognomy, *Ages* would be an attempt at historiography: a genre in which it has been placed by claims that Schelling “invented dialectical materialism.”⁴ But if *Ages* aims at a theory of history, it is not history in the an-

1. *The Ages of the World* (1815), trans. Jason M. Wirth (Albany: SUNY Press, 2000); hereafter W3. The untranslated 1811 version (W1) is included in Manfred Schröter, *Die Weltalter* (C. H. Beck: München, 1946). References to the 1813 version (W2), are to the translation by Judith Norman in Slavoj Žižek/F. W. J. Schelling, *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1997). References to German texts, when used, are given by volume and page number after the references to the English translation, and are to *Ausgewählte Werke*, 10 vols. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1966–68).

2. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Nature*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970); hereafter PN.

3. J. H. Green, *Vital Dynamics* (London: William Pickering, 1840) 103.

4. Jürgen Habermas, “Dialectical Idealism in Transition to Materialism: Schelling’s Idea of

thropological sense intended by Green. Instead, refusing to make the transition from nature to freedom, Schelling offers a *psychoanalysis* of history through nature, as an “alien existence in which Spirit does not find itself.” Or, if as a history of self-consciousness the text should be considered philosophy, it is a history of Being in its historicity that results in a psychoanalysis of philosophy.

This is to say that one could also describe *Ages* as inventing psychoanalysis, much as Schopenhauer’s *World as Will and Representation* anticipates Freudian metapsychology. For the history of nature for Schelling and Hegel serves as a laboratory for a psychoanalysis *avant la lettre*, since it is here that ideas such as resistance, inhibition, depression, crisis, the primal scene of trauma, and the (im)possibility of remembering and working through this trauma to enlightenment receive their earliest expression. Among these ideas, inhibition [*Hemmung*] can already be found in the earlier *Naturphilosophie*: specifically in the *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature* (1799). But because it is not yet part of a history, it is not resistance, inhibition in the psychoanalytic sense of something foreclosed or not known. Indeed, the *First Outline* brackets or re-idealizes its more deconstructive insights. In *Ages*, then, it is the grasping of nature as historical that seems to generate psychoanalysis. More specifically it is through the history of nature as human nature, the enfolding of phylogeny in ontogeny, that psychoanalysis is intergenerated. “One who could write completely the history of their own life,” Schelling suggests, “would also have . . . concurrently grasped the history of the cosmos” (W3: 3). But this means that one who would grasp the history of the world must unfold it from a history of their own life that is enveloped in the prehistory of life itself. Or that the analysis that is history as the “writing” of history, a writing without which history itself cannot proceed, is necessarily interminable. Hence the suggestion that *Ages* “invents” psychoanalysis, a claim that can be made for Romanticism more generally. Yet this characterization also seems not to capture what is at work in this strange text. For it leaves unbroached the question of what it means to invent psychoanalysis before, and outside, its clinical practice: outside any institutionalization or social outcome that might make it what Schelling calls a “positive” science, positive sciences being those “that attain to objectivity within the state” and are “organized into so-called faculties.”⁵

a Contraction of God And Its Consequences for a Philosophy of History,” in *The New Schelling*, ed. Judith Norman and Alistair Welchman (New York: Continuum, 2004) 78–81; Žižek, *The Indivisible Remainder: An Essay on Schelling and Related Matters* (London: Verso, 1996) 37.

5. Schelling, *On University Studies*, trans. E. S. Morgan (Athens: Ohio State UP, 1966) 78–79; hereafter US.

In taking up *Ages* (1815) as an example, I argue that the interdisciplinary transferences it sets up between history and the natural sciences (specifically geology) function according to the logic of “theory,” as a deconstructing of fixed forms of knowledge by each other, within (to evoke Schelling’s own metaphor) a general “fluidity.” For by exposing history as the realm of freedom to its pre-history in nature, and “god” or the absolute to both history and nature, Schelling dissolves the security of all three: of history, which must look back to the return and retreat of its origins, of nature, which is no longer a realm of timeless processes, and of the absolute itself which now has a nature. As a result the history of nature as key to the ontogeny of absolute spirit is made doubly problematic by the unworking of the very terms “history” and “nature,” which turns the anthropogenesis of spirit into a psychoanalysis of spirit through its (human) nature. For as Schelling writes: “The eternal nature is the same in God as what in the person is their nature, provided that if by nature one thought that which consists of body, soul, and spirit. If abandoned to itself this nature of the person, like the eternal nature, is a life of loathing and anxiety, a fire that incessantly consumes itself, and unremittingly produces itself anew” (W3: 46).

I will return to the notion of fluidity, which the early Schelling deploys within a discourse of plenitude, but the more unsettling implications of which can be read between Schelling and Hegel, who also uses the term in the concluding discussion of disease in *The Philosophy of Nature*. Schelling introduces fluidity in his *First Outline*, where he sees fixed products (or in the epistemic field disciplines and concepts) as occurring when infinite activity is “inhibited” or limited. Although there might seem to be “finite products,” because the “activity” that produces them is “originally an infinite one,” they retain the “tendency to infinite development”: “every product” is “capable of being articulated into products” by being “decomposed” further (5–6).⁶ Positive sciences, as Hegel says in taking up the same vocabulary, are those that do not recognize their concepts as finite (54).⁷ Fluidity, “as a mass wherein *no part is distinguished from another by figure*,” is the condition of possibility for finite products to be created, in that what is “solid” can only take form against the background of the fluid, through the “inhibition” of this fluidity, which remains as an underlying complexity within “bound” products that have been simplified. The fluid, Schelling clarifies, is not the “absolutely formless” but “that which is *receptive to every*

6. Schelling, *First Outline of a System of The Philosophy of Nature*, trans. Keith R. Peterson (Albany: SUNY Press, 2005); hereafter FO.

7. Hegel, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline*, in *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline and Critical Writings*, ed. Ernst Behler (New York: Continuum, 1990); hereafter EPS.

form”; as such it is the chora, the (un)ground for new formations (FO 27). It is “the absolute noncomposite, and for that reason the absolute decomposite” (6).

To be sure, in discussing the return of products to their fluidity, Schelling is not referring to epistemic products but to the “absolute activity” of nature as the “unconditioned.” Yet the fact that he describes the “*empirically infinite*” as “only the external intuition of an absolute (intellectual) activity whose intuition is “in us” (14–15) lets us connect the discussion of fluidity to knowledge and to what Derrida calls a “university without condition” in which “nothing is beyond question.”⁸ In his lectures *On University Studies* Schelling had indeed argued for “the unconditional character of philosophical knowledge” as the basis for an “encyclopedi[c]” thinking in which the “different branches” of knowledge produced by specialization interpenetrate (9, 12, 41).⁹ In *The First Outline* he suggests that “every science that is science at all has its unconditioned” (13), that against which we can see the conditions under which it is produced or limited.¹⁰ This is a very different conception of “science” from the Comtean notion that Hegel criticizes *avant la lettre*, when he defines positive sciences as rationalities or systems that “do not recognize their concepts as finite,” and that thus take themselves to be exhaustive (EPS 53–54). Absolute as opposed to

8. Jacques Derrida, “The University Without Condition,” *Without Alibi*, ed. and trans. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2002) 205; hereafter UWC.

