THE THEOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF F.W.J. SCHELLING'S THEORY OF SYMBOLIC LANGUAGE

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DPhil Thesis in Theology, Trinity Term 2010

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Short Abstract

In this thesis I examine Schelling's construction of symbolic language in §73 of his *Philosophie der Kunst*. I approach this construction in three ways. First, I compare Schellingian symbolic language to other contemporary theories of the symbol and language (in particular, those of Goethe, Kant and A.W. Schlegel). While Schelling's theory of symbolic language possesses properties similar to these other theories (the identity of being and meaning, organic wholeness, the co-existence of opposites), I show that it differs in how they are interpreted.

Second, I excavate the metaphysical and epistemological principles from Schelling's philosophy of the period which underlie this theory of language. Three tenets from the *Identitätssystem* (as it is called) are crucial: formation, quantitative differentiation and construction. They illuminate *why* Schelling interprets symbolic language very differently to his contemporaries.

Third, I consider the theological significance of Schellingian symbolic language. This significance is twofold. First, his theory gives rise to a conception of discourse *without reference*, and so to the notion of a *theology without reference*. On this basis, Schelling criticises Christian theology for remaining too concerned with referring to God, when what is at stake is rather the degree of intensity to which it *produces* God. Theology therefore stands in need of reformation. Second, the way in which theology is utilised by Schelling in order to construct symbolic language in §73 of the *Philosophie der Kunst* itself provides a model for reformed theological practice. I argue that Schelling conceives of traditional theology as material for intensifying the production of God. In this way, an 'absolute theology' is engendered which has no concern for reference or for the integrity of the theological tradition.

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Long Abstract

If F.W.J. Schelling's significance for theological thought is generally under-appreciated, this is true of nothing more than the *Identitätssystem* he worked on between 1801 and 1805. His *Identitätssystem* often seems to be relegated to a transitional phase in a transitional philosopher's oeuvre. This thesis is therefore devoted to exploring the theological dimensions of the *Identitätssystem*. In particular, I concentrate on one single section from Schelling's lectures on the *Philosophie der Kunst* (§73) in which he constructs a theory of symbolic language. In this specific section, I contend, much of Schelling's engagement with theological issues is either explicit or implicit. It is here Schelling builds the foundations for his idea of an absolute theology which is used as a standard to criticise past and present theological practice. It is also here that Schelling brings in theological vocabularies and concepts in order to dramatise how absolute theology should in fact be practiced. §73 therefore forms a microcosm of Schelling's engagement with theology between 1801 and 1805.

In consequence, the task I undertake in this thesis is to understand Schelling's construction of symbolic language in §73 of the *Philosophie der Kunst* – and especially its theological dimensions. In order to achieve this task, I approach this section in a number of ways. I consider in turn: its contemporary context, its place in the *Identitätssystem* as a whole and its theological import. My argument therefore accumulates over the thesis: I first contextualise §73 in terms of other contemporary theories of symbolic language. In the second part of the thesis, I excavate its underlying metaphysical and epistemological tenets from Schelling's philosophy of the period. Third, I give a commentary on the crucial passages in question from the *Philosophie der Kunst*. And then only in the fourth part do I explicitly

turn to theological issues arising from my description of Schelling's construction of symbolic language.

The above describes the purpose and structure of the thesis; in what follows, I summarise my argument. Schellingian symbolic language possesses the same properties as all other theories of symbolic language during the *Goethezeit*. It unifies being and meaning (or signifier and signified) and so, in consequence, there is nothing external to which it need refer; thus it also exhibits organic self-sufficiency. However, where Schellingian symbolic language differs from other contemporary theories is in the interpretation it gives these properties. Two such differences in interpretation are crucial: first, Schelling interprets the union of being and meaning as an absolute identity, so there is no longer any distinction between the two; second, he interprets the self-sufficient wholeness of the symbol along the lines of a rational argument which contains its own premises, rather than an empirically perceived object (which is the more typical interpretation).

The reason why Schellingian symbolic language is peculiar in its interpretation is because it is rigorously derived from his *Identitätssystem*, which is, in turn, a unique philosophical system. There are three unique metaphysical and epistemological principles from the *Identitätssystem* which feed into his interpretation of symbolic language. First, since reality, according to Schelling, is a completely immanent realm, all that exists does so in the same way – and this is *as formed*. On this basis, Schelling advocates the ineluctability of formation. Second, Schelling is a monist in respect to essence, so there is only one, identical essence to all things. What is more, forms do not differ qualitatively either, but only quantitatively, so ultimately all that differentiates entities is the quantity or intensity of essence each form produces. Schelling's theory of the potencies is founded on this doctrine of quantitative differentiation. Third, Schelling's epistemology is dominated by the trope of construction: all reality self-constructs as ideas or *Darstellungen*.

In consequence, Schelling defines symbols as the most intense *Darstellungen*. They are forms of reality in which essence is manifest in the maximum possible amount. They differ in this respect from allegory and schemata which manifest essence to a lesser extent,

and so are inferior forms of symbolism. On this basis, Schellingian symbolic language differs from standard interpretations: just as in metaphysical terms essence is fully contained in form for Schelling, so too in linguistic terms meaning is fully contained in being. Meaning and being are therefore utterly identical. Moreover, Schelling's epistemological commitment to construction means that symbolic language is modelled on a constructive process of production – it is not a natural object passively waiting to be perceived, but a self-contained activity.

The theological consequences of this are twofold. First, Schelling's absolute commitment to the identity of being and meaning means that there is no longer any room for reference (or any kind of signification) in his conception of language. Reference is therefore eliminated from his understanding of scientific discourse as well. Schelling establishes the ideal of a science – and more particularly, a theology – without reference. Second, Schelling's emphasis on the constructive activity of symbolisation gives rise to the idea of 'symbolic practices' which are needed to transform phenomena into symbols.

