Uncanny Belonging: Schelling, Freud and the Vertigo of Freedom

Author: Teresa Fenichel

Persistent link: http://hdl.handle.net/2345/bc-ir:104819

This work is posted on eScholarship@BC, Boston College University Libraries.

Boston College Electronic Thesis or Dissertation, 2016

Copyright is held by the author, with all rights reserved, unless otherwise noted.
Boston College
The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
Department of Philosophy

Uncanny Belonging

Schelling, Freud and the Vertigo of Freedom

a dissertation
by
Teresa Fenichel

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

October 2015
Uncanny Belonging

Schelling, Freud and the Vertigo of Freedom

Teresa Fenichel

Dissertation Director: Professor Vanessa Rumble

Abstract: The aims of my dissertation are 1) to explicate what I take to be the philosophical foundations of Freudian psychoanalysis with the aid of Schelling’s contributions to the development of the unconscious and the nature of human freedom and 2) to make use of certain fundamental discoveries of psychoanalysis in order to reinterpret Schelling’s dynamic and developmental vision of reality. My claim is that Schelling’s philosophy not only offers an important historical moment in the development of the psychoanalytic account of the unconscious, but also gives us a vision of human development—and indeed the development of Being as such—that is grounded in the unconscious and the activity of the drives. Where Freud is often viewed as a determinist, through a closer examination of the connections Schelling makes between the unconscious ground of existence and human freedom we can begin to open up the space for a more complex Freudian subjectivity. Furthermore, the advances Freud makes in terms of the structure of the unconscious, his work on the altered temporality (most notably Nachträglichkeit, or “afterwards-ness”) of trauma and repression, also serve to bring some of Schelling’s most abstract and speculative work to both a more practical and philosophically relevant level. In the work of both Schelling and Freud, the relationship between the human subject and the reality such a subject “confronts” is radically transformed. In Schelling, we find that the developmental phases of Being, of
the Absolute and of Nature are also manifested in the structure of human becoming; that is, the catastrophic divide between subjective experience and objective reality is bridged by reinterpreting both as dynamic processes. Although Freud himself often has recourse to a more static view of “objective” reality, his work also speaks to a deep and disturbing revision of such a view. Indeed, Freud’s continued questioning of the boundaries between fantasy and reality, between the internal and the external, suggest that the irreducible otherness of the unconscious extends beyond the individual.
Introduction

The Unconscious is in fact the real psychical, as unknown to us in terms of its inner nature as the reality of the outside world and as incompletely rendered to us by the data of consciousness as the outside world is rendered by the information supplied the sense organs—Freud, Interpretation of Dreams

Man must be granted an essence outside and above the world; for how could he alone, of all creatures, retrace the long path of developments from the present back into the deepest night of the past, how could he alone rise up to the beginning of things unless there were in him an essence from the beginning of times? Drawn from the source of things and akin to it, what is eternal of the soul has a co-science/con-sciousness [Mitt-Wissenschaft] of creation—Schelling, Die Weltalter, 1813

I received my first real introduction to psychoanalysis and philosophy at the New School for Social Research. I became interested in these subjects both independently and at their intersection, because I see them as offering possibilities for self-questioning—languages that could do justice to a textured reality, to an objectivity that can encompass desire, fantasy, freedom and the unconscious. Freud’s therapeutic methods and their ethical implications, namely that psychic health requires an empathetic engagement with the most radical alterity, suggested to me a way to think the kind of grounding instability that would anchor such a metaphysics of freedom.¹ With the guidance and generosity of Alan Bass, author of book-length studies of Freud, Heidegger and Deconstruction, I completed

¹ From very early on in his development of psychoanalysis, Freud insists that the “normal” is in no way qualitatively different from the “neurotic,” the “psychotic” or the “perverse.” Part of his project entails using his treatment of the pathological both to illustrate its encroachment into the normal and to show that psychic “health” can only be an interpretive recognition of unconscious desires and fears. Paraphrasing one of the theses of a late work, Civilization and its Discontents, insofar as we are civilized so too are we neurotic. And, as he writes in “The Uncanny” (1914), the work of psychoanalysis is akin to telepathic communication: “Indeed, I should not be surprised to hear that psychoanalysis, which is concerned with laying bare these hidden forces, has itself become uncanny to many people for that reason. In one case, after I succeeded—though none too rapidly—in effecting a cure in a girl who had been an invalid for many years, I myself heard this view expressed by the patient’s mother after her long recovery” (SE Vol. XVII, p. 243).
an MA thesis focusing on the psychoanalytic contributions of Hans Loewald—an analyst and former student of Heidegger’s. I found in Loewald a critique of key Freudian assertions, clinical and metapsychological, that came from a genuine, philosophical appreciation. Concerned that psychoanalysis can be naively understood as relying upon a form of “objectivity” which would be exposed as a fantasy in the therapeutic situation, Loewald argued that Freud, at times, suffered from a “neurotic” sense of reality. In other words, Freud often retreated into a fundamentally antagonistic ontology—a distorted perspective he diagnosed in his neurotic patients—rather than following through with the much more radical and nuanced alternatives that psychoanalytic treatment depends upon:

On three levels, then, the biological, the psychological and the cultural, psychoanalysis has taken for granted the neurotically distorted experience of reality. It has taken for granted the concept of a reality as it is experienced in a predominantly defensive integration of it. Stimulus, external world, and culture, all three on different levels of scientific approach, representative of what is called reality, have been understood unquestioningly as they are thought, felt, experienced within the framework of a hostile-defensive ego-reality integration. It is a concept of reality as it is most typically encountered in the obsessive character neurosis, a neurosis so common in our culture it has been called the normal neurosis (“Defense and Reality”, p. 30).

Freud could not see that the (sometimes implicit, sometimes explicit) assumption of a hostile relationship between the psyche on one side, and the pre-given world on the other, was a neurotic construction of his own making.

Like Loewald, I was dissatisfied with Freud’s strained insistence on the “scientific” status of psychoanalysis; I wanted to articulate a more radical worldview that

---

5 “Hate, as a relation to objects, is older than love” (“Drives and their Fates,” *SE* Vol. XIV, p. 137).
psychoanalysis seems to demand, but that also seems to threaten the very foundations of
the system. For my part, I considered Freud’s reading of the uncanny and telepathy as
focal points for such a questioning, and thus situated myself in the same territory that so
attracted Jacques Derrida.6 If Loewald offered insight into the therapeutic consequences
of a more philosophically robust theory, Derrida helped me work toward a philosophical
formulation of the therapeutic situation.

It was not until I began studying Schelling and German Idealism at Boston College,
however, that I became interested in the metaphysical thinking that laid the groundwork
for Freud’s therapeutic project. As Professors Bloechl, Kearney, Lawrence, Rumble and
Sallis helped bring to my attention, these post-Kantian philosophers, situated at the
interstices of science and subjectivity, were in fact the very well-spring of the intellectual
tradition from which, and within which, Freud was able to formulate his own project.7 In
a sort of shock of recognition, I recalled that in the short paper at the center of my thesis
work—“The Uncanny”—Freud had already pointed the way: it is Schelling’s definition
of the uncanny that he uses.8 And there were broader similarities: Schelling, like Freud,
has been dismissed from mainstream, academic philosophy for his false claims to
rigorous, scientific thinking; and this, in no small part, is due to the role of the
unconscious in his system. Indeed, it was partly in response to the shadow of Schelling’s

7 See in particular: John Sallis’s essay, “The Logic and Illogic of the Dream-Work,” pp. 1-16 in John Mills,
Rereading Freud: Psychoanalysis Through Philosophy, (Albany: State University of New York Press,
See also: Richard Kearney, On Stories, (London: Routledge, 2002) and Joe Lawrence, Schellings
Philosophie des ewigen Anfangs, (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1989). I have Vanessa Rumble,
Joe Lawrence, Jeff Bloechl and Richard Kearney to thank for countless wonderful conversations as well as
access to published and unpublished writings alike, including Lawrence’s essay “Philosophical Religion
and the Quest for Authenticity” in Jason M. Worth, Schelling Now: Contemporary Readings,
Hereafter, cited as SE.
once-pervasive *Naturphilosophie*—and to its consequently being shunned as mysticism—that Freud so rabidly defended psychoanalysis as a system of psychic determinism. And yet at the same time, in seeking to reinterpret the human through the reality and potency of the mythological, Freud does carry on Schelling’s understanding of myth as the privileged site of and access to a truth that exceeds the logic and order of consciousness.

It should not be a surprise that it is within a text he calls *aesthetic*—“The Uncanny”—that Freud invokes Schelling; that the uncanny convergence of fate and omnipotence, which I argue is the domain of freedom, can be most adequately addressed as feeling.

It is in the philosophical weight they give to human desire and emotion that Schelling and Freud most decidedly converge: drive [*Trieb*]—the border between the physiological

---

9 It is also worth noting that some of Freud’s most fundamental concepts—the constancy principle, for example—derive from inheritors of and contributors to the *Naturphilosophie* movement, like Gustav Fechner. This only adds to the sense that Freud is at pains to make a place for psychoanalysis as science, at times at the expense of fully admitting both the precedents and consequences of his work.

10 See Denis Schmidt’s brief discussion of Schelling’s account of the tragic coming to fruition in Freud in *On Germans and Other Greeks: Tragedy and Ethical Life*: “The ultimate outcome of this modern emphasis on the issue of subjectivity in connection with the dynamics of tragedy is most clearly expressed in Freud’s theory of psychological complexes. It is not by accident that when Freud chooses to name the complexes which forge and shape the development of the self, he names these forces after figures in ancient Greek tragic drama. Freud could not use figures from Shakespearean tragedy as models to exemplify such dynamics because those characters are already too clearly defined as psychological types and by forces too obviously directed at the specific subjectivity of the characters. Since the hiddenness of the complex belongs to its basic nature, those characters so profoundly alert to their own subjective life, cannot serve as models for such unconscious complexes. In the final analysis, Freud’s theory of complexes needs to be seen as the final consolidation of this modern shift in the presentation of tragedy. It is the ultimate destination of the specifically modern experience of tragedy. It is also the point at which the specifically ancient Greek character of the experience of tragedy is most obscured” (p. 79).

11 I only recently discovered, and have not seen it mentioned elsewhere in the literature, that the only other text in which Freud mentions Schelling (and his “followers”) is in the first chapter of *Interpretation of Dreams*: “Quite apart from all the pietistic and mystical writers—who do right to occupy the remains of the once extensive realm of the supernatural, as long as it has not been conquered by scientific explanation—we also encounter clear-sighted men averse to the fantastic who use this very inexplicability of the phenomena of dreams in their endeavors to support their religious belief in the existence and intervention of superhuman powers. The high value accorded to the dream-life by many schools of philosophy, for example, by Schelling’s* followers [*Naturphilosophie*], is a distinct echo of the undisputed divinity accorded to dreams in antiquity; and the divinatory, future-predicting power of dreams remains under discussion because the attempts at a psychological explanation are not adequate to cope with all the material gathered, however firmly the feelings of anyone devoted to the scientific mode of thought might be inclined to reject such a notion” (*SE IV*, p. 5). It is worth noting that, in this brief reference, Freud connects Schelling with both occultism and “clear-sighted” scientific explanation—thus occupying the same territory that Freud himself seeks to lay claim to in his “scientific” explanation of the dream work that follows.
and psychological—is the most basic unit of reality, structuring our psychic experience as well as the world we encounter. Although a theory of drives is implicit even in Schelling’s earliest works, it is his development of the concept in his middle and late texts that I focus on here. As with Freud, it is when the dualistic system approaches cosmological aspirations that Schelling’s drives collapse under the artifice of their rationality:

It is God’s will to universalize everything, to lift it to unity with light or to preserve it therein; but the will of the deep is to particularize everything or to make it creature-like. It wishes differentiation only so that identity may become evident to itself and to the will of the deep. Therefore it necessarily reacts against freedom as against what is above the creature, and awakens in it the desire for what is creature—just as he who is seized by dizziness on a high and precipitous summit seems to hear a mysterious voice calling to him to plunge down, or as in the ancient tale, the irresistible song of the sirens sounded out of the deep to draw the passing mariner down into the whirlpool (Philosophical Inquiries into the Essence of Human Freedom, pp. 58-59/Sämmtliche Werke Vol. VII, 381).

It is the essential liminality of the drive—where manifest opposition conceals an originary, dizzying ambivalence—that is the culmination/disintegration of both Schelling’s and Freud’s drive theories. The drive is at its core unconscious desire, whether understood most fundamentally as wish (Freud) or as will (Schelling), and as such represents the simultaneous unity and differentiation—the motivating conflict—of a (desiring) subject and the (desired) object. As Schelling notes in the Weltalter, primal desire—the will in its struggle to return to and reclaim itself—is the root of being. As a working out or progression of desire, the psychical is always already infused by the bodily, and creation as such is reconfigured as generation: “The whole is thus a spiritual-

\[12\] F.W.J. Schelling, Philosophical Inquiries into the Essence of Human Freedom. Trans. James Gutmann. LaSalle: Open Court, 1992. Hereafter this will be cited as FS (Freiheitsschrift) and I will use the pagination from Schelling’s Sämmtliche Werke Vol. VII, hereafter denoted by SW which is also given in the former.
corporeal essence, and even at this early stage, the spiritual and the corporeal find themselves to be the two sides of one and the same existence” (p. 148). Truth is not obscured by desire, but rather emerges from it: Schelling’s aesthetic claims are no mere corollary to his metaphysics of freedom, but its very foundation.\(^\text{13}\)

The connection between desire and truth in Schelling, the way they disrupt and define each other, is perhaps most evident in the call springing forth from his *Weltalter*:

> Perhaps he will yet come, who will sing the great heroic poem, encompassing in spirit (as is reputed of the seers from times gone by) what was, what is, and what will be. But this time is not yet at hand. As its harbingers, we do not wish to pluck its fruit before it is ripe, nor do we wish to misjudge our own. This is still a time of struggle (*Ages of the World* 1813, pp. 119-120).\(^\text{14}\)

The aim of philosophy, Schelling suggests, is not to overcome the illusions of art—it is not an antidote to the fantasies and deceptions endemic to the human. Rather, philosophy must be devoted to maintaining a connection—one we are always, it seems, in danger of losing—to the desiring, ecstatic pulse of existence. Schelling’s interest in the philosophical “seer,” the “great heroic poem” he will produce, does not imply that the “time of struggle” should one day cease; the unity of time is not some universal, redemptive event, as we will see, but an ever-present possibility—lost and gained—that is the life of a free subject. Schelling’s task in the *Weltalter*, as in the *Freiheitsschrift*, is to develop a form of philosophy that can serve as an expression of and impetus to this horrific (abyssal), beautiful (infinite) possibility. The mutual dependence of love and evil, which he derives from the ultimate inseparability of ontological drives towards otherness


and egoity, suggests the extent to which the creations and permutations of human desire inform even Schelling’s most abstract thinking.

Within psychoanalysis, it might seem that the drives serve to rectify the superficial irrationality of symptoms and dreams; that their underlying logic is the key to “decoding” the truth. I would argue, however, that this is a dangerously facile reading; the drives, as Freud repeatedly points out, are unknowable in themselves, a useful linguistic fiction that can help us interpret and recalibrate the meaning of our experience. As I intend to show, Freud’s dependence on a paradigm of conflict—torn between the wish and our fear of its accomplishment—is undercut by his insistence on an essentially ambivalent and eternal unconscious. For Freud, and this supports my point, there are almost as many iterations of drive theory as there are texts—from the dualism of sexual and self-preservation drives in Studies on Hysteria, to the antagonism of Eros and Thanatos in Beyond the Pleasure Principle. As with Schelling, it is this latter drive theory that I focus on, where the duality of the drives (and the stable identities such duality depends upon) becomes questionable. If Freud is commonly understood as a determinist, such a reading is surely belied by a system predicated on the strange interdependence and in-between status of unconscious drives. That is, in the confused convergence/antagonism of Eros and Thanatos that disrupts the very narrative of Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Freud recalls the essential distinction between drives and mechanical forces. In contrast to instinct [Instinkt], drives are the fundamental components of psychical reality, of the inchoate beginnings from which the oppositions between the body and the mind can emerge. In one among many revealing admissions concerning the provisional status of drives in Beyond the Pleasure Principle, an intrusion of self-doubt that speaks not only to the

subject at hand but to the philosophical underpinnings of psychoanalysis more generally,

Freud writes:

In judging our speculation about the life and death drives, we would not be much disturbed by the fact that so many strange and unclear processes occur in them, e.g., one drive may be driven out by others, or may turn from the ego to the object, and so on. This is merely a result of the fact that we are obliged to work with scientific terminology, i.e., with our own figurative language, that of psychology (or more correctly: depth psychology). Otherwise, we would be completely unable to describe the processes in question; indeed, we would not even have noticed them. The deficiencies of our description would probably disappear, were we already able to invoke physiological or chemical terms in lieu of psychological ones. Admittedly, those terms too belong merely to figurative language—but one long familiar to us and perhaps simpler as well (p. 96/SE Vol. XVIII, p. 60, my italics).\(^{16}\)

Even, or perhaps especially, in dealing with what we might call the atomic theory of psychoanalysis, Freud is torn between aesthetic and scientific truth. Language—whether chemical or psychoanalytic—is not a tool separable from the object it discloses, adequate or not to the truth it claims to reproduce; rather, as Freud is uniquely aware, language is most fundamentally the capacity to shape the truth, or to make certain kinds of truth available to us. Freud’s drive language, with its emphasis on antagonism, is world-disclosing in this way. But it is no accident that Freud draws our attention to the limitations of language in the same text where the drives begin to take on the aspect of cosmic principles. In the end, Freud’s dualism succeeds (which is to say, is over-turned) in revealing, anew, an originary plasticity and ambivalence that distinguishes the realm of the psychical and motivates each new theory of the drives. It is the irrepressible creativity and resistance of the drives, along with his determination to compulsively order their

\(^{16}\) Sigmund Freud and Todd Defresne, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Toronto: broadview editions, 2011. Hereafter, reference will be to this edition, cited as *BPP* with reference also to page numbers from *SE* Vol. XVIII.
conflicts and expressions, that leads Freud to speculate on language and structures of representation—not the other way round. As the primary components of the unconscious, the drives must be essential to developing an account of freedom in psychoanalysis—a freedom indelibly marked by its connection to this nexus of feeling and symbolization.

It is this concern with freedom, particularly in its relation to this fundamental aesthetics I will consider, that was lacking in Loewald’s and Derrida’s readings of Freud. Their elaborations of Freud’s psychic reality are untethered from the existential concerns they set out to transform. Though very much in line with their calls for psychoanalysis to acknowledge the reality of the unconscious, the temporal or causal repercussions are never fully dealt with: 17 Is there a space for freedom in psychoanalysis? And if so, how might this transform philosophical approaches to freedom? Through my focus on the uncanny as the possible site of freedom in psychoanalytic practice and theory, I found that Schelling’s middle and late texts offered insights into the understanding of the unconscious and of temporality that are essential to developing such a framework. Moreover, I began to understand Schelling’s later works as themselves metaphysical and ethical elaborations of a fundamentally therapeutic system: a theory of freedom inextricably bound to its practical realization.

Before long, I discovered a sub-set of Schelling scholars that attend to the resonances between his philosophy and psychoanalysis (and an even smaller group of psychoanalysts that tackle Schelling); while I will deal with some of these contributions in the introduction, and several at greater length in the body of the dissertation, I briefly put

---

forth my own reading of Freud to highlight the psychoanalytic themes that will
distinguish my approach to reading Schelling.

1. Uncanny Freud

Freud, citing Schelling, writes “unheimlich is the name for everything which ought to
have remained...hidden and secret but has become visible” (SE Vol. XVII, p. 224).18
This is the definition to which Freud returns after a long discussion of various
etymologies. Importantly for Freud, the word “unheimlich” is itself ambiguous,
suggesting both intimate knowledge and uncomfortable mystery—at-home-ness and not-at-home-ness: “Thus heimlich is a word the meaning of which develops towards an
ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, unheimlich. Unheimlich is in
some way or other a sub-species of heimlich” (p. 225). The word, divided in itself,
simultaneously signals the ambiguity of alienation and absorption: it enacts the “un-
homely home” that marks the dual anxieties of life. The possibility of going “home,” of
return, is precluded by the language that pronounces this desire. It is not unimportant,
then, that Freud’s analysis of the uncanny centers on literature; although he is careful to
point out that he uses aesthetic here in its widest sense, encompassing both feeling and
art, it is our experience with literature that Freud focuses on.19 His analysis is thus not

---

18 In the original version of the essay Freud attributes the definition to Schleiermacher instead of Schelling (Beach, 289).
19 It is perhaps worth noting here that Lacan sees Freud’s “The Uncanny” as the most important reflection
on anxiety, which he deals with in Seminar X. Thus, in part, the “psychoanalytic import” of the uncanny
has much to do with what can be discovered about anxiety more generally. As Roberto Harari writes in
Lacan’s Seminar on “Anxiety”: An Introduction, “The key text in understanding anxiety in its various
manifestations is simply ‘The Uncanny,’ as Lacan points out so well...As we have written elsewhere, do
not expect Freud to show up for an appointment if it is to take place in a conventionally defined place. One
only concerned with the feeling of the uncanny, but also and in no small part with the manner in which we must be affected in and by artistic creations:

The story-teller has this license among many others, that he can select his world of representation so that it either coincides with the realities we are familiar with or departs from them in what particulars he pleases...The situation is altered as soon as the writer pretends to move in the world of common reality. In this case he accepts all the conditions operating to producing uncanny feelings in real life...He takes advantage, as it were, of our supposedly surmounted superstitiousness; he deceives us into thinking that he is giving us the sober truth, and then after all oversteps the bounds of possibility. We react to his inventions as we should have reacted to real experiences (pp. 249-250).

Freud comes close here to recognizing that there is an element of deceit at the heart of our experience of art or of language more generally: the same deception that gives rise to our feeling of the uncanny. This suspension of the boundaries between truth and fantasy evoked by the artist, the presentation of reality as unreality and vice versa, is itself a repetition of the real, permeable limits characterizing a more primitive interaction with reality. The infantile relationship between ego and world that returns to us in the feeling of the uncanny is one of imaginary omnipotence and authentic helplessness—the anxiety which emerges from this ambiguity marks a space in which we may feel ourselves both absolutely guilty (our thoughts become reality, we control nature) and entirely passive (subject to fate, victims of determinism, etc.): in Schellingian terms, we have either renounced freedom in choosing evil (a separation from and presumed control over nature)

.has to proceed very cautiously with Freud because when we believe that the texts will provide answers we expect they do not; they go to unexpected, unforeseen places” (p. 63). See also: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Anxiety 1962-1963 Book X, trans. Cormac Gallagher (from unedited French manuscripts).
or do not yet belong to freedom at all (a naïve absorption in things that allows for no reflection). As Schelling puts it in the *Freiheitsschrift*,

So the beginning of sin consists in man’s going over from being to non-being, from truth to falsehood, from light into darkness, in order himself to become the creative basis and to rule over all things with the power of the center which he contains…In evil there is that contradiction which devours and always negates itself, which just while striving to become creature destroys the nexus of creation and, in its ambition to be everything, falls into non-being (*SW*, p. 390).

It turns out that one of the consequences of accepting the Freudian unconscious is that we do not and cannot *know* the extent of our freedom or our guilt. Rather, we *feel* uncanniness: we *feel* freedom as it escapes us, as loss—which is, perhaps, the only way to feel freedom at all.

The uncanny is the effect of a certain form of repetition, an experience that brings into relief past and future in their fundamental resistance to presence: our ordinary sense of history and possibility as modes of presence gives way to a feeling of their disruptiveness. In a reading that at points coincides with the work of Hans Loewald, Jacques Derrida and Julia Kristeva, I argue that via the uncanny Freud finds a place for experiences of subjectivity—projection, identification and omnipotence of thought—which are at work in and constitutive of reality at higher levels of organization. The aim

---

20 This dynamic of union with and separation from Nature, particularly as evidenced through art, is also evident in Schiller’s *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry*: “How is it that we are so infinitely surpassed by the ancients in everything that is natural, and yet at precisely this point we are able to revere nature to a higher degree, to cling to it more intimately, and to embrace even the inanimate world with the tenderest feelings? This is *so* because nature has disappeared from our humanity, and we reencounter it in its genuineness only outside of humanity in the inanimate world. Not our greater *naturalness* but the very opposite, the *unnaturalness* of our relationships, conditions, and mores forces us to fashion a satisfaction in the physical world that is not to be hoped for in the moral world. This is the satisfaction of that awakening urge for truth and simplicity that lies, like the moral predisposition from which it flows, in all human hearts as something indestructible and ineradicable…This road taken by the modern poets is, moreover, the same road human beings in general must travel, both as individuals and as a whole. *Nature makes a human being one with himself, art separates and divides him; by means of the ideal he returns to the unity. Yet because the ideal is an infinite one that he never reaches, the cultured human being in his way can never become complete as the natural human being can be in his way*” (my italics p. 194, p. 202).
of Freudian therapy is to remain available to these relationships rather than to overcome them.

In focusing on Freud’s work on telepathy and the uncanny we see specific ways in which reality must encompass more primitive ego-reality experience; further, that this integration must be dynamic, without limiting itself to the kind of static explanation that distances psychoanalysis from the very subject it must always transform and disturb. Indeed, there seems to be something about the nature of occult phenomena that tempts Freud to perform such a distancing. I would like to suggest that it is freedom (in its relation to the determined) that Freud finds so threatening to psychoanalysis, leading him to this rhetorical and methodical separation from the subjects of telepathy and the uncanny even as he feels himself compelled to approach them. Freud’s repeated efforts to differentiate psychoanalysis from the occult arts are always also possibilities for an acknowledgement of the indestructible, primary reality that Freud discloses just as he conceals it from us. Though earlier than his three main works on telepathy, “The Uncanny” also deals with what we might call a “border region;” the uncanny is on the “border” insofar as Freud locates it on the fringe of psychoanalysis and, more importantly, the uncanny is a “border,” an experience that returns us to earlier ego-reality experience, that both shapes and reflects the inherently unstable connection between

---

21 Equally, as we see particularly in The Interpretation of Dreams, Freud is always ready to point out how psychoanalysis comes to the defense of folk wisdom against science and intellectualism: “As we have seen, the scientific theories of dreams leave no room for any problem of interpreting them, since in their view a dream is not a mental act at all...Lay opinion has taken a different attitude throughout the ages. It has exercised its indefeasible right to behave inconsistently; and though admitting that dreams are unintelligible and absurd, it cannot bring itself to declare that they have no significance at all. Led by some obscure feeling, it seems to assume that, in spite of everything, every dream has a meaning, though a hidden one, that dreams are designed to take the place of some other process of thought, and that we have only to undo the substitution correctly in order to arrive at this hidden meaning (SE Vol. IV, p.128).”

inner and outer, fantasy and reality.\textsuperscript{23} In \textit{Strangers to Ourselves}, Julia Kristeva also argues that the uncanny is a “border” experience and, further, one that might lead the way not only to an \textit{ethics} of psychoanalysis, but also to a \textit{politics}:

Confronting the foreigner whom I reject and with whom at the same time I identify, I lose my boundaries, I no longer have a container, the memory of experiences when I had been abandoned overwhelm me, I lose my composure. I feel ‘lost,’ ‘indistinct,’ ‘hazy.’ The uncanny strangeness allows for many variations: they all repeat the difficulty I have in situating myself with respect to the other and keep going over the course of identification-projection that lies at the foundation of my reaching autonomy (p. 187).\textsuperscript{24}

At times, my reading of the Freudian uncanny converges with Kristeva’s, particularly in terms of the \textit{positive} possibilities of dissolving subject/object boundaries. And although Kristeva gives no real philosophical account of the structure of freedom in her text, she does gesture towards the deep connection between an ethics of the uncanny and the matrix of death, drive and the feminine in ways that would support, to anticipate the work of the next section, a Schellingian reading of Freud:

The \textit{death} and the \textit{feminine}, the end and the beginning that engross and compose us only to frighten us when they break through...Such malevolent \textit{powers} would amount to a weaving together of the symbolic and the organic—perhaps \textit{drive} itself, on the border of the psyche and biology, overriding the breaking imposed by organic homeostasis (p. 185).

Kristeva’s intuitions concerning the fundamental transitionality of the uncanny suggests a way to ground human community in something other than and indeed prior to the law. Whereas Kristeva limits herself in this text to an imagining of the uncanny that would

\textsuperscript{23} The subjects of the uncanny and telepathy—inssofar as they both illuminate and deconstruct the defensive oppositions of reality and fantasy, internal and external, present and absent—are inherently related to the kind of porous, transitional reality that Loewald sets up in contrast to “neurotic” reality.

only act as a blueprint for a cosmopolitanism of foreignness without giving much attention to its metaphysical grounds or consequences, it is the essence of my project to illustrate the ways in which an ontology of the uncanny must be bound up with a radical rethinking of freedom and the therapeutic. To this purpose, I will turn to another of her texts in the course of this dissertation, *Powers of Horror*, which while dealing less explicitly with the uncanny is more relevant to my work here:

> It is no longer I who expel, “I” is expelled… Deprived of world, therefore, *I fall in a faint*. In that compelling, raw, insolent thing in the morgue’s full sunlight, in that thing that no longer matches and therefore no longer signifies anything, I behold the breaking down of a world that has erased its borders: fainting away. The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons us and ends up engulfing us (pp. 231-232).

It is Kristeva’s notion of the *abject* as the peculiar, even devastating site of the transitional, that I will take up as an essential and fruitful point of contact between Schelling’s philosophy and Freudian psychoanalysis. It is the far-reaching repercussions of the uncanny, its inevitable drawing together of the metaphysical, the epistemological and the ethical, that motivates Freud’s peculiar approach. As he does with telepathy, Freud begins his paper on the uncanny by distinguishing between his intended subject and the more traditional material of psychoanalytic work. Specifically, he wants to make sure that psychoanalysis not be confused with aesthetics—art, no less than the occult, is shamelessly unscientific:

> It is only rarely that a psycho-analyst feels impelled to investigate the study of aesthetics…But it does occasionally happen that he has to interest himself in some particular province of that subject; and this project usually

---

proves to be a rather remote one, and one which has been neglected in the specialist literature of aesthetics (p. 219).

And it is not only in this introductory excuse for the subject matter that Freud’s language suggests his work on telepathy—we also have a foretaste of Freud’s later, and repeated, denials of any personal experience with the occult. At the same moment that Freud despairs of his own lack of uncanny experiences, he also performs the role of the medium:

The writer of the present contribution, indeed, must himself plead guilty to a special obtuseness in the matter, where extreme delicacy of perception would be more in place. It is long since he has experienced or heard anything which has given him an uncanny impression, and he must start by translating himself into that state of feeling, by awakening in himself the possibility of experiencing it (p. 220).

He is calling up his own double, long ago and far from the Freud he is now.26 Where else do we find Freud so self-consciously summoning a “feeling” in order to better serve his “science”, while at the same time dissociating himself from it?27 As Freud wills himself to be literally possessed, we see again the rhetorical distancing that is so pervasive in the

---

26 We might compare this attempt by Freud to Loewald’s view of ego-reality development, where progress requires a “sinking back” into more primitive relationships with the world: “In fact, it would seem that the more alive people are (though not necessarily more stable), the broader their range of ego-reality levels is. Perhaps the so-called fully developed, mature ego is not one that has become fixated at the presumably highest or latest stage of development, having left the others behind it, but is an ego that integrates its reality in such a way that the earlier and deeper levels of ego-reality integration remain alive as dynamic sources of higher organization” (TEL, p. 20)

27 Interestingly, Loewald points out that in fact Freud faces a similar difficulty “translating himself into a feeling” when he considers the nature of primary narcissism and its relation to religious feeling. I would argue that this inability to locate the “oceanic feeling” in himself is very much related to Freud’s claims to be poor in experiences of uncanny and telepathic nature, both dealing with Eros and its relationship to primary narcissism. It is precisely the possibility of giving up static, deterministic reality, and in doing so acknowledging reality that necessarily encompasses fantasy and more primitive ego-reality experiences, that draws Freud to the uncanny and telepathy and simultaneously forces him to hesitate and step back. Loewald cites Freud from Civilization and its Discontents and goes on: “Freud continues that he cannot discover this oceanic feeling in himself and that for this and other reasons he can approach this subject only with misgivings and hesitations (TEL, p.568, my italics).”
telepathy papers, which are written in the third person.\textsuperscript{28} Just as he does in the telepathy papers, Freud eventually concedes his own “uncanny” experience—in the former with his own dreams and the “Forsythe Saga,” and in the latter with his account of circling around a foreign town, always ending up, seemingly, where he started.\textsuperscript{29}

It is this “seemingly” that must really be at issue for us here; as Derrida indicates in his reading of Freud in “Telepathy,” Freud’s approach to the uncanny and telepathy is evidence of his ambivalence over the nature of reality—both recognizing and refusing that his contributions in these areas demand a rethinking of the division between “material” and “virtual” reality that psychoanalysis uniquely calls into question. Derrida, posing as Freud’s uncanny double, writes:

An annunciation can be accomplished, something can happen without for all that being realized. An event can take place that is not real. My customary distinction between internal and external reality is perhaps not sufficient here. It signals toward some event that no idea of “reality” helps us think…So the telepathic annunciation / has come true even if / it is not itself in external reality, that is the hypothesis that I offer to be read at the very moment I foreclose it on the surface of my text (p. 248).\textsuperscript{30}

The question of what would count as a truly telepathic event—what counts as real—arises silently and urgently. Further on, again as Freud, he writes that “I have never been in a position to witness or take part in, miterleben, a dream that is truly, precisely, ‘correctly’ telepathic… (p. 249).” And in Freud’s own words:

\textsuperscript{28} See note 21.
\textsuperscript{29} The passage from “The Uncanny” is mirrored in “Psycho-Analysis and Telepathy”: “My own life, as I have already openly admitted, has been particularly poor in an occult sense (SE Vol. XVIII, p.193).” The language in the passage quoted suggests that Freud is somehow forced, despite his resistance, to venture into this material: “But it does occasionally happen that he has to interest himself…” In his first paper on telepathy Freud makes a similar suggestion that he does not want to discuss this material, but must: “It no longer seems possible to keep away from the study of what are known as ‘occult’ phenomena…(SE Vol. XVIII, p.177, my emphasis).”
But I have never had a ‘telepathic’ dream. Not that I have been without dreams of the kind that convey the impression that a certain definite event is happening at some distant place, leaving it to the dreamer to decide whether the event is happening at that moment or will do so at some later time. In waking life, too, I have often become aware of presentiments of distant events. But these hints, foretellings and premonitions have none of them ‘come true,’ as we say; there proved to be no external reality corresponding to them, and they had therefore to be regarded as purely subjective anticipations (SE Vol. XVIII, p.197).

Freud forces us to consider what it means for an event to “come true”. Once again, he simultaneously falls back into the simple distinction between “external reality” and “subjective anticipations” even as he “offers to be read” the more complicated reality that psychoanalysis reveals:

We must add, however, that no one has a right to take exception to telepathic occurrences if the event and the intimation (or message) do not exactly coincide in astronomical time…The laws of unconscious mental life may then be taken for granted as applying to telepathy (p. 219).

He has never had a truly telepathic dream—but now he suggests that there are other ways for dreams to ‘come true’. Freud reminds us—and perhaps he himself has forgotten—that it is the distinctly other temporality and logic of the unconscious that psychoanalysis is concerned with: the traces of its irreducible alterity compel us to reconsider what it is for something to be real, to open ourselves to a truth that goes beyond the correspondence of internal and external presence.

Through Freud’s work on telepathy, psychoanalysis reveals its simultaneous assumption and rejection of a reality detached from fantasy. Despite his claims to the contrary, Freud does make progress: a strange, circular motion, where “bare” reality comes to signify the end goal of psychoanalytic treatment, while the fantastic
impossibility of such a reality remains its foundational discovery. In “The Uncanny,” Freud immediately rejects the notion that the uncanny experience is a form of “intellectual insecurity;” he explicitly places his project in this essay beyond the realm of knowledge, though the question of knowing and what is knowable plays a crucial role here. What we have the opportunity to see in these works is not so much a movement away from psychoanalysis as science, but rather toward a psychoanalytic view of reality that allows for an expansion of what counts as science—what counts as real.31

In “The Uncanny,” Freud is obviously much less concerned than in the telepathy papers that his work will threaten the tenuous link between traditional science and psychoanalysis, or call into question the supposition of an objective reality that is always already there. And yet, his work on the uncanny is surely a movement in this direction, echoing Freud’s earlier, defining step in giving up the distinction between “real” seduction and fantasy.32 In his treatment of the uncanny, Freud recalls the fluidity of the boundary, creating an undecidable space between science and fiction within which he

---

31 Freud himself is aware, at least at some points, that there is an important reciprocity between the discoveries of psychoanalysis and revolutionary changes occurring in the sciences during his time. In “Psychoanalysis and Telepathy” he writes: “The discovery of radium has confused no less than it has advanced the possibilities of explaining the physical world; and the knowledge that has been so very recently acquired of what is called the theory of relativity has had the effect upon many of those who admire without comprehending it of diminishing their belief in the objective trustworthiness of science (p.178).”

32 Freud goes back and forth on the “reality” of the primal scene, for instance, as he writes in his case history of the Wolf Man: “If neurotics are endowed with the evil characteristic of diverting their interest from the present and of attaching it to these regressive substitutes, the products of their imagination, then there is absolutely nothing for it but to follow upon their tracks and bring these unconscious productions into consciousness; for, if we disregard their objective unimportance, they are of the utmost importance from our point of view…the analysis would have to run the precisely the same course as one which had a naïf faith in the truth of the phantasies. The difference would only come at the end of the analysis, after the phantasies had been laid bare. We should then say to the patient: ‘Very well, then; your neurosis proceeded as though you had received these impressions and spun them out in your childhood (SE Vol. XVII, pp. 49-50).’” He goes on later in the same essay: “Let us assume as an uncontradicted premise that a primal scene of this kind has been correctly evolved technically, that it is indispensable to a comprehensive solution of all the conundrums that are set us by the symptoms of the infantile disorder, that all the consequences radiate out from it, just as all the threads of the analysis have led up to it. Then, in view of its content, it is impossible that it can be anything else than a reproduction of a reality experienced by the child (p. 55).”
will never be entirely comfortable. The source of this feeling is a return of the repressed, an eerie reminder of unconscious, infantile wishes/fantasies that evokes a more primitive, permeable ego-reality situation. For Freud, it is psychoanalysis itself that allows us insight into that which is so familiar it is alien; into that which touches us so deeply that we can no longer recognize it as our own. The very word “telepathy,” like the *Heimlich/Unheimlich* ambivalence Freud remarks upon, draws us into this realm of the connection-at-a-distance, connection that in fact *requires* distance, differentiation that demands integration. In Freud’s work on telepathy and the uncanny we find intimations of the transitional reality that paves the way for—and in fact surpasses—the opposition between fantasy and reality.

Focusing on the uncanny feelings associated with the compulsion to repeat and the infantile fear/fantasy of omnipotence of thought, Freud mentions telepathy in the paper, significantly in reference to the ‘phenomenon of the double’:

…Thus we have characters who are to be considered identical because they look alike. This relation is accentuated by mental processes leaping from one of these characters to another—by what we should call telepathy—, so that the one possesses knowledge, feelings and experience in common with the other. Or it is marked by the fact that the subject identifies himself with someone else, so he is in doubt to which his self is, or substitutes the extraneous self for his own. In other words there is a doubling, a dividing and interchanging of the self (p. 234).

---

33 Loewald also remarks on Freud’s discomfort here. He writes in “Psychoanalysis and the History of the Individual”: “Freud hesitated to attribute reality to the mind and contented himself with calling the psychical a ‘particular form of existence’, not to be confused with material or ‘factual’ reality…what in his view tends to confer a reality-like character on psychic life is the undeniable fact of the power of the unconscious (Loewald, 1976, p.537).” And later in the same paper: “In declaring them to be *psychic* processes, he took the step of investigating them from the standpoint of man’s full mental life, from the perspective of man as a moral being, and not from the reductive perspective of modern natural science. But he never was wholly comfortable with his decision (542).”
But it is not only this compulsion to repeat that returns in the uncanny experience of
telepathy—there is also the infantile fantasy of omnipotence of thought, “characterized
by…the subject’s narcissistic evaluation of his own mental processes (p. 240).”34 The
compulsion to repeat and the belief in the omnipotence of thought are always and
everywhere linked—the one allowing for, making manifest, the (re)appearance of the
other—no less so in the case of what Freud says we “should call” telepathy. In the
infantile fantasy of omnipotence of thought we return to the fluidity of the reality/fantasy
distinction that Freud himself, compulsively perhaps, repeats and often misrecognizes.

Freud’s relative comfort with the uncanny, in contrast to his later work on telepathy,
may in no small part derive from his use of fictional works instead of case histories. In
comparing the dearth of uncanny experience in fairy tales to its abundance in more
realistic literature, Freud says:

The situation is altered as soon as the writer pretends to move in the world
of common reality. In this case he accepts as well all the conditions
operating to produce the uncanny feelings in real life; and everything that
would have an uncanny effect in reality has it in his story…he deceives us
by promising the sober truth, and then after all overstepping it. *We react
to his inventions as we would have reacted to real experiences* (p. 250, my
italics).

We cannot read this last line without thinking of Freud’s initial discovery about the
unconscious: there is no separation between fantasy/fiction from reality.35 While Freud
seems to be making a clear distinction between the weight of fictive evidence and that of

---

34 In “Mes Chances” Derrida draws our attention to Freud’s failed attempts to distinguish psychoanalysis
from a certain form of paranoia, where psychic life cannot be clearly separated from “material reality:”
“For example, what is the difference between superstition or paranoia on the one hand, and science on the
other, if they all mark a compulsive propensity to interpret random signs so as to restore to them a meaning,
necessity, destination?” (*Psyche*, p. 365).
35 See note 32.
real accounts, this occurs precisely where the \textit{problem} of such a division becomes most pressing. Where Freud seems most insistent on the \textit{givenness} of the division between reality and fantasy, he is always simultaneously opening up the possibility of rethinking this separation.

Freud makes it clear that he worries any discussion of the occult will only cast a shadow on the legitimacy of psychoanalysis. He seems paranoid—as if merely by broaching the topic psychoanalysis will inevitably fall into the same category. And yet he goes on, \textit{possessed}, unable to turn away. As Derrida points out in a comparison between paranoia and psychoanalysis, the possibility of this “fall” is a real one, not so easily dismissed:

\begin{quote}
If the superstitious person projects, if he casts outward the “motivations” that Freud, for his part, says he seeks on the inside, if he interprets chance from the standpoint of an external ‘event’ where Freud reduces it or brings it back to a ‘thought’ it is because at bottom the superstitious person does not believe, any more than Freud does, in the solidity of the spaces isolated by our Western stereotomy. He does not believe in the contextualizing and framing, but not real, limits between the psychical and the physical, inside and outside, not to mention all of the other adjoining oppositions (Psyche, p.370, my italics).
\end{quote}

Like the paranoid worldview, psychoanalytic interpretation invariably reshapes the boundaries of reality and its oppositions. Perhaps recognizing this shared tendency, in “The Uncanny” Freud acknowledges an association with the “occult”:

\begin{quote}
Indeed, I should not be surprised to hear that psychoanalysis, which is concerned with laying bare these hidden forces, has itself become uncanny to many people for that reason. In one case, after I succeeded—though none too rapidly—in effecting a cure in a girl who had been an invalid for many years, I myself heard this view expressed by the patient’s mother after her long recovery (p. 243).
\end{quote}
Freud emphasizes the difficulty, the *duration* and the *process* of the cure— as if to remind *himself* of the difference between the analyst and the medium. The threat is minimal, the resistance small, and yet we have an indicator of what is to come—a fore-telling.\(^36\) If Freud is unable to distinguish their visions of reality, he is at least able to draw attention to a difference in *time*. Freud’s focus on time in contrasting his work with that of the occult arts might be related to the *other* temporality that “astronomical” time protects us from.\(^37\)

Capturing this reversal concerning telepathy, which is not quite a reversal, Derrida/Freud writes:

Previously, I am going back still, I had recalled that the psychoanalytic interpretation of dreams lifts up, suppresses and preserves the difference between the dream and the event, giving the same content to both…one sees the disappearance of all the objections in principle to telepathy. *The system of objections rested on a thousand naivetes with regard to the subject, the ego, consciousness, perception, and so on, but above all on a determination of the “reality” of the event, of the event as essentially “real”;* now that belongs to a history of grandad’s philosophy, and by appearing to reduce telepathy to the name of a psychoanalytic neopositivism, I open up its field. For that they must also free themselves from the massively Oedipal training by which I pretend to maintain law and order in my class. I wanted to delay the arrival of the ghosts (*Psyche*, p.253, my italics). \(^38\)

---

\(^36\) In “Telepathy” Derrida writes: “…ah! There is a lot of interest in the occult today, and because I’ve put Telepathy on the bill, here you are, all excited about it. You have always taken me, like Fliess, for a ‘mind reader’ (*Psyche*, p.245).” Freud has already expressed his fear (in a letter to Fliess) that his work would be taken as the tricks of a mind-reader.

\(^37\) Freud writes in “Dreams and Telepathy”: “We must add, however, that no one has a right to take exception to telepathic occurrences if the event and the intimation (or message) do not exactly coincide in astronomical time…The laws of unconscious mental life may then be taken for granted as applying to telepathy (*SE* Vol. XVIII, p. 219).”

\(^38\) Derrida here refers to a passage from “Dreams and Telepathy”: “The psychoanalytic interpretation of dreams, however, does away with this difference between the dream and the event, and gives both the same content (p. 206).”
Derrida points to Freud’s hesitation in formulating a reality that encompasses the non-present and fantasy—both aspects of the virtual more generally; he threatens Freud with a reality that would acknowledges the ghostly trace of the non-present and the real presence of the ghosts of our past—with the truth of fantasy and the unconscious. Loewald also uses the term “ghost” and does so in a similar gesture towards Freud’s failure to acknowledge that different ego-reality structures must be integrated into and transform reality itself; but more specifically, and unlike Derrida, Loewald uses “ghosts” in order to differentiate between the unconscious that is frozen out of the ego (“ghosts”) and the unconscious that has been incorporated into its organization (“ancestors”):

Transference is pathological insofar as the unconscious is a crowd of ghosts…ghosts of the unconscious, imprisoned by defenses but haunting the patient in the dark of his defenses and symptoms, are allowed to taste blood, are let loose. In the daylight of analysis the ghosts of the unconscious are laid and led to rest as ancestors whose power is taken over and transformed into the newer intensity of present life…(*TEL*, p. 249).

The fluidity and non-presence that Derrida considers “ghostly” are for Loewald fundamental attributes of the reality psychoanalysis exposes and Freud “delays.”

For psychoanalysis to be “in a position to create a Weltanschauung of its own,” it must grope towards the forgotten, the unutterable, the refused; Loewald’s contribution comes in no small part in critically turning Freud’s discovery of unconscious processes back upon the presuppositions of a given, material reality. Loewald, like Derrida, maintains that Freud shies away from the consequences of the reality of the unconscious, opening up a wider metaphysical horizon at the same moment that he reverts to the dichotomous, comfortable paradigms from which he constructed his therapeutic method. Psychoanalysis is a metaphysical view of the universe, and one that must be committed to
articulating and transforming its interpretation of reality: it is the unique possibility of psychoanalysis to consistently put pressure on and reinterpret its own foundations, including the nature of scientific activity and the structure of knowledge it implies.39

Painful in the way becoming a person must be, psychoanalysis is a gathering together of our essential contradictions—the alterity of an unconscious which is at the same time our deepest selves (heimlich/unheimlich), the structure of knowing that requires subjects independent of their objects while at the same time insisting on a subject that simultaneously discovers and transforms its objects (telepathy/therapy). Just as the individual must recuperate the otherness of his past, so too must psychoanalysis be unsettled by its origins—by the disrupted/disrupting truth that the unconscious bears. The challenge for psychoanalysis is to recognize its foundations, which is always to transform them, and to find a way to live with those ghostly structures of reality that demand and resist translation.

2. Uncanny Schelling

Such a reading of Freud opens up a new approach to interpreting Schelling’s more “mystical” texts—works like Clara, the Weltalter and the lectures on the philosophy of mythology which are too quickly dismissed as un-philosophical. Because I deal with the Weltalter and his work on mythology at length in Chapters III and IV, I would like to focus here on Clara—perhaps the least attended to by scholars—in order to illustrate the

39 See Freud’s discussion of psychoanalysis and the scientific Weltanschauung in “The Question of a Weltanschauung”, SE Vol. XXII pp. 158-184. He writes: “The unified nature of the explanation of the universe is, it is true, accepted by science, but only as a programme whose fulfillment is postponed to the future” (pp. 158-159).
resonances between the Freudian *Weltanschauung* I am proposing and the metaphysics emerging from Schelling’s “ghostly” works.⁴⁰

In the form of a fictional tale, Schelling presents a three-way dialogue between a woman in mourning and her friends, a doctor and a priest, concerning death and the divide (or lack thereof) between the spiritual and the physical. As we also saw in Freud, Schelling’s insistence on the literary form in approaching these matters is by no means an arbitrary decision: it is through art, through “realistic fiction” in particular, that the problem of the limit can show itself. Within the narrative, the philosophical relevance of these matters is explicitly pointed out by Clara:

> Why do today’s philosophers find it so impossible to write at least a little in the same way that they speak?...That discussions fitting to our time [could] be devised as if they were taken from the present, but without trying to imitate any particular person; discussions as they could be held now and that, without doubt, really are held. I repeat the question: why can’t discussions such as we have between ourselves be written down, whether they be made up or ones that really have taken place? (p. 65).

Drawing attention to the artifice of writing, Schelling implies that the tenuous distinction between what is “really” done, and what is fictionally presented is intrinsically related to the subject matter at hand: the limit between life and death, between the spiritual and the corporeal. In the concluding paragraphs, Clara once again compares the identity of the spiritual and corporeal with the artist’s work:

> Corporeality is not imperfection, but when the body is suffused by the soul, then it is perfection in its plenitude. The merely spiritual life doesn’t satisfy our heart. There is something in us that desires a more essential reality; our thoughts come to rest only at the final unity…And as the artist does not find peace in thinking about his work, but only when he has represented it physically, and as anyone fired by an ideal wants to find or

reveal it in a physical-visible form, the goal of all longing is likewise the very perfection of corporeality as a reflection and mirror of perfect spirituality (p. 80).

More than discussions of ghost stories, clairvoyance and the after-life, taken together these passages suggest the extent to which the work of the philosopher and the artist converge in the personal—in our uncanny belonging to what-could-have-been and what-could-yet-be, to death and to life.