9. The English text misleadingly translates both “Akademie” and “Universität” as “university.” While Schelling does not sharply distinguish the two, universities bore a relation to the state which explains Kant’s use of this term in *The Conflict of the Faculties*, where he is describing the licensing of doctors or “free teachers” and making a plea for the inclusion of philosophy in the university (trans. Mary J. Gregor [Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1992] 23). By contrast, academies and societies were non-degree granting institutions of civil society rather than the state, which included, as Kant says, “unincorporated scholars” (25). Since academies were somewhat specialized (for example the Berlin Academy of Sciences), Schelling’s use of the term in the singular to refer to the *institution* of academies, and his use of both *Akademie* and *Universität*, indicate that he wants to refer to the world of learning generally as a world that should be committed to absolute rather than “ordinary” or “positive” knowledge.

10. Schelling uses the term “unconditioned” [*Das Unbedingte*] in two senses: in a philosophical sense derived from theories of substance, denoting what is outside or before “the particular sensible determinations of the eternal substance” (US 43) that are the specific “branches” of knowledge (12); and in a political sense, marking a resistance to “the actual conditions [*Bedingungen*],” taken up by Kant, under which knowledge is taught (17; 8.457). The unconditioned, insofar as it ceases to be so when specified within a thing [*Ding*], is a repudiation of positivism: “Das Unbedingte kann überhaupt nicht in irgend einem einzelnen Ding, noch in irgend etwas gesucht werden, von dem man sagen kann, das es ist” (FO 13; 7.11). While taking up Schelling, Derrida does not specifically refer the term “unconditional” to him (*Eyes of the University*, trans. Jan Plug et. al. [Stanford: Stanford UP, 2004] 64–80). Kant also uses the term in connection with the absolute, about which he is more cautious than Schelling.

“ordinary” knowledge, then, is a pushing of sciences, whether constituted as forms of rationality or pragmatism, towards their unconditioned. “Absolute,” from the Latin “absolvere,” entails an absolving from debt. In its most radical form, which Schelling approaches in *The First Outline*, it is not total knowledge but a freeing of knowledge from the (political and discursive) conditions that produce it as a means to an end. In *On University Studies* Schelling defines absolute knowledge as a following of the particular wherever it might lead, regardless of its consistency with a larger whole. The synthesizing of all knowledge within a transcendental idealism that provides the law for domains as disparate as nature and art had been Schelling’s own version of such a whole in which the part exists as a means to an end. This is to say that absolute knowledge will involve an overturning even of the transcendental system of knowledge as an “organic whole” that Schelling himself sets up in *On University Studies* (7). Writing of such knowledge, without fully anticipating where it will lead him, Schelling says:

The demand that a particular profession be treated in the spirit of the whole is often interpreted in the sense that it should be only a means. Actually the very opposite is the case: a scientist is faithful to the spirit of the whole only to the extent that he considers his field as an end in itself, an absolute. Nothing can be conceived of as a part of a true totality if it functions merely as a means. A state is perfect if every citizen, while a means in relation to the whole, is also an end in himself. Precisely because the particular is absolute in itself, it is within the absolute and an integral part of it, and vice versa. (25)

Schelling here seems to advocate the very specialization he criticizes. But what he repudiates as specialization is an instrumentalizing of knowledge that autonomizes fields, whereas what he argues for here is a “freedom” that pushes Kant’s disinterestedness towards *its* unconditioned: one that in the *Freedom* essay will give the part the freedom to “derange” the whole (FO 26). In its most radical form such freedom may even involve an abandonment of this “whole,” not unlike Schelling’s abandonment of his own earlier “system” in his middle work. For when the “universal process of formation” arrives at a “final product,” such products must be set aside as dead matter (what Sartre calls the practico-inert), as “Nature . . . strike[s] out on another path,” and “cultivate[s] them in the opposite direction” (31). The phrasing here anticipates what Schelling will say in *The Ages* about nature’s productivity as a non-productivity that continually “re-treat[s] to . . . the beginning.” There Schelling writes that “Nature . . . develop[s] qualities . . . works, talents, to their pinnacle, only again to bury them for centuries in oblivion” and “start anew, perhaps in a new species”

(W3: 21), because the “universal process of formation” “is only *infinite* to the extent” that it “turns back into itself” in a perpetual “involution” (FO 31, 112).

The freedom of the part, however, is not the same as specialization because it is the freedom to “derange” the *whole* (26), whereas he who sees his “particular profession as a specialty” does not see “what is universal in it.” Only the universal is the source of “ideas” rather than the technical “concepts” that are part of sciences as rationalities (US 24). In *The First Outline* fluidity is the medium in which the freedom of unconditional knowledge becomes possible, as a releasing of fixed forms from what Schelling curiously calls figure (*Figur*). All natural forms from the “crystal” to the “human form,” and by extension all cognitive forms from ideas to disciplines, are “figures” (28). To speak of figure is to recognize the individual position as part of a fluidity wherein each “element,” to quote Derrida, is “constituted on the basis of the trace within it of the other elements of the chain or system.”¹¹ Or as Schelling himself puts it, every “actant” or “tendency” that tries to develop itself will “inhibit the other from producing its original figure”; this violence of position, then, means that “if . . . every actant is limited by the infinity of all the remaining ones, then all together they mutually derange each other in their productions, and none is allowed . . . to achieve the production of the originary figure” (FO 26–27). Hence Schelling can argue that figures in their apparent “cohesion” (26) are really “the *residuum*” of the formative process, so that the goal of thought must be to “set free the actants subordinated” in a particular product.

Insofar as “visible nature” is an “allegory” of more profound processes in us and nature (W3: 21), *The First Outline* provides in its chemistry and physiology of the “world-system” (86), an epistemology and methodology for a “transcendental philosophy” (13) that verges on “theory.” A chemistry in the sense that Schelling’s account of how substances are composed and decomposed doubles as an account of how concepts are composed, conveying their dynamism in a way that a “physics” of substances would not, physics being closer to what the Idealists call mechanics (US 133). But a physiology, because chemistry, which is still a kind of empiricism (131–32), does not account for, but only shows the “effects” of, a “vital force” or philosophical unconscious that is not reducible to the products it generates or even the structure of their connections (FO 110). Schelling tries to figure this vital force through John Brown’s theory of “excitability” as the core of life. “The excitability of the organism,” he writes, results “in a constant *self-reproduction*” that distinguishes the “organic” from the “dead” by

11. Derrida, *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1981) 26.

constituting it not as “an actual *being* but rather a continual *being-reproduced* (through itself)” (106–7). If physiology is more closely tied to vital force, the epistemology of *The First Outline* can also be described as a physiology, because the term implies processes happening *within* an organism, whereas “everything unorganized,” including fluids, lies “outside the organism,” and it is this that forms the subject of a chemistry (FO 118).¹² Thus a stone, Hegel writes, “cannot become diseased” but can only be “chemically decomposed” (PN 129).