Schelling tests theology, past and present, against his ideal of a theology without reference and finds it lacking. Theology has failed to live up to this standard, because it too often treats God as the ultimate reference of thought, an object of infinite meaning. Schelling rejects this strand of Christianity (and with it, perhaps, Christianity *tout court*). In consequence, theology stands in need of reformation, and it is symbolic practices which are invoked to bring this about. Schelling recommends a number of symbolic practices (like artistic creation, participating in a church and *Naturphilosophie*) so as to make theology more symbolic. A theology that has undergone these practices will become an 'absolute theology', Schelling claims. I concentrate on one symbolic practice which is geared towards the becoming absolute of theological language in particular. The absolute theologian, I argue, needs to assimilate various forms of language from all sciences in order to increase the intensity of theology's form. Absolute theology thus consists in experimentation with eclectic, appropriated forms.

What is more, I argue that §73 of the *Philosophie der Kunst* provides the model for this process of assimilation. The way in which theology is utilised by Schelling to construct symbolic language in §73 is exemplary of reformed theological practice. Specifically, the concepts and phrases imported from the *Logosmystik* tradition dramatise clearly the way in which theology can intensify its form and so become absolute. Therefore, Schelling's *Identitätssystem* itself, and in particular §73, is the best candidate for what is meant by absolute theology. §73 of the *Philosophie der Kunst* both theorises and performs Schellingian absolute theology.

CONTENTS

References …11

Chapter One Introduction …13

PART ONE THEORIES OF SYMBOLIC LANGUAGE IN THE *GOETHEZEIT*

Chapter Two The Symbol in the *Goethezeit* …29

Chapter Three Language in the *Goethezeit* …67

PART TWO THE *IDENTITÄTSSYSTEM*

Chapter Four The Symbol and the *Identitätssystem* …105

Chapter Five Schelling's Metaphysics …121

Chapter Six Quantitative Differentiation …157

Chapter Seven Construction …191

PART THREE SCHELLING'S CONSTRUCTION OF SYMBOLIC LANGUAGE

Chapter Eight §39 of the *PdK* …223

Chapter Nine Language in the *Identitätssystem* …257

Chapter Ten §73 of the *PdK* …281

PART FOUR THEOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS

Chapter Eleven Science without Reference …303

Chapter Twelve The Becoming Absolute of Theology …335

REFERENCES

Schelling Citations of Schelling's works will include two references: the first to the German original; the second to the English translation (where available). Two abbreviations will be used for the German editions:

SW F.W.J. Schelling, *Werke*. 14 volumes. Edited by K.F.A. Schelling. Stuttgart: Cotta, 1856-61.

SB F.W.J. Schelling, *Briefe und Dokumente*. 3 volumes. Edited by Horst Fuhrmans. Bonn: Bouvier, 1962-75.

Goethe Citations of Goethe's works are likewise twofold: the first to the German original; the second to the English translation (where available). The exception is for citations from Goethe's *Maximen und Reflectionen* where the aphorism number alone will be given. Two abbreviations will be used:

WA J.W. Goethe, *Werke: Weimarer Ausgabe*. Edited by Sophie von Sachsen. 5 Reihen, 133 volumes. Weimar: Böhlau, 1887-1919.

M J. W. Goethe, *Maxims and Reflections*. Edited by Peter Hutchinson. Translated by Elisabeth Stopp. London: Penguin, 1998.

Kant All citations will be to English translations of Kant's works. However, page references (as is conventional) will be to the German *Akademie* edition, except in the case of the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* where they will be to the A and B editions.

All translations are my own whenever the sole reference for a work is a non-English language publication.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This thesis argues that Schelling's construction of symbolic language in §73 of his *Philosophie der Kunst* [*PdK*] is theologically significant. This section forms a key part of Schelling's *Identitätssystem* (his philosophical project undertaken between 1801 and 1805) and, what is more, *reveals its theological potential*. Both the theory of language Schelling lays out in §73 and the manner in which he so lays it out contribute to the formulation of a new ideal for the practice of theology.

In order to argue for this theological potential, I need to pursue two lines of thought in the first half of the thesis. First, I place Schelling's construction of symbolic language in the context of other theories of the symbol and of language in the *Goethezeit*.[1] I do this so as to delineate the conceptual background out of which Schelling's own theory emerged, but also, more importantly, to sketch the dominant preconceptions against which Schelling reacts. In this way, I hope to indicate the uniqueness of his position. Second, I place Schelling's construction of symbolic language in the context of the metaphysical and epistemological principles of the *Identitätssystem* as a whole, and thereby show how what is radical in this philosophical project in general translates into what is radical in §73 of the *PdK*. It is only after this twofold contextualisation in the first half of the thesis that I then turn to Schelling's theory of symbolic language and its theological dimensions. Explicit theological engagement is the last piece of the puzzle which depends on everything that has preceded it.

[1] I use the underdetermined term, *Goethezeit*, to describe this period of German thought, since the labels, 'Idealism', 'Romanticism' and 'Classicism' all suggest an artificial separation between Schelling and (for example) Goethe or A.W. Schlegel.

The present chapter introduces the key terms, contexts and arguments of the thesis. It is split into three parts: first, I situate §73 of the *PdK* in terms of Schelling's philosophical trajectory; second, I unpack two areas of theological significance §73 possesses in order to give the reader some preliminary idea about where the argument is heading; finally, I summarise the structure of the following chapters.