Without explicitly entering into the issues of freedom and temporality that occupy him in his later works, we can see Schelling transitioning towards a thinking of the impenetrable and the unconscious—of the horrific and “irreducible” remainder persisting ever in the depths. The priest and Clara discuss the incomplete transformation of the dark particularity of the human into light, reason and divinity:

P: So, do they believe that if man has already striven towards morality in this life, this is the only thing he takes with him and is that through which he can unite himself completely with the Divine in that other life?

C: They must indeed believe this, she said.

P: So, I said, nothing physical follows him there?

C: Nothing; so it seems.

P: Not even that initial dark and obscure germ, which only gradually receives clarity and light into itself through a kind of divine transformation?

C: Not even this.

P: And which nevertheless never denies its primal nature when completely transformed?

C: It seems to me that this is as unlikely as the clearest diamond thereby ceasing to be hard or material.

P: But even when this dark and obscure speck of our existence, I continued, is completely liberated and transfigured, it nevertheless always leaves something behind in us that was not from God (p. 53).

This suggestion of the “germ” of personality, in terms of the unresolved and opaque, returns as a fundamental theme in Schelling’s Freiheitsschrift. That is, he begins to
understand freedom as a mode of personality, as a disclosure of the “dark and obscure speck of our existence.” The real possibility of evil is not this ineradicable, obscure particularity in itself, but its self-destructive tendency to become what it is not—the universal and omnipotent. Schelling writes, “Thus the ego, or individuality, is indeed in general the basis, foundation or natural center of every creature’s life; but as soon as it ceases to be the ministering center and enters as sovereign into the periphery, it burns in it like Tantalus’ malice in its selfishness and egoism” (p. 368). Schelling’s insight that freedom is an active negotiation between omnipotence and vulnerability is essential to developing a psychoanalytic account of freedom. While Freud’s work on the uncanny and telepathy emphasize the horrific, anxiety-inducing aspects of this negotiation, it is also the cornerstone of his therapeutic model. The capacity to not only live with, but to transform the boundaries between self and world—tasks of responsibility and forgiveness—is the aim and process of psychoanalytic practice.

Schelling’s relevance to a properly Freudian account of freedom is perhaps most evident in his reflections on temporality and meaning in the Weltalter and his lectures on mythology. In these works Schelling argues that time is a generative, procreative and desirous activity—that history, whether at the level of the individual or of existence as such, is an interpretive process. This leads Schelling to consider how the reality of the unconscious—as a ground that can never be fully integrated into existence or reason—threatens linear temporality. Much as Freud sketches out a uniquely psychoanalytic time (Nachträglichkeit) in order to account for trauma and repression, so the “crisis” of creation drives Schelling to articulate a past that remains vulnerable to the present.  

41 In The Language of Psychoanalysis, Laplanche and Pontalis translate Nachträglichkeit as “deferred action,” explaining that “The first thing the introduction of the notion [deferred action] does is to rule out...
contention is that in rethinking temporality in the ways they do, in terms of meaning, desire and trauma, freedom takes on a tragic dimension. Their persistent attention to Oedipus, and to the central role of the mythological and familial in psychic life more generally, signals an ongoing interrogation of what it means to inherit more than we can know: to be born and to be free. It is a similarly quiet truth that Hölderlin finds at the center of the tragedy, muted by the deafening cries of the real:

...[I]n the appearance of the terrible ceremonious forms, the drama imparts itself like an inquisition, like a language for a world of plague and confusion of the senses...so that in quiet times, in order that the course of the world will have no gaps and that the memory of the heavenly ones will not cease, God and man reveal themselves in the all-forgetting form of unfaithfulness...Here man forgets himself because he is wholly in the moment; the God, because he is nothing but time; and both are unfaithful, time, because, in such moments, it turns categorically so beginning and end simply cannot rhyme with one another in it; man, because in such moments he must follow this categorical reversal and can thus obviously no longer be identical to the beginning (“Remarks on Oedipus”, p. 201).

3. **Ugly Freud, Ugly Schelling and the Politics of the Unconscious**

Along with the recent surge in Schelling scholarship more generally, there have been a number of works that focus on the proto-psychoanalytic strains in his philosophy. Most notably, Odo Marquard, Slavoj Zizek, Sean McGrath and Matthew Ffytch have made rich and varied contributions in this area. I will briefly point to the kinds of resonances (or lack thereof) between Schelling and Freud that these thinkers are sensitive to; I hope to show, at the very least, that the reading of Freud can both benefit from and offer the summary interpretation which reduces the psycho-analytic view of the subject’s history to a linear determinism envisaging nothing but the action of the past upon the present...It is not lived experience in general that undergoes a deferred revision but, specifically, whatever it has been impossible in the first instance to incorporate fully into a meaningful context. The traumatic event is the epitome of such unassimilated experience” (p. 112).

insight into the problems raised in Schelling’s work on the unconscious, freedom, temporality and myth. It will be the aim of the main chapters of the dissertation to read Schelling with the creative entanglement of theory and practice proper to psychoanalysis always in mind, and, at the same time, to consider whether and how such a reading must revitalize the psychoanalytic project.

Slavoj Zizek, one of the most prolific writers on psychoanalysis and Schelling, does not even pretend to be talking about Freud in his major works on the subject (*The Abyss of Freedom, The Indivisible Remainder and Mythology, Madness and Laughter*). He is quite clear that his Freud is actually Lacan’s. So while I appreciate many of Zizek’s insights and explanations, Lacan’s Freud is a rather forced intellectual companion for Schelling; I call this the “ugly” Freud, inspired by the thoughtful comparison Zizek makes between the excess of the ugly and of the Real: explaining the irreducible remainder at the heart of the *Weltalter* he writes,

Contrary to the standard idealist argument that conceives ugliness as the defective mode of beauty, as its distortion, one should assert the *ontological primacy of ugliness*: it is beauty that is a kind of defense against the Ugly in its repulsive existence—or, rather, against existence *tout court*, since, as we shall see, what is ugly is ultimately the brutal fact of existence (of the real) as such….The ontological presupposition of ugliness is therefore a gap between an object and the space it occupies, or—to make the same point in a different way—between the outside (surface) of an object (captured by its representation) and its inside (formless stuff). In the case of beauty, we have in both cases a perfect isomorphism, while in the case of ugliness, the inside of an object somehow is (appears) larger than the outside of its surface representation (like the uncanny buildings in Kafka’s novels that, once we enter them, appear much more voluminous than they seemed from the outside) (*AW*, p. 21).

In adopting Lacan’s Freud, Zizek takes up Lacan’s version of subjectivity as an inherently meaningless play of desire; the subject *is* lack, or the gap between reality and
the Real that the symbolic order inaugurates and conceals. Therapy is no longer primarily a method for acquiring self-knowledge as the self drops out of the picture, although it remains a way of confronting unbearable truths. In stark contrast with Freud, Lacanian discourse is concerned with subjects and symbols, rather than personalities and meaning. If Freud sometimes seems to naively count on a world that is or will be knowable, thus idealizing science as the objective and impersonal, Lacan tends to fetishize the unknowable—to presume that absence and loss are more real than existence and love. In this sense, Freud is closer to Schelling not only because of his insistence on attending to the personal, but also in the extent to which the personal can and indeed should relate to even the most radical alterity; here it is love—the empathy and integrative possibilities of the therapeutic situation—that draws Schelling into the psychoanalytic project.

There is a certain remove from reality in Lacan, and while this might be for the purpose of exposing the threat of the Real, that makes it difficult to read Schelling’s later work in this vein. Clearly, Lacan follows through with an important aspect of Freud’s work, where defense and hostility characterize our primary relationships to an essentially chaotic and excessive world. So while I do not mean to make light of the value and viability of Zizek’s reading, nor Lacan’s for that matter, I am trying to draw attention to a reading of psychoanalytic reality that emphasizes different themes in Schelling’s work. It is not so much the distance from or proximity to the Real that I find provocative in Schelling’s thought or in Freud’s; it is rather their shared interest in the nature of the personal as the site of confronting and remaking the limits of self-knowledge—the seriousness with which they approach the kinds of relating that would hold such terror and ecstasy together.
As we shall see, Zizek’s formulation takes at face value Freud’s too-tidy appeal to the distinction between the pleasure and reality principles—a distinction that, along with that between ego and world, should remain open to transformation. Zizek takes it for granted that what Freud intends by opposing pleasure and reality in this way, and by extension what Schelling has in mind in emphasizing the absolute rupture of decision, can be unproblematically translated into Lacan’s terminology of the divide between the Real and the Imaginary/Symbolic. My issue with this concerns the (in)accessibility of the origin—the ease with which Zizek dismisses the transitional space between the expressible and the inexpressible. In other words, in contrast to Zizek’s claim that reality is sufficiently defined as the prohibition of inscrutable desire, Freud and Schelling see that reality (as represented, communicated and universal) and the Real (as traumatic, unspeakable and individual) are, or at least can be, related to each other in ways that are not simply antagonistic.

Still, Zizek rightly points out Freud’s underlying claim that the development of the ego—and with it the formation of (Imaginary/Symbolic) reality—is always also a response to the threat of disintegration into and through its Other, whether this latter is conceived of as Ungrund or the Absolute Past, primary narcissism or the Real. Zizek takes this to mean that reality simply is the repression of its undifferentiated origin, a refusal of the drives insofar as they resist the order of presence. I will suggest that Schelling and Freud understand the dynamics between repression and reality differently, particularly insofar as they view non-presence and presence, disintegration and limitation, as mutually dependent moments integral to the therapeutic process.

The danger in approaching Schelling this way, however, should not be avoided by simply denying the “ugly” Schelling altogether. In Sean McGrath’s masterful *Dark Ground of Spirit*, a “teleological,” religious Schelling is positioned at a great remove from what he calls the “tragic,” godless Freud. It is as if McGrath’s defense against Zizek’s collapse of Schelling into Lacan is a reading of Schelling that has nothing at all to gain from psychoanalysis. If Zizek focuses on Schelling as a thinker of the horrific Real and the irretrievable past, then we might say that McGrath understands him as a philosopher of ecstatic Love and the redemptive future. In both cases, Schelling’s overarching interest in ceaseless self-transformation is passed over. The attempt to systematize Schelling’s thinking risks minimizing his defining insights into the fluid borders of identity and the strange, liminal creatures that must be both at home and not-at-home in such transitional spaces.

Focusing on Schelling’s debt to Christian mysticism, and particularly to Jakob Boehme, McGrath does a masterful job of detailing Schelling’s concerns with Eros. Further, he gives the impression of letting Schelling speak for himself, without imposing upon him some alien structure or terminology. And yet Freud does not benefit from the same treatment: the tragic Freud, to whom McGrath ascribes an almost caricatured position, is an incorrigible determinist, atheist and anti-philosopher. I fear that this cursory account limits McGrath’s ability to recognize a different strain of thinking in Freud, one that is undoubtedly there even if it never congeals into a single argument or text. While he carefully attends to Schelling’s texts, Freud does not receive the same care, precluding the kind of (dis-)integrative dialogue that both Freud and Schelling, in their own ways, make possible: a conversation in the most therapeutic sense.

---

The argument that for Schelling the future will come to presence—that the completion of God and His creation through love, the sublimation of darkness into light, is an event that must occur—can certainly find support in the various drafts of the *Weltalter*. However, the more essential insight here and in the surrounding works is that the future (where such completion would occur) and the past (the repression of the ground) are qualitatively different from the present and from each other. While we may still talk about a *telos* in Schelling, it cannot be in the sense of our relation to a future that must or will be present, but in terms of a meaningful relationship to its essential non-presence or incompleteness. Indeed, this shift towards *telos* as the interpenetration of *meaning* and *temporalization* comes much closer to Freud’s deepest concerns than does the reductive, nihilistic atheism McGrath finds so fundamentally at odds with Schelling’s philosophy.

Matt Ffytche’s *The Foundation of the Unconscious: Schelling, Freud and the Birth of the Modern Psyche* at first glance seems most closely related to the work I will be engaged in here.45 Offering a detailed analysis of the development of the concept of the unconscious from Schelling to Freud, Ffytche takes great care with the nuances of Freud’s texts in a way that separates him from both Zizek and McGrath. However, Ffytche’s main argument in this text centers on the emergence of ineradicable fault-lines within the modern liberal sense of autonomy and the status of the individual this would imply or depend upon. So while I share Ffytche’s intuition about the deep connection between Freud and Schelling in terms of the possibilities for autonomy and experience of self, my project focuses on the ontological implications of this fractured freedom and individuality. Furthermore, an essential impetus to my comparison between Schelling and

Freud comes from their radical insights concerning the relationship between time and drive. If Ffytche develops an account of how the unconscious is necessary for reimagining autonomy from the perspective of the destabilization of religious, social and political power structures, I consider, as it were, the metaphysical irreducibility of this insecurity as it is made manifest in Freudian psychoanalysis and Schelling’s philosophy.

The difference between Ffytche’s project and this dissertation might be usefully compared to the way Ffytche distinguishes his own work from that of Odo Marquard; equally, the former’s critique of Marquard helps clarify the distance between Marquard’s concerns and my own. In his encyclopedic Transzendentaler Idealismus, Romantische Naturphilosophie, Psychoanalyse, Marquard argues that the German focus on aesthetics as the revelatory site of human freedom, beginning in the late 18th Century, is a turning away from the social and political. The freedom that the unconscious discloses is thus bereft of any real potency. Schelling’s work results in a freedom abstracted from its rightful space—its sphere of action—that finds culmination in Freudian psychoanalysis, where there is no longer any possibility for radically disrupting the socio-political structure from which it emerges. Ffytche writes of Marquard’s opus,

In his reading, psychoanalysis is a final symptom of transcendental philosophy’s falling away (implicitly through a lack of critical nerve) from an engagement with political reason. For Marquard, psychoanalytic psychology is shot through with appeals to historical experience—to the past, to recollection, to unconscious grounds—which function culturally as a way of displacing conscious historical experience (social and political) into these speculatively constructed and somewhat mythical unconscious dimensions of human life. But what from Marquard’s standpoint of ‘political reason’ appears as a narrative of Verfall, might be recast, from an alternative disciplinary perspective, as a narrative about the emergence of new sciences of human life and experience. For surely, what he is

---

46 Odo Marquard, Transzendentaler Idealismus, Romantische Naturphilosophie, Psychoanalyse (Dinter, 1987).
charting, without ever acknowledging it, is also the emergence of a more empirical and secular psychology, which draws on medicine and philosophy as well as aesthetics and new theories of organic nature in order to develop an account of human being adequate to the post-Enlightenment age. What happens when such a narrative is retold from the perspective of a history of psychology, as a discipline which, rather than merely perverting the course of political philosophy, is seeking its own new foundations by transforming the moral and spiritual languages of body, soul and mind? (p. 18).

It is clear that Ffytche understands his own contribution as an exemplary response to this concluding question. The appeal to and evolution of the concept of the unconscious need not be the death knell of political philosophy, or of concrete interventions, but instead a fruitful point of contact between several strains of human sciences seeking to discover new methods and frameworks of self-knowledge (and thus socio-political possibilities). But just as Ffytche recognizes a counter-narrative at work in Marquard (where the fall away from the political might just as easily be read as its rejuvenation), so too can we find another story within Ffytche’s efforts to reintegrate the political and the psychical. His argument depends on a privileging of the individual that, through a socio-politically motivated evolution, transforms our concept of autonomy. I would argue that the “evolutionary” approach that Ffytche appeals to, within which Schelling and Freud represent transitional moments in a larger liberalizing arc, actually serves to undermine the genuine value of their texts. What Ffytche fails to see is that it is precisely the therapeutic dimension of Schelling’s and Freud’s theories, and the ways in which the therapeutic transforms the very concepts of evolution and progress, that challenges liberal conceptions of selfhood and freedom.
4. **A Therapeutic Engagement**

An authentic dialogue with Schelling depends upon a reading of Freud as essentially a thinker of the *therapeutic*: therapy, in the Freudian sense, is neither a process of facing up to the essential meaninglessness of desire, nor progress towards an arbitrarily chosen happiness, normalcy or good. It goes without saying that there are and must be aims that guide psychoanalytic treatment (functioning in society, feeling connected, getting rid of a particular symptom, showing up on time, etc.); but it is also unique to psychoanalysis that even these aims—purposes and desires both practical and theoretical—are ever interpretable, bringing into relief the uncertainty of all foundations and all grounding.

Consider, for example, Freud’s famous passage concerning the dream’s navel in *Interpretation of Dreams*:

> The best-interpreted dreams often have a passage that has to be left in the dark, because we notice in the course of interpretation that a knot of dream-thoughts shows itself just there, refusing to be unraveled, but also making no further contribution to the dream-content. This is the dream’s navel, and the place beneath which lies the Unknown. Indeed, the dream-thoughts we come upon as we interpret cannot in general but remain without closure, spinning out on all sides into the web-like fabric of our thoughts. Out of a denser patch in this tissue the dream-wish then arises like a mushroom from its mycelium (p. 341).[^47]

None of this is to suggest that psychoanalysis conceals or is in need of an *existential* purpose. And yet, Freud’s method of interpreting the objectively present (words, actions) as an expression or distortion of the non-present (dream, wish) or not-yet present (fantasy, future) *does* imply a kind of metaphysical *telos*. Freud’s presupposition that the defining *wishes* of an individual or a people must be *concealed, withdrawn* from presence

or consciousness, offers us a way to understand Schelling’s teleology in the *Weltalter* as something other than religious faith. If McGrath only means to say that for Freud the *meaningfulness* of our existence is not dependent upon the *occurrence* of a particular future, or upon the eventual revelation of the ultimate purpose of creation, I would argue that this is true for Schelling as well. Freud insists on the efficacy of therapy—on the possibility of a *talking cure*—even as he recognizes *its* incompleteness. For the late Schelling, similarly, it is the impenetrability of reality—not its eventual, absolute disclosure—that guarantees the meaningfulness of existence.

In order to begin to outline the possibility for Freud of metaphysical grounding in Schelling, and for Schelling a therapeutic metaphysics supported by Freudian psychoanalysis, I propose an uncanny structure of being itself. Where Freud finds in the uncanny the return of the repressed, I will argue that Schelling understands existence itself as uncanny. Schelling claims in his *Freiheitsschrift* that identity as such, A=A or the grounding proposition of reason, is duplicitous. That is, identity is already an *activity* of differentiation and union; the predicate is not an empty reflection of the subject but its consequence.\(^{48}\) The seeming duplication is thus reconceived as mutual production, such that the predicate also recreates and redefines the subject as ground, and each depends upon the other without being reducible to it.\(^{49}\) In dismantling the equation of truth with self-evidence, by deriving reason from a generative and reciprocal act, Schelling gives us a metaphysics of the uncanny: as we will see in Freud’s account, it is that which *appears* identical but *is* not that most reliably results in the anxiety of the uncanny. Moreover,

\(^{48}\) “The profound logic of the ancients distinguished subject and predicate as the antecedent and consequent and thus expressed the real meaning of the law of identity” (*FS*, p. 342).
\(^{49}\) This returns us to Laplanche’s discussion of *Nachträglichkeit in Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, where trauma is both a product and creation of altered temporality: “it may be said that, in a sense, the trauma is situated entirely in the play of ‘deceit’ producing a kind of see-saw effect between the two events” (p. 41).
such logic is found not merely in our various experiences of the uncanny, but in the
creative longing that allows for any and all experience. In other words, the very fact that
what is is—a fact we feel in the overwhelming necessity of freedom that marks existential
crisis—profoundly broadens the scope of the uncanny.

I would like to conclude by addressing the duplicity of the uncanny, the therapeutic
possibility where psychoanalytic fantasy and the Schellingian imagination converge.
After a detailed account of one of Hoffman’s tales, The Sand-man, to which Freud
attributes great uncanny effects deriving from the return of infantile fears and desires he
comes to the following conclusions:

We must content ourselves with selecting those themes of uncanniness
which are most prominent, and seeing whether we can fairly trace them
also back to infantile sources. These themes are all concerned with the
idea of a “double” in every shape and degree, with persons, therefore, who
are to be considered identical by reason of looking alike; Hoffman
accentuates this relation by transferring mental processes from the one
person to the other—what we should call telepathy—so that the one
possesses knowledge, feeling and experience in common with the other,
identifies himself with another person, so that his self becomes
confounded, or the foreign self is substituted for his own—in other words,
by doubling, dividing and interchanging the self (p. 233).

It is not simply the resurgence of infantile fears that makes us anxious; as Freud points
out in this passage, perfectly innocuous infantile wishes may also be uncanny. This
suggests that it is the very structure of return—of the re-appearance of groundlessness
and non-presence as the root of our being—that gives rise to the uncanny. In other words,
the feeling of uncanniness is dependent upon the primordial fantasy of reason—a stable
identity; the uncanniness of the double is an echo of an original uncanniness, or better
put, of uncanniness as originary. We then experience the brute reality of that which
cannot show itself as itself—the barest structure of fantasy as that which threatens to reveal the insecurity and absence it works to conceal.\(^{50}\)

This is, in truth, not far from Schelling’s own account of the duplicity inherent in being, where the identity of ground and existence is always already divided by the longing for just such a union: “But the more this composure is profoundly deep and intrinsically full of bliss, the sooner must a quiet longing produce itself in eternity…This is a longing to come to itself, to find and savor itself” (\(AW\), p. 136). Schelling’s discussion of the copula in his Freiheitsschrift marks a concern with nothing less than constructing a system of freedom—where the structure of his system requires the thinking of a ground that belongs to the Absolute but is not identical to it:

For if, at the first glance, it seems that freedom, unable to maintain itself in opposition to God, is here submerged in identity, it may be said that this apparent result is merely the consequence of an imperfect and empty conception of the law of identity. This principle does not express a unity which, revolving in the indifferent circle of sameness, would get us nowhere and remain meaningless and lifeless. The unity of this law is of an intrinsically creative kind. In the relation of subject to predicated itself, we have already pointed out the relation of ground and consequence…Dependence does not determine the nature of the dependent, and merely declares that the dependent entity, whatever else it may be, can only be as a consequence of that upon which it is dependent…Every organic individual, insofar as it has come into being, is dependent upon another organism with respect to its genesis but not at all with regard to its essential being (p. 346).

His argument here is that in order for beings to be, the nature of identity must be rethought as a principle of unheimlichkeit: identity eternally and primordially requires

\(^{50}\) At first, this bears a strong resemblance to Lacan’s account of the uncanny as the “lack of lack”—where that which (objet a) simultaneously holds open and blocks off the abyss of desire is filled up, paradoxically forcing the subject into anxiety. However, although I am interested in the nature of the loss that appears for us in the uncanny, I do not see any deep connections between my interpretation of Freud’s essay and Lacan’s at this juncture. See: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Anxiety 1962-1963 Book X, trans. Cormac Gallagher (from unpublished French manuscript). In particular, Seminar VII.
difference. The possibility of human freedom, for Schelling, is dependent upon the ambivalent identity/duplicity of the Absolute—dependent upon the space opened up by the ungrounded ground (Ungrund) that both is and is not the Absolute. Without a fracturing which seems, horrifically, to precede and derive from the Absolute there is nothing: we are anxious in the face of identity that requires self-division and of differentiation that depends upon self-identity. Such anxiety is the essence of the uncanny, the disturbed union of the Heimlich and Unheimlich, and that which should have remained secret and hidden becomes visible.\(^{51}\)

The Freud I develop here is uncanny precisely because of this therapeutically essential and theoretically inescapable duplicity: to cure is both to disentangle reality from fantasy and to acknowledge fantasy at the basis of reality. The reality of redemption is a function of its remaining irreducibly yet-to-come—of our ability to remain open to and engaged with the meaningfulness we attribute to the past. In Freud’s works on the uncanny and telepathy, as he hovers around the possibility of an unconscious that exceeds the individual, we can begin to see how freedom must intrude upon the scientific Weltanschauung of psychoanalysis. It is no coincidence that it is in “The Uncanny” that Freud cites Schelling, as if to mark the strangeness of their similarity and, even more, of its deferred recognition. The uncanny, as “that which ought to remain hidden but has come to light,” is less an intrusion of the impenetrable Real, as Lacan/Zizek might have it, and more so a disturbing confrontation with the fragility of boundary—between self

---

\(^{51}\) Markus Gabriel suggests a similar reading of Schelling in Mythology Madness and Laughter, though only in passing: “This willingness to explore and even to embrace the uncanniness of existence grounded in its libidinal instability is certainly what makes Schelling extraordinarily contemporary” (p. 33). Markus Gabriel and Slavoj Zizek, Mythology, Madness and Laughter: Subjectivity in German Idealism (London: Continuum, 2009). Like Zizek, Gabriel’s reading of Schelling is (for the most part) grounded in the Lacanian interpretation rather than in Freud’s own texts, so the very sense of what “uncanny” means here needs to be—but is not—at issue.
and other, past and future, fantasy and reality. This is the place where Freud comes closest to articulating the incompatibility of his scientific, objective sense of truth with a truth that would be properly psychoanalytic. It is, after all, psychoanalysis that ensures the entanglement of psychic reality—drive and wish—with all perception, memory, action and speech. In the uncanny, then, it is not that a particular piece of repressed material returns to us; but rather that the very givenness of existence becomes questionable, we feel the instability of the ground as such show up for us personally, intimately. And, as it turns out, for Freud this feeling is always one of the expansion/contraction of identity—the very space of Schelling’s egoic evil and erotic good.

Although I do not claim to have given an exhaustive account of the work of Marquard, Zizek, McGrath and Ffytche, I do hope to have sufficiently and fairly distinguished their projects from my own in two fundamental ways: First, their readings of Freudian theory differ markedly from my own, in some cases not engaging with Freud’s own texts at all, in others relying on the interpretations of others. These tend to be either psychoanalytic readings of Schelling’s work, taking for granted what a psychoanalytic reading should entail, or refutations of such readings. Second, and perhaps more important, they generally fail to account for the unique relationship between theory and therapy that defines psychoanalysis and, by extension, ignore the therapeutic metaphysics Schelling develops. Not only do I want to argue that Schelling’s late philosophy suggest the kind of metaphysics Freudian therapy depends upon; the vitality and viability of Freudian therapy also offers a genuine alternative to contemporary methods of interpreting Schelling’s concerns with evil, freedom, temporality and myth.
4. Chapter Overview

Chapter I: Sublime Freedom

Beginning with Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*, and Schiller’s “Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man,” I suggest that Schelling takes up certain pivotal moments in their accounts of freedom as it is disclosed in the sublime. Ultimately, I suggest that Schelling departs from what I consider Kant’s repressive moral duty, and Schiller’s intimation of complete integration between desire and reason, in favor of a nuanced investigation of the role of the unconscious.

Chapter II: Uncanny Freedom

I look at the *Freiheitsschrift* in conjunction with Schelling’s reading of tragedy in the *Philosophy of Art*, and his account of repression in the *System of Transcendental Idealism*, to illuminate the former text as a meditation on the vital relationship between ground and existence—between the unconscious and consciousness. Through Schelling’s notion of freedom as it is revealed in tragedy, I turn to the tragic dimension of psychoanalytic therapy—particularly in regards to the temporal disruption of the traumatic that Schelling only begins to articulate in his *Freiheitsschrift*. It is through the uncanny, as worked out in Freud, that I bring together sublime and tragic freedom: the sublime and the tragic are uncanny insofar as they return us to the experience of limits that both are and are not of our own making. I then go back to Kant’s *Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone* and the rudiments of a theory of the unconscious that is gestured
at there, suggesting a way to understand the precarious negotiation between ground and existence as it develops into the possibility of good and evil, or of psychic health and sickness, dependent upon a choice that lies outside of time.

Chapter III: The Absolute Past

The uncanny freedom I point to in the previous chapter leads to an investigation of the traumatic/tragic time that is fleshed out in Schelling’s various drafts of the *Weltalter*. The question the texts revolve around is how the tranquil, unexpressed will of the *Ungrund* transforms itself—opening up temporality as such—into the contracting and expanding wills Schelling investigates in his earlier essay on freedom. The connection Schelling makes here between drive and the Absolute Past is worked out through a close reading of the function and action of the unconscious as the site of will and repetition.

I go on to consider Freud’s own ceaseless rethinking of the drives, the foundational concept of psychoanalysis, that turns on the same set of questions: in particular, I consider here Freud’s hesitancy in sketching out primary narcissism—that is, the primacy of a subject-less, object-less beginning, where desire has not yet disrupted the union of pre-ego and world. I consider the viability of such an undifferentiated stage through its reappearance in auto-erotism and primary masochism. Finally, I look to Freud’s late drive theory, the seeming antagonism of Eros and Thanatos, to show that psychoanalysis, too, can acknowledge a primary, non-oppositional ground.
The problem of beginnings Schelling lays out, destabilizing the past and any possible narration of it, is importantly connected to the structure of the drives and the nature of their opposition and force. It is the work of this section to understand the connection between the structure of the drives and the emergence of time. Although I will consider this on greater detail in the next chapter, I touch upon the way in which the historicity of creation, as well as the efficacy of psychoanalytic therapy for the individual, must be dependent upon the development of a properly unconscious (as drive, wish and fantasy) temporality.

Chapter IV: The Mythical Symptom

The goal of this chapter is to flesh out the theoretical connection between historicity and the unconscious, developed in Chapter III, therapeutically. Through Schelling’s positive philosophy, and particularly Historical-Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology, I consider the dual function of language as both symptom and cure. Insofar as Schelling’s reading of mythology is literal—claiming that mythology means what it is—I reconsider Freud’s interpretive method in similar fashion. Further, I call attention to the way in which Freud comes to understand the truth of fantasy, or the indifference psychoanalytic history assumes towards the physical or psychical reality of memory, trauma and the primal scene. This will involve a discussion of the temporality of Nachträglichkeit where, as with Schelling’s account of mythology, trauma disturbs the very possibility of origins and identity.
I. Sublime Freedom

*Everything that is hidden, everything full of mystery, contributes to what is terrifying and is therefore capable of sublimity*—Schiller, “On the Sublime”

Despite his claims to the contrary in “The Uncanny,” Freud’s interest in the *aesthetic* is in no way peripheral to the work of psychoanalysis. Through the aesthetic, Freud explores a reality that encompasses the unconscious, opening up a psychoanalytic *Weltanschauung* that fundamentally diverges from the scientific. Freud thus inherits a set of issues that pervade Schelling’s middle and late philosophy, issues arising from attempts to systematize a subjectivity no longer centered in consciousness. This chapter serves the preparatory function of establishing Freud’s place in a larger tradition of aesthetic philosophy, one that includes Kant, Schiller and the early Schelling, wherein the systematicity of reason collides with the disruptive forces of desire and feeling in important and unique ways. My hope is to show that for Freud and his predecessors, the aesthetic becomes *the* opportunity for reformulating the conflict between freedom and determinism.

Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*, a sustained meditation on the philosophical import of the aesthetic, opens up the problematic relationship between *system* and *subjectivity* that will guide the Idealist project as well as psychoanalysis. In this text, the abyss separating nature and freedom that transcendental philosophy depends upon for its
coherency is given over to the unifying domain of feeling.\textsuperscript{52} Although Kant does not posit the unconscious in this regard, as Schelling will go on to do, he reveals a dimension of experience that is similarly irreducible to the determinism of nature and the determination of reason. This aesthetic encroachment into the Critical Philosophy, a privileging of feeling and artistic genius that inspires Schiller, Fichte, Hegel and the young Schelling among others, implies that pleasure and pain transform the system of reason, as it were, from within:

Hence we must suppose, at least provisionally, that judgment also contains an a priori principle of its own, and also suppose that since the power of desire is necessarily connected with pleasure or displeasure…judgment will bring about a transition from the pure cognitive power, i.e. from the domain of concepts of nature, to the domain of the concept of freedom, just as in its logical use it makes possible the transition from understanding to reason (C.J, p. 18/179).

It is feeling, and most fundamentally pleasure and pain, that simultaneously challenges and saves Kant’s rational system. As I will suggest, the dangerous possibility that belongs to the \textit{Critique of Judgment} concerns this notion of “transition”: The centrality of the aesthetic—and particularly through returning to the bodily and natural—undermines Kant’s ultimate claims in this work about the realization of freedom.

\textsuperscript{52} Immanuel Kant, \textit{Critique of Judgment}. Trans., Werner S. Pluhar. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987. Hereafter \textit{CJ}, with pagination also from the \textit{Akademie} edition. This is merely to say that the dualism between phenomena (as determined by the concepts of the understanding) and noumena (as produced in the ideas of reason) is problematized by the spontaneity of feeling and imagination. Kant is quite explicit in his introduction to the \textit{Critique of Judgment} the faculty of judgment is a mediating faculty between understanding (the domain of nature) and reason (the domain of freedom): “And yet the family of our higher cognitive powers also includes a mediating link between understanding and reason. This is judgment, about which we have cause to suppose, by analogy, that it too may contain a priori, if not a legislation of its own, then at least a principle of its own, perhaps merely a subjective one, by which to search for laws” (p. 177). He goes on to make it clear that just as the domains of understanding and reason must be cognition and desire, respectively, the similarly mediating domain or territory of judgment is feeling: “Now between the cognitive power and the power of desire lies the feeling of pleasure, just as judgment lies between understanding and reason” (p. 178).
Although Kant spends much more time on the analysis of the beautiful, his account of its structure focuses on the *harmony* of this reflective, aesthetic judgment. In the judgment of the beautiful, it is the unproblematic union of imaginative and cognitive faculties that comes to the fore. However, his inclusion of an analysis of the sublime under the umbrella of aesthetic judgments, while at the same time insisting that the sublime has no real connection to products of nature or of art but only in feeling, brings into relief the conflict between Kant’s dual conceptions of freedom: the sublime, an experience of pleasure in pain and of transition more generally, is reduced to an expression of reason’s superiority over and absolute rupture from nature (and the body). In this insistence, Kant minimizes the much more radical consequences of *aesthetic* freedom.

In what follows, I argue that Schiller and the early Schelling develop an aesthetics that is in fact truer to Kant’s own hopes of attending to the *transition* between nature and freedom, between a concept and its realization. Specifically, they illustrate the ways in which the insights of the *Critique of Judgment* must bring into relief the tensions within the Kantian conception of freedom—as imaginative, productive spontaneity on the one hand, and as repressive prohibition and refusal of feeling and nature on the other.\(^53\) It is with this in mind that my discussion of the Kantian sublime in *The Critique of Judgment* is followed by Schiller’s elaborations of it, primarily in “Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man” and “Concerning the Sublime”;\(^54\) and Schelling’s incorporation of


\(^{54}\) Friedrich Schiller, *Essays*. Eds. Walter Hinderer and Daniel O. Dahlstrom (New York: Continuum, 2001). All citations and paginations are from this collection unless otherwise noted.
these views in *System of Transcendental Idealism* and *The Philosophy of Art*. These works share the basic intuition of the *Critique of Judgment* that art and aesthetics, in some way or another, unite the sensible and the supersensible; Schiller and Schelling, however, regard the feeling of the sublime (whether in art or in nature) as the privileged site for the disclosure of freedom that is prior to and more fundamental than the law. My focus here will be on tracing the different qualities and moments of this feeling, including the horror and confusion that anticipate the Freudian uncanny, and how such feelings must alter our conception of the freedom they make manifest. Schiller and Schelling argue that freedom is not merely the constraint of desire or nature; they call for an aesthetic freedom that recognizes the human to be in excess of the rational. In Kant, sublimity contracts into the moment in which fear and helplessness in the face of nature disappears into reverence for the supremacy of reason. For Schiller, and to an even greater degree for Schelling, the sublime is human activity—it is the process of holding together alienation and integration rather than what results. The sublime is not a failure of the imagination but evidence of its re-inscription as the root of freedom. In similar fashion, we might consider the development from Kant to Schelling, mediated by Schiller’s emphasis on wholeness and play, in terms of the role of aesthetics more generally: what begins in Kant as an understanding of art and nature as symbols or tools for recognizing our dutiful, rational, universal freedom, culminates in an aesthetic experience that must be an enactment of our creative, desirous, personal freedom.

---

1. A Painful Interruption

Kant’s Critique of Judgment, like the reflective judgment it treats, is essentially an act of unification—the faculty to which feeling belongs offers a transitional space between deterministic nature in The Critique of Pure Reason, and rational, law-giving freedom in The Critique of Practical Reason.\(^5^6\) Kant gives us some reason to believe that reflective judgments not only unify, but also exceed and even ground, deterministic and autonomous cause.\(^5^7\) As Andrew Bowie writes in Aesthetics and Subjectivity: From Kant to Nietzsche,

Kant therefore seems to suggest both that our most fundamental relationship to the world and each other is at the level of the immediate ‘feeling’ which is the basis of the postulate of ‘common sense’, and that there is a purposive sense in our cognitive capacity which goes beyond its subsumption of intuitions under rules. Given that he also suggests that our representation of ourselves is ‘nothing more than a feeling of an existence without the least concept’, the role of the non-conceptual aspects of the

\(^{56}\) “For all of the soul’s powers or capacities can be reduced to three that cannot be derived further from a common basis: the cognitive power, the feeling of pleasure and displeasure, and the power of desire” (CJ p. 18/179). Kant continues, “Now between the cognitive power and the power of desire lies the feeling of pleasure, just as judgment lies between understanding and reason. Hence we must suppose, at least provisionally, that judgment also contains an a priori principle of its own, and also suppose that since the power of desire is necessarily connected with pleasure or displeasure” (ibid.). Finally, he concludes, “judgment will bring about a transition from the pure cognitive power, i.e., from the domain of concepts of nature, to the domain of the concept of freedom, just as in its logical use it makes possible the transition from understanding to reason” (ibid.).

\(^{57}\) In Henry Allison’s Kant’s Theory of Taste: A Reading of the Critique of Aesthetic Judgment, citing the work of Béatrice Longuenesse, the author argues that reflective judgments, and particularly the principle of purposiveness that governs them more generally, introduced in the Critique of Judgment offer a way to better understand the development of the schematism sketched out in the Critique of Pure Reason. Allison states the problem of the schemata as follows: “How, for example, could one apply the concept of causality to a given occurrence unless it were already conceived as an event of a certain kind, for example, the freezing of water?” (p. 24). Allison goes on to agree with Longuenesse’s response, for the most part: “If I understand her correctly, the gist of Longuenesse’s answer is that this comparison does not begin with a blank slate. This is because the mind, in its universalizing comparison, is guided by the very same concepts of reflection that are operative in the comparison of schemata that leads to the formation of reflected concepts. Presumably, at this level, however, the comparison leads the mind to seek similarities and differences, which can first be codified as schemata governing apprehension and then reflected as concepts. And this is possible, according to Longuenesse, because this comparison is oriented from the beginning toward the acquisition of concepts applicable in judgments” (p. 27). See also: Béatrice Longuenesse, Kant and the Capacity to Judge: Sensibility and Discursivity in the Transcendental Analytic of the Critique of Pure Reason, Charles T. Wolfe, trans. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998.
Kant’s explorations of aesthetic judgments in particular, a sub-set of reflective judgments, open up a connection between the supersensible and the sensible, between the universal and the individual. Through his explanation of the a priori principle of purposiveness that grounds our experience of the beautiful and the sublime, Kant intimates a third way: a form of relating to the world and to ourselves fundamentally unlike the theoretical domination of knowing (experiences subsumed under rules of the understanding) and the practical domination of acting (feelings subsumed under the moral law). Ultimately, it is through this capacity of aesthetic judgment for bridging the personal and the universal, rather than collapsing the former into the latter, that Kant exposes the crucial question haunting his Critical Philosophy: How can the noumenal freedom of *The Critique of Practical Reason* express itself in and indeed alter the phenomenal world of *The Critique of Pure Reason*? And how could the seemingly ancillary field of aesthetics perform the philosophical task of bridging the noumenal and phenomenal realms?  

Kant distinguishes aesthetic judgments from cognitive judgments insofar as they are *reflective*, rather than *determinative*. That is, these judgments do not determine their

---

58 Hereafter, cited as *AS*.
59 “Hence an immense gulf is fixed between the domain of the concept of nature, the sensible, and the domain of the concept of freedom, the supersensible, so that no transition from the sensible to the supersensible (and hence by means of the theoretical use of reason) is possible, just as if there were two different worlds, the first of which cannot have any influence on the second; and yet the second *is* to have an influence on the first, i.e., the concept of freedom is to actualize in the world of sense the purpose enjoined by its laws” (*CJ*, p. 14/176).
60 “Judgment in general is the ability to think the particular as contained under the universal. If the universal (the rule, principle, law) is given, then the judgment, which subsumes the particular under it, is *determinative* (even though [in its role] as transcendental judgment it states a priori the conditions that must be met for subsumption under that universal to be possible). But if only a particular is given and judgment has to find the universal for it, then this power is merely *reflective*” (*CJ*, p. 19/180).
objects, or subsume particular experiences under already-given concepts or laws, but rather create or seek the universal for the particular. As a form of reflective judgment, the necessity and universality belonging to aesthetic judgments is not a function of a priori concepts or intuitions; rather, the necessity and universality involved in judgments of taste is attributable to our capacity for a common experience of the ways in which the faculties of imagination, understanding and reason relate to each other. It is feeling—not knowledge or duty—that initiates us into the universality of reflective judgments. Kant argues that aesthetic judgments offer a form of relating—albeit hypothetical—that allows us to feel the transition between the determinism of the first critique and the autonomy of the second. When faced with the workings of genius, or with a living organism, we realize that these opposed forms of causation are inadequate. Through aesthetic judgments of the beautiful, Kant emphasizes a notion of freedom which not only separates us from sensible nature, but also brings us closer to supersensible nature. That is, the tension between moral and spontaneous freedom in Kant comes to the fore in the disinterested engagement proper to judgments of the beautiful. This tension, which was already evident in the Critique of Pure Reason, could be reformulated in terms of the distinction between the productive and reproductive imagination in that text. As Bowie reminds us, Kant’s aesthetics draws our attention to the shifting boundaries, not only between subject and object, but more fundamentally within the subject, that disturb the Critical Philosophy from the beginning:

In the ‘B’ version of the CPR (1787) Kant changes the role of the imagination, in order to sustain the boundary between what we contribute to the world’s intelligibility and what the world contributes, by subordinating the reproductive imagination to the functioning of the categories of the understanding. He therefore planned (but did not actually do so) to remove the famous description of the imagination as a ‘blind but
indispensable function of the soul without which we would have no knowledge’ (B p.103, A p.78) and replace it with the assertion that all synthesis is based on the understanding. The problems lurking in the idea of a boundary between spontaneity and receptivity become most apparent in the decisive part of Kant’s account of the structure of our subjectivity, the attempt of the I to describe itself. It is this account, the ‘transcendental deduction of the categories’, which will have a major effect on German Idealism and early Romanticism, and thus upon the history of aesthetics (AS, p. 20).

Kant’s aesthetics expose (and also perpetuate) a pervasive fault-line in the Critical Philosophy, the need to develop a reflexive space between activity and passivity, whether we are dealing with self-consciousness or our experience in the world. It is not by chance that this exposure comes about through the artwork—an object that forces us to question where its meaning rests, that dares us to distinguish (universal) truth from (individual) interpretation.

In the judgment of the beautiful, the form of an object sets in motion our powers of cognition, but in such a way that they remain in “free play” [freien Spielen]: our cognitive faculties do not determine their object, but are engaged harmoniously in their proper functions despite the lack of any attainable goal or end.61 It is not only the beautiful form that is purposive, but also the feeling of this play; the beautiful form incites a feeling that the world is there for us, and this feeling of an underlying unity between subject and object is pleasure. This is mirrored in Kant’s account of genius, where the creation of an art work—like the pleasurable play that grounds our judgment of

61 “But the way of presenting [which occurs] in a judgment of taste is to have a subjective universal communicability without presupposing a determinate concept; hence this subjective universally communicability can be nothing but [that of] the mental state in which we are when imagination and understanding are in free play (insofar as they harmonize with each other as required for cognition in general)” (CJ, p. 62/218). See: Immanuel Kant, Kritik der Ureteilskraft. Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2001. “Die subjektive allgemeine Mitteilbarkeit der Vorstellungsart in einem Geschmacksurteile, da sie, ohne einen bestimmten Begriff vorauszusetzen, stattfinden soll, kann nichts anderes as der Gemütszustand in dem freien Spiele der Einbildungskraft und des Verstandes (sofern sie unter einander, wie es zu einem Erkenntnisse überhaupt erforderlich ist, zusammenstimmen “, (p. 67/218). Hereafter cited as KU.
the beautiful—is not determined by rules; the activity of rule-making itself comes to the fore—the work of the understanding and the imagination—and becomes playful, creative and spontaneous without devolving into chaos.⁶² Freedom is here understood in its creative capacity, and our vocation is realized through the playful activity of imagining rather than obeying the law. Kant’s invocation of purposiveness in accounting for the pleasure of the beautiful allows him to consider a subject’s relation to nature (and to art)—both within and external to him—that is neither reducible to the necessity of judgments of fact nor merely analogous to autonomy:

On the other hand, we do call objects, states of mind, or acts purposive even if their possibility does not necessarily presuppose the presentation of a purpose; we do this merely because we can explain and grasp them only if we assume that they are based on a causality [that operates] according to purposes, i.e., on a will that would have so arranged them in accordance with the presentation of a certain rule. Hence there can be purposiveness without a purpose insofar as we do not posit the causes of this form in a will, and yet can grasp the explanation of its possibility only by deriving it from a will (p. 65/220).⁶³

But Kant is clear that such purposiveness remains on the level of the hypothetical—that we must treat nature as if it were organized, that we approach the beautiful form as if it

---

⁶² “Genius is the talent (natural endowment) that gives the rule to art. Since talent is an innate productive ability of the artist and as such belongs itself to nature, we could also put it this way: Genius is the innate mental predisposition (ingenium) through which nature gives the rule to art” (CJ p. 174/307). [“Genie ist das Talent (Naturlage), welches der Kunst die Regel gibt. Da das Talent, als angeborenes produktives Vermögen des Künstlers, selbst zur Natur gehört, so könnte man sich auch so ausdrücken: Genie ist die angeborene Gemütsanlage (ingenium), durch welche die Natur der Kunst die Regel gibt” (KU, p. 192/307).]

⁶³ “Zweckmäßig aber heißt ein Objekt oder Gemütszustand oder eine Handlung auch, wenn gleich ihre Möglichkeit von uns nur erklärt und begriffen werden kann, sofern wir eine Kausalität nach Zwecken, d.i. einen Willen, der sie nach der Vorstellung einer gewissen Regel so angeordnet hätte, zum Grunde derselben annehmen. Die Zweckmäßigkeit kann also ohne Zweck sein, sofern wir die Ursachen dieser Form nicht in einen Willen setzen, aber doch die Erklärung ihrer Möglichkeit nur, indem wir sie von einem Willen ableiten, uns begreiflich machen können” (KU, p. 70/220).
were meant to harmonize our cognitive powers, only in order to explain particular appearances. Although Kant points beyond the determinism of nature and the self-determination of reason through the reflective principle of purposiveness, he stops short of recognizing this as a truly other causality.

In the sublime, however, this pleasurable sense of purposiveness that characterizes the beautiful (and the teleological) gives way: not only does the sublime painfully interrupt the proper functioning of our cognitive powers, but it also recalls our supersensible vocation only negatively, through violently exposing our sensible—imaginative and bodily—helplessness. The harmonious union of imagination and understanding that we feel in the beautiful is sundered in the awe of the sublime; the creativity and sense of belonging to nature that we experience as pleasure in the beautiful is lost. The sublime is predicated on our alienation from nature, disclosing a world that is distinctly not for our comprehension or pleasure, where even our own sensible nature becomes impossibly disconnected from the supersensible. In his efforts to distinguish the sublime from the beautiful, it begins to seem that Kant does not see the sublime as an aesthetic judgment at all. The sublime is rarely, if at all, the product of artistic genius; and although it remains tied to reflective judgment, it is only in the failure of the imagination that we can experience the sublime. The feeling of the sublime is only tangentially related to an object, a cue that reminds us that autonomy depends upon an insurmountable divide between freedom and nature. In contrast to his account of the beautiful, Kant’s description of the sublime does not seem to tell us anything about how the supersensible and the sensible might practically affect each other. Such a vision of the sublime reifies
Kantian freedom as a form of domination—as a repression of drive, nature and individuality—while freedom as playfulness is relegated to the subjunctive voice, to a mere symbol of morality. However, in claiming that our experience of the sublime is fundamentally the feeling of self-consciousness—of the internal contrast between the weakness of our flesh and understanding on the one hand, and the strength of reason on the other—Kant himself suggests an alternative approach to the sublime: What kind of freedom does such essential self-division lay bare? How might the violence of the sublime threaten the integrity of the subject? In order to respond to these questions, we need to consider in some detail what distinguishes the universality of the sublime from the universality of the beautiful. In the latter, of course, it is the shared, harmonious functioning of the imagination and understanding that is felt as pleasure. The universality of the sublime, however, is more problematic: grounded in disruption—in the pain of separation and division—the sublime seems to defy unity at the most intimate level. I will suggest that, paradoxically, the sublime deconstructs the Kantian equation of freedom with the universality of reason.

---

64 In Kyriaki Goudeli’s Challenges to German Idealism, she suggests a similar conception of a peculiarly Kantian repression, only here at the most basic level of cognition in the CPR: “The self can secure its unity only so long as its representations and corresponding states can be synthesized in an a priori way. However, these representations are already inwardly determined by the understanding: the legal contract turns into the domination of the understanding upon sensibility” (p. 36).