I will return to Schelling’s similar remark that what is outside the organism “cannot be the subject of disease” (FO 118), as if it is disease that defines the interiorization of “absolute activity” in the organism. David Farrell Krell has brilliantly discussed disease as the very force of life (and thought) at the end of *The First Outline*.¹³ This section, however, is an appendix: an “indecomposable” element in the fluidity of the text, that has yet to be recomposed within a less conventionally organicist organization of knowledge. It reflects the potential for the chemical system to “derange” the physiological system that, as “the body of knowledge,” is the figure unifying *On University Studies*, but which is subjected to an infinite development in the second half of *The First Outline*. Briefly, in the first half of this text, Schelling takes up the chemistry of infinite activity, arguing that “*permanence* only occurs in Nature as *object*,” while *natura naturans* or “the activity of Nature as subject continues irresistibly” (17). The basis of this activity lies in a “dynamic” and organic (rather than mechanistic) version of atomism (20–21) that has passed through Leibniz’s “expressionism” of the infinite divisibility and deconstructive creativity of monads each of which is “truly singular” and has its own entelechy. Thus a product or “monad,” according to Schelling, is composed out of an “infinite multiplicity of unified tendencies” which he calls “Aktionen.”¹⁴ It is “only an *apparent* product” constituted by some *actant* achieving “preponderance” in it, so as to create an “*apparently simple*” substance when “no substance is simple” (19, 31): all substances, as Deleuze and Guattari argue in deriving the structure of the

12. Schelling is ambivalent about chemistry as meta-discourse, wanting to discern a “universal chemical influence,” yet complaining that it treats the organism as “merely *product*,” “giving us effects instead of causes.” Discontent with vitalism too, he proposes a third “truly physiological” system, that involves pushing Brown’s “excitability” in a more philosophical direction (109–11).

13. Krell, *Contagion: Sexuality, Disease and Death in German Idealism and Romanticism* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1998) 73–114.

14. Schelling uses the Leibnizian term “monad” at several points (US 115, FO 21, 132). *Aktion* in FO is translated by Keith Peterson as “actant” to reflect the Latinate sound of the word in German and to suggest a “dynamic atom” that functions as a “simple monad” or “natural productivity” (FO 244n).

“concept” from the atomist-Leibnizian tradition, are irreducibly non-simple.¹⁵ The goal of absolute knowledge, then, is to “decompose” these products by releasing their “bound actants” (FO 30–31). “Natural science,” for example, might be such a “product” or concept, which can be “articulated into [further] products” (5). For on closer inspection it includes not just the chemistry that provides the early Schelling with models for thinking life as an endless circulation of “potences,” but also a biology that introduces sickness into the organism, and later a geology that in *Ages* makes nature the site of a traumatic past.

Schelling takes up this infinite deconstructibility of products by theorizing matter as decomposable and hence also composable into further combinations: a notion developed by Leibniz in the *Monadology* and extended into the sphere of natural science by Charles Bonnet. The “indecomposable” is a curious point of resistance in *The First Outline*, pointing to a role for inhibition in knowledge that goes well beyond Schelling’s early use of the term as a defining limit not unlike Blake’s description of reason as the “outward bound” of energy. Suffice it to say that *Hemmung* in the early work is thought within a rhetoric of the prolific that is an inversion of Fichte’s dialectic of the I and the not-I: for Fichte it is the I which meets resistance in the Not-I, but for Schelling it is the infinitely expanding force of the Not-I (or absolute fluidity) that is curbed by the force of limitation in the “I” as the drive to figure. As part of the returning of figure to fluidity, Schelling, in addition to obviously decomposable substances like soil (31), posits two further materials: “impossible” and “indecomposable,” both of which he sees as “absolutely composable” (6; 7.6). Thus nature makes the “impossible formative through decomposition,” breaking down apparent fixities to render them composable again (32). And on the other hand she has to produce apparently indecomposable substances because otherwise we would have total fluidity: “the cancellation of all individuality” and of “every product” (6). So she makes “the indecomposable [too] formative through composition” (32). In effect Schelling strategically permits but then deconstructs the notion of an undecomposable substance: first of all by defining the indecomposable in terms of its potentiality rather than resistance, as that which, because it cannot be broken down further, “is only composable”; and then, by arguing that “no composition of indecomposable materials can take place” unless “bound actants in them become free” (31), which is to say that the undecomposable is in fact decomposable into a multiplicity of actants.

Building on this decomposition of unities into further potentialities or

15. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What is Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia UP, 1994) 15–21.

complicating particulars, Schelling introduces a theory of “spheres” that Hegel extends into a theory of knowledge. Hegel constructs his philosophical encyclopedia through a doubling of “levels” and “spheres,” in which each area of knowledge is a level in an ascending totality but also a sphere in its own right. Mechanics and organics are levels in the philosophy of nature, which is a level leading to the sciences of spirit. But even as nature is thus redescribed as spirit, spirit is exposed to its nature. For organics is also subdivided into geology, botany and physiology, which contains the sphere of pathology as the traumatic kernel of nature. Similarly for Schelling, as the “individual actant” freely “develops according to its nature,” it constitutes its own “sphere” by expelling all “others from its sphere” and taking over their spheres. But this hegemony is undone by the fact that “each sphere will again itself be infinite,” containing particulars at odds with its self-simplification which result in “other spheres” being formed “within every sphere” (FO 34, 44). Such might be the process of “philosophy” itself in German Idealism, by which it turns into “theory.” Philosophy wants to become the “science of all sciences” (US 8), rendering all other areas, in Husserl’s terms, “regional” sciences grounded in a single “eidetic” science.¹⁶ Thus as “foreign actants” like the life sciences “reach into its sphere,” it “prehend[s] the sphere of every other,” and constitutes the new sphere of *Naturphilosophie*, which makes nature simply a region of spirit. And yet, within this sphere “other spheres” emerge that once again “de-range” philosophy’s immunity from its margins.

2. *The Ages of the World: Spirit, Psychoanalysis, History*

In *Ages* (1815) “the history of nature” (65) is one such sphere that decomposes history and nature, unbinding both from the teleology through which Idealism had configured them as regions of spirit. In the *System of Transcendental Idealism* Schelling had already made history the culmination of his project. History was the “first step out of the realm of instinct” in which man is confined “to an eternal circuit of actions . . . like Ixion upon his wheel.” Echoing Kant at various points, the role Schelling gives nature in this history is one of aesthetic and teleological ordering. Indeed comparing history to a work of art, he writes of a single “spirit who speaks in everyone” so as to compose it as “a progressive . . . revelation of the absolute.” As in *Ages*, there are to be three periods: the “tragic period” where there is nothing but “blind life,” the emergence of “lawful” nature in Rome, and the rule of “providence” when “God” will finally “exist.”¹⁷

16. See Jean-François Lyotard, *Phenomenology*, trans. Brian Beakley (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991) 40–42.

17. Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, trans. Peter Heath (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1978) 199–202, 210–11, 208.

Schelling will return to the fabulous scene of this white mythology in the Introduction and first paragraph of *Ages*: an epic overview in lyric form of past, present and future, which he kept unaltered through the unworking of enlightenment that occurred from the 1811 to the 1815 texts. But focusing on history in W3, as he had not done in previous versions, he foregrounds the mysteriousness of a process that extends before, beyond and within us (3–5, 50). He begins to think history unconditionally, whereas absolute knowledge of history had previously meant its development towards a “world order based on law” and its subsumption into “the science of right” (US 103,106–7, 79). For the very title *Weltalter* reconstitutes history (and also ontology) around geology, following an involution wherein a “particular nature,” specializing “itself within itself, and hence away from the whole,” commences with a “rotation about its own axis” (W3: 92) that decenters the entire system of knowledges around a new sphere. In the period after the French Revolution, as Martin Rudwick argues, the specialization of the earth sciences led to the formation of geohistory and a theory of “deep history.”¹⁸ Geohistory also had a wider impact, through its trans-ferential relationship with archeology and antiquarian history, which together formed the condition of possibility for psychoanalysis and “theory,” as the study of fossils as “documents of a history of nature”¹⁹ reconfigured practices of reading and understanding. But in Schelling’s time the immediate impact was on philosophy and history. For if as Foucault says, the Enlightenment opposed “historical knowledge of the visible to philosophical knowledge of the invisible,”²⁰ the disclosure of an invisible dimension in nature’s history now made history more philosophical. In short, history’s self-constitution through other disciplines opened it to a countertransference wherein the earth’s sedimented strata and the body’s pathological interior summoned man to a knowledge of history’s unconscious.