1.1 The *Identitätssystem*

The *PdK* is a lecture course central to Schelling's philosophical project between the years 1801 and 1805 (the *Identitätssystem*).[2] One of the secondary aims of this thesis is to give an account of this *Identitätssystem*, since there is so little engagement with this period of Schelling's work even among Schelling scholars.[3] Beiser has claimed,

> For all too long [Schelling] has been treated as a predecessor to others, 'an intermediate figure' between Kant and Hegel… [Historians] value Schelling essentially as a stepping-stone for later developments. Schelling is rarely taken as a figure in his own right, deserving close examination for his own sake. (2002 465)

Yet, if this is true, then the *Identitätssystem* is merely a transitional phase in a transitional philosopher's oeuvre. In Part Two of this thesis, I argue, on the contrary,

[2] The name '*Identitätssystem*' was only used once by Schelling in the Preface to the 1801 *Darstellung* (*SW* 4:113; 2001a 348). He later came to regret that this particular name stuck (*SW* 10:107; 1994c 120). (For the abbreviations used in my citation of Schelling's writings, see the note at the beginning of the thesis.)

[3] In English, only Vater's essays (1976, 1984, 2000) and the last 100 pages of Beiser 2002 are worth reading. The situation is hardly any better in Germany: one has to return to Zeltner's work (for example, 1975) for the last high-profile consideration of the *Identitätssystem* as such. Only in France (the spiritual home of Schelling scholarship since 1970) is there a plethora of sustained engagements with the *Identitätssystem*.

that the *Identitätssystem* should not be valued merely because of what came before or what came after it, but on its own terms.

1.1.1 The Light of 1801

The *Identitätssystem* begins at "the moment", Schelling describes retrospectively, "when the light burst upon me in philosophy, in 1801" (*SB* 3:222). It is this moment – the moment marked, as Schelling continues, by the publication of his *Darstellung meines System* in May 1801 – which is the decisive one of his philosophical career. The 'light' of 1801 marks the beginning of the *Identitätssystem*, the philosophical project which he pursued for five years from 1801 to 1805. Although it would be too much to claim that Schelling's position during this period remains identical, it is clear that he considered his work of this period as a unified whole and I shall treat it as such in this thesis.[4]

Schelling was 26 years old in May 1801 and had already been publishing philosophy for seven years. This early work prior to 1801 should be seen as a creative apprenticeship to Fichte. It begins in 1794 with his first publication, *Über die Möglichkeit einer Form der Philosophie überhaupt*, and culminates in his famous *System des transcendentalen Idealismus* of 1800. Despite the fact that today the *System des transcendentalen Idealismus* is still taken as most representative of Schellingian philosophy, Schelling himself always maintained that it was written "under the exterior [*Hülle*] of Fichtean thinking" (*SW* 10:96; 1994c 111). It was his next major work – the 1801 *Darstellung meines System* – that Schelling considered the inaugural piece of his philosophical maturity. Beiser writes,

[4] The periodisation of Schelling's philosophy is a particularly contentious issue. For a very different assessment to mine, see Grant 2006 4.

> With the *Darstellung meines Systems* Schelling finally comes into his own. True to its title, this work represents *his* philosophy in contrast to Fichte's… [He] made it plain that he was no longer toeing a master's line. If the possessive adjective in the title was not a formal act of repudiation, it was still a declaration of independence. (2002 551)

The end of the *Identitätssystem* is less clear-cut. The years 1805 to 1808 mark Schelling's slow retreat into philosophical silence. When he did emerge from that silence in 1809 with the publication of the *Freiheitsschrift*, it was with a very different philosophical voice and very different concerns. The *Freiheitsschrift* marks the beginning of a different philosophical trajectory (Schelling's 'middle period'). Where exactly to draw the line marking the end of the *Identitätssystem* is therefore debatable; in this thesis, I have assumed that, since after 1805 Schelling did not reaffirm the metaphysical principles on which the *Identitätssystem* is based, then (even if he did not conversely explicitly reject them) this serves as a convenient moment to mark the end of the *Identitätssystem*.[5]

1.1.2 The *PdK* and Other Works

The major works of the *Identitätssystem* can be listed as follows:

1801	*Darstellung meines System der Philosophie*
1802	*Bruno*
	Fernere Darstellungen aus dem System der Philosophie
	Über das Verhältnis der Naturphilosophie zur Philosophie überhaupt
	Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Natur (second edition)

[5] *During* 1805, on the other hand, Schelling is at pains to "affirm afresh" the metaphysics of the 1801 *Darstellung* (*SW* 7:114; 1984b 246).

1803	*Vorlesungen über die Methode des akademischen Studiums*[6]
	Über die Construktion in der Philosophie
1804	*System* (published posthumously)
	Philosophie und Religion
1805	*Aphorismen zur Einleitung in die Naturphilosophie*

All these works will figure prominently in the present thesis.[7]

However, at the centre of this thesis stand Schelling's lectures on the *Philosophie der Kunst* [*PdK*], for in §73 of this work Schelling gives his construction of symbolic language. Schelling gave these lectures first at the University of Jena in the winter semester 1802/3 and subsequently at the University of Würzburg in the winter semester 1804/5. They were only published posthumously by Schelling's son from the surviving lecture notes in 1859. It will be important to bear in mind in what follows that Schelling did not prepare them for publication, and, in fact, later in life requested that the manuscript be intentionally lost.[8] Portions of the Jena lecture course were also published by Schelling at the time: the last lecture of his 1803 *Über die Methode* is a reproduction of the introduction to the *PdK* and a short essay which appeared in the *Kritische Journal*, *Über Dante in philosophischer Beziehung*, replicates sections on Dante from the lecture notes.