65 As Andrew Bowie argues in his Aesthetics and Subjectivity: From Kant to Nietzsche, Kant’s departure from earlier aesthetic theories, like Baumgarten’s and Hamann’s, involves a turn from the value of the individual or particular experience (grounded in a secure theological worldview) and towards the universal: “Baumgarten’s Aesthetica, and Hamann’s Aesthetica in nuce, begin to suggest what is at stake in the emergence of aesthetics as an independent branch of philosophy. Despite their obvious differences, Baumgarten and Hamann share a concern with the failure of the rationalist traditions of the eighteenth century to do justice to the immediacy of the individual’s sensuous relationship to the world which is part of aesthetic pleasure…Aesthetic theory from Kant onwards, in contrast, often searches for the whole into which a single phenomenon can fit, once theological certainties have been abandoned, and this search is related to other ways in which modernity attempts to make the world cohere, from the political to the scientific” (p. 5).
It is in part because of Kant’s insistence that the universality of the sublime is a function of the universality of reason that he does not really discuss its role in art; as we will see, Schiller’s emphasis on the sublime in art, and in tragedy particularly, is a function of his understanding freedom as integrative wholeness rather than repressive autonomy. Still, Kant does make gestures towards the fractured universality of the sublime, possibilities that Schiller and Schelling develop in their own ways, through the fragmentary completeness of poetry:

A poet ventures to give sensible expression to rational ideas of invisible beings, the realm of the blessed, the realm of hell, eternity, creation and so on…but then, by means of an imagination that emulates the example of reason in reaching [for] a maximum, he ventures to give these sensible expression in a way that goes beyond the limits of experience, namely, with a completeness for which no example can be found in nature…Now if a concept is provided with a presentation of the imagination such that, even though this presentation belongs to the exhibition of the concept, yet it prompts, even by itself, so much thought as can never be comprehended within a determinate concept and thereby the presentation aesthetically expands the concept itself in an unlimited way, then the imagination is creative in [all of] this and sets the power of intellectual ideas in motion (CJ, pp.182-183/314-315, my italics).66

Kant describes the completeness the poet uncovers as without likeness in nature, expanding indefinitely, limitless. The completeness the poet communicates is not any determinable content, but a feeling of recognizing ourselves precisely in the non-

---

66 “Der Dichter wagt es, Vernunftideen von unsichtbaren Wesen, das Reich der Seligen, das Höllenreich, die Ewigkeit, die Schöpfung u. dgl. zu versinnlichen…die Schranken der Erfahrung hinaus, vermittels einer Einbildungskraft, die dem Vernunft-Vorspiele in Erreichung eines Größten nacheifert, in einer Vollständigkeit sinnlich zu machen, für die sich in der Natur kein Beispiel findet…Wenn nun einem Begriffe eine Vorstellung der Einbildungskraft untergelegt wird, die zu seiner Darstellung gehört, aber für sich allein so viel zu denken veranlaßt, als sich niemals in einem bestimmten Begriff zusammenfassen läßt, mithin den Begriff selbst auf unbegrenzte Art ästhetisch erweitert, so ist die Einbildungskraft hierbei schöpferisch und bringt das Vermögen intellektueller Ideen (die Vernunft) in Bewegung…” (KU, pp. 202-203/314-315).
conceptual and incomplete. In Kant’s view, the universality of the sublime, like that of beauty, derives from our shared cognitive powers. In the latter, it is the play between imagination and the understanding that binds us together, and in the former it is the limitlessness of reason. However, through these brief remarks on the nature of poetry, we can begin to see in Kant another vision, one that Schiller and later Schelling acknowledge, of how it is that we speak the sublime—how language itself, in its very failure to translate the sublime, suggests a universality that allows us to be ourselves and to be with others. It is not only, and not even primarily, the moral law that captivates us in the sublime; rather, feeling this universal lack compels us to speak, drives us to recognize and be recognized by each other and nature.

Although Kant does not offer much more on the language of the sublime, he does make strange and fruitful claims about the language of nature: “It will be said that this construal of aesthetic judgments in terms of a kinship with moral feeling looks rather too studied to be considered as the true interpretation of that cipher through which nature speaks to us figuratively in its beautiful forms” (CJ, p. 167/301). Although Kant is quite clear that nature speaks to us through its beautiful forms, not its sublimity, it is worth noting that, like the poetic genius, nature does speak to us. Moreover, he preemptively defends himself against the charge that translating our connection to nature into moral feeling is a denial and falsification of its excessive truth. If our appreciation of the beautiful implies a familiarity with the language of nature, our capacity for the sublime would be a confrontation with the precariousness of our translation: an expression of the dialectics of chaos and order, of differentiation and renewed integration. As speaker,

67 “Man wird sagen, diese Deutung ästhetischer Urteile auf Verwandtschaft mit dem moralischen Gefühl sehe gar zu studiert aus, um sie für die wahre Auslegung der Chiffrerschrift zu halten, wodurch die Natur in ihren schönen Formen figürlich zu uns spricht” (KU, p. 184/301).
nature reveals itself in its double aspect—as an objectified text that ought to be read and as an expressing that exceeds all interpretations. In the face of the sublime it is not merely our dual nature that surfaces, but the duality of nature itself.

In the shock of the sublime, we suddenly find nature indecipherable and unfamiliar—our habitual forms of communication lost; and yet, it is only this discontinuity that allows us to recognize that nature does speak and, like all speakers, also communicates meaning kept in silent reserve. Indeed, it is the silence of nature that makes language possible and necessary. The silence that would seem to characterize the sublime, and through this silence an intimation of what it is like to authentically understand and be understood, reminds us of the ways in which language serves to unify and to divide us. To name something is at once to appropriate it and to put it at a distance—it is, like freedom, simultaneously a movement away from wholeness and the struggle to recapture it in another form. It seems that in reducing our experience of the sublime to moral fortitude, and nature to a decipherable message, Kant violates their unsettling and captivating excess. But this is not to say that all efforts at speaking the sublime must do so. It is no easy task to say just what it is that we, as humans, share—nor that what we share is inherently good; and yet to persist in our efforts to speak it is our highest calling.
2. Schiller at Play

For Schiller, it is precisely the challenge of a new language that sublime nature announces. It is only when one “gives up trying to explain nature and makes this inscrutability itself the standpoint of the evaluation” that the language of the sublime, beyond knowledge or explanation, can be heard (“Concerning the Sublime”, p. 81).

The language of the sublime is the language of self-differing:

The feeling of the sublime is a mixed feeling. It is a combination of being in anguish (at its peak it expresses itself as a shudder) and being happy (something that can escalate to a kind of ecstasy). This combination, although it is not actually pleasure, is still preferred by all noble souls over all pleasure. This synthesis of two contradictory sensations in a single feeling establishes our moral self-sufficiency in an irrefutable manner. For, since it is absolutely impossible for the same object to be related to us in two contradictory ways, it follows from the fact that we ourselves are related to the object in two contrasting ways, that two opposite natures must be united within us (p. 74).

Schiller’s hopes for aesthetics are a departure from Kant’s, insofar as the latter opens up the aesthetic realm as a way to resolve the conflict of embodied reason, arguing that the ideas of reason ought to control and overcome nature. Though Schiller adheres to Kant’s vision of the sublime as the awakening within us of the power of reason, he also offers a radical rethinking of freedom in terms of the personal. Schiller manages to bring out the

---

disorienting aspect of the sublime in such a way that, despite his proximity to Kant, universal reason and morality do not do justice to the feeling of human freedom. The vocation that the sublime calls us to cannot be the enactment of the categorical imperative, for this would entail dissociation from an essential aspect of our being—our natural desires; rather, wholeness, conceived as the integration of contradictory elements, would be the true expression of human freedom. Kant argues that the sublime is within us, and yet his account of what we are fails to capture the precarious unity of human being. In looking at the way we speak the sublime, Schiller points out that just as language allows us to know, explain and dominate, so too does its limitation reach beyond itself towards that which resists knowledge, explanation and domination; in the same manner, as we see already in Kant, it is only through an acknowledgment of our vulnerability—our limit—that the sublime reveals our true potency. By pointedly expanding Kant’s account of the sublime into our experience with art, Schiller shows that the sublime gestures towards the unspeakable lack that grounds us—towards the space from which language is born and to which it recalls us. Tragically, we listen for the whispers of our freedom—freedom that breaks us apart. Only through the silence and rupture of the sublime, in our stunned inability to know nature and ourselves, can we speak truthfully of freedom.

By enlarging the value of the human to include desire and division, Schiller argues that the repression of our sensual nature and the totalizing of reason are anathema to freedom. Responding to Kant’s version of the sublime, Schiller insists that he fails to capture both the depth of our identity with nature and the severity of our isolation from nature. Because we, too, are part of the natural order, the ways in which we understand
ourselves to be united with and divided from nature are essentially tied up with self-consciousness and the possibility of ethical life: for Schiller, aesthetics is not merely useful in developing our sense of freedom, as it seems to be for Kant, but necessary. In re-appropriating the human dimension of freedom, which is not exhausted by the paradigm of law and submission, Schiller critiques the abstractness of Kant’s account; it is in part due to Schiller’s emphasis on the whole, or fully human being, that Schelling goes on to reformulate subjectivity and human freedom in terms of personality. Where Schelling will eventually suggest that freedom itself is wrapped up in the dark and desirous unconscious, Schiller focuses on our mode of enacting that freedom, refusing the model of antagonism and constraint in favor of integration and reconciliation. Looking at Schiller’s playful sense of freedom as a convergence not only of nature and freedom, but also of the beautiful and the sublime, it is clear why within Kant’s dominating version these pairs must remain ever opposed.

Though Schiller seems to accept Kant’s formulation of the sublime as the experience of reason’s supremacy over nature and desire, he also draws us more deeply into the feeling of devastation and self-division. The captivation (ergreift) of the sublime, rooted in contradiction, at first appears entirely removed from the pleasurable lingering (weilen) that belongs to the harmony of the beautiful:

In what is sublime, on the other hand, there is no harmony of reason and sensuousness and the spell that captivates our minds lies precisely in this contradiction. Here the physical and the moral sides of the human being are severed from one another in the sharpest possible way, for it is precisely when confronted by such objects that the physical side feels only

---

70 I deal with Schelling’s account of personality and its relation to freedom in the Freiheitsschrift in Chapter II. See also: Sean McGrath’s The Dark Ground of Spirit.

71 Kant writes: “Wir weilen bei der Betrachtung des Schönen, weil diese Betrachtung sich selbst stärkt und reproduziert…” (KU, 222, my emphasis). And in Schiller, “Beim Erhabenen hingenen stimmen Vernunft und Sinnlichkeit nicht zusammen, und eben in diesem Widerspruch zwischen beiden liegt der Zauber, womit es unser Gemüt ergreift” (TS, p. 798, my emphasis)
its limitation, while the moral side experiences its *power*. The moral side of human nature is infinitely elevated by the very thing that forces the physical side of human nature into the ground (“Concerning the Sublime”, p. 75).

Schiller continues to draw out this distinction, in agreement with Kant that “not gradually (since there is no transition from dependency to freedom), but only suddenly and through a kind of shock, does something sublime tear the independent spirit loose from the net a sophisticated sensuousness uses to ensnare it” (p. 77).²² As a “shock” (*Erschütterung*) and a “tear” (*reißt*), the sublime points to alienation at the root of our freedom.²³ Beauty, Kant argues, is communicable because we all have the same capacity for experiencing the harmonious, free play of imagination and understanding; because the experience of the beautiful is the feeling of our self-identity, we recall our shared human identity. But how does the sublime—in its silence—unify us in our peculiarly human vocation?²⁴

Privileging the radical division and ensuing need for re-integration that the sublime entails, Schiller maintains that identity is predicated on an essential lack inscribed in the foundation of human being:

> The road taken by the modern poets is, moreover, the same road humans in general must travel, both as individuals and as a whole. Nature makes a human being one with himself, art separates and divides him; by means of the ideal he returns to the unity. Yet because the ideal is an infinite one that he never reaches, the cultured human being in *his* way can never

---

²² *TS*, p. 799.
²³ *ibid*.
²⁴ Although Schiller takes up Kant’s term he does not share his definition, as I hope to show in what follows. Whereas Kant claims that “it is a law (of reason) for us, and part of our vocation, to estimate any sense object in nature that is large for us as being small when compared with the ideas of reason,” Schiller emphasizes the very human aspect of our vocation: “Every individual human being, one may say, carries within him, potentially and prescriptively, an ideal man, the archetype of a human being, and it is his life’s task to be, through all his changing manifestations, in harmony with the unchanging unity of his ideal” (“Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man”, p. 93). He continues, explaining what this “ideal” would consist in, “Should there, however, be cases in which he were to have this twofold experience *simultaneously*, in which he were to be at once conscious of his freedom and sensible of his existence, were, at one and the same time, to feel himself matter and come to know himself as mind, then he would, in such cases, and in such cases only, have a complete intuition of his human nature…” (p. 126).
The awareness of our freedom prohibits us from returning to an undivided, naïve unity; our freedom involves both the recognition of a lost wholeness—this lack that defines us—and a striving to recapture it. So although Schiller still believes that the sublime directs us towards a unity of will and action, human freedom itself remains irreducibly split: anguish and pleasure, fear and rapture, submission and domination. It is not surprising that the language of the sublime, for Kant as well as Schiller, is the language of violence, or at least of antagonistic forces. And it is not merely the language of violence that permeates the sublime, but also language as violence. Kant argues that aesthetic judgment is both subjective and universal: in our experience of the beautiful and the sublime we are subject to the demand that it is not I that speaks but We. Still, it is not altogether clear how through the disruption of the sublime we can speak at all—how it is that acknowledging our ruptured identity might make us whole. It would seem that the sublime calls us to a moral duty that requires an act of self-domination, to unity at the cost of repression or disavowal; Schiller’s account of the sublime, particularly insofar as it converges with the beautiful, contributes to an account of freedom that isn’t conditioned by violence, as a possibility for self-consciousness that neither denies nor succumbs to the radical disjunction that unites us.

While recognizing the chasm between nature and freedom, between passivity and activity, Schiller marks the sublime as the site of a centering contradiction. In other words, it is not only our power to resist nature that we experience in the sublime, but, and precisely because of this resistance, a vital and universal alienation: we are at a distance

---

75 TS, p. 718.
both from nature and from ourselves and this separation makes us existentially uncomfortable, disturbing the unity of self-consciousness that *ought* to ground our freedom. Schiller allows us a way to think the disorienting aspect of the sublime as more than simply “a momentary inhibition of the vital forces,” as more than an unfortunate prelude to the resurgence of reason and its lawfulness (*CJ/KU*, p. 245). The sublime, in the uncertainty of its silence, gestures towards freedom’s paradoxical demands: there must be an infinite distance between reason and nature and, at the same time, reason only comes to itself in and through its engagement with nature. To speak this impossibility would be to deny its essential withdrawal; to remain silent would be inhuman.

The experience of the sublime is a *discovery*, rather than a proof, of the essence of our freedom. For Kant, the sublime discloses to us the impossible distance between reason and sensibility that *ought to* lead us to recognize the ultimate supremacy of the moral law. In a clear departure from Kant, and motivation for Schelling, Schiller suggests that the destabilizing effect of the sublime forces us to ask different sorts of questions: Can freedom be reduced to reason’s constraint of sensibility? Is true integration between reason and sensibility attainable? In other words, freedom is threatened from both sides—vulnerable to the dangers of sensibility overcoming reason and of reason

---

76 “At this point we must remind ourselves that we are dealing with a finite, not with an infinite, mind. The finite mind is that which cannot become active except through being passive, which only attains to the absolute by means of limitation, and only acts and fashions inasmuch as it receives material to fashion” ("Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man", p. 141).

77 Frederick Beiser also makes this point in *Schiller as Philosopher: A Re-Examination*: “The shortcoming of Kant’s conception becomes apparent, in Schiller’s view, as soon as we see that moral autonomy alone is compatible with a form of constraint. A person can do his duty for its own sake yet still feel an inner reluctance, a deep resistance within himself. In this case, though his action is autonomous, though he wills it as a rational being, the person is still not entirely free. While he is free as a rational being, he is not free as a whole being, for the simple reason that part of his self is under the *domination* of his reason. It is this thesis—the very idea that reason can dominate or create lack of freedom—that is completely alien to Kant’s moral philosophy, and that plays a fundamental role in Schiller’s thinking about freedom” (p. 217).
suppressing sensibility. As Schiller points out in his treatment of tragedy, “in aesthetic judgments we are interested, not in morality of itself, but simply in freedom, and morality can please our imagination only insofar as it makes that freedom visible” (“On the Pathetic”, p. 68). Thus in no uncertain terms, freedom exceeds our adherence to the moral law, creating a space for difference outside of opposition. Where Kant tries to resolve this difference through reason’s absolutism, Schiller allows us to see that freedom—in its playful and horrific reality—entails an insoluble tension: identity that is nourished by, rather than negated in, contradiction.

If Kant focuses on the empowering aspect of the sublime, as an answer to the question that is freedom, we might say that Schiller emphasizes the suffering such questioning inspires. It is precisely the rift within us, as much as that between man and nature, which the sublime forces us to acknowledge. We can see the consequences of this shift clearly in Schiller’s treatment of tragedy; while Kant limits his account of the sublime to nature, Schiller’s interpretation extends into the realm of art—and particularly into inter- and intra-personal relationships. Part of his motivation is to show that our

78 “Reason does indeed demand unity; but nature demands multiplicity; and both these kinds of law make their claim upon man. The law of reason is imprinted upon him by an incorruptible consciousness; the law of nature by an ineradicable feeling. Hence it will always argue a still defective education if the moral character is able to assert itself only by sacrificing the natural” (“Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man”, p. 93).
79 “In ästhetischen Urteilen sind wir also nicht für die Sittlichkeit an sich selbst, sondern bloß für die Freiheit interessiert, und jene kann nur insofern unserer Einbildungskraft gefallen, als sie die letztere sichtbar macht” (TS, p. 536).
80 Schiller suggests that freedom is the ability to choose to follow or refuse to follow the moral law: “Now, at the bottom of every moral evaluation there lies a demand by reason that things be done morally, and there is an unconditioned exigency at hand that we intend what is right. But because the will is free, it is (physically) a contingent matter whether we actually do it [Weil aber der Will frei ist, so ist es (physisch) zufällig, ob wir es wirklich tun]” (“On the Pathetic”, p. 62/TS, p. 529).
81 “Since, then, the entire essence of the sublime rests upon the consciousness of this rational freedom of ours, and all pleasure afforded by the sublime is grounded precisely in this consciousness alone, it follows of itself (as experience also teaches) that the aesthetic image of what is frightful [Furchtbare] must stir us more powerfully and more pleasantly than the representation of the infinite does, and that the practically-sublime has, accordingly, a very great advantage over the theoretically-sublime, as far as the strength of the feeling is concerned” (“On the Sublime,” p. 26/TS, p. 492).
involvement with tragedy—and with poetry—involves a feeling of freedom that reaches beyond the law of reason, an expression of the human as that which holds together order and chaos, necessity and freedom. In sublime art, as in nature, there needs to be a separation that provides security: we are far enough away that the ocean will not devour us, we know that we are audience members and not Antigone. And yet there must also be empathy, insofar as the sublime demands an intimacy with finitude and fear that motivates our realization of the infinite moral demand. Indeed, it is through our acknowledgment of the frightening gulf between unlimited, chaotic nature on the one hand, and limited sensibility on the other, that the sublime comes to the fore. Tragedy, as Schiller points out, depends upon our capacity to relate and to feel—upon our ability to remain at a properly human distance from ourselves and from others. That is, the universality that belongs to our judgments of the sublime is the suffering of human distance and proximity:

Hence, the aesthetic power with which sublimeness of character and action take hold of us rests in no way upon reason’s interest in things being done rightly, but rather upon imagination’s interest in it being possible that things are done rightly. This is to say, it is in the interest of the imagination that no feeling, however powerful, be capable of subduing the freedom of the mind. This possibility lies, however, in every hardy expression of freedom and the power of the will, and only where the poet hits upon this, has he found a fitting subject matter to portray (“On the Pathetic”, p. 67/TS, p. 535).

It is not the victory of the moral law that tragedy communicates, that would unite us in our shared vocation, but rather the weight of possibility—the burden of identity that remains ever in transition. Kant traces the progression of the sublime from weakness and fear, through a recollection of unbounded reason, toward a triumphant restoration of the
moral law. For Schiller, as we see most readily in his account of tragedy, freedom is not
the capacity to deny this vulnerability, but the possibility of living with it as our own. The
tragic hero is not above fate; rather, his acceptance of fate is also a reaffirmation of his
world-view that, while remaining authentic and secure, yet recognizes its own
vulnerability. The sublimity of tragedy derives from its presentation of our essential
duality—of freedom as suffering:

Thus beings who declare themselves free from all morality, such as the
evil demons painted by folk superstition or by a writer’s imagination, and
humans similar to them; also beings who are free from the coercion of
sensuousness, such as we regard pure intellects, and humans who have
extricated themselves from this coercion to a greater extent than human
weakness permits—all these are equally unfit for tragedy. In general, the
concept of suffering and of a suffering in which we are supposed to
participate already determines that only human beings in the full sense of
the word can be the object of the suffering (“The Art of Tragedy” p.
19/TS, p. 391).

Taking seriously Schiller’s reference to “human beings in the full sense of the word.”
[Menschen im vollen Sinne dieses Worts] the sublime would demand a radical rethinking
of freedom as grounding disorientation, as identity founded in difference. It is precisely
this paradoxical identity, where in acknowledging self-division we are most profoundly
ourselves, that Schiller deems the “sublime spiritual disposition” [Diese erhabene
Geistesstimmung] that “is the lot of strong and philosophical minds” [Los starker und
philosophischer Gemüter]:

Even the most painful loss does not drive them beyond the sort of
composed melancholy that is always capable of being combined with a
noticeable degree of pleasure. Only such minds, who alone are capable of

82 TS, p. 391.
separating themselves from themselves, enjoy the privilege of taking part in themselves and feeling their own suffering in the gentle reflection of sympathy (“On the Art of Tragedy”, my italics, p. 4/TS, p. 391).  

Although this passage points to a certain tranquility that belongs to the sublime, bringing it yet closer to the beautiful, Schiller also makes the provocative claim that “taking part” in one’s own experience already implies that identity is an integrating activity—that to “feel” one’s own suffering requires an essentially disjointed subject. Again, where Kant defines freedom as reason’s power to refuse this self-separation, Schiller demands the preservation of this difference: to feel whole is already to feel ourselves divided. This notion of wholeness within the individual also informs Schiller’s account of human community, marking an important departure from Kant. While Kant locates the universal aspect of the sublime solely in our shared capacity to construct and adhere to the moral law, Schiller recognizes that, more fundamentally, we share in suffering the division of our being: unable to exhaust what we are able to feel in what we can know and do.

The problematic notions of wholeness and totality pervade both Kant’s and Schiller’s works on the sublime. Kant writes that in our experience of the sublime “our imagination strives to progress towards infinity, while our reason demands absolute totality as a real idea…” (CJ/KU, p. 250). For Kant, our realization of the unboundedness of nature, via the limitation of sensibility, leads to an awareness of reason’s limitlessness and our own supersensible freedom. Schiller’s concern with

---

83 “Auch der schmerzhafte Verlust führt sie nicht über eine Wehmut hinaus, mit der sich noch immer ein merklicher Grad des Vergnügens gatten kann. Sie, die allein fähig sind, sich von sich selbst zu trennen, genießen allein das Vorrecht, an sich selbst teilzunehmen und eigenes Leiden in dem milden Widerschein der Sympathie zu empfinden” (ibid. p. 375).

84 “[What happens is that] our imagination strives to progress towards infinity, while our reasons demands absolute totality as a real idea, and so [the imagination,] our power of estimating the magnitude of things in the world of sense, is inadequate to the idea. Yet this inadequacy itself is the arousal in us of the feeling that we have within us a supersensible power…” (CJ/KU, 250).
human totality involves an analogous development: the experience of the sublime moves us from the unfathomable infinity of nature to the human desire for wholeness, for self-identity that is not self-denial. In both cases the sublime turns us back to ourselves, suggesting a deeper reading of Kant’s claim that the sublime is not tied to the object, but to a particular form of self-relating.\textsuperscript{85} However, for Schiller this self-relating is not resolved in the suppression of the sensible by the law-giving capacity of reason; it remains instead as a questioning of wholeness that depends on human empathy.\textsuperscript{86} This idea of wholeness gets lost in Kant, as his account of the sublime veers towards a disembodied freedom as our highest calling and deepest sense of community.\textsuperscript{87} Schiller reminds us that the identity proper to human being cannot be the same as the totality of nature or of reason:

> It is, after all, peculiar to man that he unites in his nature the highest and the lowest; and if his moral dignity depends on his distinguishing strictly between the one and the other, his hope of joy and blessedness depends on

\textsuperscript{85} “We see from this at once that we express ourselves entirely incorrectly when we call this or that object of nature sublime, even though we might quite correctly call a great many natural objects beautiful…Instead, all we are entitled to say is that the object is suitable for exhibiting a sublimity that can be found in the mind \textit{Wir können nicht mehr sagen, als daß der Gegenstand zur Darstellung einer erhabenheit tauglich sei, die im Gemüte angetroffen werden kann}” (CJ/KU, 245).

\textsuperscript{86} Beiser makes a similar argument, suggesting that Kant identifies human being with reason, while Schiller take a more holistic approach: “It is important to see that Schiller’s account of the will does not define its freedom simply in terms of its power to act on the moral law. Unlike Kant in his \textit{Grundlegung} and second \textit{Kritik}, Schiller does not think that the freedom of a human being consists in its acting on the moral law independent of motives and sensibility. Rather, Schiller explains its freedom in terms of its power to act or not act on the moral law. He states that the will stands between two domains: that of morality and that of nature. It can choose from which of these domains it receives its law. We use our freedom even when we follow the law of nature contrary to reason” (\textit{Schiller as Philosopher: A Re-Examination}, p. 112). Beiser also puts forth a connected claim concerning their views on the highest good: “While Schiller is indeed correct that Kant does not exclude sensibility as a motive for moral action, he underplays his deeper difference with Kant here: that the highest good consists in an equal cultivation and synthesis of sensibility and reason, individuality and universality” (p. 145).

\textsuperscript{87} “Hence sublimity is contained not in any thing of nature, but only in our mind, insofar as we can become conscious of our superiority to nature within us, and thereby also to nature outside us (as far as it influences). Whatever arouses this feeling in us, and this includes the might \textit{[Macht]} of nature that challenges our forces, is then (although improperly) called sublime. And it is only by presupposing this idea within us, and by referring to it, that we can arrive at the idea of the sublimity of that being who arouses deep respect in us, not just by his might as demonstrated in nature, but even more by the ability, with which we have been endowed, to judge nature without fear and to think of our vocation as being sublimely \textit{above nature [über dieselbe]”} (CJ/KU, 264, my italics).
a due and proper reconciliation of the opposites he has distinguished. An education that is to bring his dignity into harmony with his happiness will, therefore, have to see to it that those two principles are maintained in their utmost purity even while they are being most intimately fused (“Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man”, p. 158).  

It is clear that Schiller, like Kant, understands the sublime as a disclosure of a crucial difference; however he does not seek the essence of human freedom beyond this divided and dividing moment, but remains precariously within it.

Making himself at home in the unsettling space of difference, Schiller offers another approach to the violence that characterizes the sublime. Kant suggests a number of ways in which the sublime violates; there is the violence of nature itself in the dynamic (or what Schiller calls the practical-) sublime—its threat to our existence; further, Kant presents reason as an oppressive force that should conquer nature and desire alike.  But I would like to draw attention to Kant’s intimation of a much more nuanced form of violence, when he claims that in our experience of the sublime there is “a subjective movement of the imagination by which it does violence to the inner sense [eine subjektive Bewegung der Einbildungskraft, wordurch sie dem inneren Sinne Gewalt antut]” (CJ/KU, 259). In introducing a rupture in time—the inner sense—Kant points to a conflict between the multiplicity of sense and the unity of comprehension that results in a specifically temporal paralysis. Kant provides us an opening to understand the

---

88 “Es ist dem Menschen einmal eigen, das Höchste und das Niedrigste in seiner Natur zu vereinigen, und wenn seine Würde auf einer strengen Unterscheidung des einen von dem andern beruht, so beruht auf einer geschickten Aufhebung dieses Unterschieds seine Glückseligkeit. Die Kultur, welche seine Würde mit seiner Glückseligkeit in Übereinstimmung bringen soll, wird also für die höchste Reinheit jener beiden Prinzipien in ihrer innigsten Vermischung zu sorgen haben” (TS, 647).

89 “In the case of what is theoretically-sublime, the cognitive instinct is contradicted by nature as an object of knowledge. In the case of what is practically-sublime, the instinct to preserve ourselves is contradicted by nature as an object of feeling. In the former scenario nature is considered merely as an object that should have expanded our knowledge; in the latter case it is represented as a power that can determine our own condition” (“On the Sublime,” p. 23/TS, p. 490).
captivating pain of the sublime: the sublime captures us—that is, it both engages and stills us—precisely because holding together difference is our vocation, our connection to the supersensible. Although Kant sees this paralysis as preliminary, Schiller suggests that returning to the space between passivity and activity—to the site where being and becoming converge—is our highest calling:

In order, therefore, not to be mere world, he must impart form to matter; in order not to be mere form, he must give reality to the predisposition he carries within him. He gives reality to form when he brings time into being, when he confronts changelessness with change, the eternal unity of his own self with the manifold variety of the world. He gives form to matter when he annuls time again, when he affirms persistence within change, and subjugates the manifold variety of the world to the unity of his own self (“Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man”, p. 117).

There is a reformulation here of the strange temporality that Kant discovers in the experience of the sublime; what is for Kant a mere shock of timelessness becomes for Schiller time created, and annulled, in the reciprocity of freedom and nature, of self and reality. Schiller equates the opposition between the eternal and the temporal, or being and becoming, with that between the sensuous drive and the formal drive. And rather than attributing the paralysis of the sublime to the irreducible conflict between them, he introduces a third drive that makes their reconciliation possible: the play drive, which “would be directed toward annulling time within time, reconciling becoming with absolute being and change with identity [“der Spieltrieb also würde dahin gerichtet sein,
die Zeit in der Zeit, aufzuheben, Werden mit absolutem Sein, Veränderung mit Identität zu vareinbaren]” (“Letters,” p. 126/TS, pp. 612-613). If along with Schiller we understand the sensuous drive as physical constraint (determinism), and the formal drive as moral constraint (autonomy), this would suggest that their harmony in freedom is a reciprocal play. Both the sensuous and the formal drive constrain us by constraining each other, and it is only through the action of the play drive that we can encounter the transitional space where freedom and necessity converge.\(^9\)

Although Schiller argues that this intermediate drive is directed at and promoted by the beautiful, the sublime must have a place here too. Returning to the same language he uses in his account of the sublime character of tragedy, Schiller writes: “For, to mince matters no longer, man only plays when he is in the fullest sense of the word a human being, and he is only fully a human being when he plays” (p. 131). Surely, the human being in the fullest sense of the world is not merely rational, but also made whole. While Schiller clearly connects the play drive with pleasure, the play drive also gives us access to a determinability that is not empty, and to a destabilizing uncertainty that is beyond and prior to both pleasure and pain:

In the aesthetic state, then, man is naught, if we are thinking of any particular result rather than the totality of his powers, and considering the absence in him of any specific determination…By means of aesthetic culture, therefore, the personal worth of a man, or his dignity, inasmuch as this can depend solely on himself, remains completely indeterminate; and nothing more is achieved by it than that he is henceforth enabled by the grace of nature to make of himself what he will—that the freedom to be

---

\(^9\) “Both drives, therefore, exert constraint upon the psyche; the former through the laws of nature, the latter through the laws of reason. The play drive, in consequence, as the one in which both the others act in concert, will exert upon the psyche at once a moral and a physical constraint; it will, therefore, since it annuls all contingency, annul all constraint too, and set man free both physically and morally” (“Letters”, p. 127).
what he ought to be is completely restored to him ("Letters", p. 147/TS, p. 635).

The determinability of the aesthetic state is not nothing, but rather openness or permeability; between the activity of self-determination, and the passivity of sensual becoming, there is a possibility for identity that recognizes its need for otherness. Freedom is not the ability to give the rule to nature in all its forms, but our infinite capacity to play with and suffer the limits of our responsibility. Schiller’s use of the term play need not remain fixed by its pleasurable connotations—indeed, as Freud astutely notes, it is precisely through play that we first begin to work out our fundamental anxieties and insecurities and to respond to the unknown. The sublime would represent this latter sense of play, where the same capacity to contemplate and reshape our relationship to the world and to ourselves might be both frightening and freeing. It is thus not only nature, but also play, that give the rule to art through genius.

We can see the intimate connection between Schiller’s account of freedom—as the playful integration of the dual aspects of our being—and of self-consciousness. In Kant’s terms, the process of unifying the manifold of intuition, or the unity of transcendental apperception, is the structure of self-consciousness: the “I” is the imaginative jointure of identity and division. Schiller transforms this foundational, spontaneous and mediating act of the imagination—the possibility of self-consciousness—into the synthesizing play of freedom. In other words, Schiller makes an important move beyond Kant in clarifying how the structure of the “I” relates to the particular nature of our human freedom. Self-consciousness, like the freedom that is its

---

92 See: Sigmund Freud, Beyond the Pleasure Principle, SE Vol. XVIII, pp. 14-17 for a discussion of the Fort/Da game Freud’s grandson engages in to deal with his mother’s and father’s (Freud’s daughter’s) absence. See also: pp. 56-60 in Dufresne’s translation.
source and fulfillment, is the active identity of our sensible and supersensible natures, of change and changelessness. This relationship between freedom and self-consciousness that Schiller presents allows us to better understand how it is that the disorienting transition we experience in the sublime—not merely its resolution through the order of reason—leads us towards our highest calling. Moreover, it is in bringing together freedom and self-consciousness in this way that Schiller can defend his inclusion of art in the realm of sublime experience. It is not merely our separation from nature that announces itself in the sublime but, more importantly, an abyssal self-division as well. The alienation from ourselves that we experience in the sublime is thus also an essential aspect of self-consciousness—a stepping outside ourselves that allows us to become whole. In order to grasp the possibility of our freedom we must allow ourselves to feel this intrinsic disjunction; for, as I have suggested, this possibility too is grounded in our ability to endure—to play and to suffer—in this place of (dis-) integration.

3. Breaking Boundaries

In Schelling’s System of Transcendental Idealism, a work widely associated with his “Fichtean” period and considered one of his more traditionally philosophical texts, the work of art and philosophical reflection are paired together as the culminating experiences of freedom. 93 Taking up where Schiller leaves off, Schelling makes his own contributions towards a theory of aesthetic freedom. He intensifies the connection between art and freedom by developing an account of our relation to the unconscious as

93 “This universally acknowledged and altogether incontestable objectivity of intellectual intuition is art itself. For the aesthetic intuition is the intellectual intuition become objective” (System of Transcendental Idealism, p. 229/624). Hereafter, cited as STI.
the essential activity of self-consciousness. Here, artistic creation and philosophy are complementary modes of expressing identity-in-difference—freedom neither collapses into Kantian constraint nor resolves itself within Schiller’s harmonious human being. The structure of the text is itself an enactment of forging a single narrative through a double history: the phases of self-consciousness are considered alongside the philosopher’s privileged observation of these phases, as Schelling deepens Schiller’s insights into the distance from ourselves that characterizes the feeling of the sublime and our engagement with tragedy. In his attempt to complete the transcendental philosophy of Kant and Fichte, Schelling comes to see freedom as a holding together of difference—a relating between consciousness and the unconscious (a relating both to ourselves and to nature) that is not reducible to Schiller’s form of integration.

Schelling does maintain in this work that “the same powers of intuition which reside in the self can also be exhibited up to a certain point in nature,” illustrating his continued support of the Fichtean identity between the “I” and the “not-I” (p. 3). That is, it first appears that Schelling is merely reiterating Fichte’s account of the self-positing “I” as the unifying principle of both the Real and the Ideal—claiming that our knowledge of and activity in nature is grounded in the universalized structure of the “I”:

Now it is certainly a productive activity that finds expression in willing; all free action is productive, albeit consciously productive. If we now suppose, since the two activities have only to be one in principle, that the same activity which is consciously productive in free action, is productive without consciousness in bringing about the world, then our predetermined

---

94 Fichte. Goudeli summarizes Fichte’s Wissenschaftslehre in the following, concise manner: “Consequently, Fichte’s major project is to provide an account of apperceptive subjectivity that would be liberated from the perplexities of the reflexive model. This task is carried out through Fichte’s major insight, which consists in his conception of the subject in terms of activity, as opposed to a static substratum or a logical concept…Through the introduction of the subject as sheer activity, indeed as productivity, Fichte mainly attempts to give a unified account of theoretical and practical reason, which would found the unitary nature of subjectivity. One of the fundamental goals of his thought, as he declares in 1795, is to ‘bring unity and coherence into the entire human being’” (p. 65).
It is worth noting, however, that Schelling already concerns himself with a creativity that is “at once conscious and nonconscious;” whereas Fichte argues that the “Not-I” ought to be transformed by and into the “I” Schelling subtly shifts into a thinking of freedom in terms of the inseparability and mutual dependence of the conscious and nonconscious. Further, this shift is made possible in part by Schelling’s linguistic move away from the “Not-I” as that which needs to be re-appropriated by the “I,” and in the direction of a more nuanced account of the unconscious/nonconscious in its identity with and resistance to consciousness: for Schelling, both consciousness (“I”) and the unconscious (“Not-I”) break down further into dualities of productivity and passivity. Despite his undeniable proximity to Fichte—as well as to Kant and Schiller—Schelling offers a way to understand the alterity of the unconscious as a condition for the realization of freedom.

I will suggest that there are two, interconnected ways in which Schelling approaches the reality of freedom in the System: 1) through the identity of the unconscious/consciousness expressed in the sublime or beautiful art product and 2) in terms of the philosopher’s approach to what must exceed consciousness in order for self-

---


96 Although as far as I can tell Schelling uses the terms nonconscious and unconscious interchangeably in this work, I limit myself to the latter term both for clarity and in the hopes that it leaves more room to understand the identity of activity and passivity that constitute it; further, insofar as I hope to develop a comparison with Freud, it is important to understand the unconscious in Schelling too as more than the lack of consciousness.
consciousness to be possible. Of course, the concept of the unconscious belongs to a long and varied philosophical history; I limit myself here to pointing out a certain thinking of the unconscious in terms of a nuanced account of *repression*, unique to Schelling’s early conception of freedom and developed in myriad ways throughout his work. To get an idea of the essential role repression plays in this regard, consider the following claim: “Since I seek to ground my knowledge only *in itself*, I enquire no further as to the ultimate ground of this primary knowledge (self-consciousness), which, if it exists, must necessarily lie *outside* knowledge. Self-consciousness is the lamp of the whole system of knowledge, but it casts its light ahead only, not behind” (p.18/357-358). Notice that, on the one hand, Schelling insists along with Fichte that self-consciousness is the bedrock of knowledge and the original, free deed of philosophy; on the other hand, Schelling hesitantly marks out space *beyond* knowledge (“ultimate ground”)—even though he disavows it (“I enquire no further”) as soon as it appears. As we will see, this logic in which the recognition or creation of a boundary already reaches out *beyond* the boundary, is essential to Schelling’s explanation of the dialectic of consciousness and the unconscious. In retracing the mutual development of self and reality, Schelling relies on the philosopher’s unique ability to locate and interpret the symptoms of unconscious activity. In contrast to Kant’s account of freedom as a form of repression, and Schiller’s integrative freedom that would claim to *eliminate* repression, Schelling’s freedom is an active, therapeutic *engagement* with the process of repression: this engagement is *aesthetic* insofar as it occurs in intuition, resistant to the dictates of reason and the understanding, whether in the intellectual intuition of the philosopher or the sensible intuition of the artwork. As with Kant and Schiller, it is the feeling of freedom that
Schelling concerns himself with. However, for Schelling, it is neither a feeling of our superiority over nature nor of our harmony with nature, but precisely the feeling of our identity as a relating to the irreducibly other that discloses our freedom: the point of convergence between the beautiful and the sublime.

In order to understand this feeling of identity, Schelling maintains that we need to begin from ordinary experience: from the opposition between subject and object that would seem to refute such identity. This opposition is not—as with Fichte—merely a semblance, an error that awaits correction; rather, Schelling immediately draws our attention to the truth of this ordinary experience—taking up a properly philosophical approach to identity that is itself grounded in a sympathetic distance, a detached attentiveness. It is towards this end that Schelling posits the distinction (and connection) between the philosopher and the self that is under investigation:

Here for the first time we may perceive very clearly the difference between the philosopher’s standpoint and that of his object. We, who philosophize, know that the limitation of the objective has its sole ground in the intuitant or subjective. The intuiting self as such does not and cannot know this, as now becomes clear. Intuiting and limitation are originally one. But the self cannot simultaneously intuit and intuit itself as intuiting, and so cannot intuit itself as limiting either (p. 54/403-404).

The demand of philosophy, which “is therefore nothing else but the free imitation, the free recapitulation of the original series of acts into which the one act of self-consciousness evolves,” is the bringing to light of what must have been repressed from consciousness (p. 49/397-398). In order for there to be consciousness, which requires opposition or limitation, there must already be a repression of its creative, non-oppositional ground—a repression of its origin. The self’s inability to know that it is the
ground of the objective is part of what it means to be a self; but because the philosopher is able to think beyond this defining limitation, it appears that some sort of encounter with this unknowability is equally essential. We are confronted with the passive/active duality that, for Schelling, constitutes consciousness as well as the unconscious. The viability of this philosophical dissociation depends upon the possibility of transforming the structure of the self—of recognizing its structure as self-transformation—which Schelling equates with freedom. Schelling understands philosophy as an enactment of freedom insofar as it is the conscious reconstruction of unconscious self-limitation. And it is only in the “free imitation” of the epochs of self-consciousness, where the philosopher dwells in the liminal as such, that the repressed becomes available to us as the beyond such a boundary exposes even as it distances us from it. The philosopher’s identity, too, is divided: in consciously reconstructing the limitations of the self, these very limits show themselves in their double relation—as both a withdrawal from, and an openness to, that which resists limitation. Freedom is just this capacity to reopen the boundaries of the self, to “interrupt this [unconscious] evolution” and to disentangle the transitionality of self-consciousness from the stability of self-knowledge (p.49/397-398). The philosopher approaches the repressed, then, not as an object of possible cognition unavailable to the layman, but as a limit—as an intimation of freedom grounded in vulnerability. Schelling is not claiming that, from the philosophical perspective, we can finally know the self-limitating activity or shed light “behind” it; as with the Freudian model, the philosopher only gains access to the unconscious through the conflicts manifested in its return—in this case, these traces are the distinguishing oppositional structures of each epoch of self-consciousness.
Part of what makes Schelling’s approach to repression so important, in contrast to Hegelian dialectic for example, is his insistence on a grounding activity that is not surpassed or exhausted in the development of self-consciousness; it is precisely because the repressed can never be entirely appropriated, because the “I” requires resistance to be what it is, that the unconscious is the impetus for consciousness and its development towards freedom.97 We would do well to return to Schelling’s introductory remarks, where he relates the nonconscious productivity of nature to the conscious productivity of human freedom:

How both the objective world accommodates to presentations in us, and presentations in us to the objective world, is unintelligible unless between the two worlds, the ideal and the real, there exists a predetermined harmony. But this latter is itself unthinkable unless the activity, whereby the objective world is produced, is at bottom identical with that which expresses itself in volition, and vice versa (p. 12/348-349).

The identity Schelling points to here, between the activities resulting in nature and freedom, suggests there is also a common form of repression; just as the productivity of nature is concealed in its inhibited products, while at the same time expressing itself through them, it must also be the case that the productivity of freedom both withdraws from and is realized through our actions. Repression, as a process both limiting and

97 Edward Beach develops a useful set of terms to deal with the differences between Schelling’s and Hegel’s dialectical thinking in The Potencies of God(s): Schelling’s Philosophy of Mythology in terms of Erzeugengsdialektik and Aufhebungsdualektik. He writes, “Hegelian dialectic typically operates by subjecting each concept to a series of ‘thought experiments’ or tests for internal coherency. In the course of these tests, the concept’s manifest purport becomes ‘sublated’ (aufgehoben)—that is to say, the surface significance, which gives rise to incoherencies, is cancelled, while at the same time the deeper kernel of truth is retained…Schellingian dialectic, by contrast, seeks to infuse the process of reasoning with a strong volitional component, so as to be capable of recovering the willing that allegedly precedes rational thought itself…Schelling’s treatment of dialectic obtains its successive forms not as though implicitly contained in the foregoing ones, but rather as produced or reproduced (erzeugt) by a kind of procreative causality which is supposed to reenact the processes by which the outer universe itself has evolved” (pp. 84-85).
necessary to self-consciousness, discloses an essential aspect of our identity with nature. Schelling’s notion of aesthetic freedom thus evokes an unknowable, repressed unconscious that we nonetheless must relate to; this marks a decisive move beyond Fichte’s negatively defined, nonconscious “Not-I” and Kant’s absolute exclusion of the noumenal realm. Schelling’s intellectual intuition, or the grasping of the unity of consciousness and the unconscious in reflection, is ultimately a free relation to the self-constituting, grounding act of repression.

This idea of the repressed as inaccessible to knowledge and yet interpretable is brought into relief through Schelling’s emphasis on the boundary; he argues that the development of self-consciousness depends upon a conflict between and reconciliation of the self as ideal activity or that which “goes beyond the boundary,” and self as real activity or a “becoming bounded” (p. 66/418-19). I would suggest that this is one way to bring together Schelling’s understanding of our freedom with the repressed: insofar as consciousness is a limitless demand for the construction of limits, it must exceed the opposition of “within” and “without;” the original activity where real and ideal are posited in their identity, “both inside and outside the boundary at once,” is also the original activity of repression (p. 67/419-420). Thus the self, an essentially boundary phenomenon, turns on a questioning of that which is fundamentally transitional—of that which, as in the return of the repressed, opens up precisely what it seems to foreclose. It is the availability of this transitional structure—rather than any particular material that has been repressed—that characterizes intellectual intuition and the work of genius.

I will consider only briefly the way this structure is made manifest in intellectual intuition, before going on to its expression in the work of art. Schelling writes,
The *self* is such an [intellectual] intuition, since it is *through the self’s own knowledge of itself* that that *very self* (the object) first comes into being. For since the self (as object) is nothing else but the very *knowledge of itself*, it arises simply out of the fact that it knows itself; the *self itself* is thus a knowing that simultaneously produces itself (as object). Intellectual intuition is the organ of all transcendental thinking. For the latter sets out to objectify itself through freedom, what is otherwise not an object; it presupposes a capacity, simultaneously to produce certain acts of mind, and so to intuit that the producing of the object and the intuited self are absolutely one; but this very capacity is that of intellectual intuition (p. 27/368-369).

Schelling argues that intellectual intuition is not a mysterious or magical revelation; rather, it is the free action of grasping identity, paradoxically, insofar as it is rooted in duality. Although he uses the term *knowledge* here, Schelling is essentially discovering a different kind of relationship between subject and object altogether. The activity that grounds subject and object—the self as self-producing/knowing or intellectual intuition—is non-conceptual: it is the site where activity and passivity, knowing and feeling, are not yet opposed. It is the intuiting of the holding together (or identity) of duality and identity that Schelling terms intellectual intuition; it is not the unconscious that is made conscious through intellectual intuition, but the boundary that unites and divides them. I only want to point out that Schelling is primarily interested in the activity that *binds* duplicity and unity; his focus is on the status of the *boundary* itself—of the boundary as the paradigmatically repressed—rather than the reality or ideality it delimits.

Not only does the very positing of intellectual intuition present a marked contrast with Kant, the freedom that is intuited through it hardly bears a resemblance to autonomy or moral obligation. Schelling implies that freedom is in fact an acknowledgment of *irreducible* resistance, distancing himself as much from Schiller’s harmonious
reconciliation of nature and reason as from Kant. It is really only through his understanding of art as “the only true and eternal organ and document of philosophy,” however, that Schelling’s original contributions to aesthetic freedom are realized. Schelling contends that which is expressed sensibly in the intuition of art, and intellectually in the intuition of the philosopher, is not an object of knowledge. The unconscious is not appropriated by consciousness—nature is neither overcome by (Kant, Fichte) nor in harmony with (Schiller) reason—but grasped, in its very otherness, as its own:

The intuition we have postulated [intuition of art] is to bring together that which exists in separation in the appearance of freedom and in the intuition of the natural product; namely identity of the conscious and the unconscious in the self, and consciousness of this identity (p. 219/612).

Feeling ourselves to be the identity of the conscious and the unconscious—this is what art can offer us that neither practical nor theoretical philosophy can. It is important to note that it is not the unconscious as such that is grasped in aesthetic intuition, but rather its unity with consciousness. In contrast to Kant and to Schiller, Schelling posits that the highest act of freedom is one “in which freedom and necessity are absolutely united”: consciousness intuits its connection to the unconscious while allowing it to maintain its integrity as unconscious (p. 220/613-14).

The work of art is no longer a useful enjoinder towards the categorical imperative, nor even a necessary moment in human progress towards moral perfection. It is quite simply the true expression of our freedom and the free expression of truth:
If aesthetic intuition is merely transcendental [intellectual] intuition become objective, it is self-evident that art is at once the only true and eternal organ and document of philosophy, which ever and again continues to speak to us of what philosophy cannot depict in external form, namely the unconscious element in acting and producing, and its original identity with the conscious. Art is paramount to the philosopher precisely because it opens to him, as it were, the holy of holies, where burns in eternal and original unity as if in a single flame, that which in nature and history is rent asunder, and in life and action, no less than in thought, must forever fly apart (p. 231-626-628).

Although Schelling’s language here is that of identity, it is more specifically the language of identity as opening. The work of genius does not present us with the “holy of holies,” but lets us confront it in a way that feels true. Aesthetic freedom, for Schelling, is a transformative communication—a communication of truth that exists only as resistance and in transition. This is the case both for the genius that produces the work of art and the one that can receive it; there is no knowledge passed on here, but only the opening itself—the active receptivity. As “an unconscious infinity [synthesis of freedom and nature],” the work of art is a testament to the possibility of renegotiating the boundaries of our existence.

It is at this point in his exposition of the art product/production that Schelling invokes the sublime:

Every aesthetic production proceeds from the feeling of an infinite contradiction, and hence also the feeling which accompanies completion of the art-product must be one of an infinite tranquility…However, the opposition between beauty and sublimity is one which occurs only in regard to the object, not in regard to the subject of intuition. For the difference between the beautiful and the sublime work of art consists simply in this, that where beauty is present, the infinite contradiction is eliminated in the object itself; whereas when sublimity is present, the conflict is not reconciled in the object itself, but merely uplifted to a point at which it is involuntarily eliminated (pp. 225-226/620-622).
Like Kant, Schelling seems to differentiate between the beautiful and the sublime in terms of the subject/object divide; as with Schiller, they are reconciled in the highest expression of freedom. Schelling suggests that while the beautiful and the sublime are present in the object as distinct forms, they are present in the subject in their identity. By asserting that the sublime does not merely belong to the subject but is transformed through it, Schelling intimates that there is something about the sublime that complicates the correspondence or communication between subject and object as such. While it is unclear what Schelling intends in claiming that through the sublime conflict is “uplifted to a point at which it is involuntarily eliminated,” it might best be understood as a disruption and recreation of the boundary between subject and object. Thus it is not the infinite contradiction between consciousness and the unconscious that is “eliminated;” instead, the boundaries of this conflict—between subject and object, freedom and nature—show themselves to be neither objectively there nor subjectively produced. Schelling reminds us that the work of art, and particularly the sublime work of art, essentially opens up the limits of self and world.