Schelling first refers to a history of nature in 1799, distinguishing it from what Kant calls natural history as the “description of nature” (FO 44). For Foucault “the history of nature” is the “counterscience” that unworks the positivism of natural history. The classical discipline of natural history had no sense of time; rather it spatialized nature so as to make the world totally legible within discourse, excluding what could not be brought into “a taxonomic area of visibility” (133–35, 137). By contrast in the history of nature, which emerges around geology and biology (as opposed to botany),

18. Rudwick, *Bursting the Limits of Time: The Reconstruction of Geohistory in the Age of Revolution* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2006) 3–6.

19. Paolo Rossi, *The Dark Abyss of Time: The History of the Earth & The History of Nations from Hooke to Vico*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1984) 36.

20. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage, 1970) 38. Hereafter OT.

time becomes “a principle of development for living beings in their internal organization” (150): in biology because the animal, unlike the plant, exists on “the frontiers of life and death” (277); and in geology because the notion of receding geotemporal strata introduces a historicity into nature that pushes it towards the limits of knowability. Arguably *Ages* invents this history of nature which will inform Benjamin’s and Adorno’s rethinking of “natural history” as “the self-cognition of the spirit as nature in disunion with itself.”²¹ But in 1799 when Schelling sees the history of nature as giving a “higher meaning” to natural history he still has in mind a scale of disciplines best articulated by Green. Beginning with physiography (Green’s name for natural history), this scale proceeds to physiology or the study of the powers behind nature (or *Naturphilosophie*), and finally to physiogony as the imbuing of nature with historical purpose (102–3). The history of nature in *The First Outline* is thus the process whereby nature “brings forth the whole multiplicity of its products through continuous deviations from [an] ideal” that it gradually approximates, in the form of an evolving world-organism “inhibited at various stages” (FO 53, 149). The idea derives from J-B Robinet’s post-Spinozist *de la Nature* (1761–65), which sees nature as working out an original “prototype” through time. It continues to underpin Schelling’s sense of history in W2, as a process of “constantly re-embod[y]” “archetypes” that are visions of “the innermost thoughts of God” and “visions of future things” (154–57, 161).

What makes history in W3 different is its traumatic turn from anthropogenesis to psychoanalysis. For W1 and W2 are highly idealistic. In 1811 Schelling locates the past in a “time before the world” which, like Eternity in Blake’s *Urizen*, is pure “limpidity,” thus promising a similar “indifference” “after the world” (11, 29, 37). He imagines three periods (and periods of philosophy) which result in the “completed time” that is the future. These periods are part of an enlightenment guaranteed by the Trinity: a myth that sublates the recognition of “God” as a “life, subject to suffering and becoming”²² within ontotheology as anthropology (W1: 67–68), and that confines the trauma of the “rotary movement” to a paganism (38–39) that is decisively past. This is to say that W1, though it too contains only the “past,” is the complete work that Schelling later unworked, because each period contains “the whole of time” (82). Less theological but no less visionary is W2, which omits the rotary motion entirely, so that if there is an “unconscious” that unfolds in history (Schelling uses the word as early as

21. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1987) 39.

22. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Nature of Human Freedom and Related Matters*, in *Philosophy of German Idealism*, ed. Ernst Behler (New York: Continuum, 1987) 274; hereafter F.

the *System*), it is not a psychoanalytic unconscious, but simply an existence before existents whose troubling potential (disclosed by Levinas) is veiled within spirit. Given this being that does not have to know what it knows, history develops unproblematically through nature as a “ladder of formations,” in which the “creative spirit” sees the “spirits of things” and “make[s] them corporeal” so as to “unfold a complete image of the future world” (154).

By contrast, at the heart of W₃ is the revolutionary turbulence of a “rotary movement that never comes to a standstill,” and which Schelling compares to an “unremitting wheel” and the “self-lacerating madness” of Dionysiac music (20, 103). The two wills comprising this madness, one “negating” and the other “freely effluent,” were already present in W₂ (144). But in contrast to W₂, which schematizes them as a dialectic of distinct wills, or W₁, which sees the negating force as a usurper (23), in 1815 the two wills constitute an “annular drive . . . in which there is no differentiation”: neither a “higher” nor a “lower” (20), as the two exchange places, each becoming the outside or inside of the other, in a relation of folding rather than contraries leading to progression. As there is no distinction between lower and higher, so too there is none between nature and history as a “higher potency” of nature (US 103). Consequently there is no longer a “true beginning” that does not “always begin again” but becomes the “ground of a steady progression,” nor is there a “veritable end” (20). Rather in Schelling’s deconstruction of Hegelian logic as the condition of possibility for “history,” the third, the synthesis he had continued to project in 1813 (144), is itself a moment in the cycle. For to escape this cycle the “unity” would have to be “outside the antithesis,” which is impossible because it would then have to “exclude” antithesis, which would make it the opposite of and thus within the antithesis (W₃: 36–37).

Several other things distinguish the 1815 text, including the transference of the sections on rotary motion and Dionysian madness closer to the beginning and end, so that the negating potency contains rather than being contained in the text. Not that idealism, as the “soul of philosophy” (F 236), is absent from this version. But the text is turned back on itself, as what was concealed in the interior of Being is brought out, while this interior that folded the world into itself is now only on its horizon. Within this derangement of the original structure is a rethinking of *Hemmung* as inhibition rather than simple limitation, which is to say that the negative that resists any positing, the “darkening that resists the light” or “obliquity that resists the straight,” is now constitutive of being.²³ And there is the recast-

23. Note the very different distinction in 1811: “Expansion is spiritualization, contraction is incarnation” (36).

ing of the wills as compulsive rather than voluntaristic, forcing us to confront “the Real of the drives,” where the 1813 text was more purely about “freedom.”²⁴ For while Schelling still uses *Kraft* or *Potenz* to describe these forces, they are now structured as *drive* because of the way they are interlocked in, and can only be configured within, an *Umtrieb* (annular drive) whose rotary motion defines the very notion of drive as a positing caught and turned back upon itself, an “auto-castration” (103), or freedom that (never quite) emerges from the heart of necessity. The obsessiveness of this entwinement is what makes the two wills drives as well as “powers,” which in W1 produce history seamlessly, while the drives produce it more unreadably by darkening the enlightenment whereby will becomes representation.

Thus the text is punctured by words like “madness,” “self-laceration,” and “revulsion”: Schelling’s term for the involution by which nature, as in the case of planets rotating on their own axis, produces herself out of herself, yet not by any “peaceful eiseplasy of forces” (91–92). Nevertheless, if at the core of nature as the dark heart of history is something Žižek calls psychosis (31), the text is the *analysis* of this “madness,” framed as a process in which there is a questioning and an “answering being, an unknowing being that seeks knowledge and an unknowing being that does not know its knowledge” (W3: xxxvi). This phrase which describes a visionary hermeneutic in W1 and W2, now opens into an analysis interminable, given that the “guidance” connecting the “higher” and “lower” principles can never be final because of the constant reversion of these positions into each other. Interestingly it is only in 1815 that Schelling introduces this word “guidance” into a discussion of mesmeric sleep in W2 that unfolds independently of any agency or affect, in the pure unconsciousness of “spirit” (158–60). In contrast to this effortlessness of “freedom” as the will producing itself “not *out of*” but “*in eternity*” (159, 137), Schelling speaks in W3 of a first stage where “the crisis is posited” from which “the material of human nature is liberated.” “Crisis” because in this *transference* of the lower into the higher Schelling admits to a “potency [and] potentiality” of the lower that has been “excessively weakened and oppressed by the higher principle” (69–70). If the higher is oppressive, then, the higher must itself be part, even a cause, of the crisis. Indeed in returning not thrice but twelve times to the first book of *Ages*, in revolving about the “axis” of his own thought in a “revulsion” that seeks absolute (self)-knowledge (92), Schelling puts the guidance he himself had offered in previous versions under erasure.