Such then is the textual context to Schelling's construction of symbolic language. In the next section, I introduce the theological dimensions of §73 of the *PdK* – that is, I indicate the conclusions towards which my argument is heading.

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[6] In what follows, I refer to this work as *Über die Methode*.

[7] Another work to which I refer is I.P.V. Troxler's notes (1988) on a lecture course on metaphysics Schelling gave in Jena in late 1801.

[8] See Tilliette 1999 152. The *SW* version of the *PdK* is certainly based on the Würzburg set of lectures (*SW* 5:xvi); the difference between the Würzburg *PdK* and the Jena *PdK* can easily be perceived from comparing this version to the notes made by Henry Crabb Robinson (1976) in Jena.

1.2 The Goal of the Thesis

1.2.1 Hyper-Cratylism

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, during the initial rise of poststructuralism, 'theology' became a theoretical insult.[9] One of the many reasons for such an anti-theological tendency in French theory of the time was theology's supposed subscription to 'Cratylism'.[10] Like the eponymous hero of Plato's *Cratylus*, theology was accused of conceiving the signifier/signified relation in language as a *motivated* one.[11] That is, theologians (supposedly) thought that the word 'state', for example, had a natural, objective relation to one specific form of state (monarchy). This is the basis of *ideology*: one form of political structure is privileged as the evident, obvious manifestation of politics. 'State' just means monarchy, because 'that is how the world is'.[12] In consequence, the critique of ideology presupposes the critique of Cratylism which in turn results in the critique of theology.

However – as they soon realised – poststructuralists of the period were a little too quick in their identification of theology and Cratylism. For (in the Christian and Jewish traditions, at least) there are two accounts of the origin (and so nature) of language: Genesis 2 *and* Genesis 11. While the prelapsarian language of Adam has, it is true, often been interpreted cratylically (as comprising the *proper* or *real* names for entities), the Fall of language described in the tower of Babel episode is usually read as a corruption of this innocent condition. On the one hand, language is indeed

[9] See, for example, references to 'theology' in Kristeva 1974.
[10] Genette 1976, Barthes 1994 2:1368-76.
[11] See especially Plato 1963a 383a. The terms 'signifier' and 'signified' have a rather rarefied meaning in post-Saussurean linguistics (Saussure 1966 65-7); however, in order to draw comparisons between twentieth-century views on language and those of the *Goethezeit*, I will use the terms in a broad manner in this thesis to refer to the 'being of language' and the 'meaning of language', respectively. 'Motivation' is another Saussurean term which designates an objective, natural relation between signifier and signified (131).
[12] See further Chapter Eleven.

interpreted as motivated, but, on the other hand, this motivated relation is relegated to an unrecoverable golden age. *In actuality*, language is arbitrary and unmotivated. In consequence, theology has in fact exhibited two attitudes to language: nostalgia for natural language on the one hand and acceptance of the fallen condition of discourse on the other. It is this second attitude which is significant here: theologians realise that theology ineluctably occurs in a post-Babel situation amidst arbitrary, unmotivated signs. Crudely put, much theology has revolved around the issue of adequately describing God from such a corrupt starting point, capturing God's infinitude from a state of fallen finitude. It is precisely this kind of problem with which the apophatic and analogical traditions grappled.[13]

In fact, this was very quickly realised by late twentieth-century theorists: theologians, especially apophatic theologians, worked with the very same arbitrary signs as poststructuralists. What emerged during the 1980s, therefore, was an alliance (if a sometimes uneasy one) between late twentieth-century French theory and some strands of theology. Both were concerned with plundering the resources of unmotivated language for the sake of philosophical or theological insight.

* *

The above is of course an over-simplistic narrative; however, it does, I think, accurately convey one recent tendency: theory's stress on unmotivated language has drawn heavily on concepts and strategies from theology, and this has led to a relative neglect of alternative, *cratylic traditions*. One of the ultimate aims of this thesis is to remedy this neglect, providing a sustained consideration of the theological and

[13] Even if it is not *only* this kind of problem: for example, there is often scepticism over whether created being can refer to God adequately at all (i.e. setting aside the Fall).

theoretical potential of Cratylism by means of Schelling's construction of symbolic language.

There are, though, cogent reasons why Cratylism has fallen out of favour. As I mentioned earlier, it is ineradicably intertwined with ideology: it 'naturalises' certain states of affairs at the expense of others. Moreover, it is often a product of nostalgia for impossible origins (in this case, Adamic language). Schelling, I will argue, does *not* fall foul of such criticisms, and this is because to call Schelling's theory of language cratylic would be incorrect (he does not think the signifier/signified relation is motivated); rather (to coin a phrase), Schelling proposes a 'hyper-Cratylism'! That is, he criticises theories of both motivated *and* unmotivated signs for presupposing that signifier and signified are distinct. In respect to the motivated sign, it is assumed the two exist separately (so as to be related naturally); in respect to the unmotivated sign, the same is assumed (for the purpose of an arbitrary relation). According to Schelling, this separation distorts the truth, i.e. it distorts the absolute identity of signifier and signified. There is for Schelling no longer any signifier or any signified, solely the symbol. While it is due to a broadly cratylic impulse that Schelling makes this move, he goes beyond Cratylism: there is no longer a motivated relation at the heart of language; there is in fact no relation at all. All reference and signification is eliminated. This makes Schelling's theory of language as radical as anything offered in Western linguistics before or since. The elimination of reference also means that Schelling avoids the more pernicious aspects of Cratylism: there can be no 'naturalisation' of one referent above all others, because there is no referent whatsoever.