4. The Mythological Imagination

Foreshadowing several strands of thinking prominent in The Philosophy of Art, as well as in many of his later works, Schelling ties the unconscious to Greek mythology in The System of Transcendental Idealism:
To explain what we mean by a single example: the mythology of the Greeks, which undeniably contains an infinite meaning and a symbolism for all ideas, arose among a people, and in a fashion, which both make it impossible to suppose any comprehensive forethought in devising it, or in the harmony whereby everything is united into one great whole. So it is with every true work of art, in that every one of them is capable of being expounded ad infinitum, as though it contained an infinity of purposes, while yet one is never able to say whether this infinity has lain within the artist himself, or resides only within the artwork (p. 225/619-620).

Again, Schelling problematizes the boundary between subject and object—the infinity of purposes cannot be located in the producer, the art product nor its interpreter. In the case of mythology, Schelling suggests, this inability to locate the meaning is particularly evident. The world that Greek mythology brings into being is at the same time so organically whole and so excessively meaningful that it resists or expands the possibilities of artifice (which needs an author) and of nature (which has none). In *The Philosophy of Art* Schelling reasserts the privileged position of art that he began to lay out in his *System*, and in particular focuses on mythology as its culmination. This section will deal with his arguments towards this claim, emphasizing the notion of *symbolism* that Schelling puts forth here. I hope to show that the highest expression of freedom—which is also necessity—must be transformational: a reframing of our relationship to the world that must also destabilize us. Already provoking comparison with Freud in that mythology becomes fundamental to our self-understanding, Schelling also moves closer to a psychoanalytic account of the uncanny: mythology, Schelling argues, is intrinsically related to a shifting boundary between fantasy and truth.\(^\text{98}\) He writes, “The world of the gods is the object neither of mere understanding nor of reason, but rather can be comprehended only by fantasy” (p. 38). Further, as we will see, Schelling’s approach to

\(^{98}\) It is in fact in Schelling’s *Lectures on the Philosophy of Mythology* that the definition Freud makes use of first appears.
the chaos and formlessness proper to the sublime is similarly implicated in this dialectic of imagination and truth:

For reason and fantasy limitation, too, becomes either simply a form of the absolute or, considered as limitation, an inexhaustible source of jest and play, for one is allowed to joke with limitation, since it takes nothing away from the essence and is within itself nullity or nothingness. Hence, the most brazen jesting plays about within the world of the Greek gods with fantasy’s images of the gods (p. 37).

This sense of playing with limitation should recall Schiller’s conciliatory play drive, and indeed his works are cited quite often and at some length throughout The Philosophy of Art. The limitations of the gods, Schelling argues, represent the perfect union of form and formlessness: it is “precisely the missing characteristics in the manifestations of the gods that lend them the highest charm and yet still weave them back together into various relationships. The mystery of all life is the synthesis of the absolute with limitation” (36). In other words, it is only in the play of limitations, in playing with limitations, that the limitless can be felt.

The meaning of Schelling’s claim that mythology is “the necessary condition and first content of all art” is not by any means obvious; that is, just what makes the union of the absolute and the particular in mythology so fundamental still needs to be worked out. One approach comes through Schelling’s understanding of mythology as symbolism and, specifically, as a primal symbolism: “Representation of the absolute with absolute indifference of the universal and the particular within the particular is possible only symbolically” (p. 45). It remains to be seen what symbolic representation is for Schelling and how mythology can be its founding moment. Schelling defines symbolism in contrast
to, or rather as the indifference point between, *schematism* and *allegory*. The schema of a work of art, and here Schelling reinvigorates the Kantian term, is the artist’s guiding “rule”.99

The schema is the rule guiding his production, but he intuits this universal simultaneously in the particular. First he will produce only a rough outline of the whole according to this intuition; then he develops the individual parts completely until the schema gradually becomes for him a fully concrete image, and the work itself is completed simultaneously with the fully determined image in his imagination (p. 46).

The schema of the genius suggests that what the artist imagines (the universal) is inseparable from what he produces (the particular), where each element of the production is meaningful only in its relation to a whole that is continuously created anew. As Schelling is quick to point out, language is perhaps the best example of schematism—where we “make use of merely universal designations even for the designation of the particular. To that extent even language itself is nothing more than perpetual schematization” (p. 46). This process of re-discovering and reshaping the whole through the particular, while at the same time already having to rely on an intuition of the whole, is the essential contradiction of language: in speaking, we invoke the shared experience that emerges through and is transformed by such speaking. As we will see, this will be

---

99 It is interesting and useful in this context to consider Kant’s definition of schematism, and its relation to the imagination, from his *Critique of Pure Reason*: “We will call this formal and pure condition of the sensibility, to which the use of the understanding is restricted, the schema of this concept of the understanding, and we will call the procedure of the understanding with these schemata the schematism of the pure understanding. The schema is in itself always only a product of the imagination; but since the synthesis of the latter has as its aim no individual intuition but rather only the unity in the determination of sensibility, the schema is to be distinguished from an image” (*CPR*, p. 273/A140/B179).
essential in understanding Schelling’s later conception of language as “faded mythology.”

If schematism suggests a peculiar vulnerability of the universal to its particular manifestations, where the meaning remains as it were ‘in transition’ or beholden to its concrete expressions, Schelling tells us that allegory must be the reverse. Rather than the particular being always already imbued with the quality of the universal, its meaning dependent on the system of which it is a part, here the universal takes on the aspect of the particular—the stability and limitation of an object. In allegory, the artwork sheds light on the framework of meaning we already share; in schematism, such a framework is shown to be malleable, itself the product of imagination and freedom. It is as if in schematism the living quality—the capacity for transformation—belongs to the creation of meaning; in allegory, to our ability to receive it.

Mythology, then, would be the living union of the universal and particular, of meaning and its instantiation. Myths do not signify the universal, the worldview from which they emerge, as allegory does; nor do myths produce the universal, a reality within which it can be meaningful, as schematism does. Rather, intention and production converge in mythology precisely because in its particularity “it itself is simultaneously also the universal” (p. 47). The world of mythology is thus neither created nor given. In a departure from his discussion of freedom and the work of art in his System, Schelling shifts his emphasis toward the role of meaning (Sinn). There is a mutual dependency between being and meaning in mythology—a life or personality—that defines the symbolic. Or, as Schelling puts it, “Meaning here is simultaneously being itself, passed

---

100 “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” (Historical-Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology, p. 52).
over into the object itself and one with it. As soon as we allow these beings to mean or signify something, they themselves are no longer anything” (p. 49). Although we can discover allegorical and schematic meaning in mythology, this is only because symbolism creates the space for both; indeed, the very possibilities of allegory and schematism already depend upon the union of meaning and being in symbolism, which is fundamentally expressed for Schelling in mythology:

Hence, one can also demonstrate convincingly—and I will do so in what follows—that the Homeric myth, and to that extent Homer himself, was absolutely the first element in the beginning of Greek poesy. The allegorical poesy and philosopheme, as Heyne calls it, were entirely the work of later periods. The synthesis is first (p. 48).

Insofar as Schelling insists that all “thinking is simple schematization” (theoretical) and that “all action, in contrast, is allegorical,” (practical) the primacy of their synthesis would entail a primacy of feeling (of the aesthetic).

Schelling sees that this simultaneity of meaning and being that characterizes the mythological challenges certain conceptions of freedom and sublimity. Indeed, Schelling suggests that morality “like sickness and death, only plagues mortals,” and that the freedom of the gods—the freedom expressed in mythology—has nothing to do with morality at all. Equally, the sublime character of tragedy depends upon a realization that even the highest morality, the most righteous suffering, still evidences “the boundaries and limitations to which human beings are subject” (p. 55). But the freedom of the gods, unrelated to autonomy and obligation, is yet tied up with necessity and fate; we know this through the prophesies fulfilled by Uranus, Kronos and Zeus, their struggles no less futile than Oedipus’. The mythological world is a primordial working out of the boundaries
between thinking and acting, desire and truth—freedom and necessity. As we might learn from the gods, freedom is not the absence of limitations but the capacity to play with them.
II. Uncanny Freedom

Let all come out,
However vile! However base it be,
I must unlock the secret of my birth.
The woman, with more than woman’s pride, is shamed
By my low origin. I am the child of Fortune,
The giver of good, and I shall not be shamed.
She is my mother; my sisters are the Seasons;
My rising and my falling march with theirs.
Born thus, I ask to be no other man
Than that I am, and will know who I am—Sophocles, Oedipus Rex

My hope in this chapter is to show that Schelling’s intuition that tragedy is the convergence of freedom and necessity in The Philosophy of Art needs to be re-examined in light of his Freiheitsschrift. Ultimately, I will suggest that the irreducible remainder of the latter, its disruption of both past and future, is the tragic core of freedom itself. Before turning to the Freiheitsschrift, and to his account of unconscious guilt and original sin that Schelling draws from Kant’s Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone, I look at how the Oedipal tragedy and freedom outlined in the Philosophy of Art may be said to define the psychoanalytic project.\(^{101}\) It is worth recalling in this regard Sean McGrath’s description of Freud as a “tragic” thinker—a characterization that, in the context of that work, serves to minimize Freud’s relevance to Schelling’s later philosophy of

---

Redemption. While McGrath claims that Freud’s worldview is tragic because he doesn’t
grant any ultimate meaning to existence, I would suggest that psychoanalytic therapy is in
fact motivated by and reliant upon the same tragic freedom that emerges from Schelling’s
Freiheitsschrift.¹⁰²

The unity of necessity and freedom by which Schelling defines the tragic,
exemplified in his reading of Oedipus, should be understood as a crucial deviation from
both Kant’s and Schiller’s views on the sublimity of tragedy; as we saw in the last
chapter, such a departure is already evident in Schelling’s insight into the transformation
of subject/object relations that characterize the sublime. That is, it is essential to
Schelling’s conception of the sublime that the limits between subject and object remain
porous—that the sublime is, above all, a reawakening to freedom grounded in an
irreducible liminality. After a brief recounting of the facts of the plot, Schelling writes of
Oedipus:

That this guilty person, a person who after all only succumbed to the
superior power of fate, nevertheless is punished, was necessary precisely
in order to show the triumph of freedom, and constituted a recognition of
freedom and the honor due it. The protagonist had to struggle against fate;
otherwise there was no struggle at all, no expression of freedom. He had to
succumb within that which is subject to necessity. Yet in order not to
allow necessity to overcome him without simultaneously overcoming it,
the protagonist also had to atone voluntarily for this guilt—guilt imposed
by fate itself. This is the most sublime idea and the greatest victory of
freedom: voluntarily to bear the punishment for an unavoidable
transgression in order to manifest his freedom precisely in the loss of that
very same freedom, and to perish amid a declaration of that free will (The
Philosophy of Art, p. 253).¹⁰³

¹⁰² Heinz Politzer, Freud & Tragedy. Trans. Michael Mitchell (Riverside: Ariadne Press, 2006). Here,
Politzer discusses several strains of Freud’s thought that converge with tragedy, including the idea of the
tragedy endemic to the therapeutic process.
¹⁰³ See also Schmidt’s discussion of this point in reference to Schelling’s tenth letter in Letters on
Dogmatism and Criticism, cited in On Germans and Other Greeks: “In order not to transgress the bounds
of art, tragedy was obliged to have the mortal succumb; yet, in order to compensate for this humiliation of
human freedom imposed by art, it also had to allow him to undergo punishment—even for a crime
committed on account of fate…It was a great idea to have man willingly accept punishment even for an
It is not that freedom is manifested through the hero’s sublime sacrifice, as Kant and even the early Schelling would have it, but rather that freedom itself is revealed as tragic. Freedom is actualized only through relating to its Other—that is, through the force of necessity. Human freedom thus coincides with the act of divine creation, where the barren logic of the potencies only breaks through to existence in the perversion of order. In both cases, evil is the indispensible precondition of individuation and self-consciousness—to be free is to take responsibility for the darkness of that decision which conditions and resists the harmony of reason.

As we will see in Schelling’s Freiheitsschrift, the redemptive possibility of the future is dependent upon our continued engagement with the past: freedom, the decision for good or evil, is atemporal in the sense that it presses beyond the limits of consciousness and presence. In just this way, the unfolding of the Oedipal tragedy forces us to experience the uncanny temporality of a prophecy that arrives too early (before the first scene, before Oedipus is born) and too late (after the deeds have been done, after his punishment has begun). The initial prophecy, external to the action that it sets in motion, is not yet an expression of the deeper unity of freedom and necessity: it is treated as an external given, and thus as something to be manipulated, controlled and avoided—a fact of nature. Only with the return of the prophecy, its (re-)appearance within the narrative as both memory and prediction, do we come to understand that the crucial error occurs in assuming that the past can be known and therein overcome.

\footnote{\textit{inevitable} crime; in this way he was able to demonstrate his freedom precisely through the loss of this freedom” (p. 77).}
1. The Fate of Freedom

If *Oedipus Rex* were to begin at the beginning, with the prophecy given to Laius and Jocasta before the birth of their son, with the mutilation and banishment of Oedipus, it might still be a tragedy but not the tragedy *of* freedom; the belated arrival of Teirisius, however, is evocative of the haunting quality of the prophetic as such, displaced and pervasive, already and yet-to-come, that drives Schelling’s system of freedom. We learn that language, whether in the telling of Oedipus’ fate or in the peculiar discomfort of his own name, is both deceptive and revelatory. The prophecy protects neither Oedipus nor his family from evil; indeed, given the inevitability it lays claim to, we might wonder at how the speech act of the prophet assures the very future it proclaims. One is tempted to ask: If the prophecy were never received, would its truth have been secured in another fashion? The deeper impulse behind this question suggests that a central motif of Oedipus’ story is a destabilizing form of knowing—of *receiving* truth—that transforms what is known. It is in this space that prophecy and self-consciousness converge as acts of awareness that inevitably alter the truth they would get hold of. Here, where subjectivity and interpretability do not exclude truth, Oedipus discovers his freedom. Oedipus recognizes that fate, like freedom, can become a mode of questioning and disrupting necessity; that his past (the meaning of the prophecy) is no more secured than
his future (the nature of its fulfillment) and that the lifeless closure of objective knowledge is not possible in matters of blood and guilt.\textsuperscript{104}

Indeed, it is in regards to the familial—the abyssal beginning from which the prophet derives authority—that Schelling’s interpretation of \textit{Oedipus} resonates with the aims of psychoanalytic therapy. The particular contents of the Oedipal complex are less important than the manner in which we take up its inexorable repetition. Oedipus, in killing his father and having sex with his mother, does not \textit{know} what he is doing: his misrecognition of others, which offers the opportunity for authentic self-discovery, is a result of his conflating self-consciousness with objective knowledge. All of us, according to Freud, are destined to the same fate—to gain self-consciousness through acknowledging our blindness to the sources of our aggression and desire. One might think that Freud, an atheist and dismantler of superstition, would have no use for an antiquated concept like fate. Yet accepting responsibility for the unconscious—working out how this is possible and indeed beneficial—is the goal of psychoanalytic therapy. That is, Freud as analyst is interested in analyzing and thus interrupting fate through the interpretation and integration of the repressed. The victim of fate, the analysand, is alienated from his unconscious desires. Or, as Freud puts it in \textit{Beyond the Pleasure Principle},

What psychoanalysis reveals in the transference phenomena of neurotics appears also in the life of normal persons. With such persons, one has the impression of a persecuting fate or of something demonic in their experience, and from the outset psychoanalysis has considered such a fate to be mainly self-imposed by the individual and determined by early infantile influences (p. 63/\textit{SE} XVIII p. 21).

\textsuperscript{104} Schelling’s emphasis on prophecy and the role of the prophet is particularly notable in \textit{Ages of the World}; prophecy is there presented both as the power belonging to the writer of the would-be “heroic poem” (to whom, perhaps, the work is dedicated) and our mode of relating to the future (p. 119). In contrast to narrating the past and knowing the present—we “prophesize” the future (p. 113).
After briefly recounting the tale of Tancred and Clorinda, where the hero kills his beloved twice, Freud concludes: “Given such observations…we will be so courageous as to assume that in the mind there really is a repetition compulsion which supersedes the pleasure principle” (p. 64/p. 22). But this is not to say that fate remains unchanged in psychoanalysis; that the necessity of unknown, external forces is merely transferred from supernatural powers to the unconscious. Rather, it is the pleasure principle that grounds Freud’s determinism—that functions as a mechanical, quantifiable explanation for psychical acts. Only the gradually acknowledged force of the compulsion to repeat—the great exception to the pleasure principle—and the connection between this compulsion to notions of fate and the “demonic,” is intrinsically related to the free act of questioning the coherence of our constitutive stories. Which is to say: pleasure and death are forms of compulsion that, at the same time, must be acknowledged in order to bring us a measure of freedom.

As I have suggested, the uncanny marks a similar disruption of reality—a possibility for the re-inscription of fate that presents itself as fate. More than that, the uncanny is a psychoanalytic acknowledgement of Schelling’s intuition that freedom is the hidden source of necessity—that order and reason can never entirely sublimate their dark and unruly origins:

Following the eternal act of self-revelation, the world as we now behold it, is all rule, order and form; but the unruly lies ever in the depths as though it might again break through, and order and form nowhere appear as original, but it seems as though what had initially been unruly had been brought to order. This is the incomprehensible basis of reality in things, the irreducible remainder which cannot be resolved into reason by the greatest exertion but always remains in the depths (FS, p. 34/SW VII, 360).
For Oedipus (and Antigone after him), the tragic task of freedom is to actively engage with this “irreducible remainder,” to articulate and deconstruct the prophecies we live out with the priority of the “unruly” ever in mind. As Schelling reminds us, and Freud the analyst exhorts us, we have the capacity and the obligation to see that we are blind: only then can we begin to take responsibility for the unconscious structures and wishes that guide and give meaning to our experience and to existence itself. To be free is not just to accept guilt for what we could not or would not know; we must remain available to the empowerment and vulnerability this transformative knowing entails.

All this is to suggest that the dichotomy of fate and freedom—a dichotomy that is sublimated for Schelling in his Philosophy of Art—itself demands interpretation. Odo Marquard, who has so fruitfully penetrated the interstices of psychoanalysis and Schelling’s philosophy (and of transcendental philosophy more generally), opens up such an analysis in “The End of Fate?” Already in the title, Marquard plays with the ambivalence of human ends: bearing finitude (death) and meaning (purpose), we question and struggle against fate while freedom is only proved in defeat. Tracing the development of the concept of fate in correlation with that of God, Marquard brings into focus our fixation on the rigid opposition: omnipotent or powerless. The death of God, no less than the death of (tragic) fate, signals a failed compromise-formation—betraying our resistance to the fundamental ambivalence and unknowability of the unconscious:

God is the end of fate. If that is the case, what does the end of God mean?...Is it possible that the official and manifest tendency toward human omnipotence of making is counteracted by a latent and unofficial tendency; an indirect reempowerment of fate...or, putting it differently, the outcome of the modern disempowerment of divine omnipotence is not only the official triumph of human freedom but also the unofficial return of fate (p. 72).
At the height of our belief in human freedom, at least insofar as it is understood in terms of powers of production and domination, fate returns. Here the convergence of freedom and necessity is a deception that calls out for a therapeutic self-questioning: What satisfaction is met, what defensive maneuver played out, by reifying the opposition between omnipotence and powerlessness?

Marquard’s analysis of the mutations of fate, from tragedy through divine providence, culminates in what we might call technological man. In Greek tragedy the prophesized fate was inescapable, personal and inscrutable; freedom was a defiant responsibility and a triumphant failure. In Christianity, necessity is reborn as providence; while fate remains personal and inscrutable, it differs from the tragic conception of freedom through faith in an ultimate end beyond this world. After the death of God, fate is given over to science—whether in the sense of a physical/psychical determinism that precludes freedom, or in the reappearance of divine omnipotence in the guise of human production and technology. Freud’s own account of fate, which would prove useful to Marquard here, is peculiar in that it straddles the modern/scientific and ancient/tragic views. Psychoanalysis offers a unique perspective on Marquard’s line of questioning: What desires (and defenses) lie hidden, repressed, in the concept(s) of fate? Might our philosophical accounts of freedom be similarly symptomatic?

It is, nota bene, worth pondering the fact that what stood at the beginning of this depletion of God’s power was the extreme theology of omnipotence that marked the late Middle Ages. The path from the theology of the potentia absoluta (absolute power) by way of the theology of the Deus absconditus and the Deus caché (hidden God) and the theology of the Deus emeritus to theology after the death of God—is a remarkable sequence. Perhaps even omnipotence was already powerlessness by other means” (p. 72, my emphasis).
The repeated polarization of fate and freedom, passivity and activity, conceals a horrifying ambivalence: such clear oppositions would protect us from the overwhelming anxiety of fearing and desiring both power and vulnerability. The anxiety of the uncanny, marked by a return to the convergence of omnipotence and fate, signals a fault line in this dualistic structure. Freedom, insofar as it is equated with omnipotence (of God or Man), is only powerlessness—fate—in disguise.

2. The Freedom of Fate

For Freud, such a confrontation with fate—whether pathological or uncanny—must be dealt with *therapeutically*. The feeling of being plagued by fate, of victimization, cannot simply be replaced with psychic determinism. Rather, psychoanalysis shares in the cathartic work—the liberation through submission—of tragedy. We are accountable to a history that cannot be settled; escaping a future of unacknowledged repetition requires a reinterpretation of, and acknowledgment of our role in creating, the prophecies constituting our past. This will always also be a question of how to take responsibility for the unconscious without falling into the neurotic polarity of omnipotence or helplessness—the same polarity that, Marquard implies, precipitated the death of God and may well do the same for technological man.

It is telling that in his one description of a personal experience of the uncanny, Freud invokes fate. He writes, “this factor of involuntary repetition which surrounds what would otherwise be innocent enough with an uncanny atmosphere, and forces upon us the idea of something fateful and inescapable when otherwise we should have spoken only of
‘chance’" (SE Vol. XVII, p. 237). An aimless stroll through a foreign city leads Freud, again and again, to the neighborhood of “painted ladies.” Yet Freud never interprets the particularities of this experience, unwilling to delve into the unconscious motivations that would normally occupy him, that would deconstruct providence, superstition or chance. Instead, he leaves it as just a feeling of “involuntary repetition”—a repetition, more particularly, of an infantile helplessness the belief in which we should have overcome; what Freud leaves out precisely here, however, is the equally powerful sense of omnipotence governing infantile life. His unmasking of fate only goes half-way, failing to see that the feeling of omnipotence has only fled to the unconscious. As Freud teaches us to suspect, it is the narrator’s omissions that tell the story: Isn’t it peculiar that

---

105 Freud writes:

As I was walking, one hot summer afternoon, through the deserted streets of a provincial town in Italy which was unknown to me, I found myself in a quarter of whose character I could not long remain in doubt. Nothing but painted women were to be seen at the windows of the small houses, and I hastened to leave the narrow street at the next turning. But after having wandered about for a time without enquiring my way, I suddenly found myself back in the same street, where my presence was now beginning to excite attention. I hurried away once more, only to arrive by another detour at the same place yet a third time. Now, however, a feeling overcame me which I can only describe as uncanny…(p. 237).

However, this is not, in fact, the singular personal experience of the uncanny Freud mentions—but the only one that is in the body of the essay. In a footnote that follows some pages later, Freud relates another “adventure”, this time relating to the “double”:

Since the uncanny effect of a ‘double’ also belongs to this same group it is interesting to observe what the effect is of meeting one’s own image unbidden and unexpected. Ernst Mach has related two such observations…I can report a similar adventure. I was sitting alone in my wagon-lit compartment when a more than usually violent jolt of the train swung back the door of the adjoining washing-cabinet, and an elderly gentleman in a dressing gown and a travelling cap came in. I assumed that in leaving the washing-cabinet, which lay between the two compartments, he had taken the wrong direction and come into my compartment by mistake. Jumping up with the intention of putting him right, I at once realized to my dismay that the intruder was nothing but my own reflection in the looking-glass on the open door. I can still recollect that I thoroughly disliked his appearance. Instead, therefore, of being frightened by our ‘doubles,’ both Mach and I simply failed to recognize them as such. Is it not possible, though, that our dislike of them was a vestigial trace of the archaic reaction which feels the ‘double’ to be something uncanny? (p. 248).

Here, it is the literal projection of one’s physical image, rather than the realization of unconscious, psychic structures and desires, that provokes the feeling of the uncanny.
Freud should end up repeatedly among the prostitutes and seductresses of the red light district? That sexuality would occupy a foreign [(un)heimliche] place? Moreover, Freud’s theoretical turn away from actual seduction, and towards fantasy, is indeed the founding gesture of psychoanalysis; and the therapeutic process that develops is itself a retracing, a circling back to the unconscious ambiguity surrounding activity and passivity that is so abhorrent to consciousness.

The permeable boundaries between self and world we experience in the uncanny, and the therapeutic demand to recognize these boundaries as our own productions, together suggest that fate cannot be so simply suffered or made: freedom is just this negotiation. The transition from real seduction (passivity, victimhood) to our interpretations and fantasies surrounding it (activity, agency) within psychoanalysis is also a movement from deterministic necessity to uncanny freedom. In giving up the seduction theory, there is no longer any absolute separation between what is real and what is desired (the essence of “omnipotent thought”), and yet we are still called to work out the limits of our guilt. It is worth noting that for Freud, no less than for Schelling, it is not the inevitability of Oedipus’ actions that makes him a tragic hero but his assumption of an inscrutable guilt. More than the theoretical significance of the Oedipal Complex, psychoanalysis relies on the therapeutic role of Oedipal awareness: on self-discovery that is neither futile nor absolute.

Paradoxically, Oedipal knowledge—self-knowledge—turns out to be a form of ignorance: it is a knowing that negates itself by transforming the past it seeks to take hold of. Oedipus’ assumption of guilt and punishment, his acquisition of the deeper truth of his defining prophecies, depends upon an understanding of freedom as the capacity to
remake our personal narrative. Ancient tragedy, as opposed to its modern iteration, expresses the conflict between who we are and what we can know. Oedipus is tragic insofar as he presumes to know himself; he is a hero because he makes these limitations his own. This is not only illustrated through his physical appropriation of spiritual blindness, but also in returning to the role of father and guide as he makes his way to the grave in *Oedipus at Colonus*: “Follow, my children/It is my turn now to be your pathfinder,/As you have been to me. Come. Do not touch me/Leave me to find the way to sacred grave/Where this land’s soil is to enclose my bones” (p. 118/1529-1595). Oedipus is free only when he becomes a prophet himself—cursing his son and anointing Theseus—and in doing so gathers the power to reshape the future. In the moment that Oedipus recognizes his great sin, and with it the provisional nature and creative potential inherent to memory and self-perception, vulnerability becomes his strength. The events of the past are transformed, indeed shown to be essentially transformable, and he with them. The puzzle at the heart Oedipus is, of course, a version of the Sphinx’s riddle: of the mystery of time as its inevitable course disrupts, and is disrupted by, the human. Prophecy, we might say, is the past’s claim on the future: it is not a denial of freedom, not necessarily, but an insistence on temporal order and continuity. Along with a greater emphasis on self-consciousness or interior life, it is the absence of prophecy that separates modern from ancient tragedy; and, I would argue, these are not unrelated. Schelling’s philosophical preference for ancient tragedy, and Freud’s as well, hinges on this distinction—the past is not something to be overcome and subjectivity is a great deal more than self-consciousness.

The fundamental claim of psychoanalysis is that the unconscious is the ineradicable past and the source of our identity. More importantly, even dangerously, this all-pervasive past is not simply given once and for all; it is not only the ground of the present, but also a creation of it. Freud’s term Nachträglichkeit, or delayed action, is an articulation of this temporal loop: Freud tells us that the Oedipal trauma, like all trauma, is not an event that has occurred. In fact, it traumatizes us precisely through its temporal disruption, insofar as it collapses the space between memory and fantasy—between the meaning we suffer and the meaning we construct. Jean Laplanche’s return to the theory of seduction in *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis* offers a psychoanalytic account of this tragic entanglement of fate, freedom and Nachträglichkeit in terms of an essentially traumatized subjectivity:

The “scene”—and we shall soon see how—must necessarily come into contact with the domain of sexuality. Moreover, two scenes, rather than a single one, will be found to be necessary; and it is in their hiatus, and in what one is inclined to call the impressive bit of deceptive trickery they gave rise to, that the objective lie we have translated as “deceit” is generated (p. 38).

The “objectivity” of the lie needs to be read in two importantly connected ways: first, the lie is itself objective (“inscribed in the facts”), and second, it is precisely the nature and possibility of objectivity (the lie of pure objectivity) that is at issue here. On the former interpretation, deceit simply is the structure of sexuality—inevitably resistant to being

---

107 In Laplanche and Pontalis’ seminal *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, they write that Nachträglichkeit is a “Term frequently used by Freud in connection with his view of psychical temporality and causality: experiences, impressions and memory-traces may be revised at a later date to fit in with fresh experiences or with the attainment of a new stage of development. They may un!!! that event be endowed not only with a new meaning but also with psychical effectiveness” (p. 111).

known; on the latter, sexuality reveals objectivity itself as a *fantasy*, disturbing our very conception of what truth—even or especially our *own* truth—is.

Indeed, the realization of our helplessness in making sense of our own and others’ unconscious, and simultaneously of the powerful effects of our fantasies and desires on the world and those we share it with, *traumatizes us*. It is not merely that certain desires and events are repressed, but that our very conception of how “desires” and “events” come together *must* be disturbed here. We find ourselves, like Oedipus, too early and too late, between desire and seduction, helpless and omnipotent. The expansive role of sexuality in psychoanalysis, and particularly in its relation to the time and truth of subjectivity, can be read as an acknowledgment of unsettled and unsettling reality that must remain inextricably bound up with unconscious fantasy—with a ground that both is and is not our own. As we will see, Schelling similarly understands subjectivity—and in fact existence as such—as intrinsically bound to trauma, and particularly to the perversions that are *desire* and *generation*.

Like prophecy, the traumatic is not confined by a beginning and an end, but acts as the atemporal event that would institute such order; the “event” is neither true nor false but rather inaugurates interpretability. Broadly construed, the psychoanalytic method of engaging therapeutically with the past is essentially based on this concept of the traumatic; therapy depends on a past that remains vulnerable to the present—whether in the deceptive coherence of the dream, or the compromise formations that address us as screen memories and symptoms. While maintaining the “prophetic” power of our earliest experiences, Freud is equally insistent that the past is only obliquely and incompletely available to us. Insofar as both past and present are pervaded by unconscious desire and
the constructions of fantasy, psychoanalysis is a process aimed at taking up the prophetic voice; Oedipus, like all of us, does not inherit his fate (the universal Oedipal Complex)—he inherits a foreign, resistant past: the unconscious.

The “foreignness” of the past, the lineage of transgression that Oedipus is unintentionally born into, is not contentious; however, the claim that Oedipus’ freedom is somehow realized in taking on this guilt, is. Implicit in this statement is the notion that who we are—and what we can be held to account for—is not limited to what we do or even to what we intend. Unconscious desire and fantasy, and no doubt Oedipus too is guilty of these, destabilize the past and our relation to it. In one of Freud’s earliest texts, “Screen Memories” (*SE* Vol. III, pp. 303-322), he argues that our most intimate connection to the past—memory—is not reliable in the way we imagine it to be; this isn’t just to say that our personal narrative is biased, but that insofar as memory is an imaginative production it betrays deeper issues concerning the reality of the past.\(^{109}\) For Freud, this “productive” memory only becomes apparent in the distortions he deals with in the therapeutic situation: the persistence of infantile modes of experience that are unacceptable to consciousness leads to the disfigured histories—the symptoms and confessions—of the analysand. But it is only in their duplicity that these memories, worked over by defenses and interwoven with fantasy, can expose the textured reality of the archaic past:

> It may indeed be questioned whether we have any memories at all *from* our childhood: memories *relating to* our childhood may be all that we possess. Our childhood memories show us our earliest years not as they were but as they appeared at the later periods when the memories were aroused. In these periods of arousal, the childhood memories did not, as people are accustomed to say, *emerge*; they were *formed* at that time. And a number of motives, with no concern for historical accuracy, had a part in

---

forming them, as well as in the selection of memories themselves (p. 24/SE Vol. III, 322).

The lack of “concern for historical accuracy” on the part of memory is, itself, an opening up of the historical and the objective in and through psychoanalysis. It is due to the nature of the past that its truth is not there to be recovered—to be deemed more or less accurate. Its truth is wrapped up in the same modes of infantile experience that are intolerable to the laws and logic of consciousness—non-contradiction, for example, or linear causality. The ambivalence and porosity that characterizes our earliest relationships, activity/passivity, love/hate, also defines our most fundamental sense of reality. We can begin to see why the oppositional structures of consciousness, including the distinction between memory and fantasy, are disturbed when confronted with the tragic dialectic of guilt and innocence. To question our responsibility for the past we must enter into its radical alterity—we must return to the disorienting ambivalence from which the dichotomies of agency and desire are first constructed.

3. Original Sin

In his 1809 Freiheitsschrift Schelling begins to define freedom in relation to the problem of evil—to the concrete reality of living, deciding and historicizing as a creature that is born into and bears the unconscious. And as Schelling only intimated in his account of tragedy, he now explicitly contends that our relationship to the past, to the unconscious ground of our existence, is integral to human freedom. The possibility of radical evil, no less than the possibility of divine love, is also necessary to human freedom—to freedom
conceived as a potential for self-transformation manifested either in seclusion or embrace. As I hope to have shown, such a potential—for vulnerability and potency specifically in relation to the past—is fundamental to the psychical liberation of Freud’s therapeutic approach.Benefitting from Kant’s reformulation of freedom in *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, Schelling’s account of evil pries the unconscious from the merely natural, necessary or animal. As we shall see, it is only in this way that Schelling’s early interpretation of Oedipal guilt and freedom comes to fruition.

Representative of Kant’s earlier, Critical period, where the unconscious has as yet no space of its own, he writes in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*:

> Will is a kind of causality belonging to living beings so far as they are rational. Freedom would then be the property this causality has of being able to work independently of determination by alien causes; just as natural necessity is a property characterizing the causality of all non-rational beings—the property of being determined to activity by the influence of alien causes...What else then can freedom of the will be but autonomy—that is, the property which will has of being a law to itself?...Thus a free will and a will under moral laws are one and the same (p. 446).^{110}

Here Kant clearly maintains that, for rational beings, there are only two options: either we act in a manner that is above the natural order—freely, according to self-given, universal law—or we act naturally, which is to say determined by desire, instinct and inclination. Evil can only be ignorance of the moral law or the inability—a weakness of will—to act in accordance with it. The possibility of acting in such a way that we are beneath nature—that is, both freely and in conflict with the moral law—is foreclosed. Freedom is thus equivalent to obeying the moral law, and the reality of evil is reduced to animality that cannot be a free choice and, therefore, that we cannot be held accountable for. It is

---

only with his work in *Religion* that Kant realizes that evil, no less than the good, must be attributable to freedom. As he reflects on the connection between freedom and evil, Kant encounters the unconscious—he considers what it would require to take responsibility for that which we cannot know or experience: the very stuff of tragedy, or of psychoanalysis.

In *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, Kant revisits the question of freedom with the developments of the *Critique of Judgment* in mind: What kind of cause is freedom? This questioning leads Kant to sort out the nature of evil and to an acknowledgment, more precisely, of its atemporal ground. In reformulating freedom as the real possibility of choosing good or evil, and in placing this choice outside of time, Kant leads the way for Schelling’s radical assertions about the essence of human freedom. If we are to understand freedom as the essence of the human, we cannot maintain that evil is merely the result of any causally determined series of events—whether physical or psychical. That is to say, the disposition to adopt evil maxims must itself be a free choice—a choice, as we will see, that exceeds the *phenomenal* (spatio-temporal) world. Kant writes,

In order, then, to call a man evil, it would have to be possible *a priori* to infer from several evil acts done with consciousness of their evil, or from one such act, an underlying evil maxim; and further, from this maxim to infer the presence in the agent of an underlying common ground [*allgemein liegenden Grund*], itself a maxim, of all particular morally-evil maxims (p.16).\(^{111}\)

Kant runs up against the notion of a “common ground” in the agent, or a *disposition*; such a disposition, to adopt good or evil maxims, must itself be *freely* chosen. We are not born with a fixed destiny, Kant argues, but neither can our moral fate be determined by the

contingent facts of our experience. How, then, do we come to choose this disposition? What kind of choice—and what kind of chooser—can remain unexperienced while still causally effective?

The problem of nature—or rather of its duality—arises simultaneously with the problem of evil. This connection between nature and evil takes on another form, as we shall see, in Schelling’s text. It is in this vein that Kant deals with the Biblical account of hereditary sin at some length in this work, as he too is concerned here with freedom as opposition to nature and as integral to our nature. This is not merely a question of semantics, but rather speaks to the complications inherent in a being that is part of nature and able to stand against nature:

Lest difficulty at once be encountered in the expression nature, which, if it meant (as it usually does) the opposite of freedom as a basis of action, would flatly contradict the predicates morally good or evil, let it be noted that by ‘nature of man’ we here intend only the subjective ground of the exercise (under objective moral laws) of man’s freedom in general; this ground—whatever is its character—is the necessary antecedent of every act apparent to the senses. But this subjective ground, again, must itself always be an expression of freedom [Dieser subjektive Grund muß aber immer wiederum selbst ein Actus der Freiheit sein] (for otherwise the use or abuse of man’s power of choice in respect of the moral law could not be imputed to him nor could the good or bad in him be called moral) (pp. 16-17/DR, 16).  

The “nature of man” is not, Kant argues, equivalent to the nature in man. That is, he does not mean to say that man is good or evil in the manner of natural cause, the way one is born a member of a particular race or sex. Despite Kant’s reticence in fleshing out this expanded understanding of nature, in reopening the concept of human nature he subtly alters the concept of nature as such. As we can already see in Schelling’s early works, for

112 ibid. p. 16
instance, it is precisely the “subjective ground” of nature—the *natura naturans* that is never fully disclosed in its products—that bridges the human and non-human worlds. Kant remains focused on the “subjective ground” of human nature that, in its deviation from the laws of nature, “must itself always be an expression of freedom.” Although this appears to be a rather familiar claim, that freedom is our *noumenal* essence, it is as if he is suddenly struck by the weight of this fact. If we are accustomed to the clarity Kant ascribes to the moral law, here he confronts us with the unfathomable depths of our guilt. *Noumenal* freedom must be the ground of law and not the law itself.

If it is by way of duty and the moral law that Kant understood the *phenomenality* of freedom, it is revealing that only through radical evil can he approach the inexpressible, *noumenal* dimension of freedom:

We shall say, therefore, of the character (good or evil) distinguishing man from other possible rational beings, that it is *innate* in him. Yet in doing so we shall ever take the position that nature is not to bear the blame (if it is evil) or take the credit (if it is good), but that man himself is its author. But since the ultimate ground of the adoption of our maxims, which must itself lie in free choice, cannot be revealed in experience, it follows that the good or evil in man (as the ultimate subjective ground of the adoption of this or that maxim with reference to the moral law) is termed innate only in *this* sense, that it is posited as the ground antecedent to every use of freedom in experience (in earliest youth as far back as birth) and is thus conceived of as present in man at birth—though birth need not be the cause of it (*Religion*, p.17/DR, 17).

---

113 “For although only transcendental philosophy raises itself to the Absolute Unconditioned [Unbedingt] in human knowledge, it must nevertheless demonstrate that every science that is *science* at all has its unconditioned. The above principle thus obtains for the philosophy of nature: ‘the unconditioned of Nature as such cannot be sought in any individual natural object;’ rather a principle of being, that itself ‘is’ not, manifests itself in each natural object…Now, what is this *being itself* for transcendental philosophy, of which every individual being is only a particular form? If, according to these very principles, everything that exists is a construction of the spirit, then *being itself* is nothing other than the *constructing itself*, or since construction is thinkable at all only as activity, *being itself* is nothing other than the *highest constructing activity*, which, although never itself an object, is the principle of everything objective” (*First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*, I, p. 13/SW III, pp. 11-12).
The peculiarity of what Kant is saying here is not obvious: it seems a mere recapitulation of his account of the negatively defined, *noumenal* spontaneity of freedom. Yet the paradox of our freedom is laid bare, as we are faced with a grounding that we have no direct access to and yet, somehow, remain ineluctably responsible for at every moment. It is this paradox that Kant’s successors try to overcome. His own efforts to move beyond the *phenomenal* expression of freedom are limited because of his equation of consciousness and subjectivity. Before and beyond the *phenomenal* expressions of actions, maxims and disposition, there must be the ungrounded, eternal decision:

To have a good or an evil disposition as an inborn natural constitution does not here mean that it has not been acquired by the man who harbors it, that he is not author of it, but rather, that it has not been acquired in time…The disposition, *i.e.*, the ultimate subjective ground of the adoption of maxims, can be one only and applies universally to the whole use of freedom. Yet this disposition itself must have been adopted by free choice, for otherwise it could not be imputed [Sie selbst aber muß auch durch freie Willkür angenommen worden sein, denn sonst könnte sie nicht zugerechnet werden]. But the subjective ground or cause of this adoption cannot further be known (though it is inevitable that we should inquire into it), since otherwise still another maxim would have to be adduced in which this disposition must have been incorporated, a maxim which in itself must have its ground (pp. 20-21/DR, 20).

Eventually, we come to a ground that can neither be known nor ignored; a ground that, marking the periphery of possible experience, suggests that the task of our lives is to acknowledge this ground as our own. Recognizing that this ground cannot show itself, that it cannot be known or experienced, is as essential to this demand as the effort to claim responsibility for it in and through our actions. The relevance of the unconscious to this problematic should be apparent: freedom is not the domination of nor refusal to engage with our unknowable ground, but the possibility of allowing such a ground to be our own and to remain irreducibly other.
By placing the ground of our disposition outside of time in this way, while still maintaining our ultimate freedom to determine ourselves, Kant suggests a relation between the noumenal and phenomenal realms that resonates with his work in The Critique of Judgment. Pointing to this dialectic of freedom and responsibility, where the unknowable ground is both the source and effect of our moral bearing, Kant articulates freedom as creative, organic cause:

However evil a man has been up to the very moment of an impending free act (so that evil has actually become custom or second nature) it was not only his duty to have been better [in the past], it is now his duty to better himself. To do so must be within his power, and if he does not do so, he is susceptible of, and subjected to, imputability in the very moment of that action, just as much as though, endowed with a predisposition to good (which is inseparable from freedom) he had stepped out of a state of innocence into evil (p. 36/DR, 34).

In this passage Kant highlights the ever-present possibility of redemption, and indeed of the difficulty involved in conceptualizing how we are always free to recreate the ground of our being even as this ground must be the source of our choice to do so. We are not the agents of one free act that determines our existence; we are, instead, free at every moment to acknowledge and recast who we are through the reappropriation of what we have done or will do—to be redeemed or damned. Without knowledge of our freedom, Kant suggests, we bear the responsibility for interpreting and creating the meaning of our actions. The decision that grounds our subjectivity is not atemporal in that it is before time, but by virtue of the fact that this decision is the eternal possibility to become who we are. Just at this moment Kant retreats into the Biblical story of original sin, turning away from the chiasmic ground that is both the necessary condition of my subjectivity (that which makes any choice mine) and itself my free choice and responsibility:
The foregoing agrees well with that manner of presentation which the Scriptures use, whereby the origin of evil in the human race is depicted as having a [temporal] beginning, this beginning being presented in a narrative, wherein what in its essence must be considered as primary (without regard to the element of time) appears as coming first in time. According to this account, evil does not start from a propensity thereto as its underlying basis, for otherwise the beginning of evil would not have its source in freedom; rather does it start from sin (by which is meant the transgressing of the moral law as a divine command). The state of man prior to all propensity to evil is called the state of innocence. The moral law became known to mankind, as it must to any being not pure but tempted by desires, in the form of a prohibition (pp. 36-37/DR, 34-35).

The “radical evil” inherent in human nature is not an inborn propensity or perversion; human freedom, like knowledge in the critical philosophy, is only actualized in experience. Freedom cannot be abstracted from the conditions through which it is expressed, and so despite its metaphysical priority freedom depends upon the real possibility of choosing evil. As Kant points out, the priority of the possibility for evil is not a temporal priority, though it has to be expressed this way in the narrative constraints of the Scriptures. Rather, the free choice that defines us seems to occur never and always, both cause and effect of our mode of being in the world. Kant goes on to suggest an analogy between the Biblical story of Adam’s fall and his own reliance on the concept of obligation in developing his practical philosophy, serving “as it must” to communicate the moral law as a prohibition. Just as the Scriptures use the crutch of a temporal event to explain the origin of evil, Kant seems to admit that his own language of logic and duty similarly conceals the radical consequences of a freedom that we are but cannot know.

The transition from innocence to guilt is not a matter of preferring evil to the good; it is not an arbitrarily chosen perversion of our nature. Rather, freedom and guilt
arrive together: in recognizing that our responsibility exceeds our knowledge, we assume our guilt. Kant, following the myth of original sin, suggests that innocence can only be experienced as having been; in taking up our subjectivity, in the self-consciousness that unifies our experience, the identity of thinking and being—of subject and object—is already lost. Self-knowledge, as the story of Adam and Eve allegorizes, necessarily precludes innocence. In our freedom and our finitude, we could always do otherwise and could not have done otherwise. Original sin, then, is as much the story of the “leap” into self-consciousness as it is into evil\textsuperscript{114}:

\begin{quote}
From all this it is clear that we daily act in the same way, and that therefore ‘in Adam all have sinned’ and still sin; except that in us there is presupposed an innate propensity to transgression, whereas in the first man, from the point of view of time, there is presupposed no such propensity but rather innocence; hence transgression on his part is called a \textit{fall into sin}; but with us sin is represented as resulting from an already innate wickedness in our nature. This propensity, however, signifies no more than this, that if we wish to address ourselves to the explanation of evil in terms of its \textit{beginning in time}, we must search for the causes of each deliberate transgression in a previous period of our lives, far back to that period wherein the use of reason had not yet developed, and thus back to a propensity to evil (as a natural ground) which is therefore called innate—the source of evil. But to trace the causes of evil in the instance of the first man, who is depicted as already in full command of the use of his reason, is neither necessary nor feasible, since otherwise this basis (the evil propensity) would have had to be created in him; therefore his sin is set forth as engendered directly from innocence. We must not, however, look for an origin in time of a moral character for which we are to be held responsible; though to do so is inevitable if we wish to \textit{explain} the contingent existence of this character \textit{[Wir müssen aber von einer moralischen Beschaffenheit, die uns soll zugerechnet werden, keinen Zeiter sprung suchen]} (and perhaps it is for this reason that Scripture, in conformity with this weakness of ours, has thus pictured the temporal origin of evil) (pp. 37-38/DR, 35-36).
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{114} See also: Soren Kierkegaard, \textit{The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin}, trans. Reidar Thomte (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980). Kierkegaard writes, as if in communication with Kant, “Thus sin comes into the world as the sudden, i.e., by a leap; but the leap also posits the quality, and since the quality is posited, the leap in the very moment is turned into the quality and is presupposed by the quality, and the quality by the leap” (p. 32).
It is “neither necessary nor feasible” [nicht nötig, auch nicht tunlich ist] to assume that the propensity for evil was created by Adam; yet Adam, like all of us, is responsible for his sin. Strangely, it is the reality of sin that seems to create its possibility.\textsuperscript{115} We might read this in terms of Kant’s own concerns with the temporal confusion that freedom draws us into: How can it be that we freely, and eternally, choose our own ground—the same ground from which choice becomes possible? Kant suggests that, as in the Biblical version, any temporal priority here is a simplification that obscures the truth. In giving precedence to sin, to the action that does not at first seem to belong to Adam essentially but only retrospectively, the story of the fall fails to think through self-consciousness that encompasses the alterity of the unconscious.

4. The Logic of Longing

In his Freiheitsschrift Schelling sketches out the rudiments of an ontological psychoanalysis in his attempt to think through the consequences of a grounding repression—of a traumatic union of fate and freedom.\textsuperscript{116} In contrast to his earlier works,

\textsuperscript{115} This peculiar temporality of original sin, of mutual production of innocence and guilt, is the focus of Kierkegaard’s The Concept of Anxiety, a work heavily influenced by Schelling: “Through the first sin, sin came into the world. Precisely in the same way it is true of every subsequent man’s first sin, that through it sin comes into the world…Just as Adam lost innocence by guilt, so every man loses it in the same way. If it was not by guilt that he lost it, then it was not innocence that he lost; and if he was not innocent before becoming guilty, he never became guilty” (p. 31/DR, 35). He continues, “Innocence, unlike immediacy, is not something that must be annulled, something whose quality is to be annulled, something that properly does not exist, but rather, when it is annulled, and as a result of being annulled, it for the first time comes into existence as that which it was before being annulled and which now is annulled…Innocence is not a perfection that one should wish to regain, for as soon as one wishes for it, it is lost…”(pp. 36-37).

\textsuperscript{116} Maurice Merleau-Ponty, The Visible and the Invisible (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968). In this text, Merleau-Ponty introduces the concept of a “psychoanalysis of Nature,” and this alongside a discussion of his “barbaric Principle”, in his notes from November, 1960, “‘Nature is at the first day’: it is there today. This does not mean: myth of the original indivision and coincidence as return.
in this text Schelling presents freedom as the possibility of choosing good or evil—innocence or guilt. The language of seduction, procreation and longing is pervasive here: and evil, as Schelling tells us, is not a privation but a *perversion*. Freedom must be a certain tendency towards—a possibility for—this perversion. As we will see, this leads Schelling to develop a metaphysical account of the unconscious, as the ground of God and human beings, in terms of drive and desire. Just as Freud develops the temporality of *Nachträglichkeit* in order to make sense of our essentially neurotic subjectivity, so does Schelling articulate a new form of causation in his efforts to redefine human nature: an ontology grounded in will and desire, where objectivity and self-presence can no longer be equated with truth, inevitably disrupts the temporal order. I will suggest that Schelling takes an even more radical approach than Freud, developing a theory of an originary, *erotic* temporality that extends beyond the human to being as such.\footnote{117}

The *Urtümlich*, the *Ursprünglich* is not of long ago.

It is a question of finding in the present, the flesh of the world (and not in the past) an “ever new” and “always the same”—A sort of time of sleep (which is Bergson’s nascent duration, ever new and always the same). The sensible, Nature, transcend the past present distinction, realize from within a passage from one into the other

Existential eternity. The indestructible, the barbaric Principle

Do a psychoanalysis of Nature: it is the flesh, the mother.