But if this crisis stalls history, it is also psychoanalysis that produces his-

24. Žižek 27–32, 38. Žižek, however, does not relate the drives specifically to W3.

tory, though not as the “actual history” Schelling desires: a “series of free actions through which God . . . reveal[s] itself” (49). For in W1 and W2 there was no history because there was no subject, no explanation of hypostasis and beginning. The problem of history in both texts is that of a will that “produces itself out of itself,” and is “unconditioned,” “pure freedom.” But this will that “knows no differentiation” (and is the stilling of what Schopenhauer calls will) is without “effectivity” (W1: 15; W2: 137). To explain the transition from eternity to time Schelling must construct the will as subject: the “subject” is the means by which a being “completely immersed in itself” can “step forth from . . . potentiality into activity” (W2: 123–24). Yet it is unclear how a *subject* can be engendered “at the heart of the objective” (W1: 35), if the will is a non-will. Schelling therefore sees this subject as produced “unconsciously,” through a peaceful eisemplasy of the two wills, in which the second, “actively opposed to eternity,” also engenders itself without “know[ing] what it does” (W1: 18; W2: 136–37). But immaculate as this conception is, such a will cannot be a subject. In 1815 it is the drives that mediate between the primal narcissism of Being and the differentiated subject, thereby also producing an unconscious closer to that of psychoanalysis. The drives are the way an indifferent Being that would otherwise be “eternally in itself” (W1: 16) produces itself as subject, but only because this non-difference never existed, since the “annular drive” is now “among the oldest potencies” rather than coming later as a “supplement” (W3: 92). For “the will that wills nothing” is now not the beginning, but the “Other” that is “outside and above all potency,” beyond “obsession and nature” (23–24), which is to say in the future. This also means that though the text’s psychic “action” appears to be before the beginning, in a pre-history that the will yearns to forget, because there never was a prior time, it is already *in* history as the impossibility of any dialectical enlightenment.

The drives produce the self as a “rotary whole” in which the primordial negating force is also “elevating and creating” because the “selfhood,” contracting away from universal Being, “eccentrically seeks . . . its own foundational point” (92). But the text is not about the production of a psychotic subject but about understanding the drives. This self-consciousness is a *historical* responsibility, for those who would grasp “the history of the cosmos” must confront “what is concealed in themselves . . . the abysses of the past that are still in one just as much as the present” (3–4). To return to the problem of categorizing the *Ages*, should we, then, see it as inventing psychoanalysis, especially since it sets in place a matrix of concepts constitutive for the discipline: analysis itself, madness, archetype, drive, inhibition, trauma, crisis? Yet these “figure[s]” (92) are not in the service of analyzing the subject *per se*. Rather, the self-understanding of being as psyche aims to produce a *history* very different from that of a transcendental idealism in

which history unfolds as “Spirit” through a form of mesmerism. To be sure, the 1815 text has psychoanalysis as its very mode of being, insofar as it articulates itself within a movement of (re)turning back on itself (38). But because this psychoanalysis forms itself in the margins of something else, it remains a set of metaphors for understanding history or ontology: what Foucault calls a “counterscience” that “flow[s] in the opposite direction” to science so as to “clear the ground of its positivity” and “question it on the archeological level” (365, 379).

If the *Ages* is not “about” psychoanalysis as a positivity, is it about history? But the question then is *what* history? Perhaps spirit’s difficulty in emerging from the darkness of matter makes *Ages* a forerunner of negative dialectics, whether as a “natural history” (in Adorno and Benjamin’s sense) that exposes spirit to the suffering of history; or as a utopianism that discerns in the “dark ground” of history “something not yet made good [that] pushes its essence forward.”²⁵ Schelling calls this something “soul.” Soul is the ideal principle that is not spirit and dwells in matter, and that can “come out” only if it is “enveloped and retained by the negating force as by a receptacle” (W3: 69, 57–58). Or perhaps the history shadowed in this text through the development of freedom is a post-anthropological history that Schelling draws out of the physiogony of Robinet and Bonnet.²⁶ Or perhaps, following Žižek, one could generate a psychoanalytic politics from the *Ages* that sees the creative “potency” in evil without imagining that there can ever be a history without psychosis. But such readings posit a theory of history at the cost of not seeing history itself as also a counterscience. That is to say the shrouding of all things in a past that marks their finitude makes history too, as historicity, a space that maintains with the sciences a “relation that is strange, undefined, . . . and more fundamental than any relation of adjacency” (OT 367). Or as Schelling says, the unconditioned can reveal itself only through “negations. No *positive* external intuition of [it] is possible” (FO 19). Rather, unconditional knowledge in *Ages* consists in a *retreat* from positive knowledge through the turning of all sciences into countersciences, as history is a contraction away from the plenitude of nature, and psychoanalysis a withdrawal from any positing of history.

3. Philosophy, Theory

What makes *Ages* (1815) “Theory” while *The System* is “philosophy”? The early Schelling wants to rethink all disciplines through philosophy, as part of an attempt to move philosophy beyond its ironically marginal yet con-

25. Jürgen Habermas, *Philosophical-Political Profiles*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985) 63–64, 71.

26. See my “Spirit’s Psychoanalysis: Natural History, The History of Nature, and Romantic Historiography,” *European Romantic Review* 14.2 (2003): 187–96.

tained position as a fourth, lower faculty in Kant's *Conflict of the Faculties*. "As for philosophy," he writes, "there is no such faculty, nor can there be, for that which is all things cannot . . . be anything in particular" (US 78). The goal of introducing "Idealism . . . into all the sciences"²⁷ encompasses *The Philosophy of Art*, several forays into the philosophy of nature, and *The System*, which concludes by extending philosophy to history. Schelling's rationale for this project as part of the (re)organization of knowledge that both he and Hegel were attempting is provided in *On University Studies* where, reflecting on the "method" (as distinct from system) of academic study, he surveys a number of disciplines from chemistry and physics to law and history. Schelling suggests that all knowledge emanates from "primordial knowledge, which in the phenomenal world exists only in separate branches, no longer as one single great tree of knowledge" (9). Resisting the "widespread specialization" prevalent in universities (21), he wants to pursue the interconnectedness of knowledge, and the form of thinking that makes this possible is philosophy, "the science of all sciences" (8).