Schelling's hyper-Cratylism forms the subject matter of this thesis. I explore the resources the elimination of reference offer theology. Indeed, as we shall see, it is

theology in particular on which Schelling concentrates in this regard, because he contends that hyper-Cratylism offers both a critique of Christian thought's tendency to view God as the ultimate referent and also hope for a reformed theological practice.

1.2.2 The Equality of Philosophy and Theology

Certainly since Kant, theology has measured itself against philosophy. Philosophy has played the role of theology's twin and rival, against which the latter has tested its strength and through which it has uncovered its own weaknesses. Theology and philosophy have cultivated a 'special relationship' – their intimacy has made their squabbles all the more fierce.

Barber (2010) has identified four popular conceptions of the theology/philosophy relation in the twentieth century. First, philosophy has posited itself as the ground or condition of theology. Heidegger's *Phänomenologie und Theologie* is the classic statement of this view: theology is situated at the ontic level, philosophy at the ontological, so philosophy lays claim to a more fundamental mode of thinking. Second, in a reversal of the first view, theology is made the ground of philosophy. Theological traditions are primary and philosophy parasitic upon them. Proponents of the secularisation thesis tend to make claims to this effect. Third, theology is envisaged as the unthought remainder of philosophy: a thorn in the flesh which stimulates philosophers to greater insight. Finally, there is the post-liberal position resulting from a synthesis of Wittgensteinianism and Barthianism: theology and philosophy are incommensurable language-games and have nothing of interest to say to each other.

With the exception of the last view which refuses to countenance any relation between philosophy and theology whatsoever, these positions all share a *hierarchical*

mode of thinking. The relation between philosophy and theology is always modelled on a hierarchy through which one discipline is made superior to the other. A contest ensues wherein one tries to trump the other. Talk of the relation between theology and philosophy remains mired in the categories of superiority and inferiority. This hierarchical mode of thinking is not inevitable and attempts have often been made throughout the twentieth century to undermine it[14]; however, Barber is surely correct in diagnosing such hierarchy as predominant.

The same is true, moreover, of conceptions of the theology/philosophy relation in the *Goethezeit*.[15] One the one hand, there was the Jacobian, counter-modern claim that philosophy is nihilistic and can only be saved by theology; on the other hand, there was the common philosophical position (shared in different ways by Kant and Hegel – at least on standard readings) that theological language should be translated into conceptual language. Philosophy here completes theology: the confused and mythic discourse of theology needs to be reformulated into philosophical vocabulary in order to make its insights explicit and secure. Again, both these views are thoroughly enmeshed in adversarial thinking.

* *

A pressing question thus becomes: is *the equality of theology and philosophy* conceivable? My answer in this thesis is that it is and Schelling, I argue, provides the resources to conceive it. Schelling's *Identitätssystem* makes possible (even if it does not explicitly articulate) the equal treatment of theology and philosophy. Moreover, it

[14] The model of dialogue has been utilised most successfully in this regard. See, for example, Pattison 1998.
[15] Again, there are some *prima facie* exceptions: Schleiermacher, Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis, for example.

is in §73 of the *PdK* that this equality is dramatised. The interplay of philosophy and theology in this section is a clear illustration of how the two disciplines can be conceived as equal. In short, visible here is the fact that philosophy and theology (along with all other scientific disciplines) are equivalent *materials* to be plundered to express reality as intensely as possible. Schelling appropriates concepts from philosophy and from theology as resources for intensifying the manner in which his system articulates reality. Theology and philosophy are conceived non-hierarchically, because they are both employed in the same way *for the sake of something else*.

1.3 Structure

The above is a preliminary sketch of where my argument is heading. The evidence for these conclusions accumulates as I contextualise Schelling's construction of symbolic language first in terms of other, contemporary theories and second in terms of the metaphysical and epistemological principles underlying it. Only then in the second half of the thesis do I examine in a sustained manner the relevant sections from the *PdK* and their potential for theology.

Part One therefore focuses on other theories of language and the symbol formulated in the years leading up to Schelling's construction of symbolic language in late 1802. Chapter Two considers theories of the symbol, especially those of Kant, Goethe and A.W. Schlegel, so as (a) to delineate the parameters into which Schelling's own theory of the symbol must fit and (b) to sketch an interpretation of the symbol which was extremely dominant then and since (what I call, the 'romantic' interpretation) against which Schelling vehemently reacts. In Chapter Three, I turn to

the other element of symbolic language – language, and I outline the various traditions of linguistic thought which provide the context for Schelling's construction. For the most part my focus rests on other accounts of (or failures to account for) *symbolic* language in the *Goethezeit*.

It is worth pointing out at this point a lacuna in my thesis. I do not discuss Coleridge's theory of the symbol, for example, or Humboldt's theory of language, nor in Part Two do I consider Hegel's criticisms of Schelling's *Identitätssystem*. In fact, philosophical, theological and linguistic developments after 1805 are not discussed in this thesis at all. The reader may find this a somewhat frustrating lack, since the question 'how does this relate to X?' seems extremely pressing at many points. However, understanding Schelling's own thought (and the sources on which he drew) is the prime objective of my thesis, rather than complex comparisons with *later* thought.[16]

In Part Two, I examine Schelling's *Identitätssystem*, and so the metaphysical and epistemological principles underlying his construction of symbolic language. Chapter Four provides a brief justification of the strategies I employ in reading the *Identitätssystem*. Chapter Five looks in detail at the metaphysical foundations of the *Identitätssystem*. It rehearses Schelling's answer to the fundamental metaphysical question, 'in what does reality consist?'. Chapter Six concentrates on a much neglected, but central tenet of the *Identitätssystem* – quantitative differentiation. I use quantitative differentiation to elucidate the doctrine of the potencies (the *Potenzlehre*). In Chapter Seven, I turn to Schellingian epistemology and in particular his notion of construction. By focusing on construction, I consequently downplay the term usually seen as key to Schellingian epistemology – intuition.