A philosophy of the flesh is the condition without which psychoanalysis remains anthropology

In what sense the visible landscape under my eyes is not exterior to, and bound synthetically to…other moments of time and the past, but has them really *behind itself* in simultaneity, inside itself and not it they side by side ‘in’ time

Time and chiasm” (p. 267).

\footnote{117} In Robert Vallier’s essay “*Être sauvage and the Barbarian Principle,*” in the collection *The Barbarian Principle*, where he discusses the relationship between Merleau-Ponty’s concept of a psychoanalysis of Nature in reference to Schelling’s work, he makes use of Freud’s *Nachträglichkeit* in order to account for God’s auto-production. However, Vallier does not consider the Freudian roots of this temporality which I will go on to consider here. Yet he does imply that, as with the coming-to-be of God, the relationship between ground and existence that characterizes human freedom must also take part in this disruption of linear time:

Like light, God comes to His existence, He becomes Himself. Yet He also belongs to the ground, and so when God comes to His existence, the ground flees. Once again we see this structure of *Nachträglichkeit*…When God represses Nature, when He masters
Schelling’s essay, which can almost be read as a series of digressions on the limitations of reason, is a performance of the radically incomplete and disruptive freedom he encounters. That is, he initially attempts to develop a system of freedom in the weaker sense, a system that does not contradict freedom; through the course of the text, however, he constructs (and deconstructs) a system of freedom in the strongest sense, where freedom is the unifying and foundational principle. Rather than assuming the equivalence of “system” and “the principle of sufficient reason,” Schelling re-imagines the possibilities of systematicity in light of a grounding freedom. Partially in response to the “pantheism controversy,” Schelling points out that the equation of system with pantheism, and of pantheism with fatalism, stem from fundamental misunderstandings of the terms involved: if pantheism is understood as the culmination of reason, and furthermore as the identity of God and His creation, this need not inevitably lead to determinism or nihilism. Rather, such a claim calls for an investigation into the structure of this identity.\footnote{See: Frederick C. Beiser, The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987). Beiser offers an illuminating and in-depth discussion of the pantheism controversy and its importance in the development of post-Kantian German philosophy (pp. 44-108). He writes, “It is difficult to imagine a controversy whose cause was so incidental—Jacobi’s disclosure of Lessing’s Spinozism—and whose effects were so great. The pantheism controversy completely changed the intellectual map of eighteenth-century Germany; and it continued to preoccupy thinkers well into the nineteenth century. The main problem raised by the controversy—the dilemma of a rational nihilism or an irrational fideism—became a central issue for Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche. It is indeed no exaggeration to say that the pantheism controversy had as great an impact upon nineteenth-century philosophy as Kant’s first Kritik” (p. 44).} Schelling is quite clear that Kant’s critical account of freedom—or “mere mastery of intelligence over senses and passions”—will not suffice. Indeed, Schelling sees that Kant can only approach freedom in its \textit{phenomenal} expression—and thus \textit{as} determined. The question of how we might reconcile system and freedom, then, is fundamentally the question of how to bring together what Kant emphatically tore apart Himself, He properly exists; but Nature can be His ground only if He already exists. But He is never independent of this ground, which remains in Him as repressed (p. 140).
without devolving into dogmatism or mysticism. The essence of freedom is at issue, though not as an object or thing accessible to knowledge, and for Schelling this remains the singular task of philosophy:

For the true conception of freedom was lacking in all modern systems…until the discovery of Idealism. And the sort of freedom which many among us have conceived, even those boasting of the liveliest sense thereof, a freedom, namely, consisting of the mere mastery of intelligence over senses and passions [in der bloßen Herrschaft des intelligenten Prinzips über das sinnliche und die Begierden besteht], could be deduced from Spinoza himself without difficulty, indeed quite easily with superior decisiveness (Philosophical Inquiries into the Essence of Human Freedom, p. 17/SW VII, p. 345).

Schelling’s criticism of dogmatic and Kantian freedom, already prefigured in his emphasis on the priority of organism and generation over mechanism and production in the Naturphilosophie, is finally made explicit: “God is not a god of the dead but of the living. It is incomprehensible that an all-perfect being could rejoice in even the most perfect mechanism possible” (p. 346). It is in this sense that Idealism alone offers the tools to develop a positive account of freedom, as every coming-into-being presupposes and remains tied to a structure of inexhaustible, active subjectivity—here understood as a vital exchange between consciousness and the unconscious.

In a system of freedom the principle of sufficient reason cannot be primary, and Schelling recognizes that he has to make room for causation that is neither reducible to nor entirely disconnected from determinism: the fact of creation (the existential consequent) is neither logically implied by, nor undifferentiated from, the act of creation (its antecedent)—both accounts of pantheism fail to grasp the space of the human, between finitude and eternity. The bond of identity that simultaneously individuates and
unites Creator and creation still needs to be articulated: “The principle does not express a unity which, revolving in the indifferent circle of sameness, would get us nowhere and remain meaningless and lifeless. The unity of the law is of an intrinsically creative kind [ist eine unmittelbar schöpferische]” (p. 345). If God and creation were identical in the sense of an inert sameness, there could be no relationship at all; there could be no terms connected as identical without these terms remaining in some sense discrete—without there being a way to distinguish antecedent from consequence. Further, this undifferentiated confusion could not account for a being that is both created and free, so that freedom itself becomes a form of differentiation Schelling aligns with birth and the familial. Schelling argues that in order to reconcile finitude with freedom, we need to understand this (re-)productive identity as creaturely dependence—as a form of generation that must be ontologically prior to mechanistic production:

Every organic individual, insofar as it has come into being, is dependent upon another organism with respect to its genesis but not at all with regard to its essential being...on the contrary, it would indeed be contradictory if that which is dependent or consequent were not autonomous. There would be dependence without something being dependent (p. 346).

The investigation that Schelling takes up here is an attempt to flesh out the form of causation that a system of freedom requires. It is a question of what kind of identity-in-difference, an inherently acitive identity, grounds the possibility of being both created and free—or the convergence of the temporal and eternal. As it turns out, this turns on an account of the relationship God and the human being bear to themselves as well as to each other—that is, that each bears to their own dark ground or the otherness at the root of selfhood. These free unions relate that which is irreducibly concealed/concealing to
that which is essentially revealed/revealing—a communicative structure that is both free and necessary. The active identity that holds together the individual human being is also the active identity of God and with God, precisely insofar as they are all expressions of the bond of personality—of the belonging-together of the unconscious and consciousness, ground and existence: the originary disruption that is life, the condition of possibility for love and hate, psychosis and neurosis.119

While Schelling opens up his account of the unconscious already in his Naturphilosophie, the Freiheitsschrift builds upon the specifically human unconscious that is first sketched out in The System of Transcendental Idealism. If the System is concerned with the unconscious ground of consciousness, however, the Freiheitsschrift is a meditation on the unconscious as it pertains to the personal and divine: the unconscious is no longer merely the condition for consciousness, but a force of its own, structured by drives towards appropriating and excluding otherness. Paradoxically, in narrowing the unconscious to the personal Schelling simultaneously extends freedom beyond the human; the strange progression of the essay (a product of ceaseless regression and digression) suggests that an investigation of human freedom inevitably leads beyond itself, to freedom that exceeds even the Absolute: the Ungrund. Thus in making freedom and the unconscious personal, Schelling actually designates personality as the original and definitive system. Schelling defies Kant’s hypothetical approach to organic cause, asserting instead that organism is systematic in a more primordial sense than reason or

119 See: Sigmund Freud, “The Loss of Reality in Neurosis and Psychosis” SE Vol. XIX, pp. 183-190. Freud contrasts neurosis and psychosis in the following manner: “Accordingly, the initial difference is expressed thus in the final outcome: in neurosis a piece of reality is avoided by a sort of flight, whereas in psychosis it is remodeled. Or we might say: in psychosis, the initial flight is succeeded by an active phase of remodeling; in neurosis, the initial obedience is succeeded by a deferred attempt at flight. Or again, expressed in yet another way: neurosis does not disavow reality, it only ignores it; psychosis disavows it and tries to replace it” (p. 185).
mechanism: God and human beings are *personalities*—self-conscious organisms—insofar as they are always already engaged with otherness, with what they could be or could have been. A personality *is* insofar as it must be entangled in what it *is not*, capable of inhabiting its own possibilities—its self-development and self-concealment—as freedom.\(^{120}\) Schelling argues that it is only through the identity-activity of personality, which draws the human near to God, that the possibility of evil arises—and, therein, human freedom. *Personality* and *freedom* are inextricably linked for Schelling, descriptions of a systematicity that can encompass the self-potentiating interplay between ground and existence: that is, between the unconscious and consciousness in becoming an individual, between concealment and revelation in coming to expression.

The arc of Schelling’s argument is itself an enactment of the strange temporality at work in personality—and it is, of course, the very emergence of time that is at stake in the system of freedom. Beginning with the dual aspects of God—his ground and existence—Schelling progresses to the human; but it is only towards the end of the essay that the ultimate ground, the *Ungrund*, makes its appearance as absolute freedom or indifference. It seems that Schelling performs a freedom that is the beginning and the end of philosophy, both in the content and the form of the *Freiheitsschrift*\(^{121}\):

> In the cycle whence all things come, it is no contradiction to say that that which gives birth to the one is, in its turn, produced by it. There is here no

\(^{120}\) “It goes without saying that this principle [for judging nature teleologically] holds only for reflective but not for determinative judgment, that it is regulative and not constitutive. It only serves us as a guide that allows us to consider natural things in terms of a new law-governed order by referring them to an already given basis [a purpose] as that which determines them. Thus we expand natural science in terms of a different principle, that of final causes, yet without detracting from the principle of mechanism in the causality of nature” (*CJ/KU* 379).

\(^{121}\) “The alpha and omega of all philosophy is freedom” (*Schelling’s Organic Form of Philosophy*, p. 5).
first and last, since everything mutually implies everything else, nothing being the ‘other’ and yet no being without the other (p. 358).

If it is not quite clear why an investigation into human freedom opens immediately onto the relation between ground and existence, it is worth keeping in view the difficulty in approaching freedom by way of evil. Schelling’s tendency to circle back to the beginning might be more fruitfully understood as a method for drawing us into the reciprocal activity of personality; existence as the infinite capacity to return to, and to reinterpret, its inexhaustible ground. As we have already seen, the question of freedom concerns the unconscious as primordial causation. The relationship between ground and existence, then, is Schelling’s way of bringing into relief a manner of becoming an individual—of simultaneously being created and creating oneself—that is neither capricious nor determined. Freedom requires a certain kind of distance, a vital grounding that needs to be thought through to its most originary form.

Although Schelling finds the rationalized, sanitized freedom of the Critiques insufficient, he takes up in earnest the Kantian equation of independence from time with freedom. While this connection is first presented in the critical philosophy, Schelling’s inquiry into the role of the unconscious here is more deeply engaged with Kant’s confrontation with radical evil in Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone. However, recognizing these resonances, Schelling maintains that Kant does not see his insights through to their natural—if disturbing—conclusion:

But it will always remain strange that Kant, after first distinguishing the things-in-themselves from appearances only negatively, as being independent of time, and later, in the metaphysical explications of his Critique of Practical Reason, treated independence of time and freedom as
correlative concepts, did not proceed to the thought of transferring this only possible positive conception of per-se-itv to things (pp. 351-352).

Freedom is not just one noumenal property among others, nor is it attributable only to the human being. Indeed, we might even say that Schelling’s main contention in the Freiheitsschrift is that freedom is the essence of the noumenal as such. That is, “[i]n the final and highest instance there is no other Being than Will. Will is primordial Being and all predicates apply to it alone—groundlessness, eternity, independence of time, self-affirmation!” (p. 350). Pressing beyond Kant and expanding the unconscious to include the ground of God, Schelling claims that not only human beings but being as such belong to freedom. Only through approaching all existence as expressions of living personality, in attending to the structure of such expression, can his philosophy of freedom get underway. These concepts of personality and life, however, can be too easily dismissed as an anthropomorphizing of God, of the Absolute or of being; instead, such language ought to call attention to the distinction Schelling makes between freedom as the mere property of a creature or a being, and freedom as the very principle of creating or coming-to-be. Schelling’s quite human terms actually belie a deanthropomorphizing and re-opening of freedom, as he seeks to reclaim its most primordial truth.122

Having provisionally worked out why Schelling approaches human freedom through ground and existence, we can consider the ways in which this relationship functions in God, human being and finally in the Ungrund. Following Schelling, we begin neither with that which is nearest (human experience) nor with the most distant (Ungrund), but with the grounding relationship shared by God and human beings:

122 This is Heidegger’s claim as well, as cited on the following page.
But since there can be nothing outside God, this contradiction can only be solved by things having their basis in that within God which is not God himself [daß die Dinge ihren Grund in dem haben, was in Gott selbst nicht Er Selbst ist] i.e. in that which is the basis of his existence. If we wish to bring this Being nearer to us from a human standpoint, we may say: it is the longing which the eternal One feels to give birth to itself [es sei die Sensucht, die das ewige Eine empfindent, sich selbst zu gebären]. This is not the One itself, but is co-eternal with it. This longing seeks to give birth to God, i.e. the unfathomable unity, but to this extent it has not yet the unity in its own self (p. 359).

What we might be tempted to read as analogies—the longing of the divine ground to give birth to itself—are actually efforts to recover a more original sense for what we take to be fundamentally human experiences; the human is called to re-gather itself through the first stirrings of creation, appropriating itself anew as a reverberation of freedom, rather than deforming the Absolute in the effort to make it accessible, conceivable—knowable. Our melancholy, as Schelling puts it in his Stuttgart Seminars, is just such a call from and echo of this shared ground:

The most obscure and thus the deepest aspect of human nature is that of nostalgia [Sensucht], which is the inner gravity of the temperament, so to speak; in its most profound manifestation it appears a melancholy [Schwermuth]. It is by means of the latter that man feels a sympathetic relation to nature. What is most profound in nature is also melancholy; for it, too, mourns a lost good, and likewise such an indestructible melancholy inheres in all forms of life because all life is founded upon something independent from itself…(p. 7/SW, 466).

Schelling’s use of melancholy is not an allegory, but a way of making manifest the necessity and difficulty of a living Absolute. That is, the deepest structures of human experience are not cognitive, but emotional—it is life that we share with God and with each other, and for Schelling life can only show itself in and as feeling. More specifically,
as Schelling notes, our attunement to life is an attunement to loss—to finitude, limit and otherness (“mourns a lost good,” “founded upon something independent”). This is by no means an escape into irrational speculation or mysticism, but a nuanced articulation of Schelling’s central concern with the emergence of reason—of thought and language—from its other:

We are speaking of the essence of longing regarded in and for itself, which we must view clearly although it was long ago submerged by the higher principle which had risen from it, and although we cannot grasp it perceptively but only spiritually…Following the eternal act of self-revelation, the world as we now behold it, is all rule, order and form; but the unruly lies ever in the depths as though it might again break through, and order and form nowhere appear to have been original, but it seems as though what had initially been unruly had been brought to order. This is the incomprehensible basis of reality in things [Dieses ist an den Dingen die unergreifliche Basis der Realität], the irreducible remainder [der nie aufgehende Rest] which cannot be resolved [auflösen] into reason by the greatest exertion but always remains in the depths (SW VII, pp. 359-360).

Schelling understands that within a system of freedom, the characteristic distinctions or analyses of reason are not given but rather in need of explanation: any investigation into the structure of grounding depends upon an acknowledgment of “the irreducible remainder” that is “the incomprehensible basis of reality.” Insofar as we are to understand freedom here in its most primordial sense, as the source of reason and the confines of its system, so too are we to consider longing as the ground of intelligibility.

Although Schelling’s descriptions of God’s ground can be read as all-too-human—“to bring this Being nearer to us from a human standpoint”—I think that the context demands a different interpretation. It is not that we should simply accept these as useful comparisons that aid our limited capacities in grasping a transcendent Creator, as
though we need to merely imagine our own feelings and then subtract ourselves from them. Part of what Schelling is doing here is emphasizing the darkness that human beings share with the act of creation—appealing to the ground that resists reason even as and because it allows it to come forth. We need to look at Schelling’s entire essay as a meditation on the nature of identity, as a sustained effort to show that existence is a manifestation of the deepest structures of personality—of the longing and anxiety from which a subject might emerge. The fundamental structure that Schelling will propose, an unconscious differentiation and gathering in personality, must be prior to any mere analogy between the divine and the human. Heidegger calls attention to Schelling’s privileging of the differentiating-gathering activity over any stabilized being, suggesting that in longing we touch upon that allows for and resists the paradigm of subject-object opposition:  

The nature of the ground in God is longing? Here the objection can hardly be held back any longer that a human state is transferred to God in this statement. Yes! But it could also be otherwise. Who has ever shown that longing is something merely human? Who has ever completely dismissed the possibility with adequate reasons that what we call “longing” and live within might ultimately be something other than we ourselves? Is there not contained in longing something which we have no reason to limit to man, something which rather gives us occasion to understand it as that in which we humans are freed beyond ourselves? (Schelling’s Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom, p. 124).

Longing, like the freedom it “gives us occasion to understand,” is a mode of reaching out towards that within us that is not us—towards that within God which is not God: the Absolute ground, the Ungrund. It is a consequence of Schelling’s method of investigation

that we are called upon to recognize *otherness* even, or especially, at the heart of self-absorption and evil.

Before we can even enter into the functioning of the ground in God, we already find ourselves caught up in the dialectic of identity and difference. In the very *language* through which Schelling binds God and human being, the strange forms of resonance and reflection that lead from the one to the other, it becomes clear that *grounding* must be intrinsically connected to *expressing*. Schelling explicitly unites ground and expression in his description of God’s self-constituting, *imaginative* act:

This primal longing moves in anticipation like a surging, billowing sea, similar to the ‘matter’ of Plato, following some dark, uncertain law, incapable in itself of forming anything that can endure. But there is born in God himself an inward, imaginative response, corresponding to this longing, which is the first stirring of the divine Being in its still dark depths. Through this response, God sees himself in his own image, since his imagination can have no other object than himself. This image is the first in which God, viewed absolutely, is realized, though only in himself; it is in the beginning in God, and is the God-begotten God himself (pp. 360-361).

The “imaginative response” [*eine inner reflexive Vorstellung*] to this primal longing is the gathering of an “image” [*Ebenbilde*]—God’s own image, as there is as yet no other possible object.¹²⁴ The dark order of longing is given shape through the work of the imagination—the subject/object distinction, the very possibility of reason, is a product of fantasy. As Christopher Yates writes in *The Poetic Imagination in Schelling and Heidegger*,

To recognize understanding in anarchy and will in yearning, the divine imagination exercises its creative capacity through a willfulness not yet fully formed. Representation, as it were, marks the delivery of *logos* and not the other way around. God does not calculate the merits of a creative

---

project, but rather in his very self-imaging already enacts a word and will of loving formation; such self-imaging marks, at once, God’s coming into existence with the creation of the world. (pp. 85-86).  

As Yates so pointedly argues in the course of this text, Schelling’s use of imagination in the Freiheitsschrift both resonates with and challenges his earlier preoccupations with intellectual intuition, human freedom and creation. In this context, Schelling equates divine fantasy with the temporal dislocation of an origin that is only in the revelatory process that would also depend upon it. God does not imagine creation and so it appears: rather, both more miraculously and more humanly, the movement of letting-be must be prior to God and his (self-)generation.

We are left with the problem of how to articulate this primordial letting-be, this grounding that is the image of imagination itself. How is it that the essential darkness of inchoate longing is always already an imagining? And why should this imagining longing call forth its own reflection in and as reason? The image, Schelling continues, is the first emergence of reason as “the logic of that longing” [das Wort jener Sensucht] which, in itself, follows only “some dark, uncertain law” [nach dunkelm ungewissem Gesetz]:

This image is at one and the same time, reason—the logic of that longing, and the eternal Spirit which feels within it the Logos and the everlasting longing…The first effect of reason in nature is the separation of forces, which is the only way in which reason can unfold and develop the unity which had necessarily but unconsciously existed within nature, as in a seed. Just as in man there comes to light, when in the dark longing to create something, thoughts separate out of the chaotic confusion of thinking in which all are connected but each prevents the other from coming forth—so the unity appears which contains all within it and which had lain hidden in the depths (p. 361).

126 In a footnote to this phrase, Schelling adds “in dem Sinne, wie man sagt: Das Wort des Rätsels”, or “in the sense in which one finds Logos in Logograms”. In other words, Logos or the Word is here understood as something like a key to a puzzle—that which shows the order within the apparently unordered.
We will need to approach the “logic” [Wort] of the primordial longing, which Schelling calls reason, in its essential contradiction: indifference is drawn out of itself by self-need. Reason is the exposure and attempted resolution of difference—of a doubling—at the very root of identity. My suggestion is that the primordial imaging that is reason, as imaging, betrays a duplicity already, albeit unconsciously, at work in longing itself. As Kyriaki Goudeli points out in her text, Challenges to German Idealism,

*Logogrif*, as the reflection of longing upon itself, is not only the *word* of longing but also its *act*. As such, *logogrif* contains not only the thoughtful reflection on experience but is a form of experience itself. The *image* which longing sees in its reflection is not its *representation*, but what is *caught in the net* of its bending movement, for *grifos* originally meant plait, and *logogrif*, the plaited *image* of longing which sees and utters itself (p.11).

It is not as if reason somehow “adds” an order to longing that was not there before. Rather, as an image of an even more fundamental giving-forth, reason is a reflection in the most uncanny sense. Its arrival evokes what should have been, but cannot be, overcome: the disordering disclosure at the basis of all order and limitation. Or, as Goudeli goes on to say, “*Logos*, rather than being frustrated by its inability to conquer the absolute, rediscovers meaning in its activities, precisely by virtue of its finitude; not by a self-heroising resolution to perform the extraordinary, but by means of its ability to be perennially fascinated, intrigued, provoked by a puzzling cosmos” (p. 11).

Heidegger’s reading of the longing that is the ground [*die Sensucht*] is useful here, as he suggests that reason emerges as both a (re-)shaping and (re-)presentation of primal imagination conceived of as an ontological self-addiction:

“Addiction” (*Die “Sucht”*)—which has nothing to do with searching (*Suchen*) etymologically—primordially means sickness which strives to spread itself; sickly, disease. Addiction is a striving and desiring, indeed,
the addiction of longing, of being concerned with oneself. A double, contrary movement is contained in longing: the striving away from itself to spread itself, and yet precisely back to itself. As the essential determination of the ground (of being a ground) in God, longing characterizes this Being as urging away from itself into the most indeterminate breadth of absolute essential fullness, and at the same time as the overpowering of joining itself to itself. In that the general nature of the will lies in desiring, longing is a will in which what is striving wills itself in the indeterminate, that is, wills to find itself in itself and wills to present itself in the expanded breadth of itself...Eternal longing is a striving which itself, however, never admits of a stable formation because it always wants to remain longing...it does not know any name; it is unable to name what it is striving for. It is lacking the possibility of words (p. 125).

Longing is thus a process of differentiation without which there could be no identity—and no being—at all. Insofar as we are seeking a way to understand the co-primordiality of longing and imagining in Schelling, we would do well to consider the connection Heidegger makes here between repetition and difference. Existence is the repetition of self-concern, but the eruption of self-concern is always already infected by the intimation of difference. Thus longing is the imaginative act par excellence to the extent that creation, as the letting-be of existence as such, is an act of dissociation and reiteration. Through Heidegger we can begin to see the error in attributing a subject and object—or an anthropomorphic frame—to the longing Schelling names “ground.” It is the very structure of a subject that wills an object that is in need of grounding. Thus, it is not that the ground longs, but rather that longing grounds; it is only with the imaging of reason that the “possibility of words”—the opposition between being and doing that such a possibility announces—that the seeker and what is sought begin to take shape.
Although primordial reason here might look like an external ordering, a distinguishing capacity external to the chaotic ground it organizes, we ought to pay close attention to Schelling’s claim that “the first effect of reason in nature is the separation of forces.” He does not say reason is the separation of forces. We can equally say that the first effect of the image, insofar as the image of the logic of longing is reason, is the separation of forces. By forces, Schelling means the fundamental oppositions of concealment and revelation, contraction and expansion; yet the separation of these forces, the unity of which already but “unconsciously” existed, is not somehow in the image, but emerges through imaginative productivity. Reason, then, is this response—dependent upon and distinct from the structural responsiveness already at work in longing itself.

It is clear that for Schelling longing is not overcome or negated by reason; nor can it be that order follows necessarily from the unruly. Rather, the activity of grounding is both a withdrawing from existence and also that which is expressed in existence. And this duplicity, where self-differentiation sustains identity, is precisely the structure of freedom that Schelling wants us to open up to: the splitting within the ground that is only made manifest as existence, or the doubled identity of longing that can only be manifested in the image of reason, are both subject-less and free. That is, ground and existence are bound together unconsciously and, through a still unconscious longing, the subject and object of this longing take shape—that is, they separate out of their unconscious unity and are gathered together again.

Insofar as the ground is longing, there is already within it the presentiment of the responsiveness or relating that prefigures separation. As longing, the ground unconsciously belongs to something other than itself and its implicit self-division is made
explicit through its expression into existence. It is only later in his essay that Schelling takes on the division within ground itself, when he posits that the being of the ground is itself grounded—in the Ungrund, the indifferent, unconscious unity. And this Ungrund is itself pure freedom. If the ground is itself already involved in a grounding relationship, its very mode of existence depends upon yet deeper roots. For now, I only want to keep in mind that it is not longing and its logic that, so to speak, comes first: rather, the ground as longing is itself only the first expression, the first “existence”, of the Ungrund—of the Absolute freedom to be or not to be. In looking closely at the duplicity concealed within the term “ground”, we are also retracing the active identity of longing and reason, of the unconscious and consciousness. Only in having begun to work out the ground in relation to existence—a relation that hinges on concealment or negation as that which appears and affirms—can Schelling reach back towards the unfathomable Ungrund, or that of which the ground itself is an expression.

Longing is thus not the being of grounding as such, but the being of that which holds together the grounded and the grounding. In this way, bringing us quite close to its ordinary meaning, longing becomes a mode of existing between or remaining in transition. Schelling’s refusal to let identity collapse into sameness breaks down the viability of his language: it is not only the being of existence, but also the being of the ground, that must be divided between ground and existence. The expression of the Ungrund is longing, while that which is withdrawn from or grounding this expression can only be indifference.127 As the most primordial grounding, the non-existence of the

---

127 “Reality and Ideality, darkness and light, or however else we wish to designate the two principles, can never be predicated of the groundless as antitheses. But nothing prevents their being predicated as non-antitheses, that is, in disjunction and each for itself; wherein, however, this duality (the real two-foldness of
Ungrund is disrupted by a longing to return to itself. Because the Ungrund itself cannot
be the expression of some further ground, the fullness of its being can only be grasped as
an abyssal loss, in the nostalgia for what must have been but never was.

The Ungrund is a testament to the depth of unruliness that Schelling contends
with in his investigations into the essence of human freedom. Because creation is, it is
necessary that the Ungrund has in fact eternally fractured and re-gathered itself.
However, the free decision to express its indifference imaginatively, insofar as it is
always already decided, is necessarily effected through the reflection of the image:
through the dialectic of concealment and revelation. At first, Schelling’s professed
interest in human freedom—the real possibility of good or evil—seems far removed from
such unthinkable metaphysical positions as absolute indifference or ontological desire.
However, the way in which even the absolute freedom of the Ungrund is bound by
necessity to a particular expression—as withdrawing/revealing, as longing/imagining—is
essentially a reformulation of real and radical evil. The temporal disruption that Kant
approaches through original sin, albeit obliquely, is taken up by Schelling in a more
rigorous and philosophical manner. Freedom, whether we are referring to the indifference
and infinite determinability of the Ungrund or to the concrete possibility of choosing
between good and evil, is inevitably an engagement with being always already permeated
by desire.

It is in this way that I understand the Freiheitsschrift as a presentation of uncanny
freedom. Schelling realizes that freedom is not the capacity to separate ourselves from
our actions and to judge them, as it were, objectively or sublimely; as in the Freudian

the principles) is established. There is in the groundless itself nothing to prevent this. For just because its
relation towards both is a relation of total indifference, it is neutral towards both” (SW VII, 407).
experience of the uncanny, freedom is a confrontation with the depth of our responsibility and the limitations of our knowledge—a disturbing recognition of our inability to either escape from or to fully inhabit our subjectivity. Because freedom and life are inextricably joined for Schelling, objective truth is a contradiction in terms: the culmination of freedom, as laid out in the Freiheitsschrift, is not the exhibition of some ultimate truth but the imaginative possibilities of personality and love. In other words, the truth of creation is not something revealed, it is not the sublimation of all darkness into light; it is the infinite capacity to orient ourselves to otherness—to the unknowable, to the unconscious, to the liminal as such—in a way that creates rather than closes off possibilities for meaningful engagement. We have seen that freedom is not the mastery of the intellect over the senses and passions; it is not a denial of the creaturely. In fact, to be free is to acknowledge our dependency—to claim responsibility for, to identify with, the deepest foundation of our being that is expressed and developed through our choices and yet exceeds all choice. If the good is not merely repression, evil cannot be merely uninhibited desire. For Schelling, good and evil are both human modes of relating ground and existence—orientations to otherness in all its forms.
III. The Absolute Past

*Verily at the first Chaos came to be*—Hesiod, *Theogony*

Nothing less than the origin of differentiation, the transition from the timeless to the temporal, is at stake in the development—and frustration—of Schelling’s and Freud’s drive theories. Continuing last chapter’s investigation of the obscure convergences of freedom and prophesy in tragedy, the focus in this chapter is on Schelling’s and Freud’s formulations of the chaotic unconscious drives “before” their organization into and generation of life—the destabilizing tendencies of the past. Schelling’s efforts to reclaim or narrate the Absolute Past in his *Weltalter*, and Freud’s attempts to uncover the drives at the origin of life in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, represent the simultaneous culmination and dissolution of their drive theories. In these similarly fragmentary texts, the logic of identity within and division among distinct drives is disturbed—undone by a thinking of unconscious temporalization and the transformations of pleasure. Taken together, the vanishing difference between the drives bring Freud and Schelling to the limit of their systems and, ultimately, towards unveiling liminality in all its uncanniness.

Whereas *Trieb* is a fundamental concept for psychoanalysis from the start, the term is absent from Schelling’s early *Naturphilosophie* where he instead relies on the language of *potency* and *force*. By the time of the *Freiheitsschrift* (1809) and the *Weltalter* (1811-1815) *Trieb* has become the fundamental, dynamic unit for Schelling. This seems to occur simultaneously with his turn to the language of *desire*, suggesting
that this departure from the Naturphilosophie correlates with a rethinking of the psychical/physical divide. Notably, Schelling develops his first truly drive based theory in his System of Transcendental Idealism (1800). As argued in Chapter I, it is in the latter text that the unconscious becomes more nuanced than the blind productivity of natura naturans and is connected with the repressed. For their part, the potencies no longer act as a quantitative differentiation and integration of “forces” as they do in the Naturphilosophie and Identitätphilosophie, signaling in this context an apparent separation of the Real from the Ideal, but they do remain essential to Schelling’s later philosophy of freedom and the positive philosophy. As a non-deterministic, creative process of development, the potencies continue to serve an explanatory function for the activities and productions of drive activity in these later texts. Indeed, I argue that the connection between the retroactive temporality of organism in Schelling’s early texts, and of the unconscious (both the human and the Absolute) in the Weltalter, depends upon the potencies’ adaptability to a philosophy of drive. As Edward Beach writes, contrasting Schelling’s dialectic with Hegel’s, “Because the truth, for Schelling, emerges in this process of (re)production, subsequent phases in the dialectic can supplement and perhaps subordinate, but by no means cancel or reconstitute (as for Hegel), what the previous

128 Edward Allen Beach, The Potencies of God(s): Schelling’s Philosophy of Mythology (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994). “Schellingian dialectic, by contrast [with Hegel’s Aufhebung], seeks to infuse the process of reasoning with a strong volitional component, so as to be capable of recovering the willing that allegedly precedes rational thought itself. Proceeding from this perspective in structured stages [the potencies], the thinker must then elucidate how this willing guides the development of determinate being. The emphasis on volition is directly coupled with a call for experience; for willing and experiencing alone can produce a truth that goes beyond the abstract demonstrations of logic” (p. 85). Beach goes on, “Schelling’s treatment of dialectic obtains its successive forms not as though implicitly contained in the foregoing ones, but rather as produced or reproduced (erzeugt) by a kind of procreative causality which is supposed to reenact the processes by which the outer universe itself has evolved. The proper aim of philosophy is to find a path of conative (re)production (Erzeugung) by which the universal forms of volition sequentially emerge in poses of mutual reinforcement or conflict. Furthermore, inasmuch as this ‘reenactment’ depends upon causal influences as well as logical inferences, any conclusions that it yields must remain incomplete until they can be exemplified in direct historical experience” (p. 85).
phases have revealed.” In other words, setting the stage for his later philosophy of drive, Schelling’s potencies help create a space for a past that is neither completely overcome in, nor entirely resistant to, the present.

With this in mind, I begin with a brief discussion of organism in Schelling’s Naturphilosophie, highlighting the connection between life as such and a certain temporal “backwardness;” I then suggest that it is a similar conception of retroactive existence that leads both Freud and Schelling to theorize a beginning that, eternally becoming and eternally dying, is never fully present. Through a reading of Schelling’s Weltalter, I focus more explicitly on the ways in which Schelling’s theory of drives evolves into a temporalization of eternity—the Absolute Past—inherent in desire itself; I go on to consider Schelling’s disruption of the dyad drive/satisfaction within the primal will, consequently presenting a slippage from pleasure-in-nothingness to pleasure-in-difference. My hope is that detailing this progression in Schelling can help untangle Freud’s late drive theory, and in particular the collapsing distinctions between and within Eros/Thanatos that we find there; with the help of Jean Laplanche’s reading of Freud’s primary masochism, I then suggest a way forward in reconciling this failed dualism with the early, “polymorphous” pleasures of Three Essays on Sexuality. Just as Schelling’s efforts in the Weltalter lead him away from conceptual underpinnings of the negative philosophy, so Freud’s struggle to understand the development of life and consciousness leads to a rejection of the foundational pleasure principle. This apparent fissure in the Freudian project, where pleasure loses its former scientific and psyche-orienting status,

\[\text{\cite{ibid.} p. 85.}\]
might in turn offer a way to better understand Schelling’s claim that to know the past is to take part in the genealogy of desire.ⁱ³⁰

1. Backwards Progress

Schelling’s approach to organism as the fundamental form of causation and existence extends from his Naturphilosophie all the way through to his positive philosophy. Focusing on the potentiation of opposed drives (towards development and inhibition, for example, or attraction and repulsion), Schelling reformulates Kant’s work on organism as a hypothetical instantiation of freedom in nature in the Critique of Judgment into a foundational, metaphysical truth. Specifically, the Naturphilosophie suggests the primacy of organic temporality.

Schelling’s treatment of organism brings together several problematic lines of thought stemming from Kant’s aesthetic-teleological approach to cause and temporality in the Critique of Judgment. Through the dynamic structure of the organism, Schelling responds to the temporal disruption we have already noted in Kant’s account of the sublime in Chapter I. Schelling thus rejects a linear, mechanistic understanding of causation so as to highlight an ongoing, infinite conflict and attempted reconciliation

---

ⁱ³⁰ In Time Driven: Metapsychology and the Splitting of the Drive, Adrian Johnston’s arguments concerning the two versions of cause/temporality in Freud are indebted to Cutrofello’s work and, at times, converge with my own claims: “In identifying Trieb as the place of intersection for Freud’s two temporal models, these models no longer need to be thought of as mutually exclusive. In fact, the hypothesis of Trieb as split between two temporal organizations avoids favoring one portrayal of the drive at the expense of the others—for example, stressing the conservative, ‘deathly’ side of the drive to the detriment of the drive’s potential for constant modification. The problem is that Freud himself, in part due to his neglect of the role of time in psychoanalysis, doesn’t attempt any sort of reconciliation between his two unharmonized schemas” (p. 22). Using Lacan, Johnston connects the Kantian “transcendental” with the Freudian unconscious, and particularly with certain aspects of the drives themselves—suggesting that drives are split into mutable (aim/object) and eternal (source/pressure) components. His overarching concern in this text is with what it might mean for the unconscious to be “timeless”—why it is that Freud tends to shy away from a psychoanalytic account of temporality and how the drives are central to this project. I will be in conversation with Johnston’s work at various points throughout the chapter.
between forces of expansion and contraction, freedom and determination, the universal and the particular. Whereas Kant implies that organism and the sublime can only be signals or symbols of human freedom, Schelling insists that they are real manifestations of a freedom that extends beyond and grounds the human. As Bruce Matthews writes in *Schelling’s Organic Form of Philosophy: Life as the Schema of Freedom*,

The common epistemological requirement of these elements—apprehending a reciprocal causal system, organism, and the sublime—is their common need to effect what Kant calls “a comprehension of the manifold in unity” (*KU*, 107). Only if we can comprehend the reciprocal establishment of whole and part—*simultaneously* with the interaction among the parts themselves—only then can we understand the dynamic whole that is organic nature…What this requires however, is that Kant must *shatter the static form of our pure a priori intuition of time...he must qualify intuition’s sequential processing of time and permit an experience in which the time-condition is removed* (146, my italics).

Matthews points to the analogous structure of our comprehension of the organic and of the sublime in terms of Schelling’s overarching claim that the philosopher/scientist’s task—no less than the artist’s—is to strive to unite the infinite and the finite, the eternal and the temporal.\footnote{In Chapter I, I have already suggested the ways in which the Kantian sublime is transformed in Schelling; it should be clear that the latter’s insistence on the renegotiation of the boundaries between subject and object, self and other, in the sublime are also relevant in terms of the reciprocity belonging to organism.} Contrary to Kant’s claims in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, experiences of the sublime and the organic require that the “static” (and thus measurable) form of time be “removed.” The subject must be implicated in this synthesis of finite and infinite rather than merely receptive to it. Insofar as organic cause—irreducible to the mechanism of the phenomenal realm—is *primary* for Schelling, the “static form of our a priori intuition of time” must be derivative; whatever the altered temporality of organism
(and of sublimity) entails, as the structure of life and freedom it must ground “static,” deathly, linear temporality and its necessity:

Every organic product exists for itself; its being is dependent on no other being. But now the cause is never the same as the effect; only between quite different things is a relation of cause and effect possible. The organic, however, produces itself, arises out of itself; every single plant is the product only of an individual of its own kind, and so every single organism endlessly produces and reproduces only its own species. Hence no organization progresses forward, but is forever turning back always into itself (Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature, p. 30).

The independence or self-sufficiency of organism already implies a kind of retroactive causation, a circular movement that is simultaneously self-transformative (change) and self-sustaining (continuity). Here Schelling introduces a notion of generative repetition that allows him to defend identity that is an activity rather than a state. The temporal repercussions of this organic union of unifying and differentiating forces, however, are only really cashed out through Schelling’s turn to drive theory; the transition from force to drive is also a transition from organism to personality. Thus organism is not only the great achievement of Nature’s non-conscious polarities. Sharing the temporal structure of Schellingian personality, organism is also the site where the distinction between force and drive becomes relevant. Schelling writes in the opening pages of the Weltalter, “Every physical and moral whole requires for its maintenance a reduction, from time to time, to its innermost beginning….Every thing runs through certain moments in order to attain completion: a set of processes coming one after the other where the later always

---

133 Joseph L. Esposito, Schelling’s Idealism and Philosophy of Nature. (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1977). Esposito writes: “Our very concept of a thing cannot be separated from the notion of interaction and reciprocal determination…A thing is actually a locus of activity, resulting from the interaction of several or all parts of the community” (p. 61).
intrudes on the earlier, bringing it to fruition” (my italics, *AW* 1813, p. 117). In view of this later text, then, Schelling’s insistence that no organization can “progress forward” becomes a critique of a certain understanding of scientific knowledge and, even more so, a refusal to reduce self-knowledge to such a model: the incessant and mutual intrusion of past and future is a rejection of truth as presence, at least insofar as this sense of objectivity would lay claim to a totalizing neutrality. Progress forward is equated with the mechanistic trope of effects as implicit in, and pouring forth from, similarly circumscribed causes—science conceived as an inert accumulation of discrete and homogeneous events.

Thus Schelling’s account of organic backwardness—characterized by the mutual activity of uniting identity (the whole/persistence) and difference (the unfolding of parts/development)—is not only a claim about how to know a particular type of being; it is a claim about the most fundamental and philosophical form of knowing. As Schelling writes in the *Outline*, “[n]o subsistence of a product [of Nature] is thinkable without a continual process of being reproduced. The product must be thought of as annihilated at every step, and at every step reproduced anew” (cited in Esposito, p. 86).134 And, when Schelling later locates organism at the root of creation in his *Weltalter*, he is quite explicit that this (re)generative activity is the essence and origin of temporality as such: “We have a presentiment that one organism lies hidden deep in time and encompasses even the smallest of things” (1813, p.123). Thus to temporalize—to begin—is to reach back; the eternal and unconscious past will always already have been intruded upon by the longing

---

134 F. W. J. Schelling, *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*, Trans., Keith R. Peterson. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004). “Evidently every (finite) product is only a seeming product, if again infinity lies in it, i.e., if it is itself again capable of an infinite development. If it engages in this development, then it would have no permanent existence at all; every product that now appears fixed in Nature would exist only for a moment, gripped in continuous evolution, always changeable, appearing only to fade away again” (p. 18).
for the origin that it was and cannot be, and philosophical knowing must structure itself accordingly: linearity is but a defense against the shifting temporality of desire. In this way, Schelling poses a serious challenge to the equation of knowledge with presence. To know is not to intuit the eternally present within the temporal, but to trace the desiring, temporalizing activity already at work in eternity.

In Schelling’s Naturphilosophie, the seeming independence and priority of thing-like stability (and, by extension, the deterministic paradigm that presents us with a thing-like world) is unmasked as a product of inhibitive and creative forces: A deceptive stagnancy conceals the conflict between infinite productivity and infinite constraint. Equally, our ordinary conception of time as a series of discrete, causally connected now-points, would be the illusory result of an infinite becoming and that which resists it—an equally eternal returning. Indeed, Schelling’s struggle to articulate this conflict as the source of both the ontological and the temporal is evident in the various and unfinished drafts of the Weltalter:

Whoever takes time only as it presents itself feels a conflict of two principles in it; one strives forward, driving towards development, and one holds back, inhibiting [hemmend] and striving against development. If this other principle were to provide no resistance, then there would be no time, because development would occur in an uninterrupted flash rather than successively; yet if the other principle were not constantly overcome by the first, there would be absolute rest, death, standstill and hence there would again be no time…Thus, the principles we perceive in time are the authentic inner principles of all life, and contradiction is not only possible but necessary (1813, p.123).

135 In his Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature (1797), which is considered Schelling’s first complete Naturphilosophie text, he is already making use of the language of conflict between forces to account for the apparent stability of products of nature and to illustrate the identity (and apparent distinction) between the Real and Ideal in terms of potencies. This language continues in the work that follows, First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature. It is in fact not until his System of Transcendental Idealism (1800) that he first makes use of the term Trieb [drive] in reference to these generative forces of opposition (SW Vol. III, pp. 545-547).
The strangeness of this claim cannot be overstated: for Schelling, the eternal is not unmoving in contrast to the dynamism of the temporal, but rather the other way round. As I hope to show in what follows, the eternity or timelessness of Schelling’s Absolute Past, which he often equates with the unconscious, is not immobility—it is neither the absence of temporalization nor of differentiation. Time as we perceive it is a compromise formation, brought about through the same potentiation of contradictory drives towards inhibition and development presented in his Naturphilosophie. The timelessness belonging to the Absolute Past is a more fundamental form of relating these eternal tendencies of will. It is no mere illusion: if anything, it is our experience of mechanistic cause (time as a series of now-points) that is akin to the illusory, static appearance of natural objects (existence as a concatenation of things).

This dialectical engagement between apparent stability and eternally united and opposed potencies is revisited in the Weltalter; here it is through contradictory drives towards expression and concealment, along with the bond [das Band] that unites them, that the Absolute reveals itself. By way of the identity-activity of organisms, the infinite forces that Schelling first posits in his Naturphilosophie are temporalized into drives; the implicit presence of these forces already begins to erode in the Ungrund of the Freiheitsschrift, as Schelling senses the need to historicize the emergence and development of temporality in terms of desire and repetition—as a function of an eternally withdrawing beginning. Beyond the ordered progression of potencies at work both in nature and human freedom, in the Weltalter Schelling returns to the essential backwardness of the organism, to the temporalizing attraction and withdrawal of the
Absolute Past: he suggests that it is the being-as-craving of the drives that ultimately draws non-being into being, indifference into decision. Through the course of the Weltalter, Schelling suggests that it is the diffusion/integration of drive as such that unites the developmental logic of the potencies (necessity) and the eternal decision (freedom) of the beginning.  

Schelling can only approach the cyclical, self-devouring drives, before their contraction into existence—the potencies of A₁/the contracting drive, A₂/the expansive drive, and A₃/the bond that unites them—or, in relation to the Ungrund or A₀, which constitutes the disintegrative possibility threatening and supporting the coherence of presence:

> With this there is nothing left over except an alternating positing, where alternately now one is that which has being and other is that which does not have being and then, in turn, it is the other of these which has being and the one which does not have being. Yet, so that it thereby also comes exclusively to this alternating positing in the primordial urge for Being, it is necessary that one of them be the beginning or that which first has being and after this, one of them is the second and one of them is the third. From this, the movement again goes back to the first and, as such, is an eternally expiring and eternally recommencing life (1815, p. 12-13).

His description here of a beginning before the beginning already includes what can only come after—difference and life—just as he goes on to depict the primal will as already

---

136 Part of the reason I focus on Schelling’s 1813 draft is due to his increasing minimization of spontaneity and his consequent return to the language of potencies in the 1815 draft. I find his movement away from the language of desire and drive to be indicative of his wanting to distance himself from the human that is so much at the heart of his Freiheitsschrift. That is, I find more compelling Schelling’s willingness to make the philosophical essentially human, while remaining able to avoid an anthropomorphism of being and time. Furthermore, in the 1815 version Schelling emphasizes the necessity of decision, of the cision of the Absolute Past, whereas the 1813 draft focuses almost entirely on its freedom.

137 SW, p. 220.
divided between self-absorption (indifference) and self-seeking (tension).\textsuperscript{138} It is not that Schelling is limited to a narration of the past distorted by the biases of the present; rather, it is only through the retroactive structure that he can enact and come to know the contradiction of eternal beginning. The Absolute Past \textit{is not}—until, of course, it \textit{was}.

In the language of the 1815 draft, that which will have become the Absolute Past, the pulsation of potencies that withdraw from and contract being, are already differentiated; but it is a differentiation that itself can only want existence, that must remain in the mode of, or under the sway of, craving and non-presence: $A_1$. The transition to the Absolute Present, to expression, revelation and development, is thus both a re-organization of the relation between the potencies (where $A_1$ \textit{lets be} $A_2$ as that which ought to have being) and an actualization of the potency of expression or differentiation: $A_2$. But the lingering mystery of the differentiation and unity of these potencies \textit{in and as creation}, in and as the cision separating Absolute Past from Absolute Present, is ultimately ascribed to free decision (albeit through a \textit{necessary} union of God’s nature and spirit): $A_3$. This eternal decision for self-revelation is itself a desire for the beginning—a desire that cannot \textit{have} a beginning—and existence erupts as an orientation towards and delimitation of what no-longer-is:

But precisely \textit{that} one commences and one of them is first, must result from a decision that certainly has not been made consciously or through deliberation but can happen rather only when a violent power blindly breaks the unity in the jostling between the necessity and the impossibility to be. But the only place in which a ground of determination can be sought for the precedence of one of them and the succession of the other is the particular nature of each of the principles, which is different from their general nature which consists in being equally originary and equally independent and each having the same claim to be that which has

\textsuperscript{138} “Therefore, two principles are already in what is necessary of God: the outpouring, outstretching, self-giving being, and an equivalently eternal force of self-hood, of retreat into itself, of Being in itself. That being and this force are both already God itself, without God’s assistance” (1815, p. 6) [SW, p. 211].
being...It is now clear that what is posited at the beginning is precisely that which is subordinated in the successor. The beginning is only the beginning insofar as it is not that which should actually be, that which truthfully and in itself has being. If there is therefore a decision, then that which can only be posited at the beginning inclines, for the most part and in its particular way, to the nature of that which does not have being (1815, p. 13).\textsuperscript{139}

We should note that the necessity belonging to this eternal beginning, as Schelling tells us, only comes \textit{after}. It is only characterizable as a decision retroactively—thus its \textit{Nachträglichkeit}. The rupture of the beginning that occupies Schelling in the \textit{Weltalter}, as he traces the absent moment of transition from the logic of potency to its (re)productive realization, is tied to an uncanny temporality. That is, it depends upon an originary, eternal act of repression—upon a “decision that inclines…to the nature of that which does not have being”—that conditions and always threatens to dissolve existence as such.

We can see that Schelling views this \textit{other} temporality that grounds creation, or the already-temporalized transition into creation, in terms of the dynamics of drive and repression. The unconscious, as the timeless past, is repressed as blind craving (\textit{vorweltliche}), gives way to vital contradiction (\textit{weltliche}), and intimates the possibility of renewed integration (\textit{nachweltliche}).\textsuperscript{140} Schelling implies that consciousness and presence, no less than sublimation and futurity, depend upon the dual identity of drive—

\textsuperscript{139} \textit{SW}, p. 221.
\textsuperscript{140} Schelling makes it clear in the 1813 draft that the Absolute Past, Present and Future refer to what comes before, during and after creation, respectively. Immediately after suggesting that one must put the past behind him in order to have a present, “only the man with the strength to rise above himself is able to create a true past; he alone can savor a true present, just as he alone looks forward to a genuine future,” Schelling posits that “the world has in itself no past and no future. [This would entail] that everything that has happened in it from the beginning and everything that will happen up to the end belongs to a single overarching time; that the authentic past, the past as such, is what came before the world [\textit{vorweltliche}]; that the authentic future, the future as such, is what will come after the world [\textit{nachweltliche}]. And so a system of times would unfold for us, of which the human system would be just a copy, a repetition within a narrower sphere” (1813, p. 121).
upon the structural confusion involved in separating what the drive is (which can only be what it wants) from its aim (which must also be its defining characteristic); the drive occupies a virtual space, split as it is between returning to and differentiating itself from non-existence. As we shall see, this ever-recurring collapse of the antagonism between the drives—and specifically in light of its connection to the transition into temporality—is quite close to Freud’s work in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.\(^{141}\) This latter text, often understood as a narrative illustrating Freud’s insistence on conflicting drives towards integration and disintegration, actually makes manifest the extent to which even the most fundamental duality—life and death drives—conceals an oscillation between and resistance to oppositional frameworks of differentiation/disintegration and fusion/integration. Freud’s clinging to these opposing drives qua opposing actually elicits their bizarre and productive transformations. Indeed, Freud’s difficulty in maintaining a dualism of the drives in this work brings him quite close to the Schellingian drive that must bear both possibilities: to progression that always conceals repetition/regression, and to presence that is disrupted by the destabilized and destabilizing existence of the past:

> It would not be without a kind of horror that spirit would finally recognize that even in the primordial essence itself something had to be posited as past before the present time became possible, and that it is precisely this past that is borne by the present creation, and that still remains fundamentally concealed (1813, 122).