In pursuing this "vision of knowledge as an organic whole" (8), Schelling relocates transcendental idealism in a tradition of "encyclopedics" to which Friedrich Schlegel pointed when he described Idealism as a better basis for the encyclopedia²⁸ than the positivist and pragmatic conceptions of knowledge in "ordinary encyclopedias." The latter, in Hegel's words, are "assemblage[s] of science, taken up in an empirical and contingent manner," including topics called "sciences," which are "only collections of bits of information" ordered "extrinsically." Leaving aside Hegel's condescension towards these "pseudosciences" that "exist for themselves outside of philosophy" (EPS 53), the two encyclopedias, as I argue elsewhere, inaugurate different modes of knowing that continue today. The *Encyclopédie* and *Encyclopedia Britannica*, in responding to print culture, institute various forms of modernity as a privileging of the up-to-date. These range from the deployment of "science" as a model for knowing in the social and "human" sciences, to what is now called Cultural Studies as the curricular space for what Gianni Vattimo terms a "society of generalized communication" not unlike the Enlightenment public sphere. On the other hand is the Idealist and Romantic interweaving of fields within a general fluidity committed to "unconditional" knowledge. In the longer term this mode of knowing is part of the genealogy of "Theory," which Derrida describes in its contemporary form as "an original articulation of literary theory, philosophy, linguistics, psychoanalysis, and so forth" (UWC 208).²⁹

27. Schelling, *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, trans. Errol E. Harris and Peter Heath (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988) 272n.

28. Ernst Behler, *German Romantic Literary Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP) 284.

29. Gianni Vattimo, *The Transparent Society*, trans. David Webb (Baltimore: Johns

While Schelling never gathered his work into a multicomponent structure as Hegel did, he did suggest that his “outline” in *On University Studies* “might take the place of a general encyclopedia of the sciences” (US 41). Schelling, moreover, places himself at the site of the encyclopedia where the (inter)disciplinarity of knowledge is negotiated, in evoking two figures commonly used by encyclopedias: the *arbor scientiae* and the body (US 9, 42, 123). For Derrida, contrary to Schlegel’s and Novalis’ notion of encyclopedics, the encyclopedia is always a totalizing structure, which is why he does not associate Schelling with the encyclopedia. At the same time he does make *On University Studies*, which frees philosophy from the “conditions” imposed on it by Kant, a key text in the development of a “philosophy” which for Derrida, insofar as it is engaged with the margins of philosophy, is synonymous with theory.

But philosophy is not Theory. Rather it is because he makes philosophy “the central organ”³⁰ in a body without organs that Schelling can still think history in the *System* as the anthropogenesis of Spirit. For the body as a trope for knowledge is a specific body: not Deleuze’s body without organs, but the organism as an “organization of organs.”³¹ In *On University Studies* Schelling distinguishes two sciences of the body, anatomy and physiology, concerned with the “external” and “internal . . . aspects of the organism.” Schelling is not interested in the anatomical body as an organization of parts, which subtends Kant’s notion of “architectonic” or Chambers’ statement that his *Cyclopaedia* consists of “distinct *Parts of Knowledge*” that constitute “a *Body* thereof.”³² His interest is in comparative anatomy which, at the level of the world-process, establishes the “unity and inner affinity of all organisms,” that “originate in one archetype whose objective aspect” changes but whose subjective aspect is unchangeable” (141–42). Still, if comparative anatomy replaces formal with organic unity, it is no less a paradigm that assimilates parts into a whole. Like Chambers’ anatomical body, then, the notion of a world-soul or organism whose parts are linked by

Hopkins UP, 1992) 12–13; Tilottama Rajan, “In the Wake of Cultural Studies: Globalization, Theory, and the University,” *Diacritics* 31.3 (2001): 67–88.

30. Schelling does make mathematics as well as philosophy a “central organ,” but concludes that the former “is absolute knowledge only in the formal sense” (48). Importantly, alluding to Kant, he also couples philosophy with mathematics as a “reinen Vernunftwissenschaft” (8.482), which is to say that contrary to Derrida’s reading (or excerpting) of this text, philosophy is still a restricted rather than general economy, an eidetic science or meta-discipline.

31. Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, trans. Daniel Smith (New York: Continuum, 2002) 44. Hereafter FB.

32. Quoted in Richard Yeo, *Encyclopaedic Visions: Scientific Dictionaries and Enlightenment Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000) 28.

emanation or metamorphosis subtends Schelling's organization of the disciplines within a total body of knowledge. In Goethe's theory of metamorphosis, the parts of the plant are developments of a single matrix, such that differences are reabsorbed into the same. In the model of emanation "every individual thing exists in the universal soul and when separated from the One, strives to return to it" (131).

Physiology seems a more problematic paradigm for the body of knowledge than anatomy. But at this point Schelling sees them as "correlative disciplines" (141). To be sure, there are sporadic sub-versions of physiology in *On University Studies*, for instance a strange segment about diseases as "ideal organisms" that are part of "metamorphosis" (US 140). Nevertheless the body of physiology is still "an organization of organs," which is to say a form of aesthetic ideology. "Those sciences which reflect primordial knowledge most directly," Schelling writes, are "the sensorium of the organic body of knowledge. We must start from the central organs and trace the life that flows from them through the various channels to the outermost parts" (42). Though the figure used is again "fluidity," the more radical fluidity explored in *The First Outline* is recontained here through an insensible projection of anatomical structure onto physiological process.³³ This projection, mediated by the more organicist version of structure in comparative anatomy, results in a typically Romantic distinction but coordination of *natura naturata* and *natura naturans*, wherein the "external" body of actual knowledge emanates from the "internal organism of primordial knowledge" (76), anatomy from physiology.

The figure of the body, in short, is correlative with the hermeneutic circle, in which the whole can only be known through its parts, but the parts (of knowledge) can be known only in relation to the whole. At an archeological level, the hermeneutic circle is homologous with a series of Romantic notions that synchronize the empirical and detailed understanding of parts with a more intuitive and immediate grasping of the whole, as if there is no *aporia* between them. These notions include Schleiermacher's own procedure of "grammatical" vs. "psychological" reading, which is homologous with Schelling's distinction between anatomy and physiology in relating the external and internal. They also include distinctions between *natura naturata* and *natura naturans*, structure and process, the ideal and the real. What results is a symmetrical reversibility of the empirical and transcendental, the temporal and eternal (14), and the real and ideal "aspects of knowledge, the one in which actuality precedes potentiality, and the other

33. Hegel puts it explicitly, when he says that "structure, as alive, is essentially process," which occurs as the organism, through digestion and assimilation, "produces its own self" as a "totality of articulated members" (PN 377).

in which potentiality precedes actuality" (44). In this logic the philosophy of nature as "the real aspect of philosophy as a whole" (122) can in no way threaten the ideality of philosophy.

So it is not surprising that Schelling dismisses "theory" which, even if it does not quite have its current meaning, he defines (in anticipation of Foucault's coupling of the empirical and the transcendental—OT 318–22) as a "mixture of the particular and the universal" incompatible with "absolute science" (120). But later, in "The Nature of Philosophy as Science" (1821), Schelling thinks differently about the body of knowledge. Using the body as a trope for system, he argues that it contains several subsystems—nervous, digestive, etc.—and that knowledge is "asystasy," "inner conflict," or asystematicity. In contrast to his earlier alignment of philosophy and mathematics as sciences of pure reason, Schelling now criticizes Kant's preference for mathematics over the untidiness of philosophy: "It is as though one preferred a stereometrically regular crystal" because "the former has no possibility of falling ill, while the latter hosts germs [*Keime*] of every possible illness."³⁴ Earlier Schelling had discussed the part's dis-ease with the whole in terms of freedom: "The individual member, such as the eye, is possible only in the whole of an organism" but "has a life for itself," a "freedom, the proof of which is disease" (F 228). The passage radicalizes the belief in the "particular [as] absolute in itself" that was always part of absolute knowledge (US 25). The body as an image for unconditional knowledge is no longer the body as totality, but is more like Deleuze's body without organs, which "does not lack organs," but "simply lacks the organism," in Deleuze's sense of an "organization . . . defined by determinate organs" (47). This decentering of the body of knowledge becomes Schelling's characteristic mode of thought in the *Freedom* essay and *Ages*. Here philosophy is no longer the central organ, as knowledge occurs through an "indeterminate organ," or a "polyvalent organ," or through "temporary and transitory organs" (FB 47–48) like medicine and geology that become intermittently central, in the process altering central organs such as history and philosophy.³⁵

But this more radical physiology of knowledge was already potentially present in *The First Outline*, which is itself a body without organs, an unbound text consisting of several systems focalized through different disciplines: physics, chemistry, biology, physiology, anthropology, history.