[16] I also use the archaic masculine pronoun where today it would be inappropriate, so as to reflect standard practice at that time.

Part Three explores the key sections from the *PdK* in which Schelling constructs first the symbol in general and second symbolic language in particular. Chapter Eight is a detailed commentary on §39 of the *PdK* where Schelling constructs his notion of the symbol; I show how he here subverts and mutates previous theories of the symbol. In Chapter Nine, I turn to some of the more general questions concerning the status and role of language in Schelling's *Identitätssystem*. This chapter is preliminary to my more sustained engagement with Schellingian symbolic language in Chapter Ten. Chapter Ten itself is another detailed commentary, this time on §73 of the *PdK*. I bring all the arguments of the thesis to bear in attempting to fully describe the meaning, role and significance of the construction of symbolic language.

Part Four argues for the theological significance of the preceding exposition. In Chapter Eleven, I draw some general conclusions from Schelling's philosophy of language and transpose them into the domain of theological practice. I argue that (a) Schelling's views on language compel him to critique theology both past and present and consequently (b) Schelling sets about reforming theology. Finally, Chapter Twelve concentrates on a specific strategy Schelling practises to make theological language symbolic. It is here that the equality of philosophy and theology becomes clear: both are materials to be plundered to give rise to an 'absolute theology'.

This then is what the following chapters set out to do. They provide a cumulative argument for the theological significance of the construction of symbolic language Schelling undertakes in §73 of the *PdK*.[17]

[17] I would like to thank Pamela Sue Anderson, Jenny Bunker and Anthony Paul Smith for their comments. Most of all, I would like to express my thanks to George Pattison for all his support and advice throughout this research project.

PART ONE

THEORIES OF SYMBOLIC LANGUAGE IN THE *GOETHEZEIT*

CHAPTER TWO

THE SYMBOL IN THE *GOETHEZEIT*

Part One of this thesis is devoted to the context in which Schelling's construction of symbolic language takes place. The present chapter considers theories of the symbol written during the *Goethezeit*, prior to Schelling's own. I initially consider them historically, then from a synchronic viewpoint, examining in particular the essential properties of a symbol and the typical ways in which it was interpreted.

2.1 A Brief History of the Symbol

This initial section takes the form of a history of the term 'symbol' as it developed during the late eighteenth century. I am concerned in particular with Kant, Goethe and A.W. Schlegel's theories of the symbol and how they may have influenced Schelling's own thought.[1]

2.1.1 Meanings of 'Symbol' Prior to 1790

Before 1790, the modern notion of a symbol had yet to emerge. There are five pre-1790 resonances the term possessed.

1. Neoplatonism: In neoplatonism and early Christian theology, 'symbol' refers to a cipher for the divine. This usage remained entrenched within much Christian discourse. In eighteenth-century Germany, this mystical use of 'symbol' can be

[1] Sørensen 1963, 1972 remain the standard histories on which I draw.

found in the works of Franz Baader and J.G. Hamann[2], but – as we shall see – it can also be easily discerned in most theories of the symbol during the *Goethezeit*. In all such theories, there is (directly or indirectly) an influence from early Christian theologians, such as pseudo-Dionysius, as well as pagan neoplatonists, like Iamblichus. Passed down through the centuries was a conception of the symbol as providing a point of mediation between the created world and what transcends it.[3]

2. Allegory: 'Symbol' was also employed within eighteenth-century *aesthetics* to refer to the attributes accompanying an emblematic figure. For example, the lamb with which St John the Evangelist is portrayed was designated a 'symbol' by which the saint could be recognised. Also relevant here is the fact that the English 'symbol' has two German equivalents, *Symbol* and *Sinnbild*. *Sinnbild* was the term used in the early modern era to designate this emblematic symbol, whereas *Symbol* was reserved more for the epistemological usage discussed below. In the late eighteenth century, when the emblematic symbol came under attack, it was criticised under the name of *Sinnbild*. As a consequence, theorists of the symbol initially employed the term *Symbol* to distinguish their theories from the emblematic symbol. Indeed, (as we shall see) Schelling was the first theorist of the symbol to redeploy the term *Sinnbild*.[4]
3. Epistemology: 'Symbol' (this time, *Symbol* not *Sinnbild*) was also a key term in the Leibniz-Wolffian tradition which dominated German philosophy during the eighteenth century. At the heart of Leibniz-Wolffian epistemology lies a distinction between *intuitive* and *symbolic* cognition. Here is Christian Wolff's seminal pronouncement on the issue:

[2] See Sørensen 1972 72-4, 101-2.
[3] See, for example, Pseudo-Dionysus 1987 1108b, 1109a.
[4] See further Marache 1960 20.

> It should be noted that words are the basis of a special type of cognition which we call symbolic cognition. For we represent things to ourselves either in themselves or through words or other signs. The first type of cognition is called *intuitive* cognition, the second is symbolic cognition.[5]

Intuitive knowledge is immediate, indubitable knowledge that grasps things as they actually are, without aid from artificial conventions. It has two properties: immediacy and particularity. There is, however, a second inferior mode of gaining knowledge which is dependent on the sign rather than the thing itself – symbolic cognition. Symbolic cognition is attenuated knowledge, distanced from the thing itself by the mediation of the sign.