Schelling’s language of “horror” and “concealment” is of course pervasive in Freud’s work. The ground is not as firm as we like to imagine, but volatile and frightening, in that

existence depends upon a past that fundamentally resists (self-)presence. Moreover, Freud’s accounts of both the phylogenetic and individual inheritance of the unconscious echo Schelling’s claim that the Absolute Past—the true, and truly horrific, past—is producing and eroding itself in every moment and in us:

Indeed, we will hazard the assertion that every act of generation occurring in nature marks a return to a moment of the past, a moment that is allowed for an instant to enter the present time as an alienated (re)appearance. For, since time commences absolutely in each living thing, and since at the beginning of each life time is connected to eternity anew, then an eternity must precede each life (*AW* 1813, p. 162).

Not only is each moment tied to an unfathomable past, disrupting any linear sense of an unqualified individual agency; furthermore, the essentially repressed past must be a function of what comes after. Already, “before” the beginning, there is difference: there is drive divided within itself. The Absolute Past, like the *Ungrund* hovering at the periphery of the *Freiheitsschrift*, remains in the depths of the individual and of existence as such; we are as a frustrated striving, as an insatiable need to recuperate the past into presence—into a presence that, paradoxically, depends on a past that *is-no-longer*. This existential longing to return—to know the past—would be wrongly conceived as a desire for some *thing*. Rather, this self-defining and self-dissolving desire is the cision: a repetition grounding every act of existence. Disturbing the equation of reality and presence, bringing to awareness the precarious denial holding together all appearance, the

---

142 See Sean McGrath’s *Dark Ground of Spirit* for a discussion of Freud’s nihilism/relativism, most notably pp. 179-190.

143 Unfortunately, Schelling’s own language can often lead to this kind of reading. His suggestion, for instance, that we must put the past behind us to truly have a present implies that such an exclusion of the past is both possible and desirable. I think, however, that the spirit of Schelling’s texts calls for another interpretation, one perhaps exemplified in the following: “The beginning that a being has outside of itself and the beginning that a being has within itself are different. A beginning from which it can be alienated and from which it can distance itself is different than a beginning in which it eternally remains because it itself is the beginning” (1815, p. 17/ *SW*, p. 226).
Absolute Past is not there, once and for all, to give a name to and protect us from the meaningless transformations within non-existence. Indeed, if its withdrawal were complete, this would constitute Schellingian evil—an absolute self-absorption that excludes the otherness of expression; it is only as a continued claim on the present and future, as the primordially repressed ambivalence of the desire to become (other) and to return (to itself), that the Absolute Past provides the space for love and freedom.

2. Two Beginnings

What becomes evident in reading Schelling’s Weltalter alongside Freud’s Beyond the Pleasure Principle is that these texts are disrupted by two seemingly irreconcilable versions of the beginning. On the one hand, there is the undifferentiated, tranquil immobility of indifference or primal narcissism; on the other, there is the originary perversion and repetition of the drives. With this in mind, I have separated this section into two sub-sections, although I hope that the mutual dependency of these two accounts—the inability to engage with one without being intruded upon by the other—becomes clear through the course of the chapter. The two sections that follow, “Primal Fantasy” and “Primary Masochism”, can be read as elaborations of “The Oceanic Feeling” and “Fort/Da”, respectively. While this leads to a certain lack of clarity in the presentation, it seems to me that this is the only way to do justice to the complications at work in Freud’s and Schelling’s own texts dealing with the problem of origins.
2.1 The Oceanic Feeling

Already in the opening lines of Schelling’s *Weltalter*, we find the condensed, structural irony that motivates the therapeutic project of the text: intending to develop an account of the ages of the world, Schelling is—like all neurotics—engulfed by the past. In each of his drafts Schelling begins with the decisive assertion: “The past is known, the present is recognized, the future is divined” (p. 113). The simplicity of these claims obscures what it is that keeps demanding to be re-written: a sense of (self-)knowledge that could be adequate to the ongoing transition between the timeless and the temporal:

Man must be granted an essence outside and above the world; for how could he alone, of all creatures, retrace the long path of developments from the present back into the deepest night of the past, how could he alone rise up to the beginning of things unless there were in him an essence from the beginning of times? Drawn from the source of things and akin to it, what is eternal of the soul has a co-science/consciousness of creation...Accordingly, the unfathomable, prehistoric age rests in this essence; although it faithfully protects the treasures of the holy past, this essence is in itself mute and cannot express what is enclosed within it (1813, p. 114).

The past Schelling is concerned with is pre-historical in the sense that it resists conceptualization through the generality of language—“the authentic past, the past as such, is what came before the world [vorweltliche]”—and yet, it is the past that must be narrated (1813, p. 121). The past here imagined is importantly connected to the unconscious, or rather to that condition from which the division between consciousness and the unconscious comes to be: “This separation, this doubling of ourselves, this secret intercourse between two essences, one questioning and one answering, one ignorant
though seeking to know and one knowledgeable without knowing its knowledge…is the authentic secret of the philosopher” (1813, p. 115). The Absolute Past—and man’s knowing/unknowing essence that participates in it—is a mutual desiring: a vital difference within a primal drive(s) that always, already disturbs indifference—that has always, already duplicated itself. As Schelling goes on to say,

Put most succinctly, the Highest can be what-is, and it can be being…A thing that is free, not either to be something or not to be it, but rather to exist or not to exist—such a thing, by itself and with respect to its essence, can only be will…It alone is allowed to stand in the middle as it were, between being and nonbeing” (1813, p. 132).

If we ought to narrate the beginning, as Schelling suggests here, we shall name it will; but a peculiarly desireless will (“the will that wills nothing, that desires no object”) out of which opposing wills emerge. It is a will that remains, essentially and eternally, in transition.

It remains to be seen whether or how such an originary, transitional space may already contain the present and future; time is redefined and transformed through Schelling’s various attempts at going back to the beginning. As David Krell points out in *The Tragic Absolute*, that Schelling does in fact offer more than the past in the Weltalter is already suggested in his notes for the first draft: from the very first line, “1. Ich beginne,” Krell reminds us that “the simple past…is *not* among the tenses into which we can translate *Ich beginne* (p. 109).” At the outset, the past shows itself as

---

144 See also “On the Nature of Philosophy as Science” in Bubner, Rüdiger, ed. *German Idealist Philosophy.* (London: Penguin Books, 1997): “There is a contradiction in the idea of knowing eternal freedom. It is absolute subject=primordial state. How, then, can it become object? It is impossible for it to become object as absolute subject, for, as such, it has no object-like relation to anything…Instead of absolute subject, it can also be called pure knowledge, and as such it cannot be that which is known” (p. 224).
145 *AW*, p. 133.
heterogeneous, ambiguous and already entangled in present and future tenses. The eternal beginning, an act that is both paradigmatically past and the condition for there being a past at all, is only insofar as it makes itself past—it is insofar as it is not.

The tranquil immobility of the past already carries within it the seeds of contradiction—and most essentially, the self-contradiction constitutive of desire. The will to remain as it was silently, freely unfolds, giving rise to the founding question of philosophy: “Now the great riddle of all times originates precisely here, the riddle of how anything could have come from what is neither externally active nor is anything in itself. And yet life did not remain in the state of immobility, and time is just as certain as eternity” (135). Schelling goes on to offer the following solution, grasping for language that can express the very possibility of expression, the potentiating movement from the First to the Second, from the eternal One to the temporalizing Two:

Everything that is something without actually being it must by nature seek itself; but this is not to say that it will find itself, and still less that a movement or a going out from itself takes place. This is a seeking that remains silent and completely unconscious, in which the essence remains alone with itself, and is all the more profound, deep, and unconscious, the greater the fullness it contains in itself. If we could say that the resting will

---

147 Krell writes in *The Tragic Absolute*, quite beautifully and with great and original insight, of the movement from One to Two in Schelling—its relevance to his project as a whole: “The tragic absolute is in multiple senses the stroke of one—the stroke of one by one. That stroke instigates critique, judgment, crisis, separation, severance and divorce; it also initiates the more languid moments of love and desire that we call languor and languishment. The stroke severs one not into two, that is not into two clearly definable units, but into a manifold that resists synthesis. The stroke of one severs ‘that loved clasp’ of Una and Dua, severs all singular identities and all binary oppositions...The stroke of one marks the end of all philosophies of eternity and the instauration of a new understanding of time and temporality. It sounds a knell, initiating a period of progressive paralysis and ultimate decrepitude for all absolutes; yet it also rings the bell, at least to Schelling’s ear, at the birth of a finite human freedom” (p. 70). This sense of the stroke both of and by one, a unity in self-division, is in part what leads me to consider Freud (and Laplanche) on primary masochism in connection with Schelling’s *Die Weltalter* in this chapter. Indeed, I was inspired by Krell’s work and, in a sense, consider my efforts in this dissertation (and specifically in this chapter) to be one way of heeding his call to “problematize (or at least leave open) the very meaning of ‘inheritance’ and historical succession. One would thereby show greater respect for both psychoanalysis and Schelling, precisely by setting out in quest of the undiscovered source of primal repression. That source lies hidden in a time so remote that it appears—to both Schelling and Freud—as timeless” (117).
is the First, then we can also say that an unconscious, tranquil, self-seeking will is the Second…This will produces itself and is therefore unconditioned and in itself omnipotent; it produces itself absolutely—that is, out of itself and from itself. Unconscious longing is its mother, but she only conceived it and it has produced itself (p. 137).

In and as unconscious seeking, the will simultaneously negates itself (as what-is) and posits itself as lack (as what is not); it can only produce itself—only be itself—through a desire for itself indistinguishable from a desire for the Other. The longing Schelling wants to account for appears—or rather, is neither present nor absent—already in the resting first will (“everything that is something without actually being it must by nature seek itself”); the self-sufficiency of the First is simultaneously affirmed and refused. At the same time, the Second will, which would disturb the First, is characterized as tranquil. What Schelling glimpses here is a beginning that is always, eternally, too late; the will that wills nothing is already congealed into self-seeking desire, into the will that wills nothing—and such a beginning can only appear as “having been,” as a grounding that resists presence, and thus as an ungrounding.

There is a tendency in readings of Schelling and Freud to conflate the unconscious that fundamentally resists consciousness (the Absolute Past) with the unconscious that is only potentially or problematically conscious (the past). However, such a reading obscures the reality of an unconscious that is not merely the shadow of consciousness, and protects us from an Absolute Past that is more than just faded presence. Indeed, it seems to me that Schelling’s own vacillation on this point is one of the main reasons he can never be finished with the Weltalter; and why, in the Freiheitsschrift, the loving sublimation of ground into existence—the filtering or molding of the darkness of desire into the light of reason—is complicated by an eternal
“remainder”.\textsuperscript{148} Finishing the \textit{Weltalter} would require a final victory of linear time—a beginning and an ending which could be ultimately fixed. As we shall see, there is a similar hesitancy pervading Freud’s reflections on time, as the above competing senses of the unconscious rise to the surface. It is worth noting that when Freud most self-consciously indulges in this sort of temporal “speculation,” he compares his work with Kant’s: in \textit{Beyond the Pleasure Principle}, the timelessness of the unconscious is notably presented alongside and supported by the philosopher’s equation of the noumenal and the atemporal.\textsuperscript{149} And so we need to ask: Why is the Kantian tradition evoked here? Why does pleasure (pleasure understood in terms of a primal unity with otherness) lead Freud to develop the rudiments of a psychoanalytic theory of temporality?\textsuperscript{150}

Today, due to certain psychoanalytic discoveries, Kant’s pronouncement that time and space are necessary categories of the mind can be brought to discussion. We have discovered that the unconscious mental processes are in themselves ‘timeless.’ That is to say, first of all, that they are not ordered chronologically, that time changes nothing in them, and that one cannot really apply to them the concept of time. These are negative

\textsuperscript{148} See Sean McGrath’s \textit{The Dark Ground of Spirit} for a reading that emphasizes this conception of the teleological interpretation, where darkness is made light, where the unconscious is translated into consciousness. See also: \textit{FS}, pp. 399-407.

\textsuperscript{149} In \textit{Imagining Otherwise: Metapsychology and the Analytic A Posteriori} Andrew Cutrofello brings together Kant, Freud and Lacan, making the case that metapsychology brings out the possibility of the analytic a posteriori concealed within transcendental philosophy; in particular, he argues that Lacan’s \textit{objet a}, and the Freudian conception of the subject’s relation to his unconscious more generally, are instantiations of this elusive form of judgment. Making use of Kripke’s claim that an analytic judgment is one that the subject will not give up under any circumstances, Cutrofello claims that the repressed desires of the hysteric, and the manifest beliefs of the psychotic, offer cases of judgments that are both analytic (necessary) and a priori (deriving from experience). I will return to these claims later in the chapter.

\textsuperscript{150} Freud’s relevance to the trajectory of transcendental philosophy is noted and expounded upon by a great variety of philosophers, from all areas of the field. As Stanley Cavell writes in “Freud and Philosophy: A Fragment”: “In these paths of inheritance, Freud’s distinction is to have broken through to a practice in which the Idealist philosophy, the reigning philosophy of German culture, becomes concrete (which is roughly what Marx said socialism was to accomplish). In Freud’s practice, one human being represents to another all that that other has conceived of humanity in his or her life, and moves with that other toward an expression of the conditions which condition that utterly specific life. It is a vision and an achievement quite worthy of the most heroic attributes Freud assigned himself. But psychoanalysis has not surmounted the obscurities of the philosophical problematic of representation and reality it inherits. Until it stops shrinking from philosophy (from its own past), it will continue to shrink before the derivative question, for example, whether the stories of its patients are fantasy merely or (also?) reality; it will continue to waver between regarding the question as irrelevant to its work and as the essence of it” (\textit{Critical Inquiry}, Winter 1987, 393).
characteristics that can only be clarified through comparison with the conscious mental processes. Our abstract concept of time, by contrast, seems to be completely derived from the modus operandi of the system P-C [Perception-Consciousness] and to correspond to a self-perception by that modus operandi. This mode of function in the system might possibly be another way of providing a shield against stimuli. These comments will surely sound very obscure, but I must restrict myself to such hints (p. 68).

Freud’s suggestion that conscious time is a defense can be seen as a gesture towards the silent, traumatic transitionality that haunts the text—the emergence of consciousness from the unconscious, life from death, pleasure from pain; indeed, Beyond the Pleasure Principle is a text defined by repeated and failed beginnings—a text that is itself always in transition, unable to truly and decisively begin. Before considering that work in some detail, I would briefly point to the opening pages of its later, companion text, where Beyond the Pleasure Principle finally begins. In Civilization and its Discontents, citing a letter from a friend, Freud implies that although timelessness threatens consciousness, it is not excluded from reality or inherently traumatic:

I had sent him my small book that treats religion as an illusion, and he answered that he entirely agreed with my judgment upon religion, but that he was sorry I had not properly appreciated the true source of religious sentiments. This, he says, consists in a peculiar feeling, which he himself is never without, which he finds confirmed by many others…It is a feeling which he would like to call a sensation of ‘eternity’, a feeling as of something limitless, unbounded—as it were, ‘oceanic’ (p. 11).

Continuing, or rather retroactively initiating the exploration of pleasure in excess of its principle, Freud first posits the oceanic feeling; by presenting this feeling through a personal letter, Freud draws our attention to the particular quality or specificity of pleasure. To include this private account so prominently is to demand from psychoanalysis a reevaluation of the tension between the individual and the universal that
so disrupted *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*—hovering, as that text does, between biology and myth, between organic immortality and individual death. In other words, the opening pages of *Civilization and Its Discontents* make it clear that Freud’s move beyond the pleasure principle could only lead him more deeply *into* pleasure which can in no way be equated with “diminution of tension.” He goes on, as we saw in his accounts of the uncanny and telepathy, to remind us that while he personally lacks these feelings he can nonetheless use them to illustrate psychoanalytic discoveries:

From my own experiences I could not convince myself of the *primary* nature of such a feeling…Further reflection tells us that the adult’s ego-feeling cannot have been the same from the beginning. It must have gone through a process of development, which cannot, of course, be demonstrated but which admits of being constructed with a fair degree of probability. An infant at the breast does not as yet distinguish his ego from the external world as the source of the sensations flowing in upon him. He gradually learns to do so, in response to various promptings…A tendency arises to separate from the ego everything that can become a source of unpleasure…One comes to learn a procedure by which…one can differentiate between what is internal—what belongs to the ego—and what is external—what emanates from the outer world. In this way one makes the first step towards the introduction of the reality principle which is to dominate future development…In this way, then, the ego detaches itself from the external world. Or, to put it more correctly, originally the ego is everything, later it separates off an external world from itself. Our present ego-feeling is, therefore, only a shrunken residue of a much more inclusive—indeed an all-embracing—feeling which corresponded to a more intimate bond between the ego and the world about it (pp. 13-15, my italics).

151 It is strange, to say the least, that in a text that claims to introduce the death drive, Freud should also concern himself with the possibility of immortality: “But maybe this belief in the internal necessity of dying is only one of the illusions we have created for ourselves um die Schwere des Daseins zu ertragen [to bear the weight of existence] (Schiller, *Die Braut von Messina [The Bride of Messina]*, I, 8)…The greatest interest for us is connected with the treatment of the duration of life and the death of organisms in the works of August Weismann (Weismann 1882, 1884, 1892). It was he who proposed a distinction in living substance between mortal and immortal halves. The mortal half is the body in the narrower sense, the soma, which alone is subject to natural death. The gametes, by contrast, are potentially immortal: under certain favorable conditions they can develop into a new individual, or, in other words, surround themselves with a new soma (Weismann 1884)” (*BPP*, pp. 82-83). Freud’s quick transitions from war neuroses to play, from biology to myth, are particularly astounding here: the convergence of immortality and finitude is also a point of contact between the delusions of religion and the axioms of science.
Freud re-appropriates his friend’s religious language in order to explain that the boundaries between ego and world remain permeable and are not given from the beginning but produced through, and ever vulnerable to, our modes of experiencing pleasure and pain. The dichotomies of internal and external, active and passive, seem to derive from an undifferentiated, “oceanic” engulfment that remains the ambivalent source of pleasure (repetition) and anxiety (dissolution).

2.2 Fort/Da

It is no coincidence that Freud and Schelling both repeatedly compare their work (like Rousseau before them) to archaeology and its ruins—to the unearthing of an inconceivably distant past preserved in the unconscious. But there is a deeper similarity in their revitalization of the past, as they problematize the continuity and homogeneity that hold together the very being of past, present and future. As Schelling writes in his Weltalter (1815),

For different times (a concept that, like many others, has gotten lost in modern philosophy) can certainly be, as different, at the same time, nay, to speak more accurately, they are necessarily at the same time. Past time is not sublimated time. What has past certainly cannot be as something present, but it must be as something past at the same time with the present. What is future is certainly not something that has being now, but it is a future being at the same time with the present. And it is equally inconsistent to think of past being, as well as future being, as utterly without being (p. 76/SW, p. 302).

Schelling writes in the Weltalter: “Everything that surrounds us points back to a past of incredible grandeur. The oldest formations of the earth bear such a foreign aspect that we are hardly in a position to form a concept of their time of origin or the forces that were then at work…In a series of time immemorial, each era has always obscured its predecessor, so that it hardly betrays any sign of its origin; an abundance of strata—the work of thousands of years—must be stripped away to come at last to the foundation, to the ground” (1813, p. 121). And Freud in Interpretation of Dreams:
This passage recalls the opening lines, retained from both the 1811 and 1813 drafts, in which Schelling tells us with a deceptive simplicity that “The known is narrated, the discerned is presented, the intimated is prophesied” (xxxv). I say “deceptive” because we must take care not to confuse times with things—objects that can be put at a distance and dissected. Since Schelling himself never explicitly reaches beyond the past, what are we to make of his claim that the “past is known…the known is narrated”? This cannot imply that the past contains nothing left unknown or unexpressed. We, at least, have no such privileged relationship with the past. Perhaps it is better to think of this knowing not as a structure that is external or applied to the past, but one that is instead constitutive of it.

In disclosing the great (de-)cision [(Ent-)scheidung] of the Weltalter, the crisis through which God takes up His nature (the drives) by separating the Absolute Past from the Absolute Present of creation, Schelling again focuses on an abyssal site of transition—from succession to simultaneity and back again. The chaotic, annular pulsation of negating and affirming drives, though not yet actualized or brought to presence, is described as a succession; before the beginning, each drive and that which unites them—which is to say the expressible (being and what-is) and the expressing—

153 “Hence, the contradiction only breaks with eternity when it is in its highest intensity and, instead of a single eternity, posits a succession of eternities (eons) or times. But this succession of eternities is precisely what we, by and large, call time. Hence, eternity opens up into time in this decision” (1815, p. 76). Schelling continues, comparing the free necessity of human decisiveness—a return to Kant’s work in Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone and his own Freiheitsschrift—to this eternal beginning: “We say that the person who doubts whether they should be utterly one thing or the other is without character. We say that a decisive person, in whom something definitely expressive of the entire being is revealed, has character. And yet it is recognized that no one has chosen the character following reasoning or reflection. One did not consult oneself. Likewise, everyone assesses this character as a work of freedom, as, so to speak, an eternal (incessant, constant) deed. Consequently, the universal ethical judgment discerns a freedom in each person that is in itself ground, in itself destiny and necessity. But most people are frightened precisely by this abyssal freedom in the same way that they are frightened by the necessity to be utterly one thing or another. And where they see a flash of freedom, they turn away from it as if from an utterly injurious flash of lightening and they feel prostrated by freedom as an appearance that comes from the ineffable, from eternal freedom, from where there is no ground whatsoever” (78).
excludes the others in its singular craving for being. It is only in the contraction of being that this unruly succession is realized in the simultaneity of the beginning. Thus simultaneity returns to succession (past, present, future) in the Absolute Present, and the drives regain their lost unity through historical revelation:

[T]he talk here is of the highest self of the Godhead, which can never become Being with respect to something else. This self can only have being and be active in each of its forms (if one is to permit this expression), as the Yes and as the No and as the unity of both. Given the decisive contradiction between the Yes and the No, this self is thinkable only because of the concept of different times. Hence, here it depends much more on the simultaneity among the different forms being sublimated and transformed into a succession (1815, p. 77).

In other words, Schelling’s insistence on distinct times does not imply a disorder that precedes the beginning. Times, as we experience them, are rather the return of the primordially repressed transition, an actualization of what already actively belongs together in the Absolute Past. Schelling also refers to this “transition” as a “perversion,” much in the way we will see in Freud. Schelling too understands the primordiality of perversion; he will claim that existence itself depends upon it. The interplay of negating, affirming and unifying potencies contracts being—both in the sense of withdrawal and disease, active and passive—through a perverse act: $A_1$, the negating potency, rather than remaining the indeterminate subject that wants being, becomes $B$—the impermeable object that will no longer submit to $A_2$. As Edward Beach writes,

Not just randomly unordered, the actualized first Potency transforms into a positive force for disorder, disruptive and tumultuous in the extreme. This

---

154 *AW* 1813, p.145

155 “This progressive generation can be represented as an increase. If one posits the affirming principle as such = A and the negating principle as such = B, then the first active will is indeed in itself what-is, but it also negates itself as such. It is thus an A that acts as such = B; that is = (A=B). This is the beginning, and hence the first potency” (*AW* 1813, p. 144).
new substrate, Schelling continues, would in effect be an “inversion” [Umkehrung]—or, more forcefully still, a “perversion” [Verkehrung]—of the first Potency as it was in its original state of rest. In its capacity as the material ground of a concrete, but disordered and in this sense “blind” existence, this principle would ceaselessly work against all that is systematically ordered and rational in the world (p. 133).

In this manner, the harmonious unity of the potencies is inverted, marking the “second beginning” in Schelling as an actualization of the purely logical first potency into a “positive force for disorder.” For now, I would just note that perversion is in some sense at the origin—that while the radical move from A₁ to B remains logically inexplicable, its truth is ensured by the fact of creation. If this seems like a deus ex machina, we need to remember that the movement of perversion coincides with freedom for Schelling—that, as we have already seen in the Freiheitsschrift, freedom requires the originary possibility of evil, of the ground erupting out of its proper place.¹⁵⁶ The thatness [Daß] of being cannot be derived from the merely logical order of the potencies, but requires a force that is in fact positively opposed to such order and, because of this, repressed by the increasingly rational reality it works against and makes possible.

What strikes me most in bringing Schelling together with Freud is the extent to which their projects rely on a past that does not—that cannot—come to presence; a past that, despite this existential uncertainty, remains at the center of their work. For Schelling, this insight penetrates the deepest logic of existence: so that beings can be, the

¹⁵⁶ Beach also obliquely points out the connection between the perversion of the first Potency and Schelling’s radical account of evil in his Freiheitsschrift: “Assuming that there is a God, therefore, B would be a principle fundamentally opposed to the divine Providence. It would assume the aspect of ‘that-which-ought-not-to-be’ (das nicht-sein-Sollende). In this capacity, then, B would take on the role of the cosmic Antagonist, the dark Other which needs to be subdued…Yet although B would in this way become the counterweight poised against the good, it would not for that reason be an absolute evil, but only a relative one. For without it, without a firm foundation for self-assertiveness that would be capable of resisting, at least for a time, the grand designs of the Deity, neither independent selfhood nor real freedom would be possible (pp. 133-134).”
positively irrational and chaotic past must actively ground rational, ordered existence. In Freud, this is much less an ontological claim than it is a therapeutic discovery: whether verbal or bodily, narration is inherently symptomatic—it is not a re-presentation of the past but a trace of its resistance. Such a past is never finished but remains eternally in transition, its traumatizing opacity a challenge to the familiar order of presence. Freud’s unconscious, in its absorption in the past, suggests a great deal more than psychic determinism. It is evocative of Schelling’s eternal beginning and the originary decision that represses the Absolute Past: if this self-limitation were to be made present, it could no longer act as the beginning, and presence itself would collapse. Similarly, the Absolute Past that is reconstructed in psychoanalysis is not some content or event. What is revealed, or glimpsed through repeated dissimulation, is a mode of being that remains utterly foreign to and yet harbored within presence. To posit a way of existing that is neither potential nor actual coming-to-expression—an existing that defines who we are and what we will become—such is the strangeness of the true unconscious and the Absolute Past.

And so it is that before the beginning, before the oceanic feeling, Freud opens Beyond the Pleasure Principle with a discussion of constancy (i.e. the steady operation of the pleasure principle’s urge for stasis) that is almost immediately overcome by trauma and anxiety. Acting out the process he describes, tranquility is already disturbed from within. Freud goes on to interrupt his account of war neuroses and its nightmares, the first disruption in the text, with a discussion of the repetition in a child’s (his own grandson,

157 Schelling makes an almost identical claim in his introduction to Die Weltalter, writing “But movement never occurs for its own sake; all movement is only for the sake of rest…all movement seeks only rest, and rest is its nourishment or that from which alone it takes its power and sustains itself” (1813, p. 133).
his own repetition) play. The seamless functioning of the pleasure principle that
ultimately aims at the tensionless state of primary narcissism, is doubly disturbed—first
by the repetition (signaling the inability to escape the past and the consequent attempt to
have no past) and then by the repetition (signaling the ability to attribute meaning to the
past and thus to make past). It is within this strange (unheimlich) scene that the
authenticity of the personal converges with the detachment of the theoretical: the
convergence that forces psychoanalysis towards a Weltanschauung all its own.159

The psychoanalytic challenge to science depends on a singular method for
translating the individual into the universal. Freud’s interpretation of his grandson’s game
is particularly useful as an illustration insofar as it brings into relief the therapeutic
position of intimacy/objectivity. It is perhaps due to the difficulty of navigating this
peculiar neutrality that Freud cannot see the fundamental structure of the game—an
exploration, creation and dissolution of boundaries: “[H]e very skillfully threw the spool,
attached to the string, over the edge of his little curtained bed…then, using the string, he
pulled the spool out of the bed again” (BPP, p. 57). More than an attempt at mastery,

158 Though I will not pursue this here, Freud’s interpretation of his grandson’s game of Fort-Da is by no
means irrelevant to this discussion. Indeed, Freud does not finally explain how it is that the frustrations the
child experiences can be relieved by repeating them; Freud variously attributes this to a natural pleasure in
imitation, to the compulsion to repeat and to the narcissistic pleasure of mastery/omnipotence. The
relationship between interpretation and Eros, indeed of interpretation as Eros, will also be relevant to
understanding the possibility of pleasure in tension that periodically disturbs the text of Beyond the
Pleasure Principle.

159 Cavell, Stanley. “Freud and Philosophy: A Fragment”. Critical Inquiry, Vol. 13, No. 2, The Trial(s) of
Psychoanalysis (Winter, 1987), pp. 386-393. This is the question enacted by the scenes of Freud the father
and grandfather circling the Fort/Da game of repetition and domination, looking so much like the
inheritance of language itself, of selfhood itself. What is at stake is whether psychoanalysis is inheritable—you
may say repeatable—as science is inheritable, our modern paradigm for the teachable. If
psychoanalysis is not thus inheritable, it follows that it is not exactly (what we mean by) a science, then its
intellectual achievement may be lost to humankind. But now if this expresses Freud’s preoccupation in
Beyond the Pleasure Principle and elsewhere, then this preoccupation links his work with philosophy, for it
is in philosophy that the question of the loss of itself is internal to its faithfulness to itself (389).
Ernst is engaged in a playful recognition of the intersection of vulnerability and control, of self and other.

As Freud understands him, Ernst repeats the disappearance of his parents in order to cope with the traumatic experience of passive loss and separation; but it is also the case that in doing so Ernst opens himself to the equally traumatic possibilities of responsibility and guilt. After all, his violent and sexual desires—now that they are becoming his—cannot be without consequence. It is from this latter perspective that we might interpret Ernst’s preference for the first half of the game—“Fort”—which Freud the grandfather refuses to take seriously. That is, despite the fact that Ernst for the most part only plays “Fort” [“gone”], Freud still proclaims that he derives the greatest pleasure from its proper completion, “Da” [“here”].¹⁶⁰ This merely begs the question: Why would Ernst generally play “Fort” if he prefers the complete game—if the pleasure is only in return? One way to approach an answer would be through the transformation of pleasure at work within the game itself: Ernst’s absorption in the world (his union with his mother) is no longer merely pleasurable but also a source of anxiety (loss of self/fear of castration). At the same time, the pain of separation offers Ernst a new model of desire and satisfaction altogether.

While Freud seems to explain away his grandson’s game in terms of a putative instinct for mastery, he too remains unsure about its finality. Freud shows a sensitivity to the problem of “inheritance”—to the viability of analytic metapsychology—in immediately going on to question the most fundamental axiom of psychoanalysis-as-science:

¹⁶⁰ See section II of BPP for the description of the Fort/Da game.
But if a compulsion to repeat *does* operate in the mind, we should be glad
to know something about it, to learn what function it corresponds to, under
what conditions it can emerge and what its relation is to the pleasure
principle—to which, after all, we have hitherto ascribed dominance over
the course of the processes of excitation in mental life” (*BPP*, p. 25).

A beginning that operates beyond and independently of the physiology of pleasure
suggests that psychoanalysis is no longer beholden to determinism; the repetition of the
drives, whether paralyzing or productive, is now *primary*.

Freud develops his final theory of drives, the inseparability and opposition of Eros
and Thanatos, in response to the threat this original repetition poses to the scientific
*Weltanschauung*. Like Ernst, Freud is caught up in the dual anxiety—the two
beginnings—of union and differentiation. While generally assumed that it is the death
drive that first makes its appearance here, it is really Eros that marks a more decisive shift
in Freud’s thought.¹⁶¹ Or rather, the essential insight of the text concerns the relation that
holds Eros and Thanatos—conflict and tranquility, union and dissolution—together.

Freud opens up the realm beyond opposition and, first and foremost, beyond the
opposition of pleasure and pain. The primacy of the transitional, evidenced in the
*Nachträglichkeit* origin of subject and pleasure alike, disrupts the deathly mechanism of

---

¹⁶¹ In Peter Gay’s seminal *Freud: A Life For Our Time*, it is clear from Freud’s own correspondence and
the mixed responses of the psychoanalytic circle that the death drive was considered the major innovation
of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, with Eros rather just an expansion and reformulation of the sexual drives
of his earlier works: “This slim volume [*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*], and its two successors,
demonstrated why he could not publish that much-announced, much-postponed book on metapsychology.
He had complicated and modified his ideas too much. Not least of all, they had not had enough about death
in them—or, more precisely, he had not integrated what they had to say about death into his theory” (394).
Gay also points out how the death drive—unlike Eros—divided psychoanalysts: “As they debated Freud’s
new theory of instinctual dualism, psychoanalysts were assisted by the distinction Freud drew between the
silent death drive, working to reduce living matter to an inorganic condition, and showy aggressiveness,
which one encountered, and could daily substantiate, in clinical experience…But for most analysts Freud’s
idea of a hidden primitive urge toward death, of a primary masochism, was something else again…In
distinguishing the death drive from sheer aggression, Freud enabled his followers to uncouple the two,
reject his epic vision of Thanatos confronting Eros, and yet retain the concept of the two warring drives” (p.
402).
constancy and establishes the temporality of psychoanalysis. Repetition, Freud suggests, is what makes drives drives—“all instincts [Trieb] tend towards the restoration of an earlier state of things” (p. 44). What precisely this is to mean, given the ambiguous sense of “repetition” which emerges in Beyond the Pleasure Principle, is to the point: As we have suggested above, this repetitive structure of the drive is neither an escape from the past nor an unqualified immersion in it. It marks, rather, the transitional space between the objective and the intimate, between a vanquished past and a static present. Freud’s earlier “pleasure principle” failed to do justice to precisely this understanding of the drive.

In Chapter VI of Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Freud ponders at length the emergence of life from the inanimate, depicting the death drive as arising from a demand to return to the tension-less state of non-existence. Life entails increased tension and complication and the aim of the drive is to be rid of tension. We settle into a restatement of the nirvana principle and a re-justification of Freud’s understanding of the instinctual need to decrease or eliminate tension. It is less obvious how Eros or the life drive aims at an “earlier state of things,” or how it might be reconciled with the general aim of pleasure as a decrease in tension. From his earliest texts, Freud argues that we have a tendency to retain attachments to our earliest sexual aims and satisfactions. In expanding Eros beyond the sexual to a class of drives towards greater and more complex unities—and in further breaking down and distributing the sexual drives between Eros and the death drives

162 Freud himself initially seems confused about whether Eros is a radical addition to psychoanalytic theory or a long familiar concept—indeed, this may be the motivating question of the whole text: “As for the sex drives… it is obvious that they reproduce primitive states of the organism, but the goal for which they strive with all their means is a merging of two gametes differentiated in a specific manner” (BPP, pp. 81-82). However, Freud begins Beyond the Pleasure Principle with the opposition between “ego” and “sex” drives, only to complicate this paradigm by suggesting that the sex drives themselves can be further broken down between Eros and death drives. As we will see, however, this opposition cannot fare much better—the relationship between differentiation and dissolution cannot be simply oppositional or dualistic.
drive—the connection between pleasure and repetition-qua-lifeless-stasis is weakened.

Indeed, if Eros is not merely a mutation of the death drive, and thus truly opposed to it, pleasure in tension must be equi-primordial with pleasure in the reduction or absence of tension. The same conclusion is implicit in Freud’s questioning as to whether and how the reality principle is distinct from the pleasure principle. The difficulty in determining the origin of limits becomes an exploration of the liminality of origins:

The attributes of life were at some time evoked in inanimate matter by the action of a force of whose nature we can form no conception. It may perhaps have been a process similar in type to that which later caused the development of consciousness in a particular stratum of living matter. The tension which then arose in what had hitherto been an inanimate substance endeavored to cancel itself out. In this way the first instinct [Trieb] came into being: the instinct to return to the inanimate state (p. 48)

The drive, we might say, is not inherently responsive but—as a longing (differentiation) to be what it is not (undifferentiated)—self-productive. Without yet delving into the complications of Eros, Freud suggests that drives are by nature split: the drive is tension and the drive is the desire to be rid of tension.

The death drive, which Freud here refers to as the “first,” is more obviously self-negating; while its existence is a disruption, it is only through the drive that release becomes an aim—a satisfaction lost and a source to return to. In more human terms, as Schelling argues in “On the Nature of Philosophy as Science,” the longing to restore the past is precisely what separates us from it: “Here, then, emerges the contradiction of man destroying what he wants by wanting it. From this contradiction arises that drifting movement, because that which the searcher searches for escapes him, so to speak, in constant flight” (German Idealist Philosophy, p. 233). This self-defeating longing—this
“drifting movement” between the searcher and what is sought—defines Eros and Thanatos insofar as they are drives. And it is this beginning-in-transition that Freud’s final theory of the drives hits upon but cannot resolve: the essential mutability and mutual formation of the drives (as emphasized in *Three Essays on Sexuality*), seemingly forgotten in the theoretical dyads and triads of the metapsychological papers, returns in repetition.163

The central contradiction of Freud’s metapsychology is thus made explicit in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Ultimately, Freud will equate Thanatos and Eros with unbinding and binding, respectively.164 The work of Eros is to prepare the way for restoration, return and thus satisfaction. It is only because psychic energy is bound—brought to unity—that an organism is able to unbind or release it. Freud makes the case that erotic *repetition* is essentially *conservation*; although Eros seems to be a force of differentiation and development, at its most fundamental level it is the retroactive

---

163 Freud’s paper “Drives and their Fates,” however, is a remarkable instance within the metapsychological papers of paying heed to a possible primacy of ambivalence—a reflective, or transitional, beginning. Though Freud does not quite see this through, his attention to the intermediate phase is essential to understanding the problems he faces in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and his eventual acceptance of a primary masochism. Dealing with the fates of the drives that are prior to and less sophisticated than repression or sublimation, reversal into its opposite and turning round upon the subject, Freud approaches their peculiar union in sadism/masochism: “With the pair of opposites sadism-masochism, the process may be represented as follows:

(a) Sadism consists in the exercise of violence or power upon some other person as its object.  
(b) This object is abandoned and replaced by the subject’s self. Together with the turning round upon the self the change from active to a passive aim in the instinct is also brought about.  
(c) Again another person is sought as object; this person, in consequence of the alteration which has taken place in the aim of the instinct, has to take over the original role of the subject.” (*SE* 1915, p. 81).

Freud goes on to define (b) in the following terms: “The active voice is changed, not into the passive, but into the reflexive middle voice” (p. 81). As we will see in what follows, this stage (b) not only begins to take on a more primary place in Freud’s thinking, but already did so in his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, where auto-erotism is the initial phase of drive activity.

164 See: section IV of *BPP*.  

---
Freud’s juxtaposition of the useless nightmares of war neuroses and the all-too-serious play of Fort/Da implies that to repeat is to prepare, however unconceivably, for our past.

The subtle shift here between conservation and pathological repetition echoes the move from the First will to the Second in Schelling: what begins as a restful, proto-satisfaction turns into an active desire to be what it already is—to preserve, though not yet to desirously repeat. It is as if the longing to maintain its current state necessitates a doubling—an unconscious splitting that is the opening up of desire. What Freud senses in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is that the beginning cannot be reduced to either opposition or to singularity: through Eros Freud is forced to move not only beyond the pleasure principle, but also beyond his own fantasies of dualistic/monistic paradigms. He is better able to express the insufficiency of such views by the time of writing *Civilization and Its Discontents* and, once again, it is the connection between pleasure and time that is at issue:

> It is in sadism, where the death instinct twists the erotic aim in its own sense and yet at the same time fully satisfies the erotic urge, that we succeed in gaining the clearest insight into its nature and its relation to Eros. But even where it emerges without any sexual purpose, in the blindest fury of destructiveness, we cannot fail to recognize that the satisfaction of the instinct is accompanied by an extraordinarily high degree of narcissistic enjoyment, owing to its presenting the ego with a fulfillment of the latter’s old wishes for omnipotence (pp. 80-81).

---

165 This sense of Eros as repetition and development resonates with Schelling’s claim in the *Outline* (already cited) that “[n]o subsistence of a product [of Nature] is thinkable without a continual process of being reproduced”.

166 Freud’s fear of falling into a monistic account is in no small part a reaction against Jung’s theory: “Our views have from the very first been dualistic, and to-day they are even more definitely dualistic than before—now that we describe the opposition as being, not between ego-instincts and sexual instincts but between life instincts and death instincts. Jung’s libido theory is on the contrary monistic” (64). Of course, Freud’s insistence belies his discomfort, writing in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*: “Wherever the original sadism has undergone no mitigation or intermixture, we find the familiar ambivalence of love and hate in erotic life. If such an assumption as this is permissible, then we have met the demand that we should produce an example of a death instinct—though, it is true, a displaced one. But this way of looking at things is very far from being easy to grasp and creates a positively mystical impression” (65, my emphasis).
The bond that holds Eros and Thanatos together as drives—neither identical nor
opposed—hinges on Freud’s eventual acceptance of primary masochism: on a primal
transitionality where pain coincides with pleasure, object with subject, repetition with
temporalization.

3. Primal Fantasy

In “On Narcissism,” Freud traces the development of a more stable boundary between
ego and world. He proposes that this relatively undifferentiated state is repeated or
returned to in what he terms secondary narcissism. My hope here is to unpack his account
of just what narcissism is; how it relates to auto-erotism as a mode of subject/object
unity; and whether or how the fantasy characteristic of the narcissistic level of psychic
integration parallels the freedom and auto-production of Schelling’s imagining, self-
reflective Absolute considered in the previous chapter.

Starting out with a discussion of the schizophrenic turning away from the world,
Freud continues with an explanation of narcissism and its derivative status:

The libido that has been withdrawn from the external world has been directed to the ego and thus gives rise to an attitude which may be called narcissism. But the megalomania itself is no new creation; on the contrary, it is, as we know, a magnification and plainer manifestation of a condition which had already existed previously. This leads us to look upon the narcissism which arises through the drawing in of object-cathexes as a secondary one, superimposed upon a primary narcissism that is obscured by a number of different influences…This extension of the libido theory—in my opinion a legitimate one—receives reinforcement from a third quarter, namely, from our observations of the mental life of children and primitive peoples. In the latter we find characteristics which, if they
occurred singly, might be put down to megalomania: an overestimation of the power of their wishes and mental acts, the ‘omnipotence of thoughts,’ a belief in the thaumaturgic force of words, and a technique for dealing with the external world—‘magic’—which appears to be a logical application of these grandiose premises (SE XIV, p. 75, my emphasis).

Freud posits primary narcissism and connects it to the “primitive” belief in the “omnipotence of thought,” a term familiar to us from “The Uncanny.” The pathological narcissism occurring in adults is a repetition of a more primal experience in which the limit between ego and world is first being worked out, a repetition that nonetheless complicates the undifferentiated “oceanic feeling”.

Freud’s claim that the boundary between ego and reality is an accomplishment, a development generated from the permutations of pleasure and satisfaction, is first made explicit in Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality. In this text Freud claims sexual drives and fantasy are the distinguishing characteristics of human subjectivity. Freud shows that adult sexuality (both normal and neurotic) has its roots in the polymorphous perversion of infantile life rather than in any physiological instinct developing during puberty; he further claims that it is infantile sexuality, and its inevitable repression, that determines the variations of adult sexuality and pathologies. These observations lead Freud to ask the questions that will define his life’s work: Why do unconscious drives become structured into the conscious experience of a subject confronting a world of objects in the particular ways that they do? How is it that the limit between ego and world develops out of infantile sexual life? Part of my claim here is that such development depends, paradoxically, on a repeated return to and reclaiming/reintegrating of earlier states of creating just such a limit.
Whether limitation shows itself as *our own activity* in the anxiety-provoking uncanny, or in the therapeutic scene of transference, the regression that propels psychic development can be traced to auto-erotism—to the site where subject and object converge in fantasy:

…[W]e are bound to suppose that unity comparable to the ego cannot exist in the individual from the start; the ego has to be developed. The auto-erotic instincts *[Trieb]*, however, are there from the very first; so there must be something added to auto-erotism—a new psychical action—in order to bring about narcissism (“On Narcissism”, *SE* Vol. XIV p. 77)

A more nuanced account of narcissism can help explain Schelling’s self-desiring, self-generating Absolute in the *Weltalter*, but we first need to consider what it means that these auto-erotic drives are there “from the very first.”¹⁶⁷ Laplanche’s approach to this question in *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis* hinges on a close reading of *Three Essays* and, more specifically, on a more narrowly defined understanding of drive. Laplanche contends that the drives are perversions of the instincts—“propping” themselves on vital needs; this reading in turn grounds Laplanche’s claim that the translation of *Trieb* into *instinct* rather than *drive* in the *Standard Edition* is faulty. Indeed, Laplanche argues that much of the confusion surrounding the drive centers on Freud’s failure to flesh out the consequences of his theory of “propping”:

Our study of thumb-sucking or sensual sucking [taken as a model of oral sexuality] has already given us three essential characteristics of an infantile sexual manifestation. At its origin it *attaches itself to [or props itself upon; ensteht en Anlehnung an] one of the vital somatic functions; it has as yet no sexual object, and is thus *auto-erotic*; and its sexual aim is dominated by an *erotogenic zone* (cited in Laplanche, his emphasis, p. 15).

The essence of the drive is its dependence upon and subsequent separation from the vital instinct. We might also say, though this will take some working out, that the perversion of the drives is “beyond” the pleasure principle: insofar as desire is no longer connected to need, fantasy is already a perversion of the mechanics of pleasure.

What remains unclear is the kind of proto-object (and proto-subject) that belongs to autoerotic drives. Laplanche gives us the following explanation, in response to Freud’s proposal in the just cited work that “the finding of an object is in fact the re-finding of it”:

The text cited has an entirely different ring to it from that vast fable of autoerotism as a state of the primary and total absence of an object: a state which one leaves in order to find an object; autoerotism is, on the contrary, the stage of the loss of the object…But above all, if such a text is to be taken seriously, it means that on the one hand there is from the beginning an object, but that on the other hand sexuality does not, from the beginning, have a real object. It should be understood that the real object, milk, was the object of the function, which is virtually preordained to the world of satisfaction. Such is the real object which has been lost, but the object linked to the autoerotic turn, the breast—become a fantasmatic breast—is, for its part, the object of the sexual drive…From this, of course, arises the impossibility of ultimately ever rediscovering the object, since the object which has been lost is not the same as that which is to be rediscovered. Therein lies the key to the essential “duplicity” situated at the very beginning of the sexual quest (Life and Death, pp. 19-20).

We are again faced with the beginning that is not the beginning—the first sexual object is a result, not a given. The first object of the instinct, which the fantasized object of the drive models itself on, is not an object in the proper sense. As Laplanche says, the initial “real” object is “the object of the function,” which is precisely to say that it is not the object for any subjectivity. The appearance of subject/object opposition is not a creation at all but a re-creation: in the displacement that occurs between the needed “milk” and the fantasied “breast,” Laplanche reminds us that a certain kind of linguistic magic—
productive symbolism, through which desire and satisfaction are delimited—must already be in play before a unified subject can arise. He maintains that the beginning is loss (of undifferentiated unity) and also the fantasy of its restoration (wish-fulfillment): for Laplanche, auto-eroticism is the Freudian term for this grounding duplicity—a proton pseudos—from which the subject and objects for it emerge.

The psychoanalytic obsession with the past reflects and distorts this more fundamental relationship to the Absolute Past and to the beginning that destabilizes all opposition:

Because this essence holds time enveloped, it serves as a link that enables man to make an immediate connection with the most ancient past as well as with the most distant future. Man often sees himself transported into such wonderful relations and inner connections through precisely this innermost essence, such as when he encounters a moment in the present as one long past, or a distant event as if he himself were witness to it (AW 1813, p. 114).

The very assumption of a compulsion to repeat, where an origin to be repeated is taken for granted, belies the alterity of such a past. It is this relationship that Schelling struggles to speak in his Weltalter, the creative gesture that is no longer tranquility and not yet opposition. Schelling marks the beginning as an unconscious longing between the First and the Second, between the resting will and the tranquil, self-seeking will:

The eternal will alone provides the initial point that starts up the great process of the whole. It posits itself as the mere willing of eternity, and to that extent as negated. But in positing itself as negated, it is at the same time the self-negated will. Yet it cannot negate itself by positing itself as not being at all; rather, it can only posit itself as not being the essence, or what affirms, or what (genuinely and by nature) is. Moreover, the will cannot negate itself as being the essence without positing itself as lack and—to the extent that it is also active—as hunger, as yearning, as desire for essence. Returning into itself, it necessarily finds itself to be empty and
in need but is for that reason all the more eager to fill itself, to satiate itself with essence. But it finds essence neither inside itself nor outside itself; for it does not recognize eternity, and by returning into itself it is turned much more away from eternity than toward it. Thus, nothing is left but for the will to posit essence or affirmation absolutely outside of itself through an unconditioned and totally generative force (1813, pp. 138-139).

From this dense passage I would like for the moment merely to pull out two ideas: the will posits itself as “desire for essence” and the will posits essence as “absolutely outside of itself through an unconditioned and totally generative force.” In other words, the seeking subject and the object it seeks are aspects of the same will—as if viewed internally and externally, respectively. Through what Schelling elsewhere calls a “dark presentiment and longing,” the will is driven out of its complacency by way of searching for and creating its own limits—producing selfhood from otherness and otherness from selfhood. The “dark presentiment” that urges the will out of itself is of course no event within time or consciousness—but then how are we to approach this simultaneously world-constructing and self-revealing longing?