34. Schelling, "On the Nature of Philosophy as Science," in *German Idealist Philosophy*, ed. Rüdiger Bubner (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1997) 212; hereafter NPS.

35. Schelling strikingly anticipates Deleuze when he suggests that the body does not have organs but produces them in response to sensations: "Sensibility is present before its organ has formed itself; brain and nerves, instead of being causes of sensibility, are . . . already its product" (FO 113).

None of these are fully worked out, and all contain undeveloped tendencies. The first system is a physico-chemistry that potentiates the vital elements in inorganic matter by adding *chemistry* to physics: a project Schelling also pursues in focusing on electricity and magnetism so as to make “conceivable the *productive power* in matter” that “mechanics” fails to access (FO 76). At the same time any idealization of these forces is complicated by adding *physics* to chemistry: by an atomism or “corpuscular philosophy” that deconstructs such simple totalizations of a “dynamical” vitalism (76) as the world-soul or the universal fluid. Interestingly, Schelling takes up only heuristically the second system of “vital force” that he himself sometimes endorses, to point to the fact that “if life is a chemical process” there must be something generating it, that we know only as an absent cause, which we “fantas[ize]” as vital force (110–11). Thirdly, there is the system of “excitability,” a term Schelling borrows from Brown’s *Elements of Medicine*, but complicates by decomposing it into Haller’s terms sensibility and irritability, along with Blumenbach’s notion of (re)productive force [*Bildungstrieb*]. The Brownian system is not the third system that offers a synthesis (111), providing rather a set of metaphors. But Schelling’s unconditional reading of Brown, through a decomposing of the bound actants in his positivism, is not that system either. “Third possible system” in the *Table of Contents* refers to yet another set of systems, but intimates the status of all these systems. Finally there is the system of the “graduated series of stages in nature,” to which Schelling returns, in his account of inhibition and then excitability, in order to see a teleology at work in what may be a more aleatory process. Despite the text’s title, none of these systems is more than speculative. For as Schelling later says, no system can achieve predominance except for a time, since the very endeavour of “contemplating human knowledge within a system . . . presupposes . . . that originally and of itself it does not exist in a system, that it is an *asystaton* . . . something that is in inner conflict” (NPS 210–11).

The system of excitability occupies a curious place in this first outline of a system of theory as asystasy. It is an asystaton itself, compounded from Brown, Haller and Blumenbach. And it is a merely “provisional organ” (FB 47) for expressing the nature of thought, generated by the excitability of the “outline” itself as a “*being-reproduced* (through itself),” or a process of “construct[ing] *itself*,” but “as object,” which is to say “under duress from an outer world” on the margins of philosophy—the world of chemistry, physics, physiology (FO 106–7). Indeed an outline is what Deleuze calls “diagram” or “sketch”: the “preparatory work” from which the “painting appears as an afterward” that cleans up the work and makes it into a product (FB 99–102). Significantly excitability, as “the essence of the organism” by which “organic activity” is “hindered from exhausting itself in its prod-

uct" (FO 110), now takes the place of the earlier "absolute activity" in this process of the text's "continual self-reproduction" and rewriting of itself, as it is "excited" by and against itself (14–19, 108). While "absolute activity" posits a vital force in the organism, excitability suggests something more unpredictable: an unfixable dis-ease in thought, something not securely within the organism, still less within "Nature" as meta-organism.³⁶

Struggling to deal with the untidiness of the concept, Schelling decomposes it into three further "systems" which Hegel takes up in his discussion of disease: sensibility, irritability, and force of (re)production. Schelling schematizes these forces via the fourth system described above, which is a variant of vital force. Thus he reimagines them as a "gradation of forces" that are all "one force," resulting in "one product" within the "universal organism" (141, 149–50). But unlike Hegel, who (however anxiously) arranges them in a dialectic, Schelling cannot clearly distinguish the forces. Rather they seem to be part of a circular process in which sensibility is the most inward form of a certain restlessness that is "knowable only in its object (of irritability)"; irritability is "the armor" of the sensible" and a "middle term" connecting the organism with the world, but is "still something *inner*"; then because "the activity" must "present itself" in an "*external product*" irritability becomes "formative drive." Yet the purpose of this "activity directed outward" is to produce "activity reverting into the subject," in what becomes an "alternation of expansion and contraction" (123–25) that is closer to the rotary movement of *The Ages* than to the teleological system of productivity projected as "the graduated series of stages in nature." In this rotary movement, reproduction, rather than being a resolution, is the intermittent inscriptive force of an irritability that must then again "turn back *into itself*" so as to make the process of "formation" one of "ever-renewed heterogeneity" (31, 125).

Moreover the organism contains "individual systems of *specialized excitability*" that make "organization" an "infinite involution" of "system within system." Schelling thus "deni[es] . . . the *absolute identity* of excitability throughout the organism" (112–13, 127). Among these systems is disease, which is unique to the "organic individual." As is well known, Schelling draws on Brown to theorize disease, but with the difference: that for Brown sthenic and asthenic diseases (caused by a surplus or deficiency of excitability) are deviations from a norm, while for Schelling, disease is constitutive of the individual organism. Because it is only in the "*individual body*" as a "*determinate proportion of organic forces*" that "genuine cohesion"

36. Despite Schelling's desire for a "true physiology," the theory of excitability does not get beyond the contingencies of "chemistry," inasmuch as it is still "only the excitation [that] can be explained," only the phenomenon, "but not excitability itself" as a principle of life (FO 112).

occurs, only the individual can feel a deviation from this proportion as “intolerable” (26, 159). Only the organic individual, as a whole that is not a whole, is “capable” of disease (159); there is no disease in the universal. Disease therefore marks an involution not just within the system of excitability, but also within the very system of considering things from the perspective of a world-organism, and the constitution of disciplines according to this universality in both positivism and idealism. That disease shifts the discipline of physiology from the universal to the individual lets us ask what the consequences are of no longer thinking the “body” of knowledge in terms of the universal. To think it universally, as Schelling does in *On University Studies*, is to think it as philosophy. But to think knowledge individually, as a body without organs in which an organ may, even if only temporarily, go its own way, is what Schelling does in “The Nature of Philosophy as Science” as a summing up of his own practice in his middle work. Nor can we dismiss this body without organs as “disease,” “a hovering between being and non-being,” as Schelling still yearns to do in the *Freedom* essay (242, 244). Disease is “completely relative,” in that the “degree of irritability” that produces it in one organism might constitute health in another (FO 159). This is to say that disease, as Georges Canguilhem says, may be a “positive, innovative experience in the living being”—which is not to normalize disease, but to “idealize,” or in Novalis’ words, “raise to a higher power,” the cognitive potential of what is other.³⁷ For “disease is only present where the organism as *object* is altered. As long as the organism as *object* does not appear to be an *other* it is not ILL” (FO 169). But becoming an Other is a “capability,” since as Hegel says only the organism “has its other within itself” and this is its superiority to the chemical body (PN 275). It is in this sense of producing something other that we can understand Schelling’s description of diseases as “ideal organisms” possessed of a certain force of production or positive, positional power.