4. Theology: 'Symbol' was occasionally used (following the Greek and Latin) to designate the Christian creeds or denominational confessions. As was also the case in eighteenth-century English, 'Nicene symbol' commonly designated the Nicene Creed. This use of 'symbol' (more than any other) foreshadows the *performativity* of later employments. To recite a creed or confession was both to declaratively assert the truth of the statements contained therein, but also to performatively assert one's existence as a member of a specific community. Symbols in this sense were speech-acts.
5. Mathematics: Mathematical symbols are those signs used in algebra and arithmetic to represent quantities ('7' and 'x') and operations ('+'). To a limited extent, the logic of the time also employed symbols in this manner, for (although modern 'symbolic logic' is a product of the late nineteenth century) Leibniz' call for the creation of an *ars characteristica* – an algebrisation of all ideas – was still a live option at the end of the eighteenth century.[6] In both mathematics and logic,

[5] Quoted in Wellbery 1984 22; translation modified.
[6] See *SW* 8:439-54.

symbols were abstractions from the given which allowed a greater freedom of thought and simplicity of representation when dealing with complicated problems. As such, the connection of this usage of 'symbol' to Leibniz-Wolffian 'symbolic cognition' should be obvious: 'symbol' in both traditions meant a reliance on abstract signs.

All five of these meanings were relatively insignificant compared with the role the symbol went on to have. In 1809, Friedrich Creuzer could write, "Today the term 'symbol' is mentioned by everyone in various guises as if there were some deep-seated need to employ only this term"[7] – it is now my task to understand whence this sudden popularity came.

2.1.2 The Kantian Symbol

The pre-history of the symbol (in its 'new' usage) begins in the 1760s with the critique of allegory launched by Lessing and Mendelssohn. In the late 1770s and 1780s (as a consequence of this attack), a new participative and expressive ideal for art emerged in the writings of Herder and Moritz that would go on to influence theories of the symbol. However, it is in 1790, in §59 of his *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, that Kant first explicitly sets forth a new theory of the symbol. The revolutionary importance of this theory can be seen from a remark Kant makes in the middle of his exposition: "The more recent logicians have come to use the word *symbolic* in another sense that is wrong and runs counter to the meaning of the word." (1987 5:352) That is, previous philosophical usage of 'symbol' has been wrong; instead, the term has a completely different theoretical role and significance, so a new definition is required.

[7] Quoted in Sørensen 1963 16.

Kant's own theory of the symbol does not totally anticipate the notion which was to fully emerge in the late 1790s on all points: there are some traits of the later usage which are absent from Kant's account and others which are muted.[8] However, there is no doubting the influence of Kant's theory. In Sørensen's words, "A worth and meaning was given to 'symbol' that it had never before possessed." (1963 92) One could thus repeat of Kant in respect to the symbol what Schelling later claimed of his philosophy in general: it was "herald and prophet" to what was to come (*SW* 6:4). For example, Schelling himself was noticeably influenced by Kant's theory: the majority of his pre-1801 uses of 'symbol' are patently Kantian in inspiration.[9]

2.1.3 The Goethean Symbol

On 17th August 1797, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe wrote a letter to Friedrich Schiller that speaks of 'symbolic objects' in a new way. Commentators frequently ascribe to this letter the first new use of the concept.[10] Goethe writes,

> A thought has struck me which, as it may be important for the rest of my journey, I will at once communicate to you… In following the calm and cold path of an observer, nay of mere onlooker, I very soon remarked that the accounts which I had given of certain objects were in some measure sentimental, and this struck me so forcibly that I was instantly induced to reflect upon the cause… I have carefully observed the objects which produce this effect and have found to my astonishment that in fact they are symbolic, that is (as I scarcely need say), they are eminent cases which in characteristic variety, stand as the representative of many others, embrace a certain totality in themselves, demand a certain succession, excite similar and foreign

[8] See A.W. Schlegel's criticisms (1997 205-6). Indeed, Schlegel claims, "The symbolic nature of the beautiful [is] a concept that unfortunately eludes Kant entirely." (200)
[9] See *SW* 1:405-6; 1994a 105-6 – *SW* 3:510; 1978 138 – 559; 176.
[10] Sørensen 1979 638, Gadamer 2004 66.

> subjects in my mind, and thus, from within as well as from without, lay claim to a certain oneness and universality. (*WA* IV/12 243-4; Goethe and Schiller 1914 1:372-3)

One of the strangest elements of Goethe's letter is the throwaway phrase, "as I scarcely need say", by which he prefaces his definition of the symbol. If his use of 'symbol' here were as radically new a departure as some critics maintain, then surely Goethe would not excuse himself for repeating what is self-evident? Goethe must be drawing on some common source he and Schiller share, and such a source is, of course, Kant's 1790 *Kritik der Urteilskraft*. Kant's first exposition of the concept remained definitive for all subsequent theorists.

Goethe's attempt to articulate this new experience is (as is to be expected) slightly confused; however, a number of elements require note. First, Goethe defines the symbol as an 'eminent case' which represents many others, but also 'embraces a certain totality in itself' – the symbol both refers beyond itself but is also self-sufficient. We will see this tension repeated throughout the *Goethezeit*. Second, Goethe claims, the symbol brings about 'a certain oneness and universality': it does not just represent others, it is, Goethe implies, the paradigmatic or archetypical case. These characteristics will go on to be fundamental to the *Goethezeit* definition of the symbol.

Goethe continues,

> The matter is an important one, for it annuls the contradiction which lies between my nature and direct experience, and which in former years I was never able to solve immediately and happily. For I confess that I would rather have turned straight home again, in order to work out of my inmost being phantoms of every kind, than to have again, as hitherto, to buffet with the million-faced Hydra of Empiricism. (246-7; 1:375)

Again, Goethe here puts his finger on a property of the symbol that will go on to play a crucial role in its later history. The symbol mediates between mind and world. Goethe describes himself as, prior to this experience, beset by dualisms between thought and the empirical world: each subsisted in an independent realm and reconciliation seemed impossible. However, the symbol achieves this seemingly impossible task: a symbolic experience is one in which the empirical object becomes imbued with, and so commensurate to, thought.