The problem of beginning is not merely pushed back to the inexplicable awakening of unconscious discomfort. Although we cannot yet speak of a “before,” in order for there to be a beginning there must be an unconscious inscription of desire. The satisfied will longs—but what could it long for if not for satisfaction? And what could provide satisfaction when there is as yet no Other? This would be a self-defeating desire indeed. But what if satisfaction were not the inchoate aim of this dark presentiment, what if longing erupted as an end (and as a beginning) in itself? What if the opposition between being and what-is did not come from frustrated desire but from the primordial play of fantasy? In “On the Nature of Philosophy as Science” Schelling makes an important distinction between desire for and desire as such:
The concepts of ability and will are united in the word ‘to desire…’ Eternal freedom is eternal desire, not the desire for something but desire in itself or, as it can also be expressed, eternal magic. I am using this expression because it expresses my concept; true, it is a strange word, but when we use it for ourselves it is in our possession again. Saying eternal ability or eternal magic is one and the same. This expression, however, suggests itself because it expresses the capacity both to adopt any form and not remain in any given one…The original magic contains more than mere knowledge, that is, objective production (p. 222).168

One cannot help but see the resemblance between The Absolute, which Schelling calls eternal magic, and the source for the Freudian conception of wish. Initially, Freud’s primal fantasy—and its reappearance in the formation of the dream/symptom—is nothing other than the (hallucinatory) production of its object: a wish that provides its own satisfaction.169 Desire extends beyond its common usage in connection with an object to its original form as a ceaseless productivity of its own object—of itself as well as its Other. Schelling goes on to claim: “That which is the absolute beginning cannot know itself. In its transition to knowledge it ceases to be the beginning and it therefore has to proceed until it rediscovers itself as the beginning. The beginning, restored as a beginning that knows itself, is the end of all knowledge” (p. 222).170 The task, for Schelling and for Freud, is to explain the movement from primal fantasy—a fantasy that “cannot know itself” because there is as yet no subject distinct from its object—to self-creation and interpretation. In Schelling’s words, the task is to discover how to “break through to the bliss of ignorance again (which at this point is a knowing ignorance)”.171

168 German Idealist Philosophy.
170 German Idealist Philosophy.
171 ibid. p. 222.
4. Primary Masochism

We have seen that beginnings in general, and the drives in particular, are essentially
duplicitive; the repetition of the life and death drives is a perversion and dislocation of
*instinctual* or *mechanical* repetition. And while Freud sees that there is something
disturbing in the kind of repetition that Eros demands, he fails to recognize that
Thanatos—*as drive*—must disturb us in the same manner. Perhaps here one might note
that both primary masochism and the aggression which is understood as the fruit of the
death drive in *Civilization and its Discontents* is worlds away from the Nirvana principle:
Destruction is no mere return home. In “The Economic Problem of Masochism” Freud
suggests that primary masochism is the site where Eros and Thanatos “coalesce”:

> If one is prepared to overlook a little inexactitude, it may be said that the
death instinct which is operative in the organism—primal sadism—is
identical with masochism. After the main portion of it has been transposed
outwards on to objects, there remains inside, as a residuum of it, the
erotogenic masochism proper, which on the one hand has become a
component of the libido and, on the other, still has the self as its object.
This masochism would thus be evidence of, and a remainder from, the
phase of development in which the coalescence, which is so important for
life, between the death instinct and Eros took place (*SE* XIX, p. 164).

Life, as Freud suggests, requires *difference*—but this difference is not mere antagonism.
The interpenetration of Eros and Thanatos depends upon their grounding in something
that is common to, but distinct from, both. In order to show that primary masochism can
serve such a function for psychoanalysis, we would do well to return briefly to where
Freud initially deals with sadism and masochism in Part I of *Three Essays*: “Sexual
Aberrations.” It is part of Freud’s larger aim in this work to show that heterosexual
intercourse aimed at procreation is an achievement, not the result of an instinct [*Instinkt*]:
what we take to be perversions of the sexual instinct are in fact evidence that human sexuality is itself perverse—which is to say, driven rather than instinctual. By beginning with the aberrations, Freud forces us to see that perversion is somehow originary: any stable opposition between ego and world derives from the disruptive, the chaotic and the perverse.

Freud writes that sadism/masochism is “the most common and the most significant of all the perversions—the desire to inflict pain upon the sexual object, and its reverse.” His reasons for giving such weight to sadism and masochism are two-fold: First, “sadism and masochism occupy a special position among the perversions, since the contrast between activity and passivity which lies behind them is among the universal characteristics of sexual life” (p. 25); second, “the most remarkable feature of this perversion is that its active and passive forms are habitually found to occur in the same individual” (p. 25). It is not just that sadism and masochism embody activity and passivity, two primitive drive fates, but also that activity and passivity are so often entangled there.\(^\text{172}\) The union of pleasure and pain in masochism reflects Freud’s emphasis on the sexual as the site of ambivalence and the source of subjectivity.

According to Laplanche, Freud’s fascination with sadism-masochism is a consequence of its connection with the fantasy that distinguishes drive from instinct:

\[\text{Finally, we have situated, in the position of what we called reflexive masochism, or the middle voice, a fantasy which, however, has a properly masochistic content in the \textit{passive} sense: I am being beaten by my father. But that is because, as we have emphasized, the process of turning}\]

\(^{172}\) As Freud also writes ten years later in “Instincts and their Vicissitudes,” (sometimes and better translated as: “Drives and their Fates”) it is not only the \textit{object} of the drive that gets reversed in sadism-masochism, but also its \textit{aim}. In other words, a transitional, auto-erotic space opens up between subject and object (I am both the one that inflicts pain and the one that receives it) and between pain and pleasure (I derive pleasure from the pain of the other and I am the other that experiences pain) \textit{(SE XIV, p. 81)}.\]
round is not to be thought of only at the level of the content of the fantasy, but in the very movement of fantasmatization. To shift to the reflexive is not only or even necessarily to give a reflexive content to the “sentence” of the fantasy; it is also and above all to reflect the action, internalize it, make it enter into oneself as fantasy. To fantasize aggression is to turn it round upon oneself, to aggress oneself: such is the moment of autoerotism, in which the indissoluble bond between fantasy as such, sexuality, and the unconscious is confirmed (Life and Death, p. 102).  

In effect, Laplanche rejects the originality of primary narcissism and the viability of a completely undifferentiated state, and offers trauma and perversion instead: there is no “before” the intrusion of adult sexuality, nothing that precedes relating to the Other, because primary masochism is the traumatic beginning of time and memory. The primal fantasy, the movement from instinct to drive, is a turning round upon oneself the inscrutability of sexuality. Because adult fantasy—the unconscious of the Other—is already there, already addressing, the subject emerges in frustrated, fantasied attempts to receive and make sense of this address. The priority of masochism is a function of its disturbing location between the structured drives of a more coherent subjectivity that addresses/aggresses on the one hand, and the instinctual incoherence or disorganization of infantile life on the other. Put differently, the simultaneous emergence of fantasy and drive is a response to the intrusion and inscription of something other than instinct.

Auto-erotism, and its traumatic origin in and as primary masochism, takes the place of Freud’s underdeveloped, theoretical construct of primary narcissism. Freud is never comfortable with an undifferentiated, primary narcissism that is anything more than a retroactive construct or fantasy; in Laplanche, this undifferentiated state is complicated

173 Laplanche continues, “If we press the idea to its necessary conclusion, we are led to emphasize the privileged character of masochism in human sexuality. The analysis, in its very content, of an essential fantasy—the “primal scene”—would illustrate it as well: the child, impotent in his crib, is Ulysses tied to the mast or Tantalus, on whom is imposed the spectacle of parental intercourse…the passive position of the child in relation to the adult is not simply a passivity in relation to adult activity, but passivity in relation to the adult fantasy intruding within him” (ibid.).
by the “vital differences” of the Other that is always already there. The “propping” of the drive on vital instincts, the gap that appears between them, is the coming into being of a pleasure that resonates with the desires and fantasies of the Other but cannot yet be perceived as such. Perversion is a movement away from that negative, or pleasure-less pleasure conceived of as the satisfaction of an instinct—as the release or absence of tension. Instead, perverse pleasure is detached from such a mechanistic paradigm, to the extent that it can even account for pleasure in pain, in the excessive tension of suffering and desire, and in the differentiation of Eros. Primary masochism is not only a way for Freud to illustrate the death drive, and to distinguish drive from instinct, but also for temporality and subjectivity to become fundamental issues for psychoanalysis. The imagined tranquility of primal narcissism is not upset by something other than itself, but rather by the propping or slippage from the pleasure of non-existence (instinctual life) to the pleasure of longing (the life of the drives). It would seem that there is something about this self-enclosed pleasure—pleasure that is initially satisfaction belonging to no subject—that already seeks subjectivity: in fantasy, pleasure attracts subjectivity and otherness to itself.

Pleasure as preservation becomes pleasure as repetition, as we have already seen in “Fort/Da”, where little Ernst’s sense of the unity of self and world is threatened by the perversion of desire. In order to preserve this felt unity (in fact always already lost), Ernst puts himself in the place of another who, as he is in the process of discovering, is not merely an extension of himself; he repeats the process of separation and integration, of boundary-making, that initially traumatized him from without.\footnote{The child had a wooden spool with a piece of string tied around it. It never occurred to him to drag it along on the floor behind him and pretend it was a carriage, for example. Instead, he very skillfully threw
course, such play is possible only through the intrusion of adult sexuality—through the suggestion of another form of pleasure. But even for Laplanche, this is not an intrusion that occurs in time, but one that is already a condition for temporal existence. Human beings do not simply arrive: we are born. The otherness of sexual pleasure—of pleasure that is a perversion of instinctual satisfaction—quite concretely makes our existence possible. It seems at least viable, then, to approach Schelling’s account of the movement from the resting will to the self-seeking will—with unconscious longing as the Mother of the latter and born from the former—in terms of such transformations of pleasure.

Although Laplanche suggests that the other pleasure of drive and sexuality is proper only to human being, dependent upon the adult unconscious that impinges upon us, we might instead consider existence itself to be generated by—*birthed* by—the internal dynamics of pleasure. When Freud pushes against the limits of psychoanalysis, as he does in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, he moves towards biology, myth and philosophy. With great reticence, Freud suggests that the beginnings of human being inherently lead us towards the origins of being as such.

Freud recognizes that the primacy of repetition/preservation that he argues for would threaten conscious temporality. He quite explicitly ties together pleasure/unpleasure and temporality, albeit without claiming any final solution.

Conscious time is put forward as a form of *defense* against traumatic, unconscious time—

---

the spool, attached to the string, over the edge of his little curtained bed so that it disappeared therein, all the while uttering his meaningful ‘o-o-o-o.’ Then, using the string, he pulled the spool out of the bed again and greeted its appearance with a joyful *da* [there]. So this was the whole game—disappearance and return—of which it was usually possible to see only the first act, tirelessly repeated as a game in its own right, though the greater pleasure was no doubt associated with the second act. The interpretation of the game was then clear. It was connected with the child’s great cultural achievement: by renouncing his drives (renunciation of drive gratification) he allowed his mother to leave without protest. He compensated for this, so to speak, by enacting the same sort of disappearance and return of the objects in his reach” (pp. 57-58).
“this mode of functioning [the self-perception of the system *Pcpt.-Cs.*] may perhaps constitute another way of providing a shield against stimuli…but I must limit myself to these hints” (31). Freud is quite clear that *external* traumas are “any excitations from outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield” (p. 33). But if conscious time is a defense against the unconscious—and thus the drives—how do we understand *this* trauma, regarding which Freud expressed such concern?

The connection to Schelling’s *Weltalter* should be apparent: in this text, the perversion that precipitates the differentiation of times is also the origin of the internal and the external, subject and object—internal trauma, the trauma of the drives, simultaneously creates and is created by a more primordial, unbearable excess. Such an originary trauma, where there are as yet no boundaries to be overwhelmed, forces Freud closer to Schelling’s ontological account of pleasure/pain:

> We have decided to relate pleasure and unpleasure to the quantity of excitation that is present in the mind but is not in any way ‘bound’; and to relate them in such a manner that unpleasure corresponds to an *increase* in the quantity of excitation and pleasure to a *dimunition*…the factor that determines the feeling is probably the amount of increase or dimunition in the quantity of excitation *in a given period of time*.…it is not advisable for us analysts to go into the problem further so long as our way is not pointed by quite definite observations (*BPP*, p. 4).

In both passages where Freud brings up the problem of time in relation to pleasure, he pointedly refuses to go *beyond*: Freud’s unwillingness to engage with the kind of temporality that psychoanalysis opens up, however, belies his contributions in the form of his theory of *Nachträglichkeit*. Although in the “speculative” *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Freud circles around the tangled relationship between trauma, repetition and time, the practice of psychoanalysis quite clearly depends upon a temporality that defies
consciousness. After all, the founding discovery of psychoanalysis may well be compressed into the joint claims that “hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences” and that, in the unconscious, reality and fantasy are indistinguishable: the ways in which the past disrupts our present, and that the present redefines and recreates the past, already invokes a troubling and profound attack on any notion of linear time or the stasis of history.\textsuperscript{176}

IV. The Mythical Symptom

More memories, mine, than from a thousand years—Baudelaire, Spleen

In this chapter, I argue that the approach to the Absolute Past we have considered in Schelling and Freud is a therapeutic one: in order to know such a past we must allow ourselves to be altered by it, to become intimate with the methods and depths of our own concealment. The therapeutic is here conceived as an active engagement with our own repressed beginnings that, remaining vulnerable to the reconstructions of the present, challenge our assumptions about the past as such. Therapeutic engagement would thus be a self-desiring, self-transforming act—a holding together of the past both as irretrievable origin and as a continuous possibility for (re-)creation. The Absolute Past is thus not only the object of philosophical and psychoanalytic desire but also, in its eternal becoming, the very form of therapeutic desire—a desire that can sustain and stabilize itself in its own provisional nature.

Beginning with a discussion of the role of primal repression in both Freud and Schelling, I hope to show that such an account is necessary in order to understand the privileged place of mythology in their respective systems. Having offered an argument for the centrality of primal repression to their methods of interpretation, I focus on Historical-Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology, arguing that Schelling’s main contribution to the philosophy of mythology comes in his attempt to locate the
origins of differentiation—and of meaning—within a primary and recurrent transitionality: to radicalize the notion of origin and, in turn, the therapeutic connection between its explanatory and transformative possibilities. Schelling’s account of unconscious desire giving way to creation and history, which in turn shapes unconscious desire, gives narration a *metaphysical* weight; Schelling’s insistence on our paradoxical intimacy with, and alienation from, the Absolute Past suggests that our approach to its truth must be both familiar and disorienting. In other words, we come to know the Absolute Past in and as the uncanny.

Unpacking Schelling’s lectures will entail dealing with some fundamental questions about the relationship between trauma, language and the emergence of a people. These questions fall out of Schelling’s initial inquiry into the *meaning* of mythology—and, in particular, its relation to philosophy on the one hand and poetry on the other.\(^{177}\) As an introduction to his positive philosophy, Schelling’s lectures on mythology bring the conclusions and insights of the freedom essay and his *Weltalter* into contact with *actual* historical development and revelation; in line with the earlier texts’ account of freedom, and particularly its relationship to the unconscious, Schelling argues that mythology is neither a capricious invention nor a mechanical necessity. Indeed, he writes,

> Mythology would not in general be only a *natural* product, but rather an organic one; this is certainly a meaningful step in comparison to the merely mechanistic type of explanation. But it would also be an organic product in the following respect. Poetry and philosophy each for itself, is for us a principle of free, intentional invention, but because they are bound... 

\(^{177}\) “Now, however, one could still ask in particular if in mythology’s era of emergence poetry and philosophy as such—that is, in their formal opposition—could really have been present at all; because we have seen, on the contrary, how as soon as a mythology is present and has completely filled consciousness, both initially depart from each other in different directions, from out of mythology as from a mutually held middle-point, albeit even then they separate themselves very slowly” (Lecture 3, p. 38).
to one another neither, properly speaking, can freely be active; mythology would thus be a product of in themselves free activities, but here, however, of unfreely causally effective activities, just as the organic is a birth of freely necessary emergence; and to the extent that the word invention is still applicable, mythology is here a product of an unintentional-intentional, instinctive invention, which on the one hand would hold at a distance from itself everything merely fabricated and artificial, but on the other hand would at the same time allow that the deepest meaning and the soundest relations inherent in mythology be seen as not merely contingent (Lecture 3, p. 41).

At first glance, this appears to be a recapitulation of Schelling’s description of the conscious-unconscious production in his much earlier lectures on the philosophy of art; here, however, the model of artistic creation is brought to bear on the real emergence and differentiation of languages, world-views and peoples. Schelling writes of Genesis, “Also, it is not at all a mere fabrication; on the contrary, this story is created from actual memory, which is in part also preserved by other peoples, a reminiscence—out of mythical time to be sure, but from a real event of the same” (Lecture 5, p. 74). As we shall see, this will lead Schelling to view mythology as a response to and retroactive framing of a traumatic, originary cision or, “as we have called it, a crisis” (Lecture 5, p. 74).

Despite his professed distaste for metaphysics, Freud’s account of the traumatic development of ego and reality out of a state of non-differentiation offers a parallel vision of this “beginning before the beginning;” for Freud, of course, the therapeutic bond between trauma, mythology and language is the founding discovery of psychoanalysis. Narration neither corresponds to nor falsifies some historical event but, through its emphases and caesurae, gestures towards both personal and universal mythologies, as well as the bond that holds these together. Through the process of free association—the
breaks of memory, slips of the tongue and transferences that analyst and analysand take as their starting point—psychoanalysis focuses on the fractures that signal a forced coherence and an opening to (re)interpretation and, ultimately, towards psychic health and integration.\footnote{178} This does not suggest a failure to accurately remember past events, but rather redirects us to the way narrative can expose the unrepresentable, unspeakable Absolute Past.

While the place of mythology in psychoanalysis is not always entirely clear, it is certainly a quite prominent one. Not merely a tool to aid in interpretation, or a text to be psychoanalyzed, mythology unites the unique experience of the individual with the broader realities of the culture and species he is born into. That is to say, part of what Freud discovers in therapeutic practice is that each of us creates a mythology—a language—that constitutes the specific pathology that we ourselves are. It is our capacity as unique myth-makers that undergirds Freud’s refusal, in *Interpretation of Dreams* for example, to rely on any universal symbolism.\footnote{179} Of course, Freud is equally insistent on the inheritance of common desires and frustrations—most notably, the Oedipal

---

\footnote{178}I have in mind here Freud’s description of secondary revision in his *Interpretation of Dreams*: “What marks this part of the dream-work out and exposes it to view is its purpose. This function proceeds rather as the poet* [Heine] maliciously declares philosophers do: with its snippets and scraps it patches the gaps in the dream’s structure. The result of its labours is that the dream loses its appearance of absurdity and incoherence, and approaches the pattern of an intelligible experience” (pp. 319-320).

\footnote{179}*ibid.* One of Freud’s major claims to a novel approach to dream interpretation depends on the difference between his method and what I have termed “universal symbolism”. He writes, “The other popular method of dream-interpretation [besides the “symbolic” method in which a diviner “takes the dream-content as a whole and seeks to replace it with a different, intelligible, and in certain respects analogous content.”] popular method of dream-interpretation…might be called the ‘decoding method’, as it treats the dream as a kind of secret writing in which every sign is translated by means of a fixed key into another sign whose significance is known. I have had a dream of a letter, for example, but also of a funeral or the like; I now consult a ‘dream-book’ and discover that ‘letter’ is to be translated as ‘ill humour’, ‘funeral’ as ‘betrothal’” (p. 79). Freud goes on to explain that his own method, though scientific in nature, is closer to the ‘symbolic’ than to the ‘decoding’ method: “Patients who had undertaken to inform me of all the thoughts and ideas that beset them on a certain subject told me their dreams, and in this way taught me that a dream can be interpolated into the psychical chain which, starting from a pathological idea, can be traced backwards in the memory. This suggested that the dream itself might be treated as a symptom, and that the method of interpretations for symptoms might be applied to dreams” (pp. 80-81).
Complex—that are in some sense universal. Thus, psychoanalysis might be described as the process by which an analyst becomes “fluent” in the mythological expressions of the analysand; at the same time, by bringing the analysand’s symptom-language into a broader, communicable mythology, therapy can effectively provide relief. It is the task of this chapter to show that Schelling’s insistence on (mythological) narrative as the philosophical approach to the Absolute Past can be re-framed on this Freudian therapeutic model, with a focus on the development of the latter as it is presented in *Interpretation of Dreams* and other texts that deal with the process of cure.

1. Primal Repression

How do I separate from myself a world? This is both Freud’s question about individual human beings and their pathologies, and Schelling’s concerning the origin of peoples and the emergence of consciousness; I believe that in order to address either dimension of the issue we need to look at just what repression represses. Primal repression, like the primary masochism we encountered in the last chapter, seems to lead back to the inherently fantasized site of an identity that can never be settled and yet must be decided: to an abyssal freedom, an eternal beginning, that we need only engage with in order to feel for ourselves the traumatic effect on the conceptual order.

Freud first uses the term primal repression as a way of differentiating between an idea that is repressed on its own account and the derivatives or associated ideas that are repressed as a consequence of their connection to it. At the economic level Freud argues
that primal repression, as opposed to “actual repression”, is maintained by the counterinvestment of the preconscious (pcs) system:

What is required here, then, is another process, which in the first case maintains the repression and in the second is responsible both for establishing and continuing it. For this we need to postulate a counterinvestment, by means of which the pcs system protects itself against the pressure of the unconscious idea…It is the counterinvestment that represents the ongoing expenditure in primal repression and which also guarantees the durability of the repression. In primal repression it is the sole mechanism, whereas in actual (follow-up) repression it is accompanied by the withdrawal of pcs investment. It may very well be that it is precisely this energy withdrawn from the idea that is used to create the counterinvestment (“The Unconscious,” p. 64/SE XIV, p. 181).  

Freud seems merely to say that initially—before there is a force of attraction coming from the unconscious—there must be an active warding off, energetically, on the part of the pcs. But this merely begs the question: Why is this increase of tension on the part of the pcs called for in the first place? Why, indeed, does Freud want to distinguish between primal and actual repression at all? Further along in the same essay, there is another account of the nature of and need for primal repression:

If human beings do inherit psychic formations, something analogous to animal instincts, then these are what form the core of the ucs. Everything that is discarded over the course of infantile development—material not necessarily different in nature from that which is inherited—is then subsequently added to this core (p. 77).  

The “core of the ucs” is inherited in the form of something like animal instincts. Once the psychic structure is sufficiently organized and capable of repression, one would assume that ideas bearing some resemble to this “core” would be the best candidates.

181 SE Vol. XIV, p. 195
Strangely, Freud says only that the subsequently “discarded” (not “repressed”) material is “not necessarily different in nature from that which is inherited.” Wouldn’t Freud want to say something much stronger—that this discarded material is likely similar in nature to what is inherited? Instead, he seems to go in the opposite direction—but why does Freud do this?

Here, it is not so much an economic account of primal repression as it is a developmental one. Freud sees repression as a defense against the overwhelming force of the drives, but by no means as the first or most basic of such mechanisms. In “Repression,” Freud argues that

[R]epression is not one of the original defense mechanisms, that it cannot occur until a sharp division has been established between conscious and unconscious psychic activity…prior to this stage of psychic organization, the task of defense against drive impulses was dealt with by the other drive fates, such as reversal into the opposite and turning back on the self.182

It is at this point that Freud introduces primal repression, having just explained that repression itself is precisely not primal. Repression, Freud argues, develops from more primitive mechanisms of “reversal into the opposite” and “turning back on the self.” Indeed, Freud suggests that in one and the same moment—sadism-masochism—both of these mechanisms appear simultaneously: “These two drive fates—turning back on the self and reversal of activity into passivity—are dependent on the narcissistic organization of the ego and bear the imprint of this phase”.183 These earlier methods of coping with the demands of the drives “bear the imprint” of a time before any stable boundary between ucs/pcs or ego/world has been developed; they are the primary modes of working out and

183 ibid. p. 25/p. 132
constructing such a limit to defend against, or indeed recognize, the intolerable force of
the drives.

The real need for an account of primal repression, it seems, should come here:
Freud has to differentiate between the boundary-making and dissolving process through
which the unconscious develops, and the defense mechanism that depends upon there
already being such a boundary. Primal repression would be the making unconscious of
those originary moments where the boundary between ego/world, ucs/pcs—has not yet
stabilized. In support of this claim, I return briefly to Kristeva’s discussion of the abject
as an objectification (an *abjectification*) of the transitional as such which she, too, relates
to primal repression and the sublime:

If, on account of that Other, a space becomes demarcated, separating the
abject from what will be a subject and its objects, it is because a repression
that one might call “primal” has been effected prior to the springing forth
of the ego, of its objects and representations. The latter, in turn, as they
depend on another repression, the “secondary” one, arrive only a posteriori
on an enigmatic foundation that has already been marked off; its return, in
a phobic, obsessional, psychotic guise, or more generally and in more
imaginary fashion in the shape of *abjection*, notifies us of the limits of the

Taken together with the passage cited in the Introduction, where Kristeva claims that in
the abject “[t]he border has become an object”, we might understand the uncanny as the
potentially creative, rather than merely paralyzing, dimension of this experience. In other
words, while I agree with Kristeva that the border is the material of primal repression, I
would suggest that our access to this primal repression comes in the uncanny: in the
experience of the liminal not *as* object but precisely *in its liminality*.

I am borrowing and remaking Freud’s term, “primal repression,” as a way to
approach the processes that must—originally—form the core of the unconscious. This is
to say that the inheritance Freud refers to hinges on the fundamental movement of auto-
erotism—on the self-differentiation of desire. Primal repression conceals the perversion of instinct into drive, or the trauma that grounds our subjectivity. Unconscious processes—the core of the unconscious—do not exist in themselves because, without or prior to difference, there is nothing. They can only exist once there is a distance, a space for desire: the transitional is only afterwards. Primal repression is inseparable from—if not equivalent to—Nachträglichkeit. Only after limitation, after actual repression begins to function and to fail, can primal repression manifest itself as having been. When Freud warns us “we should not think of the process of repression as a single event with permanent results, as when, say, a living thing is killed and from then on remains dead,” we might take this further: beyond defining primal repression negatively, it must be approached as a challenge to and foundation for the deterministic structure of event/result, cause/effect, desire/satisfaction.\footnote{ibid. p. 39/p. 151} Freud only sketches out what the temporality of unconscious processes are not—“processes in the ucs system are timeless, i.e., are not chronologically ordered, are not altered by the passage of time, indeed bear no relation to time whatsoever”—and thus fails to follow through with several strands of thought within his work that edges towards a conception of what such timelessness might entail.

If the unconscious is the timeless origin where fantasy and reality cannot be differentiated, the nature of and mode of apprehending truth must be radically reconceived. Insofar as the unconscious is the ground of consciousness, to begin is to find ourselves already divided. And yet it is only because we are divided that the beginning can speak to us—can belong to us—at all: “The man who cannot separate himself from
himself, who cannot break loose from everything that happens to him and actively oppose it—such a man has no past, or more likely he never emerges from it, but lives in it continually” (AW 1813, p. 120). Paradoxically, it is the very act of repression—of foreclosing the past and claiming ourselves in so doing—that allows us to be historical, to have a past at all.

Schelling’s claim that “philosophy is thus a history of self-consciousness” suggests that this kind of re-appropriation is in fact the demand of philosophy—that this creative remembrance of the past is freedom itself (STI, p. 50). Interestingly, Schelling claims that repression is an unavoidable and repeated condition of this freedom. In order for there to be an objective world outside of us, or a world within, the productions of the self—the originary subject/object, the self-itself, the thing-in-itself—must successively “disappear” from consciousness:

The thing–in-itself arises for it (the self) through an action; the outcome remains behind, but not the action that gave rise to it. Thus the self is originally ignorant of the fact that this opposite is its own production, and must remain in the same ignorance so long as it remains enclosed in the magic circle which self-consciousness describes about the self; only the philosopher, in breaking out of this circle, can penetrate behind the illusion (p. 69).

It begins to seem that Schelling’s philosopher comes close to the Freudian analyst: at an engaged remove, the philosopher and the therapist interpret the return of the repressed—whether in bearing witness to the deeper ground of the transcendental conditions of knowledge or the symptoms of a neurotic. Taking this comparison seriously, I believe that we can find support for Schelling’s historical metaphysics in Freud’s therapeutic method. If it is indeed the case that the transitional space of the beginning is primordially repressed, that it cannot be fully translated into or overcome by consciousness, how can it
be understood? The question of how one interprets or recognizes the traces of the past in the present—of how our history is profoundly lost and inescapably alive—is one that both Schelling and Freud force us to consider. Moreover, we have to ask: What kind of truth necessitates such a method? What kind of truth does such a method makes visible?

2. Archaic Truth

What Schelling sees as a misconceived search for the real meaning of mythology, achieved by removing the distortions of fantasy, sounds quite like one way of understanding Freud’s therapeutic technique. Allying psychoanalysis with the scientific worldview, Freud often claims to seek bare reality salvaged from the fantasies we project upon it, as he does quite explicitly in “The Question of a Weltanschauung”:

In summary, therefore, the judgment of science on the religious Weltanschauung is this. While the different religions wrangle with one another as to which of them is in possession of the truth, our view is that the question of the truth of religious beliefs may be left altogether on one side. Religion is an attempt to master the sensory world in which we are situated by means of the wishful world which we have developed within us as a result of biological and psychological necessities. But religion cannot achieve this. Its doctrines bear the imprint of the times in which they arose, the ignorant times of the childhood of humanity (New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, p. 209).

However, it is also the case that in denying the truth of the religious Weltanschauung, Freud unwittingly exposes a similar wish—for an undistorted, recoverable reality—as the

---

185 Schelling writes in the Weltalter that the goal of his science is to engage with the “boundary”: “For the essential thing in scientific progression is to recognize the boundary of each moment and to focus on it sharply” (1813, p. 131).
That is, if psychoanalysis does have a Weltanschauung of its own, it would center on a capacity for self-analysis—for recognizing its own fundamental and motivating fantasies. In this sense, we should keep in mind that while Schelling dismisses a poetic reading of mythology, he admits that it is integral to his own work and, in fact, the only place to begin:

The poetic view is also one such first interpretation. It undoubtedly contains what is correct, to the extent that it excludes no meaning and indeed permits mythology to be taken properly. And so we will be careful not to say that it is false; on the contrary, it shows what is to be reached” (Lecture 1, p. 15).

The question of whether and how the “truth” of mythology might be presented is also an invitation to rethink the correspondence between objective science and the reality it knows.

As the experience of the uncanny illustrates, the subjective processes through which we (re)negotiate the boundaries of reality are never really overcome: the unconscious, indelibly marked by the trauma of separating “off an external world from itself,” is timeless and indestructible. Moreover, it is through these varied modes of relating to the world and to ourselves that mythology, as a dynamic process of identification with and differentiation from reality, remains meaningful. In his

---

187 It is worth noting that it is in Freud’s polemic against religion, Future of an Illusion, that he implicitly draws science and philosophy closer to religion—precisely insofar as each kind of illusion conceals a wish for the world to make sense: “And thus a store of ideas is created, born from man’s need to make his helplessness tolerable and built up from the material of memories of the helplessness of his own childhood and the childhood of the human race” (SE Vol. XXI, p. 18).

188 “…originally the ego includes everything, later it separates off an external world from itself. Our present ego-feeling is, therefore, only a shrunken residue of a much more inclusive—indeed, an all-embracing—feeling which corresponded to a more intimate bond between the ego and the world about it” (Civilization and its Discontents, SE Vol. XXI, p. 68). See Chapter I: Beginnings; and Chapter IV: The Primal/Freud for more detailed examination of primary narcissism.

189 “At this point, however, a curious psychic transformation occurred in the mind of Kronos’s devotees. For precisely in the act of his destroying his antagonist [Uranus], Kronos became intimately identified with him” (Beach, p. 200).
insistence that a true philosophy of mythology must seek out the source of its religious power—what he calls the “dark and uncanny power of the belief in gods”—Schelling comes quite close to the psychoanalytic unconscious and to Freudian interpretation (Lecture 3, p. 45). As Freud points out, the uncanny is a return to the original horror—and to the horror of origins: consciousness, including scientific consciousness, is born from unconscious desire. It is born like we ourselves are, like the gods are, generated not from bloodless logic but from dark, familiar longing.

For Freud and Schelling, it is clear that unconscious fantasies and dynamics do not disappear with the advent of the higher levels of organization that they gives rise to. That is, the unconscious can never be entirely reducible to consciousness—there is always the “irreducible remainder”—insofar as only the former can hold together the contradictory attitudes and relationships that constitute our earliest and most fundamental grasp on reality. In psychoanalysis, this means that the goal of therapy could never be the complete destruction or sublimation of the unconscious, but only the practice and development of a language that can begin to integrate the inchoate communications of our deepest selves. In the process of psychoanalytic therapy, then, it is not a matter of translation but of transformation: becoming who we are requires a return to more primitive forms of relating to ourselves and to the world—which is to say, to the various methods of “making sense” that continue to operate unconsciously. The goal of psychoanalytic therapy is not the destruction of the unconscious, but the increased capacity to remain open to the unconscious as the impetus of such transformative power.

190 FS, p. 360.
191 See: Introduction, pp. 38-39 for a discussion of Freud’s “navel of the dream” in The Interpretation of Dreams that suggests a particularly affecting admission of this impossibility.
As I have suggested, this “return” to modes of experience that we thought were overcome is integral both to therapeutic success and to the anxiety of the uncanny. In the psychoanalytic uncanny, we experience a haunting realization of our primitive modes of relating to the world *in reality*: our sense that we have overcome infantile fears, wishes, theories of knowledge and desire, is radically disturbed by their “coming true.” Part of what I take from Freud’s investigation of the uncanny is that we are disturbed precisely *because* the distinctions that define our subjective experience and the scientific *Weltanschauung* do not extend to the unconscious. Although Freud can sometimes claim that psychoanalysis is a science in that it rids reality of all traces of wish-fulfillment, his insistence on the indestructibility of the unconscious threatens any such model. The unconscious is the site where the contradiction between fantasy and reality is undone, or rather has not yet arisen, and yet remains the ineradicable and dynamic grounding of consciousness and the reality it confronts. This is not to say merely that fantasy is one kind of experience among others that make up human being, but rather that the non-contradiction of truth and fantasy remains the vital *source* of conscious, rational life and all the distinctions that entails. Reality cannot finally and completely be disentangled from fantasy because, in the beginning that continues to *act* as beginning, they are bound together.

By insisting upon the connection between the uncanny and the force of religion, I hope to show that Schelling, too, senses the therapeutic possibilities of mythology. That is to say, because reality includes the unconscious, truth cannot merely be correlated with a heightened level of objectivity and scientific distance. Like Freud, Schelling instead struggles toward the recovery of a founding trauma—an ever-receding primal scene—
suggesting that a metaphysics grounded in the unconscious demands a different model of truth and knowledge altogether. Such a scene, or a crisis as Schelling calls it, requires a rethinking of processes of differentiation that prepare the way for opposition—particularly the oppositions between fantasy and reality, subjectivity and objectivity, fable and truth.

In Schelling’s claim that mythology is the highest reality in his early lectures on art, that fantasy is to imagination what intellectual intuition is to reason, we gain more insight into Freud’s insistence on the world-creating (whether religious, philosophical or scientific) power of the wish:

I define creative imagination in relation to fantasy as that in which the productions of art are received and formed, fantasy as that which intuits them externally, casts them out from within itself, as it were, and to that extent also portrays them. The relationship is the same as that between reason and intellectual intuition. Ideas are formed within reason and, in a sense, from the material of reason; intellectual intuition is that which presents them internally. Fantasy is thus the intellectual intuition within art (Philosophy of Art, 38).

In the same way that intellectual intuition defines the deed of self-consciousness—where the self is simultaneously creator and created in a moment eternally repressed from consciousness—fantasy must hold together artistic self-creation and its abyssal beginnings. This conception of fantasy in his Philosophy of Art lectures comes to carry a metaphysical weight only in Schelling’s much later lectures on mythology; in this latter text, the most fundamental fantasy—mythology—is real: there is thus no deeper meaning to be recovered from mythology because within it, as within infantile subjectivity dominated by unconscious processes, fantasy and reality are not yet distinguished.
As Schelling goes on to argue that the emergence of mythology is simultaneous with the separation of *peoples*, with the dispersion of languages and world-views, the analogy between intellectual intuition and fantasy can be more fully fleshed out. Like the self-positing “I” of intellectual intuition, the primal scene that gives rise to mythological expression and to differentiation more generally must remain outside of time.\(^{192}\) That which precedes mythology, that which mythology pathologically “remembers”, can only be an undifferentiated, timeless unity:

> *Whatever* duration we give to this period of homogeneous humanity is entirely indifferent to the extent that this period in which nothing happens has in any event only the significance of a point of departure, of a pure *terminus ad quod*, starting with which time is counted, but in which itself there not actual time (Lecture 5, p. 75)

Like the Absolute Past, it is only after the rupture that mythology responds to—the *Entscheidung*—that this trauma takes shape as a transition, as a beginning. In some way that we still must determine, this Absolute Past of self and god(s) alike must relate to Schelling’s claim that “the night and fate, the latter itself standing over the gods just as the former is the mother of the gods, are the dark background, the hidden and mysterious identity from which all gods have emerged” (Lecture 3 p. 41). As with all true beginnings—and isn’t mythology always about beginnings?—the gods were not brought forth at some point in time; instead, received through fantasy and produced in imagination, they make “dimly visible” the bringing forth of time itself—the very process of reality-as-(historical) revelation.

\(^{192}\) As Schelling writes in *System of Transcendental Idealism*: “For if it is through self-consciousness that all limitation originates, and thus all time as well, this original act cannot itself occur in time; hence, of the rational being as such, one can no more say that it has begun to exist than that it has existed for all time; the self as self is absolutely eternal, that is, outside time altogether” (p. 48).
Schelling’s initial insight into the failures of competing approaches to mythology—primarily the poetic and the philosophical/scientific—concerns their inadequacy in addressing the “dark” power of religion.\(^{193}\) He argues that while it might be possible for a poetic or philosophical genius to invent a system of the gods, no such arbitrary creation could result in the intensity of a religion for a people, and that addressing the source of this power is essential to understanding mythology. It is in this context that Schelling introduces the concept of \textit{unheimlichkeit} in his \textit{Historical-Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology}, suggesting that only the most profound and continuous spiritual “crisis” could explain such a hold on a people: “[A] well-known and popular way of thinking [is] to presuppose for the later, serious times of our human species an epoch of a clear and serene poesy, a condition that was still free from religious terror and all those \textit{uncanny} feelings by which later humanity was harried, the time of a happy and guiltless atheism.” Schelling then presents his own view on the matter, as he doubts whether it is even conceivable “that the dark and \textit{uncanny} power of the belief in gods [developed] from a weak and artificial beginning” (Lecture 1, p. 14/Lecture 3, p. 45).

It should already be clear from these passages that the uncanny is integral to the dark potency of religious belief for Schelling—the strength of which is such that it could not have contingently come-to-be. When Schelling goes on to define the uncanny in his lectures on mythology and revelation, it is still attached to a “principle” that remains obscure—an obscurity that, it seems, may be ineradicable:

\(^{193}\) I call the “philosophical/scientific” views those which “say that no gods are meant in mythology at all; neither proper and real nor improper and unreal, no personalities, but rather impersonal objects that are only represented poetically as persons. Personification is the principle of this method of interpretation; either ethically customary or natural properties and phenomena are personified” (Lecture 2, p. 24). This covers the possibility of geniuses, whether scientific, political or philosophical, that cover their (perhaps rudimentary) knowledge of the world in poesy in order to communicate it to society at large.
The Homeric pantheon tacitly contains a Mystery within it, and is as it were built up over an abyss, which it bedecks as with flowers… The pure sky that hovers above the Homeric poetry was first able to extend over Greece after the dark and darkening power of that uncanny (unheimliches) principle (for one calls “uncanny” all that should have remained in secret [im Geheimnis], in concealment and latency, but which has nonetheless stepped forward)—that aether which forms a dome principle, which dominated in earlier religions, was precipitated down in the Mystery. The Homeric age was first able to conceive of that purely poetic narrative of the gods after the actually religious principle had been hidden in the interior and thus allowed the spirit to turn freely toward the outside (cited in Beach, p. 228).

The suggestion here is that even “poetic” narrative, and perhaps narrative more generally, is built upon the withdrawal of the “dark and darkening”. While Schelling seems to suggest that the uncanny is this darkness, this cannot be quite right: after all, what is uncanny must—though it ought not—come to light. That is, the uncanny is only insofar as it returns; even—or, perhaps, especially—the most harmonious coherence points to its violent history.

The spiritual crisis that Schelling invokes as the real basis of religious power, the trauma that imbues the beautiful Homeric pantheon with meaning, is crucially linked to the Freudian uncanny: it marks the site-less site of the transition from immersive union to differentiation, from Schelling’s relative monotheism to successive polytheism.194 This

194 Although I will deal with successive polytheism in greater detail through the course of this chapter, Schelling initially uses the term as a way to distinguish a historical system of the gods from a merely hierarchical one. In other words, Schelling’s interest lies in the genealogy of the gods given in mythology, and in successive polytheism as a recollection and trace of an actual genealogy: “Indeed, it can escape to whom it is pointed out that there is a great difference between the polytheism that emerges when indeed a greater or lesser number of gods is conceived, which are however subordinated to one and the same god as their highest and master, and that polytheism that emerges when several gods are assumed, but each of them is the highest and dominating in a certain time and for this reason can only follow one another. If we think to ourselves, say, that the Greek history of the gods had, instead of the three races of gods—which it has follow one upon the other—only one, say that of Zeus, then it would also only know of gods (all of which would be resolved into Zeus, as their common unity) coexisting and simultaneous with each other, it would know only of simultaneous polytheism. Now, however, it has three systems of gods, and in each one One god is the highest…Thus these three gods cannot be simultaneous ones but rather only mutually excluding, and for this reason ones following one another in time. So long as Uranus dominates, Kronos
crisis provokes a process of individuation, of working out the boundaries that connect us to and separate us from each other and the world:

Thus this fear, this horror before the loss of all consciousness of unity, held together those who remained united and drove them to maintain at least a partial unity, in order to persist, if not as humanity, then at least as a people. This fear before the total disappearance of unity, and therewith of all truly human consciousness, provided them not only with the first institutions of a religious type but even the first civil institutions, whose goal was no other than to preserve what they had saved of the unity and to secure against future disintegration (Lecture 5 p. 82).

Schelling goes on to more explicitly connect this spiritual crisis to language, pointing out that “it is the name that differentiates and separates a people, just as an individual, from the others, but for just this reason at the same time holds them together” (Lecture 5 p. 83). Elsewhere, he refers to this transitional space in biblical terms as a “confusion” of language, a confusion that extends to the temporal priority of differentiation and crisis: “let us build a city and a tower, whose summit reaches to the heavens, that we may make a name for ourselves, for we might perhaps be scattered across the whole earth. They say this before language is confused; they intimate that which stands before them, the crisis which is announced to them” (Lecture 5 p. 83). Schelling continues,

Thus, the fear of being dispersed, of no longer being a whole at all, of rather being fully disbanded, motivates it to the undertaking. Stable residence is first considered when humanity is in danger of losing itself entirely and of disintegrating, but with the first stable abodes the separation begins, thus also the repulsion and exclusion, like the tower of Babel, which is supposed to prevent the entire dispersion, becomes the beginning and the occasion of the separation of the peoples (Lecture 5 p. 83).

---

cannot; and should Zeus attain dominance, Kronos must recede into the past. Thus we will name this polytheism the successive polytheism [successiven Polytheismus]” (Lecture 6 p. 86).
The emergence of a people—which is also the emergence of distinct languages and mythologies—is, in an important sense, linked to the time of trauma: Nachträglichkeit. Differentiation, Schelling tells us, cannot be easily located as cause or effect of the confusion of language. Only retroactively, through the histories of the gods in successive polytheism, can relative monotheism show itself as what came before. And thus mythology is in no way an overcoming of the trauma that provoked it—mythology is instead both a historical record and a retroactive creation of this transition. Similarly, the uncanny is not merely the return of the repressed: it is a return to the temporality activated in and through trauma—to a realization of non-existence converging with existence, indifference with difference, by way of the dissolution of the ordinary limits of our experience.

Mythology is an enactment of the development of multiplicity from undifferentiated unity, though these concepts of history and development must be carefully rethought: “When one compares the mythologies of various peoples, it becomes fully incontestable that it is the actual history of its emergence that mythology has preserved in the sequentiality of its gods” (Lecture 6, p. 88). Mythology here is self-reflective—if we can only bear to listen, it tells of its own arrival: the dispersion and historicization of men and gods that mythology works against (as a unifying process) is, at the same time, effected by mythology (as a differentiating process). This does not mean, however, that the myths are narrations of actual events. Rather, Schelling questions just what it means for something to be an actual event—what it might mean for the truth to show itself mythologically, or at all.
One way to approach such a truth is to take up Markus Gabriel’s claim that mythology is the necessary and meaningless foundation of meaning: “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 meaningfulness, it is the foundation of meaning, even of the meaning of meaningfulness” (p. 64).195 Schelling himself uses the term “unprethinkable” in reference to the tower of Babel, pointing out that “such an indelible symbolic meaning, like the one attached to the name Babel, only emerges in that it is derived from an unprethinkable [unvordenklich] impression” (Lecture 5 p. 76). Like Gabriel, Schelling suggests that the common ground of religion and language, which is to say the ground of difference, reason and meaning more generally, must exceed meaning: brute reality cannot be logically derived or further interpreted, and it is precisely this impenetrability that makes meaning—whether mythological or scientific—possible.

My worry with Gabriel’s account, however, concerns the distinction made between what he calls constitutive mythology and regulative mythology; the former, in some sense, is the unprethinkable event, and the latter the histories of the gods that constitute the content of Schelling’s successive polytheism. He writes, “whereas regulative mythology makes use of specific metaphors, symbols, personae, and the like, constitutive mythology bases itself on ‘absolute metaphors’ in Blumenberg’s sense… ‘fundamental stocks of philosophical language’” (p. 66). Gabriel’s essay seems to depend upon an abstract mythology, or set of mythemes, that allows for—and thus cannot be contained by—the existence of any particular world-view; at the same time, Gabriel

195 Markus Gabriel and Slavoj Zizek, Mythology, Madness and Laughter: Subjectivity in German Idealism (New York: Continuum, 2009).
wants this constitutive mythology to provide the unprethinkable thatness of reality. But, drained of its specificity, constitutive mythology can only become the generic, groundless ground of Reason. Although I find his argument that meaning needs mythology persuasive and important, it seems to me that the constitutive/regulative distinction in no way helps explain Schelling’s account of how meaning depends upon theogony, or the connection between the unprethinkable real and its particular mythological expressions, but only serves to further obscure it. Ultimately, Gabriel seems to assume the opposition between particular and universal in the guise of the regulative and the constitutive, rather than to trace its development. Like the philosophical and poetic approaches Schelling condemns, Gabriel uses mythology instead of letting it speak for itself. As we will see in both Schelling and Freud, the emergence of mythology—a bringing forth that is the stories of the births and deaths of gods—is an essential moment in the dialectic between the particular and the universal. The myths of creation and destruction are expressions of the traumatic eruption of (self-)consciousness, of the crisis through which the very possibility of the particular (the differentiated) and the universal (the undifferentiated) first appears.

Instead of dwelling on Gabriel’s distinction between constitutive and regulative mythology, which merely begs the question of whether and how universal and particular mythemes come together, we should consider instead the identity Schelling posits between language and myth: “One is almost tempted to say: language itself is only a faded mythology; what mythology still preserves in living and concrete differences is preserved in language only in abstract and formal differences” (Lecture 3, 40). In other words, Schelling suggests that language is mythology, no less than mythology is a
language: communication, as we saw with the construction of Babel, is always an act of connection and separation. The “faded” or immobile quality of ordinary language, perhaps even more so than the bright sky of the Homeric pantheon, keeps the ongoing crisis of coming-to-consciousness at bay. Even the most comfortable abstractions promise an uncanny return of the repressed—a resurrection that, as Freud so carefully attends to, is evident in the ambivalence of the very terms *Heimlich/Unheimlich*. Where Freud points to the same deconstruction of opposition in the experience of the uncanny, like truth/fantasy and inner/outer, Schelling focuses on the incipient anxiety of renegotiating surface and depth, the periphery and the center.196

Indeed, Schelling’s overall claim that mythology *means* what it *is*, would suggest that it is not something psychoanalysis can effectively *interpret*—or at least not in the way Freud is accustomed to. Schelling’s account of mythology may instead lead us to how Freud *can* relate to mythology, how his method of interpretation *uniquely* depends upon it. At a superficial level, we can see this dependence in the centrality of Oedipus in Freud’s theory more generally—itself a repetition of the motifs already operative in the prophecy, murder and castration of Uranus/Kronos/Zeus as well as Freud’s own myth of the primal horde; there is nothing for Freud to “interpret” in these events except for their literal, universal truth. However, this is not to say that the themes shared by the Oedipal tragedy and Greek mythology are instances of constitutive mythology and its

196 Schelling deals with the relationship between periphery and center at some length in his *Freedom* essay: “The most appropriate comparison is here offered by disease, which is the true counterpart of evil and sin, as it constitutes that disorder which entered nature through a misuse of freedom. Disease of the whole organism can never exist without the hidden forces of the depths being unloosed; it occurs when the irritable principle which ought to rule as the innermost tie of forces in the quiet deep, activates itself, or when Archaos is provoked to desert his quiet residence at the center of things and steps forth into the surroundings. So, on the other hand, *all radical cure consists in the reestablishment of the relation of the periphery to the center, and the transition from disease to health can really only take place through its opposite, that is through the restoration of separate and individual life to the inner light of being, whence there recurs the division*” (my italics, p. 41).
“fundamental stocks of philosophical language” that Gabriel introduces. Rather, the psychoanalytic approach to mythology, where interpretation does not quite apply to mythology but emerges from it, suggests a way to trace the mutual development of language and reality in Schellingian terms.

3. Uncanny Meaning

On Schelling’s view, the uncanny is the site where self-identity (Heimlich) shows itself as irreducibly not-itself, divided (Unheimlich). The Homeric pantheon, Schelling writes, can only appear to us as basking under a “pure sky” because there is hidden within it the “religious” and “darkening power” of the uncanny. If there were no place to hide—no interiority and no limit—there could be no meaning at all. Thus the uncanny, as the return of the repressed, also allows for meaning construed as retrieval from the depths. It is for this reason that Schelling refuses to engage with mythology as allegory: the very possibility of the latter has to be grounded in the former.