Disease, as we have seen, is integral to the idea of history as freedom in the middle work. It is also integral to the method of these texts, albeit still as a resistant kernel that is never quite digested, but which *precisely as such* forms part of a fluidity in which history, for example, is rethought through nature. Indeed Schelling’s irritability with the progressiveness of time in conventional history is what generates the matrix of psychoanalysis in these texts, through a “force of production” by which a way of thinking provides the outline, like a photographic negative, of a thought to come. But in the *First Outline* disease “must be recovered in an appendix,” as something the text has not assimilated, but must develop monadically, in a section of its own, to give it its own freedom. From the perspective of the

37. Quoted by Krell 47. Novalis’ word “Potenzirung” can be connected with Schelling’s notion of “potencies.”

physiology that underpins the organicism of *On University Studies*, this appendix is “dead matter,” like other forms of parergonality including front matter and footnotes (which are ubiquitous in *The First Outline*). For what “cannot be incorporated into [the] active living whole,” the “inorganic excretions” of the “sexless bees” who populate “the hive of sciences,” must be “eliminated sooner or later—such is the law of all living organisms” (US 11). A “hive,” of course, is an organization “that lacks the organism” in Deleuze’s sense but contains innumerable separate cells of activity. And as Schelling concedes in passing, these cells are not just to be eliminated, as “specialization [*Trennung*]” occurs because there is “material still to be assimilated” (21; 8.462). In *The First Outline* the specialized system of disease is such a cell, “another perspective” left out by the “graded” stages of nature as “absolute organism,” because it pertains to the “individual.” It must therefore “be recovered [*nachgeholt*] in the form of an appendix” (53, 159; 7.220), and adheres within the text as an incomposable component of its argument. Yet not really incomposable in the longer term, because the process of formation “is only *infinite* to the extent that it continually turns back *into itself*,” taking up “dead materials once more into the universal process of organization,” even at the cost of strik[ing] out on another path” (31), as Schelling will do in *Ages of the World*.

This is to say that these indecomposable materials, which are precisely points of resistance to fluidity, can be used to rethink the fluidity with which we began. For Hegel health exists when all “organs are fluid in the universal.” By contrast, disease occurs when one of the organism’s “systems or organs . . . establishes itself in isolation and persists in its particular activity against the . . . whole, the fluidity and all-pervading process of which is thus obstructed” (PN 128). In this account of fluidity and inhibition, fluidity is not the absolute decomposite or unground against which fixed products are defined. Rather it is the normal process of the body that is interrupted by something indigestible that resists incorporation into the whole. If fluidity, as the system of assimilation, is the process to which these indecomposable materials should be returned, but if resistance is necessary for products to be formed, then can it not be the case that resistance or blockage is in a strange way also a product, which is to say productive? As I argue elsewhere, Hegel’s use of the middle stage of disease as a trope for negativity; his valorization of this “irritability” as an “active maintenance of self” but as the “negative” of self (PN 359, 429); and his identification of excretions (along with art) as a form of “reproduction” all verge on placing the indigestible, rather than assimilation, at the core of consciousness.³⁸

38. See my “(In)Digestible Material: Illness and Dialectic in Hegel’s *The Philosophy of Nature*,” in *Cultures of Taste/Theories of Appetite: Eating Romanticism*, ed. Timothy Morton (London: Palgrave, 2004) 217–36.

“Even in the healthiest animals,” Hegel writes, the excrement is not “homogeneous” but contains “undecomposed food,” because the organism ingests more than it can assimilate (PN 405). Yet this undecomposed matter cannot simply be eliminated, because excrement “consists mainly of digested matter, or what the organism itself has added to the ingested material” (405). Hence Hegel’s curious sense of waste as productive, because it contains what the individual has made its own alongside what it has not assimilated.

To suggest that the resistance to philosophy as a universal system of assimilation is productive, however indirectly, is to read Hegel’s and Schelling’s discussions of fluidity and assimilation aslant each other, and through the resistance, the indecomposable kernel of the Real, that produces philosophy as a form of Theory in *The Ages*. It is to use “against the edifice the instruments or stones available in the house,”³⁹ as Schelling himself does, in developing his middle work from the aporias between his earlier texts. For no less than the system of digestion and excretion that Hegel evokes as fluidity, Schelling’s absolute decomposite, when figured in *On University Studies* as the universal fluid to which separate forms of knowledge return, risks becoming another system of assimilation. Questioning his conception of nature as “one organism” in terms of freedom, Schelling asks how any “individual organism” can “hold its own against the universal organism,” which “operates absolutely by assimilation, i.e., it admits no production within its sphere that does not fit into it. . . . In order that it not *be* assimilated, it must *assimilate*, in order that it not *be* organized, it must *organize*” (FO 54). In the *First Outline* Schelling has an answer but it is derailed by the shift from the universal to the individual in the segment on disease. For in assimilation “the original form is not altered, but only the volume”: more knowledge is acquired but the paradigm remains the same, whereas illness names a process in which the very organism “as *object* is altered” (129, 169).

It is this alteration in the very conceptuality of history (or ontology) that we see in *Ages*: an alteration produced by a shift away from the economy of plenitude in the early work. Even then Schelling had been uncomfortable with assimilation, saying that the “*aim*” of excitability is “just the excitation itself” (129). But because the excitation “presents itself as a constant self-reproduction,” through “the stimulating potencies of nutrition it unavoidably passes into an annexation of mass through *assimilation*” (129). The excitability of philosophy as “self-reproduction” means that even if the mind does not eliminate what does not fit into the “living whole” of thought

39. Derrida, “The Ends of Man,” *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1982) 135.

(US 11), it includes it in the mode of addition rather than working through, so that the Appendix on disease alters the volume and not the form of a thought that remains “prolific” in Blake’s word. And this is because, as Schelling later says, “humans show a natural predilection” for the expansive, but cannot “grasp . . . that which closes itself off” (W3: 6), hindering the larger organism rather than contributing to its richness. Yet as he suggests earlier, anticipating what he calls asystasy, “the organism is a *whole* of systems,” each with its own “special activity,” “stimulated” in its own different way (FO 125–26). Could not undecomposed or incomposable material, then, form part of a countersystem of knowledge that coexists with the need to assimilate? It would seem that Hegel is reaching towards this coexistence in describing such material as the organism getting rid of its “error” and “entanglement with outside things” by excretion, while also saying that since “the animal did not need to ingest anything . . . superfluous,” what it eliminates cannot “only” be “unusable material” (PN 405). As Deborah Britzman argues, education is made of blockages and avoidances that do not just interrupt but also constitute it,⁴⁰ through a turning of the self “against its own structure” (PN 429), that produces, insofar as it produces, not a specific thing but a way of (not) thinking. Schelling will refer to this non-knowledge in *Ages* when he distinguishes a self “that seeks knowledge” from “an unknowing being that does not know its knowledge” (W3: xxxvi). As he explains the complexity of “system” in the *First Outline* (126), the two systems of assimilation and inhibition would exist in a symbiosis that we could still think in terms of fluidity as the unavoidable nervous connectivity of knowledge. But it would be a different fluidity, a “secret circulation” (W3: xxxvi), in which what cannot be digested, rather than being “take[n] up” once more into “the universal system of organization” (FO 31), affects it as a “thought from outside.”

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40. Deborah Britzman, *After-Education: Anna Freud, Melanie Klein, and Psychoanalytic Histories of Learning* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2003) 1–32.