Without the intimation of the hidden, without interiority or limit, there can be no meaning at all; but it is only with mythology that depth and surface, center and periphery, past and future come to be distinguished. Schelling discovers that interpretation is unthinkable without the histories of the gods: from Uranus, through Kronos to Zeus/Dionysus, Schelling draws together the formation of consciousness with the development of meaning. Initially, with Uranus, there is a certain flat naïvete, an unreflective and undifferentiated immersion (the unconscious unity, pre-historical and self-enclosed); with the birth of Kronos, which is also the transitional stage between
unconscious unity and self-conscious differentiation, anxiety sets in. Dislocated by the
memory of overcoming that defines him, and the desire to forget that he is vulnerable to
the same fate, Kronos is uncanny: individuality is grounded in the split between the need
for the past in legitimating himself and denying such a past to the gods that would come
(the all-consuming, child-devouring present forecloses the past to refuse the future). It
is only with the arrival of this second god—and the anxiety succession entails—that the
first becomes meaningful as a god:

[T]he one God, reigning over the placid, pre-historical time, was indeed the only one existing up to that point, but not in the sense that no second one was able to follow him; rather, only that another had not yet actually followed him. To this extent he was essentially already a mythological god, although he only first became such actually when the second actually arrived and made himself into the master of human consciousness (Lecture 6, p. 97).

Only in Kronos’ subjecting Uranus to the past—in his conflicted creation of and
separation from a past that was never experienced as such, that never belonged to a
people—does mythology, as historical and symptomatic, properly begin. The anxiety that
Kronos experiences is real—it is an anxiety surrounding the emergence of times, a
consequence of making past that defines us and divides us in trauma.

In Totem and Taboo, his first text dealing with the emergence of religion and the	taboos of civilization from totemism, Freud makes a similar claim about the anxiety that
comes with the succession of the gods:

The contrast between ‘sacred’ and ‘unclean’ coincides with a succession of two stages of mythology. The earlier of these stages did not completely disappear when the second one was reached but persisted in what was

---

197 See Schiller’s account of a similar development in “On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry” in Essays (pp. 179-260).
regarded as an inferior and eventually contemptible form. It is, he [Wundt] says, a general law of mythology that a stage which has been passed, for the very reason that it has been overcome and driven under by a superior stage, persists in an inferior form alongside the latter one, so that the objects of its veneration turn into objects of horror (*SE* Vol. XIII, p. 25).

Here Freud explicitly connects *history* with *anxiety*: the first god inspires horror because the past is not over—in its very disappearance, the first god is erected and threatens return. Such an understanding of the collective consciousness of a people converges with Freud’s theory of *Nachträglichkeit* for the individual—the radical therapeutic premise that trauma is not a stable event locatable in time, but a disruption and redefinition of the temporal order. As with Schelling, in making memory and history *active* Freud destabilizes the past, its *reality* beholden to what can only come later. In the same work Freud goes on to discuss Dionysus-Zagreus, Kronos’ successor, who Schelling presents as the meaningful gathering of past and present that could resolve the anxiety of differentiation in the eternal coming-to-be of the future. However, Freud’s version seems to emphasize instead the endless cycle of familial brutality: “Mankind, it was said, were descended from the Titans, who had killed the young Dionysus-Zagreus and torn him to pieces” (p. 153). The future (Dionysus), like the present (Kronos), is a *repetition* of the past—and particularly of its dislocation and violent sundering. This repetition threatens to undo any real differentiation between times, as each god suffers the fate of and becomes identified with his father. But it can also be envisioned in its productive, or rather reproductive, aspect: we might recognize such a *creative repetition* in the way that the past is both *repeated* and *engendered* in the continued development of an individual or a people. In its oscillation between revelation and concealment, the conflicted pulse of the
symptom suggests how we might understand mythology as both literally true and still interpretable.

The crisis of consciousness speaks to us mythologically: mythology is the memory of a founding loss, the trace of the mutual emergence of times and consciousness—of difference as such. But it is also the repetition of this primordial separation, concealing as it does the lost unity through the very act of historicizing, of narrating. In this way, the trauma of transition unites the history of consciousness with the history of the gods. Mythology expresses the constitutional anxiety of the subject, and consciousness as a negotiation between the dual threats of immersive unity and isolating difference. The individual, no less than language and meaning, disappears in the collapse into undifferentiated union as well as in the fetishization of distinction. Schelling’s emphasis on birth, and furthermore his attentiveness to birth that is marked by the castration of the father and the devouring of the son, cannot be overlooked in this respect. Birth recalls us to Schelling’s overarching concern with an organic holding together, with a living temporality that neither destroys what comes before nor vanishes into what comes later; but it also gestures towards the undeniably horrific (murderous, incestuous, bloody) aspects of such an (un)natural begetting. The bond that unites Uranus, Kronos and Dionysis is the dialectic of individuation and communion—the intractable identity of illness and cure, of repetition and creation.
4. Therapeutic Meaning

Schelling’s work on mythology requires a rethinking of the meshwork of temporality, meaning and anxiety. In tracing the development of human consciousness from the unconscious, Schelling does not want us to simply find the historical development of subjectivity comparable to, or allegorized in, mythology. Rather, he challenges us to develop forms of meaning and relating that are necessary for approaching mythology and origins more generally:

Certainly, mythology has no reality outside of consciousness; but if it only takes its course in the determinations of consciousness, that is, in its representations, then nonetheless this course of events, this succession of representations themselves cannot again be such a one that is merely imagined; it must have actually taken place, must have actually occurred in consciousness. This succession is not fashioned by mythology, but rather—contrariwise—mythology is fashioned by it. For mythology is just precisely the whole of those doctrines of the gods that have actually succeeded each other, and thus it has come into being through this succession (Lecture 6, 89).

As we can see more explicitly in Schelling’s explanation of mythological meaning, the connection here is precisely not allegorical. But how then do we begin to understand that the births or history of the gods do relate to us? How are we to understand what Schelling is doing when he interprets mythology as both fantasy and actual history?

These questions gesture towards the great hope and the great danger of Schelling’s efforts. I suggest that this relation is an uncanny belonging together—a connection founded in and expressed by the anxious, transitional space between what is and what is not. In other words, it is precisely through the activity of working out the boundaries between the actual and the imagined, within the border realm of the uncanny,
that the gods and consciousness arrive (and continue to arrive) together. On the surface it seems that the manner in which Freud derives mythology from psychic structures, as the projection of infantile desires and fears onto the world, offers a stark contrast with Schelling’s views. This kind of interpretive gesture on Freud’s part is apparent in texts like *Future of an Illusion*, where he presents mythology both as a mode of religious experience and as a protection against paralyzing vulnerability and senselessness:

> Impersonal forces and destinies cannot be approached; they must remain eternally remote. But if the elements have passions that rage as they do in our own souls, if death itself is not something spontaneous but the violent act of an evil Will, if everywhere in nature there are Beings around us of a kind that we know in our own society, then we can breathe freely, can feel at home in the uncanny and can deal by psychical means with our senseless anxiety. We are still defenseless, perhaps, but we are no longer helplessly paralyzed; we can at least react. We can apply the same methods against these violent supermen outside that we employ in our own society; we can try to adjure them, to appease them, to bribe them, and, by so influencing them, we may rob them of part of their power (*SE* Vol. XXI, pp. 16-17).

It appears that what Schelling finds *actual* in mythology, Freud deems utter *delusion*, and vice versa. But as I have tried to suggest, the uncanny is precisely the moment at which we are called to address—to return to—just what separates truth from desire, the actual from the imagined. Freud’s own fascination with mythology is not limited to finding examples that illustrate the projection and distortion of unconscious fears and wishes; at pivotal moments in the development of his thought, Freud is unable to clearly demarcate the foundational elements of his science from the structures and status of myth. Further, these “mythological moments” that Freud can never entirely embrace nor do without—

---

198 It is worth noting that before Freud classed totemism and mythology together with monotheistic world religions, Schelling’s claims for the continuum of religious phenomena—stretching from paganism to Christianity—were relatively new and controversial. See: Beach’s pp. 4-23 for a discussion of these debates.
for instance, in his Platonic defense of Eros in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*—tend to concern the relationship between desire and history, between the individual and the species, between repetition and recreation.\(^{199}\) Perhaps most memorably, Freud’s primal horde, as presented in *Civilization and its Discontents, Totem and Taboo* and, to a certain extent, in *Moses and Monotheism*, is itself a myth of origins and the origin of myth: it serves to explain, in various and contradictory ways, the inheritance of guilt, the Oedipal Complex and religion by way of repression and primary ambivalence. As Freud writes in *Civilization and its Discontents*, concerning the remorse that follows the murder of the father in the primal horde: “This remorse was the result of the primordial ambivalence of feeling towards the father. His sons hated him, but they loved him, too” (p. 95). It is only out of this “primordial ambivalence” that in devouring the father, they also become the father—the very stuff of generation, connection and separation: which is to say, of mythology.\(^{200}\) And yet, this is *what actually happened*. Paradoxically, inescapably and uncomfortably, Freud—and perhaps this can be seen as one way to answer Schelling’s call in the *Weltalter*—discovers mythology in truth and truth in mythology.

This convergence of truth and myth is perhaps most fully explored in Freud’s final reworking of the primal horde in *Civilization and its Discontents*. In an effort to explain the development of civilization, Freud again turns to the sexual, murderous and familial at the root of psychic life. Hoping to discover in the process the emergence of the

---

\(^{199}\) *BPP*, pp. 94-95/SE Vol. XVIII, pp. 57-58.

\(^{200}\) In Freud’s *A Phylogenetic Fantasy*, he posits not only the killing of the primal father by his sons, but also the castration of the sons by the father: “experiences admonish us, however, to substitute another, more gruesome solution—namely, that he robs them of their manhood—after which they are able to stay in the horde as harmless laborers” (p. 17). This text, a so-called twelfth metapsychological paper, written in 1915, was found among Freud’s unpublished drafts in 1983. In large part, this text is important due to Freud’s inclusion of a pre-Ice Age period of general happiness and satisfaction; his claim is that, due to the shortages and exigency of the Ice Age, the conflicts within the primal horde appear and—more importantly—become etched into human psychic life.
super-ego and the origin of guilt and repression, Freud reworks the hypothetical primal horde from *Totem and Taboo* insofar as it fails to adequately explain why the murder of the father results in the guilt of the sons. Here, Freud marks the importance of omnipotence of thought—a term familiar to us from its uncanny effects—in terms of whether the primal horde be understood as fiction or reality:

A great change takes place only when the authority is internalized through the establishment of a super-ego. The phenomena of conscience then reach a higher stage. Actually, it is not until now that we should speak of conscience or sense of guilt. At this point, too, the fear of being found out comes to an end; the distinction, moreover, between doing something bad and wishing to do it disappears entirely, since nothing can be hidden from the super-ego, not even thoughts (*Civilization and its Discontents*, *SE* Vol. XXI, p. 125).

Interestingly, Freud suggests, the developmental achievement that is the super-ego is in fact a re-enforcement of the mechanism of omnipotent thought; that is, the ambivalence between desire and reality is not surpassed at this stage but preserved and even increased. And yet, it is in this text that Freud is most insistent on the reality of this primal scene: “We cannot get away from the assumption that man’s sense of guilt springs from the Oedipal complex and was acquired at the killing of the father by the brothers banded together. On that occasion an act of aggression was not suppressed but carried out” (p. 131). He argues that while following generations may feel guilt due to the renunciation of their murderous, sexual impulses (in the form of punishments from the super-ego), the erection of the super-ego as an agency, and with it the remorseful idealization of the father, can only be the effects of *real action*.

The contradiction here should be apparent: why must it be *real* if there is as yet no distinction between the wish and its fulfillment? The omnipotent thought that holds sway
in primitive psychic life, while not perhaps as totalizing as it becomes with the super-ego, makes any question of the reality of the murder irrelevant. However, it is not first and foremost to explain the guilt of the brothers that Freud needs the act to be a real one; it is in order to explain the deification of the father that follows. It is thus the inheritability of the Oedipal complex—the very possibility of succession, to use Schelling’s term—that leads Freud to assert the reality of the primal scene. Simply put: the father needs to actually die in order to become a god.

Freud’s late text *Moses and Monotheism* reiterates the real need for the death of the father to explain the potency of religious feeling. He treats biblical events in the same way he treats Greek mythology, pointing to their identity as religious phenomena and their shared rootedness in real and enduring crises very much in the style of Schelling. Here it is a question of the emergence of a particular people (his own people, the Israelites) and the mythology that both exposes and propagates an originary trauma: the story of Moses bears within its fault-lines the violence of differentiation and individuation, the trauma that marks all true beginnings.\(^{201}\) Indeed, Freud emphasizes the transition from polytheism to monotheism as fundamental to the meaning and power of Moses’ story. The continued reverence for these narratives, Freud suggests, is a testament to a constitutively hidden force—to the most profound and ambivalent feelings of love and hate that spur our development and awaken our nostalgia. It is worth noting, as Derrida does in *Archive Fever*, that Freud’s interpretation of Moses is marked by the language of the uncanny: “Freud characterizes the impression which circumcision leaves on those who are uncircumcised: ‘a disagreeable, uncanny [unheimlich] impression’ [SE

For Freud, the symptom-formation that is Moses is a version of the Oedipal myth—and, even more archaically, the theogony of Uranus-Kronos-Zeus—at the level of a people: the murder of their leader, their father figure, is repressed, transformed, inherited. And, like the tragedy of Oedipus or even his grandson’s game of Fort/Da, the story of Moses is a story of inheritance—of our unconscious and ungrounding ground, of the past that we never experienced (before we were born, before we were self-conscious) and inevitably take up in our own way. It is not so much that Freud insists upon a physiological structure of inheritance, but rather that he opens up the possibility of a distinctively psychoanalytic process of history. We do not inherit, genetically as it were, some set of archetypes or mythemes; rather, we are born into a reality, as well as a people, that is shaped by and remains vulnerable to the earliest psychic formations.

Hesitantly, Freud marks out an understanding of reality that must take into account relationships to the world that we no longer have access to but cannot be rid of. Just as Schelling refuses to relegate religion and mythology to the status of mere projections that need to be overcome, Freud also knows that mythology is not just symptomatic of primitive psychic states that can be more rationally interpreted and explained; indeed, such a false sense of overcoming the past is the pre-condition of the uncanny and of the therapeutic method. For Freud, remaining open to primitive modes of

202 Derrida goes on, “(I have attempted elsewhere to show, and cannot go into it here, that each time the word unheimlich appears in Freud’s text—and not only in the essay of this title Das Unheimlich—one can localize an uncontrollable undecidability in the axiomatics, the epistemology, the logic, the order of the discourse and of the thetic or theoretic statements; and the same is true, in just as significant a way, of Heidegger.)” (p. 46). In light of this hint of Derrida’s, we notice that in Freud’s late work on religion—Future of an Illusion—he does in fact return to the language of the uncanny yet again: “But if the elements have passions that rage as they do in our own souls, if death itself is not something spontaneous but the violent act of an evil Will, if everywhere in nature there are Beings around us of a kind that we know in our own society, then we can breathe freely, can feel at home in the uncanny and can deal by psychical means with our senseless anxiety” (SE Vol. XXI, pp. 16-17).

engaging with reality, including pre-repressive, ego-building processes like projection, introjection and identification, is integral to therapeutic success and to understanding mythology.²⁰⁴ Freud comes close to Schelling here, suggesting that the truth we discover is neither an historical fact nor an insight into the psychology of an alien, primitive people; it is a truth that still and always belongs to us, and so we experience the uncanny.

Schelling argues that traditional interpretations of mythology amount to various ways of masking the transformative reality of myth—protecting us from our essential and existential uncanniness. Mythology, Schelling maintains, enacts the historical development of meaning—and, in doing so, the birth of language and of peoples:

In any case it is apparent that to the Old Testament way of thinking the emergence of peoples, the confusion of language and polytheism are related concepts and connected phenomena. If we look back from here to what was found earlier, then every people is first there as such after it has defined and decided itself in view of its mythology. Thus this mythology cannot emerge for it in the time of the already completed division and after it had already become a people; because, moreover, it could equally less emerge for the people as long as the latter was, in the whole of humanity, still at the point of being like an until then invisible part of it, mythology’s origin will occur precisely in the transition, because the people does not yet exist as a determinate one but precisely at this point is ready to extrude and isolate itself as such (Lecture 5, 79).

Notice the connection Schelling makes between mythology and transition: the origin of mythology, its meaning and truth, is located in transition. And what kind of location—destabilizing, dynamic—would this be? We are faced with a mutual productivity where the longing for identity springs from and creates difference. The source of this cision, a spiritual crisis as Schelling calls it, can only be experienced as having been, as already past; consciousness is a demand for the very unity it destroys in coming to be. The

²⁰⁴ See: Laplanche and Pontalis The Language of Psychoanalysis for discussions of the development of the terms “introjection”, “projection”, and “identification” in psychoanalytic theory.
histories of the gods bear witness to the originary longing and unutterable self-division through which meaning becomes questionable—which is to say, becomes possible. For Schelling, there is no sense in working out the distortions in mythology to uncover what really happened. Rather, we need to consider the way in which mythology plays out the developmental—the transitional—structure of reality itself.

5. Symptoms of Subjectivity

The fact that Schelling’s interest in the uncanny comes in his late exploration of mythology gives credence to my claim that reality must encompass the unconscious and the archaic. Mythology, as Schelling explains, is not some primitive attempt to explain the world that modern science has made redundant; neither is it a veiled message or allegory that might be translated into laws or moral codes. The meaning of mythology is united with its being in a manner quite unlike the removed knowledge of conscious experience or scientific investigation. By grounding knowledge in the unconscious, truth in the mythological, Schelling disturbs the distinction between the objective and the subjective. Thus meaning is re-imagined in Schelling as process, as revelation: like the gods themselves, truth is timeless, but only if we reframe this timelessness, as Schelling does in his Weltalter, in terms of repression and historicity. In other words, truth is not essentially and eternally present, but instead tied to that vanishing limit between concealment and revelation that, equally, holds together the “darkening power” with the “clear blue” Homeric sky: the uncanny.

205 See Markus Gabriel’s essay “The Mythological Being of Reflection” in Mythology, Madness and Laughter for a sustained and fruitful discussion of the central role of mythology in Schelling and for a provocative distinction between constitutive and regulative mythology (p. 66).
Schelling writes, “As the common germ of both gods and men, absolute chaos is night, obscurity. The first forms and figures fantasy allows to be born from within it are also still formless. A world of misshapen and frightful forms must perish before the mild realm of the blessed and enduring gods can enter” (p. 37). Although these “frightful forms” may perish, the gods themselves bear the traces, we might even say the symptoms, of their bond with “absolute chaos”. Thus, in order to understand the reality Schelling ascribes to the gods (and the “common germ” that humans share with them) we have to approach the non-preservation of the boundary—a concealment that is always also the possibility of revelation—as integral to the truth of mythology.

Schelling argues that mythology tells us what it means in the only terms it can: as a history of the gods and thus of the development of consciousness. What comes out of Schelling’s account is a theory of meaning that both allows for and presses beyond conceptual thought. Language, in its mythological expression, is not primarily a medium for transmitting ideas: it is also and more importantly a reflection of a particular, and perhaps even foundational, sense of how psyche and world interact as reality. The practice of psychoanalysis, at least implicitly, depends upon a similarly developmental and reciprocal theory of world-creation and self-expression. Furthermore, it is a tenet of psychoanalysis that these various levels and forms of self-understanding are not simply cast out in favor of more rational structures; rather, the former maintain and even increase their effectiveness precisely insofar as they threaten and contradict the latter. Borrowing heavily from Hans Loewald’s work, Jonathan Lear explains in Love and Its Place in Nature that symptoms (and the unconscious fantasies and desires they express) are always pervaded by infantile theories of selfhood and primal forms of subjectivity:
The case of Anna O. shows us, right at the beginning of psychoanalysis, that in addition to infecting our memories and current experience, archaic mental life has a “theory” of the mind’s own workings. Anna O.’s “theory” of catharsis was not an explicitly conceptualized theory, thus the use of quotes. Her “theory” was expressed at the same archaic level of mental functioning as the rest of her fantasies: she experienced catharsis as corporealized discharge (p. 36).

Lear continues, explaining how it is that the therapeutic model fits into this account: “A ‘theory’ of the mental process is part of the person’s (perhaps unconscious) experience of that process. Thus the fantasied ‘theory’ becomes part and parcel of the mental process, and in altering the fantasy one alters the mental process itself” (p.37). Mythology is thus a theory of the mind, in Lear’s sense of the term, insofar as it is an expression of a form of psychic life bound up with the attempt to understand that life. Or, as Schelling would have it, mythological language is what it says—the symbolic (or symptomatic) is the union of being and meaning, the entanglement of our existence with the sense we make of it:

Mythology as such and every poetic rendering of it in particular are to be comprehended neither schematically nor allegorically, but rather symbolically. This is the case because the requirement of absolute artistic representation is: representation with complete indifference such that the universal is completely the particular and the particular simultaneously the entire universal, and does not merely mean or signify it. The requirement is poetically resolved in mythology, since each figure in it is to be taken as that which it is, for precisely in this way is each also taken as that which it means or signifies. Meaning here is simultaneously being itself, passed over into the object itself and one with it. As soon as we allow these beings to mean or signify something, they themselves are no longer anything. Their reality is one with their ideality; that is, their idea, their concept is also destroyed to the extent that they are not conceived as actual. Their ultimate charm resides precisely in the fact that they, by simply being as they are without reference to anything else—absolute within themselves—simultaneously always allow the meaning itself to be dimly visible (Philosophy of Art, pp. 48-49).
The gods of mythology, on Schelling’s account, cannot be fully acknowledged through a language where concept and being, form and content, remain opposed; that is to say, we cannot understand mythology through the paradigm of any depth of meaning to be recovered. Already in this early text, Schelling suggests the existential line of thinking that will culminate in his positive philosophy and its interpretation of mythology: to philosophically engage with mythology, one must confront a destabilizing truth, a truth that encompasses modes of relating to ourselves and the world that can neither be fully integrated nor refused.
Conclusion: Magical Thinking

As a result of these rites, the initiate himself becomes a link in that enchanted chain, he himself a Cabir, taken up into that indestructible nexus and, as an ancient inscription puts it, welcomed into the company of the higher gods. In this sense, we may call the Cabiri or their acolytes the inventors of those magical incantations that, as Socrates says, the child in us must always conjure up in order to be healed by them, annealed to the point where the child in us is liberated from the fear of death—Schelling, *The Deities of Samothrace*

In approaching the relationship between the development of mythology and the development of consciousness in Schelling—or the convergent inheritance of an individual, a people and reality as such—it is useful to look at psychoanalysis as a therapeutic response to the same line of questioning: How does reality encompass the unconscious? It seems to me that the truth sought in Freudian psychoanalysis—a truth that can only be judged by its therapeutic effect—is indispensable in understanding Schelling’s philosophy of mythology: the reality of the unconscious, and the various and contradictory forms of subjectivity that constitute it, depends upon a *transformative* dimension of meaning. The histories of the gods, no less than the case histories of Freud’s analysands, open up disturbingly foreign (and thus potent) forms of subjectivity that remain at work in the mutual development of meaning and being. Myths are not just stories, they are profoundly and disturbingly *our own*—if we can let them mean what they say.

I turn briefly to Freud’s Hungarian protégé, Sándor Ferenczi, as a concrete example of how psychoanalytic therapy depends upon language that remains open to and marked by these various modes of meaningful engagement. In *First Contributions to*
Psychoanalysis he suggests a series of developmental moments where the structures of the developing ego parallel the modes in which meaning can be created and appreciated. One such stage is “the period of magic thoughts and magic words”:

Now conscious thought by means of speech signs is the highest accomplishment of the psychic apparatus, and alone makes adjustment to reality possible by retarding the reflex motor discharge and the release from unpleasantness. In spite of this the child knows how to preserve his feeling of omnipotence even in this stage of his development, for his wishes that can be set forth in thoughts are still so few and comparatively uncomplicated that the attentive entourage concerned with the child’s welfare easily manages to guess most of these thoughts. The mimic expressions that continually accompany thinking (peculiarly so with children) make this kind of thought-reading especially easy for the adults; and when the child actually formulates his wishes in words the entourage, ever ready to help, hastens to fulfill them as soon as possible. The child then thinks himself in possession of magic capacities, is thus in the period of magic thoughts and magic words...In superstition, magic, and in religious cults this belief in the irresistible power of certain prayer, cursing, or magic formulas, which one has only to think inwardly or only to speak aloud for them to work, plays an enormous part (p. 230).

Ferenczi argues for a robust psychoanalytic reality by way of a productive, primal language; such a language reaches back to a nascent self-consciousness, suggesting that the individual emerges out of myriad efforts to make sense of and defend against the dual threats of engulfing union and castrating differentiation. Furthermore, I draw attention to this particular “magical” language insofar as it is essentially a form of playing with boundaries—the same kind of experience that recurs in the uncanny and the therapeutic (as well as in the aesthetic). For the child, we might say, such a phase is developmentally useful, if not necessary; and while behaving in such a manner might appear pathological in an adult, the process of renegotiating the limits of our agency and vulnerability in psychoanalytic therapy is in fact a re-appropriation of this creative, playful dimension of language.
Schelling, in his philosophy of mythology, similarly returns language to its world-creating capacities. That is, if we want to elucidate Schelling’s account of mythological meaning, we would do well to consider the concrete and mutual development of language, subject and world that psychoanalysis finds inextricably bound to fantasy and to the transitional more generally. Though Schelling has been attacked as an obscurantist for suggesting that absolute truth defies conceptualization, I think this concern is misplaced; we need to ask, as psychoanalysis does, how it is that language does in fact give voice to repressed non-conceptual truths. We could say that language functions within psychoanalytic therapy in a manner much closer to the way it functions in mythology than in ordinary speech: speaking both reveals and conceals the historical and contradictory truths that constitute the subject. Language shows itself in its double aspect—as a tool for delimiting and defining our experience but also as a concrete manifestation of our sense of being a subject. In other words, the deceptive transparency of language echoes the more fundamentally deceptive transparency of self-consciousness. In ways intentional and not, the words we choose, like our actions and bearing in the world, encompass various modes of subjective experience. Free association is not the deterministic manner in which the unconscious speaks, but an activity that brings into relief these oscillations between various stages of self-understanding that constitute our subjectivity. Tempted by the solidity of words, and before that by the clear outlines of our bodies, we erroneously imagine that knowledge—and self-knowledge along with it—must be unchanging, self-identical and rational.

Schelling’s provocative claim that mythology means what it is, is importantly related to Freud’s discovery that hysterical symptoms are memories. For Schelling, we
saw that the symbol binds together being and meaning, cause and existence. Equally, Freud discovers that how symptoms mean is inextricably connected to what they mean. For instance, bodily manifestations are not only and not primarily a representation of intolerable conflicts (what they mean), but also a defensive regression to a different mode of subjectivity that understands itself as bodily (how they mean). As with Schelling’s theory of mythology, meaning is not concealed within the symptom. “Interpreting” a symptom, for Freud, is something other than “translating” it into a more refined, scientific language; meaning is created between life and language, between our being and the thought of our being.\(^{206}\) It is not merely the particular unconscious wish/es that are manifested in the symptom, but also the mode of self-consciousness, irreducible to conceptual terms, through which and by which the symptom appears. Similarly for Schelling, it is the self-consciousness of a people—their sense of reality—that is essentially preserved as mythology. To interpret a symptom—or a mythology—is to gather together our various modes of relating self and world in new, more fulfilling ways. Schelling’s lectures on mythology are a rethinking of history in terms of the pathological. Destabilizing the relationship between being and meaning, and in an effort to engage with the crisis mythology attests to, Schelling develops a therapeutic approach: mythology threatens us with the intimation of our shared, conflicted beginnings, but in doing so offers the possibility of renewed health and individuality. Mythology reveals itself as the symptom of a primordial anxiety, as a defense against and eruption of temporality and differentiation for an essentially traumatized subjectivity.

If we view Freud’s project as a philosophy of therapy, concerned with the way meaning affects our very being, then approaching Schelling’s reading of mythology as an interpretation of a symptom does not seem so far-fetched. As Freud writes, “linguistic usage, then, employs the word...*symptom* when a function has undergone some unusual change or when a new phenomenon has arisen out of it” (“Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety”, p. 3/SE Vol. XX p. 87). Mythology would thus be a symptom insofar as consciousness itself develops a new form of expression and embodiment through it. Schelling, like Freud, defines a people and an individual in light of their pathology—and subjectivity becomes a negotiation between the threat of an immersive unity on the one hand, and of alienating separation on the other.

I hope that by framing Freudian interpretation as a form of historicizing subjectivity, and in bringing this to bear on Schelling’s philosophy of mythology, we can begin to sketch out what a Schellingian therapy might look like. Schelling’s lectures on mythology ask to be read in this way, his proximity to Freud showing up even in his locating mythology—as Freud does with psychoanalysis—outside of the opposition between science and art. In Schelling’s lectures mythology is a defense and a therapeutic effort—a reaction to and repetition of the anxiety concomitant with creation and differentiation. This appeal to an originary anxiety might help provide ontological grounding for separation anxiety, on the societal and individual levels, that Freud assumes are repetitions of a purely *physiological* overstimulation. Instead, as mythology arises in Schelling from a primordial cision, from the unprethinkable transition into languages and peoples, so does the Freudian symptom conceal and express the trauma of individuation (echoes of which resonate in the anxieties of birth, castration, and death).
In order to flesh out the nature of this “ontological” anxiety, I cite Freud in “Inhibition, Symptom and Anxiety,” where he reverses a foundational psychoanalytic view of clinical anxiety:

The anxiety belonging to the animal phobias was an untransformed fear of castration. It was therefore a realistic fear, a fear of a danger which was actually impending or was judged to be a real one. It was anxiety which produced repression and not, as I formerly believed, repression which produced anxiety…it is always the ego’s attitude of anxiety which is the primary thing and which sets repression going (SE Vol. XX, pp. 108-109).

Notice the strange emphasis on the “realistic” nature of the danger of castration—a danger we might want to banish to the realm of “fantasy.” Anxiety, Freud now realizes, is powerful enough to produce repression—to authenticate and delimit reality, or rather, to alert us to its inherent instability. Such a constitutive instability is corroborated in the same work, as Freud articulates the trauma this anxiety signals as loss:

The statement I have just made, to the effect that the ego has been prepared to expect castration by having undergone constantly repeated object-losses, places the question of anxiety in a new light. We have hitherto regarded it as an affective signal of danger; but now, since the danger is so often one of castration, it appears to us as a reaction to a loss, to a separation (“Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety”, SE Vol. XX, p. 130, my italics).

The danger Freud concerns himself with here is not merely the loss of a particular object or satisfaction, but the loss of the sense of reality through which object and satisfaction became meaningful.  

With this deeper sense of separation in mind, and what this may suggest about the connection between trauma and subjectivity, we can better approach the symptom in its peculiar fixation on the past: the desire for a lost unity, which the symptom feigns to

---

recuperate, also signals an underlying terror of futurity and the overwhelming openness of historical processes. The pathological repetition that symptom and mythology share serves to foreclose the danger of otherness, to conceal the abyssal freedom that constitutes an individual and a people as historical. And yet as efforts to bind this “separation anxiety” within the limits of symbol and narrative, the myth is always also a real trace of the trauma that makes the pre-historical, pre-egoic past interpretable again. Therapeutic engagement with symptoms, then, is effective only insofar as it returns us to the formlessness of anxiety that the symptom, in its contained particularity, would deny. Schelling insists that in reading mythology we are not recovering some concealed truth: the interpretation of mythology demands a re-appropriation—a reliving—of the trauma that continues to threaten our stability and to spur our development. If mythology is both the history and the enactment of an emerging consciousness, this is because consciousness itself is a symptom of irreducible, conflicting desires for union and separation, for projection and identification, revelation and concealment. In Schelling’s example of the successive polytheism of the Greeks—from Uranus through Kronos to Zeus—we find a literal expression of Freud’s psychic processes of development: the vomiting up of the son is the primordial projection or creation, the swallowing a bodily identification, and castration a physical separation. History—or the development of the individual through trauma and anxiety—is a working out of the boundaries between being and meaning, between the physical and the psychical.

When history and consciousness are conceived of in this way, the pre-historical and the unconscious need to be understood as essentially without boundary; anxiety arises in the excess of an undifferentiated totality that is always also an unbearable need,
a self-seeking. This need, which Freud calls the wish, is the contradictory essence of the unconscious. The wish is directed at eliminating difference—the tension between desire and satisfaction—but the wish is itself the primal division. This central conflict that defines the unconscious, this struggle between non-differentiation and separation that is already there in the wish, is transformed into the symptoms of an individual and the mythology of a people. Indeed, the very fact that there is mythology means that the unconscious continues to exist within higher levels of organization, that the pre-historical remains vital to the historical. For psychoanalysis, this means that the goal of therapy would be the “new development” of a function—of language and of consciousness—for acknowledging our most ancient and unrecognizable subjectivity. The temptation here is to imagine that there are unconscious “thoughts” that are identical to their potentially conscious counterparts, only temporarily or contingently inaccessible. But it is more fitting to say that symptoms—as symbols of conflict both within unconscious wishes and between varying levels of psychic organization—express a primal form of subjectivity. Psychoanalytic therapy is the process of individuation achieved through a return to more primitive forms of relating to ourselves and to reality. Psychoanalysis thus comes ever closer to the role Schelling gives philosophy in his lectures on mythology: the living force of the unconscious is essential to self-transformation or to becoming an authentic individual. And individuality is here understood as the health of the subject. It is a permeability and ambivalence rooted in our primal modes of responding to the world and making it our own.

Schelling’s account of the meaning of mythology suggests a similar notion of healthy regression, of a method of self-narration and a notion of history that opens truth
into the archaic. Mythology is the truthful expression of a people, the intimate self-reflection of the birth and development of consciousness from the unconscious. This is in fact quite close to Lear’s explanation of cathartic regression in psychoanalysis: the symptomatic return to infantile activities that initially constructed the boundaries between self and reality, processes like projection and identification, also embody a primitive theory of selfhood or subjectivity. Therapeutic interpretation is an attunement to the subjectivity these meaningful expressions belong to. Schelling’s interpretation of mythology is thus therapeutic because it brings us into contact with the beginnings of subjectivity and our most tenacious, founding fantasy: that the past remains fixed behind us, ensuring the self-certainty of presence and the continued familiarity of the future. But in reading mythology in this way, as a symptom that expresses conflicted desires, Schelling also exposes us to the disintegrative danger of interpretation—to a confrontation with the lack that existence disguises and the grounding anxiety that consciousness harbors within itself.

Acting as signal and disguise, a memory that is also a forgetting, mythology shares the dual structure of the symptom—at once evidence of a deeper illness and the first painful step towards a cure. And it is because mythology is divided in this way that its interpretation must be more than an explanation of its emergence—its history

---

208 See Markus Gabriel’s essay “The Mythological Being of Reflection” in Mythology, Madness and Laughter, for a sustained and fruitful discussion of the central role of mythology in Schelling and for a provocative distinction between constitutive and regulative mythology (p. 66).

209 At the metaphysical level, mythologizing is thus a form of cure for certain Kantian limitations. Goudeli says something quite similar: “His suggestion [in AW] seems to be that, when we think of the unconditioned, we do not necessarily reach impenetrable dead ends; instead, we can create stories, myths and surmises, which are certainly full of antinomies and paradoxes, but nonetheless, we can do it endlessly. For man himself is part of the ‘unconditioned’ in the moments of his reenactment of the act of creation, in the special experiences where man regenerates the paradox of life and death that permeates his own mode of being. Man’s ‘nexus of living forces’, imagination, reason, creativity are but moments in the paradoxical unity of the history of becoming” (p. 124).
more than the inert result of what came before. Early on Freud recognizes that merely explaining the significance of a symptom to its sufferer does not succeed therapeutically; its meaning must be grasped by the analysand in a particular way—it must become his own. The insufficiency of merely “giving” the meaning of a symptom in therapeutic practice suggests two related ramifications that apply to Schelling’s reading of mythology: 1) a symptom is more than the effect of discrete events that lead to its formation and 2) in order for it to be therapeutic, an interpretation requires more than explanation. The symptom (and the interpretation of it) not only belong to a subjectivity which, by its very nature, is historical; it is also the case that the form the symptom takes is itself a mode—albeit a regressive one—of historicizing; it is an expression of a subjectivity that goes through the trauma of temporalization, a coagulation of primal anxiety that shapes the past and protects us from the alterity of the future. The symptom is duplicitous once more—simultaneously a narration of and defense against the past. Such strange expression betrays the anxiety at the heart of mythology—a history of emergence that also is the emergence of history.

Insofar as mythology is a memory of temporalization itself, it cannot simply belong to the past. It is rather like the symptom, which only appears external to the subjectivity it disturbs. Indeed, it is the peculiarity of being experienced by the sufferer as an alien, meaningless affliction that marks the inhibition or perversion of a function as a symptom. In order to relieve the symptom, the sufferer must approach it as a mode of self-understanding. Thus psychoanalytic treatment, no less than Schelling’s interpretation of mythology, requires a certain vulnerability: a re-opening of the borders of subjectivity so that we might come to acknowledge the symptom as our own, as a meaningful

expression of the foreignness and familiarity of the past. Schelling maintains that truly engaging with mythology demands disintegration—a depth of questioning that extends to our most fundamental sense of the limits of self and world. Such interpretive vulnerability does not necessarily signal the corrosion of illness or psychosis: to interpret mythology as a symptom is also to light up the world and our subjectivity in a particular way—to develop a sensitivity to and reverence for the uncanniness of existence. In this way, Schelling’s interpretation of mythology inaugurates a radical rethinking of what it means for something to be true. Mythology draws us into the reciprocity of subject and interpretation, returning us to the therapeutic unity between our being and the sense we make of it.

At this point, where existence and interpretation converge, I would like to make some concluding remarks concerning an essential Schellingian theme that might seem to have only a limited place in the scope of this dissertation: the imagination. The kind of truth that I have tried to suggest is bound up with psychoanalysis and with Schelling’s philosophy—and furthermore the possibility of becoming available to such a truth—has everything to do with a certain conception of creative imagination or fantasy, and particularly in regards to self-understanding. If I have tended to use these terms interchangeably, and focused more on fantasy, I would like to take the time now to defend that choice. The ambiguity that characterizes imagination in the Kantian tradition, between passivity (receptivity) and activity (productivity), is maintained in the Freudian use of fantasy; furthermore, both imagination (Einbildung) and fantasy (Phantasie) can suggest a paradoxically immaterial materiality. That is, the language denotes the brute physicality of a picture (Bild) or appearance (from the Greek phantasia), while at the
same time gesturing at the difference between what is emphatically real and what is merely imagined. That is, imagination is differentiated from sensation on account of the absence of an empirical object, but is itself an activity of bringing to presence. As John Sallis puts it so succinctly in *The Gathering of Reason*,

Consequently, imagination as the power of intuiting an object without its presence, of intuiting an absent object, involves making present something which is and remains in another regard absent. Even at this elementary level imagination inaugurates a certain play of presence and absence, a gathering into presence. And because it makes something present, imagination cannot be merely passive (as sense is); it is an active stem within sensibility, within passivity in general. Inaugurating a play of presence and absence, imagination installs itself as a play of activity and passivity, as activity within passivity (p. 147).

Sallis’s reading of the Kantian imagination is of course compatible with Heidegger’s remarks in his *Kantbuch*, where the latter emphasizes the creative power and ambivalent space of the imagination in terms of the formation of “the horizon of objectivity as such” (p. 138). It is worth noting, however, that Heidegger immediately goes on to point out that while the imagination can be productive in this sense, it is so only with respect to the production of a “possible object” and that the realization of such an object is “never accomplished by the imagination itself” (p.137). Given Sallis’s point about the play of the imagination between presence and absence, however, the very notion of production—of relating possibility to its realization—must be revisited. Indeed, this is precisely the space in which Schelling developed his account of intellectual intuition: while imagination cannot by itself will a particular empirical object into existence, this does not exclude the possibility of a self-productive subject. If we take seriously the idea that there is no “objective” reality beneath our meaningful engagements with it, a claim I have

---

suggested that both Schelling and Freud put forth in their own manners, this productive imagination would have some far-reaching consequences.

So while I would not want to collapse imagination into fantasy, my preference for the latter term in large part derives from its unique place in psychoanalysis. That is, I believe we are better able to grasp Schelling’s account of the productive imagination as a departure from the Kantian tradition—as an activity that weaves together the potencies of nature with the personalities of man and God—if we think of it in terms of the unconscious. In contemporary English usage, imagination tends to be tied up with conscious creativity while fantasy, in large part due to our Freudian inheritance, connotes the unconscious desires, complexes and forms of thinking and feeling that put pressure on familiar narrative arcs and traditional logical and temporal structures. Whereas the freedom of the Kantian imagination is generally reduced to a certain form of schematic “spontaneity” that is organized and subdued through the understanding, Schelling confronts us with the uncanny aspect of imagination—which I call fantasy—and its vulnerable, excessive freedom.

So while much important work has been (and I’m sure will continue to be) done on the philosophy of imagination—including an interrogation of the ambivalence between the appearance and that which appears, unity and multiplicity, passivity and activity—my own contribution in this project has a slightly different, though hardly unrelated, emphasis. My interest in the convergence of Schelling’s metaphysics and Freudian psychoanalysis concerns the uncanny space of the boundary—and insofar as

---

this boundary, like the truth that it embodies, ought to remain non-objective, it would confuse the matter to introduce the problematic of the image as such and, furthermore, to assume the unified subject that the Kantian *Einbildung* can imply. In the German, *Einbildung* suggests a process of unification/formation that, I would say, threatens to conceal the equally powerful process of dislocation/dissolution that is as much at the heart of the ambivalent reality I have tried to develop here. Indeed, as Kyriaki Goudeli points out in *Challenges to German Idealism*, the Kantian imagination that Schelling takes up and rearticulates can be seen to run aground on precisely this point:

```
Furthermore, the requirement of the static, formal identity of the self excludes the possibility of dreams, visions, or any states where the subject does not recognize in them its continuing and absolutely same ego—in fact, states which, as will be seen in the following chapters, may lead to even deeper levels of self-consciousness. Instead, according to Kant, these states do not count at all as synthesized representations but as mere ineffable glances, and ultimately as irrational ones; the formal unity of the self excludes the possibility of any sense of break, loss or change of its pure abiding identity (p. 31)
```

The advantage in working with the concept of fantasy, then, comes in part from the broader psychoanalytic implementation of a subjectivity grounded in dislocation—in precisely those moments of break, loss and “ineffable glances” that Kant could not or would not contend with. Indeed, Freud’s wide-ranging applications of the term “fantasy” speak to its dual capacity to cover over and let be seen the disruptions that constitute and disturb identity—to speak and to withhold the truth and to reconfigure and bring to light the limits between self and world. The acknowledgment of unconscious fantasies, no less than the interpretation of dreams, is an act of creativity; the fantasies are not there fully formed, to be retrieved and put aside, but exist as a negotiation of the limit between what we have been and how we choose to be—or, as Kant might have put it, as a decision that
lies outside of time. Fantasy, as Freud reminds us, is the ineradicable root and motor of memory and perception. Fantasy is thus the act of self/world-constitution, at the most concrete level, while imagination was so for Kant only theoretically.

With respect to this essentially liminal, uncanny character of fantasy, where spatio-temporal reality confronts its Other, Kristeva writes in *Time and Sense*:

The fantasy makes the unconscious into a narrative. As a result, when the outside-time of the unconscious is named and recounted, it acquires a meaning, a goal, and a value. The fantasy, along with the dream narrative, becomes a narration torn between the atemporality of the unconscious and the forward-moving flight of the story. The fantasy is the novel that Freud asked his patients to bring him. As opposed to the neurotic, who is afraid and ashamed of his fantasies, and the pervert, who acts them out meticulously without being disturbed by what they mean, the analysand is invited to do with words what the pervert does with things (and with people who are reduced to mere things). He is invited to stage his unconscious...[t]he fantasy is at the boundary between the outside-time space of the unconscious (which threatens to consume it by depriving it of words in order to direct it toward drives and acts) and the haste of narration (which is the hero’s seduction of his victim and narrator’s seduction of his addressee) (*The Portable Kristeva*, p. 130).

Kristeva locates fantasy as a temporalizing moment—as that which appears only in its resistance to the conceptual framing through which it is realized. Its therapeutic import derives as much from the empathetic collaboration between analyst and analysand—their mutual *production*—as it does from its value in developing a personal, interpretive rubric. My intention is thus not to disavow the role of the imagination, in either Schelling or Freud, but rather to insist on a reading that focuses more precisely on its therapeutic and even existential possibilities. The connection between freedom and fantasy that I have attempted to draw out of Freud in particular, our ability to acknowledge the fluidity of our past and to rearticulate our founding prophecies, depends upon a conception of a subject whose truth is not concealed in or deluded by fantasy, but rather enlivened and
continually renewed by it. For Schelling as well, the redemptive and tragic possibilities of personality are dependent upon our availability to a radically non-objective truth: to a hopeful, albeit insecure, self-knowledge. This strong sense of freedom—a belief in authentic self-creation—is in no way a naïve, Romantic artifact but remains essential to any genuinely philosophical account of the reality and experience of subjectivity.

Indeed, the emphasis on mythology and tragedy can be seen as not only naïve but, in fact, quite dangerous: looking to Nietzsche’s project in The Birth of Tragedy, which in many ways articulates the convergence of Schelling’s and Freud’s thought, and therein the convergence of the sublime and the uncanny, we remember the threatening aspect of inaugurating or recalling the mythology of a people. I would suggest, however, that we would do well to remember Heidegger’s appropriation of Hölderlin’s line from Patmos here: “But where danger is/grows the saving power also”. That is, I believe that both Freud and Schelling rely on a cure that always also endangers us—that disintegration, evil and illness are necessary moments of freedom, goodness and health. Salvation, no less than damnation, is subject to finitude. As Nietzsche tells us so succinctly, the Dionysian is in no way fully separable from the Apollinian—our identity is inextricably linked to our utter diffusion, form and reason bound to chaos and desire.

To return briefly to Freud, this precarious balance between reason and desire is perhaps best approached through his late, and relatively obscure paper “The Loss of

---

217 “Of this foundation of all existence—the Dionysian basic ground of the world—not one whit more may enter the consciousness of the human individual than can be overcome again by his Apollinian power of transfiguration. Thus these two art drives must unfold their powers in a strict proportion, according to the law of eternal justice. Where the Dionysian powers rise up as impetuously as we experience them now, Apollo, too, must already have descended among us, wrapped in a cloud; and the next generation will probably behold his most ample beautiful effects” (p. 144). Friedrich Nietzsche, Basic Writings of Nietzsche. Ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: The Modern Library, 2000).
Reality in Neurosis and Psychosis” (1924). Insofar as we have, along with Loewald, suggested that there is a certain neurotic restraint at work in Freud’s metapsychology, it is perhaps worthwhile to address the role of psychosis in expanding the psychoanalytic worldview. While I do not want to collapse the Apollinian into the neurotic, nor the Dionysian into the psychotic, it is still useful to understand the ways in which these are always and everywhere intertwined—the ways in which, that is, reality itself must be comprised of both psychotic and neurotic elements. Freud writes in this paper, “Both neurosis and psychosis are thus the expression of a rebellion on the part of the id against the external world, of its unwillingness—or, if one prefers, its incapacity—to adapt itself to the exigencies of reality, to Ananke [Necessity]” (p. 185). Notably, Freud’s language here becomes tragic, as he argues that the necessity characterizing reality is fundamentally at odds with the wild freedom of the id. The dichotomy between neurosis and psychosis that in a sense stabilizes his metapsychology is undone, as Freud recognizes that the irreducible alterity of the id cannot but expand and disturb the order of reality.

What I would really like to point to, however, is not so much the contrast between “id” and “reality”, or “freedom” and “necessity”, that is expressed in neurotic and psychotic formations but rather what Freud understands by the “loss of reality”. My sense is that Schelling’s understanding of freedom, of the choice between good and evil, in large part rests on a similar conception of reality lost and gained. One way to view this loss is in terms of limits that define truth and fantasy, inner and outer, self and other; rather than any particular aspect of reality that might be distorted, denied and replaced, the loss of reality indicates an utter vulnerability and disintegration that indeed

---

characterizes the psychotic that suffers from it. While Freud struggles to maintain a reality that lies apart from the threat of its dissolution or transformation, Schelling allows us a way to shore up this reality precisely because of this threat. If we look back at Schelling’s account of evil and love in the *Freiheitsschrift*, we see that it is only in the pulsation of disintegration and creation, in the letting go of limits in order to realize them more fully, that love can manifest itself. In other words, it is only in loosening our grip on reality that we come closest to its truth. To cite Nietzsche again, the great thinker of psychotic reality,

> He beholds the transfigured world of the stage and nevertheless denies it. He sees the tragic hero before him in epic clearness and beauty, and nevertheless rejoices in his annihilation. He comprehends the action deep down, and yet likes to flee into the incomprehensible. He feels the actions of the hero to be justified, and is nevertheless still more elated when these actions annihilate their agent. He shudders at the sufferings which will befall the hero, and yet anticipates in them a higher, much more overpowering joy. He sees more extensively and profoundly than ever, and yet wishes he were blind (*The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 131).

It is in holding together impinging *presence* with the equally powerful and disruptive *withdrawal* that we glimpse reality. This is the essence of tragic vision, Nietzsche tells us, that can take seriously the world of necessity and appearance while simultaneously embracing its impermanence:

> Those who have never had the experience of having to see at the same time that they also longed to transcend all seeing will scarcely be able to imagine how definitely and clearly these two processes coexist and are felt at the same time, as one contemplates the tragic myth (p. 140).

One of my hopes for this project is that it might gesture at how the intimacy between freedom and evil in Schelling, and between therapy and trauma in Freud, remains relevant to current and impending crises in philosophy. Particularly in light of the ways
in which science and philosophy appear at odds in the modern academy, and yet so clearly converge again in areas of research like neuroscience and phenomenology, questions of how the unconscious and our experience of self come together are more pertinent than ever. Part of what becomes apparent here is a much-needed reevaluation of the dichotomy between the subjective and the objective (which is so easily reified in the opposition between the “humanities” and the “sciences”). That is, as I have tried to suggest, Schelling and Freud teach us to expand our ideas of “objectivity” to include modes of experience that require a different form of knowledge—a knowledge more dependent on empathetic engagement, hope, despair and vulnerability; and on developing a certain sensitivity to the uncanny, the mythological, the psychotic and the sublime. If the trend has been for academics to focus on narrower and narrower issues within the history of philosophy, I will consider it no small contribution to return to the “big” questions and concerns that might yet reach beyond professional journals and university classrooms.


   ---. *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987


    ---. *Must We Mean What We Say?* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976.