Goethe, having identified this new form of symbolic experience in August 1797, continued discussing it with his close friend Friedrich Meyer, and later that year they both began drafting articles (both entitled *Über die Gegenstände der bildenden Kunst*) which define the 'symbol' in this new way. Goethe's essay, however, never got beyond draft form, and indeed – and this is significant – *none of his claims about the symbol were published until the 1820s*.

* *

Goethe was certainly extremely influential on Schelling's employment of the term 'symbol'. This is certain because in November 1803 after Schelling had moved to Würzburg, Goethe wrote him a letter which ends as follows,

> This year [in the annual Weimar art competition] we have bestowed our whole prize of 60 Ducats on a Würzburg artist, Martin Wagner… Could you make comprehensible to him the difference between allegorical and symbolic treatment; in this you would be his benefactor, since so much turns on this axis. (*WA* IV/16 367; *SB* 3:32)

On the basis of this letter, we can be sure that Schelling and Goethe discussed the notion of the symbol at length while Schelling still lived in Jena. *That* Goethe and

Schelling discussed the symbol is thereby *proven* and so it most likely follows that Goethe played a crucial role in the genesis of Schelling's theory of symbolic language.

However, Sørensen – commenting on this passage – goes further to suggest that Schelling must have been in *complete agreement* with Goethe on the topic of symbolic and allegorical presentation at this period (1963 249). For Sørensen the implication is that Schelling takes up Goethe's concept of the symbol *unchanged*: Schelling displays "a *verbatim* dependence on Goethe" (264). However, we should be wary of jumping to such a conclusion. Krueger has shown, *pace* Sørensen, how Goethe distances himself from Schelling's exposition of the symbol in the *PdK*. In a discussion of two of Goethe's most famous assertions concerning the symbol (*M* §1112-3 – which she dates as early as 1807), Krueger observes how they "might in fact be understood as Goethe's reply to Schelling, not least as a rejection of Schelling's *Indifferenz* in favour of two reciprocal and utterly mediated figurative strategies." (Krueger 1990 65)[11] Presumably, if Schelling were reproducing Goethe's thought *verbatim*, there would have been no need to respond critically. Krueger's example shows that there may have been some disagreement on the details of how the symbol was to be conceived. For similar reasons, Titzmann directly disputes Sørensen's claim. He criticises histories of the symbol, like Sørensen's, "based on a common and unfounded overestimation of Goethe, not only as a theoretician, but also as a historical source, making as many other authors as possible dependent on this one writer". Such historical dependence, Titzmann claims, "is certainly false in the case of Schelling" (1979 642). Be that as it may, the evidence is certainly clear that Goethe was *one of the major stimuli* to Schelling's own theory of the symbol.

[11] Although Krueger's argument has a problem of its own: how could Goethe reply to an unpublished lecture course he did not attend?

2.1.4 Jena Romanticism

The fact that Goethe's statements concerning the symbol remained unpublished until a much later date makes it difficult to assess his influence on the rise of the symbol. It is certain from the above example that he discussed the concept with his friends in Jena and Weimar; however, what exactly was discussed – or even whether he let others read his draft essay, *Über die Gegenstände der bildenden Kunst* – will never be known.[12] However, we can be sure that Goethe must have had some influence, because the similarities between Goethe's initial use and later uses are too great to be merely coincidental. The various properties Goethe identifies in his letter to Schiller remain entrenched throughout the *Goethezeit*.

There is therefore some kind of oral transmission from Goethe to later adherents of the symbol. Indeed, much aesthetics in Jena and Weimar during the 1790s did take place verbally. Out of this climate of verbal exchange emerged a series of employments of the term 'symbol' identical to the way in which Goethe had already used it; employments which would ultimately lead to the term becoming a popular new addition to German critical vocabulary.

It is worth pausing here to see if any sign of this oral discussion is evident in the texts written by the inhabitants of Jena and Weimar during the last few years of the 1790s. This is a particularly significant question because, at this time in Jena, Romanticism was born; it is thus natural to wonder whether the notion of the symbol played any role here. The question becomes even more pressing when we realise that the next theory of the symbol to be written after Goethe was by a member of the Jena Romantic group – A.W. Schlegel. The question therefore becomes: what were the sources for Schlegel's theory of the symbol? Was there a precedent within Jena

[12] Heinrich Meyer's essay was published in a journal in 1798, so this suggests at least one possible means of wider influence (although none of his contemporaries discuss Meyer's work in this respect, and critics often write off him off (Todorov 1982 212-3, Sørensen 1963 111)).

Romanticism itself? Or was A.W. Schlegel exceptional among the Jena Romantics in the influence Goethe's thought had upon him?

* *

Two cases are worth brief consideration: Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis. These two thinkers more than any other have been considered in recent years to define early German Romanticism.

The term 'symbol' is a frequent one in Novalis' fragments from the late 1790s.[13] While their appearance is cryptic, they do hint at some fuller theory of the symbol lying behind them – a theory which, like so much of Novalis' thought, remains implicit. This does not, however, mean that Novalis esoterically subscribed to a theory of the symbol in line with Goethe, Schelling or A.W. Schlegel; instead, the reader can only guess what Novalis meant.

Like Novalis, Friedrich Schlegel employs the term in his writings of the late 1790s. He even claims, "All knowledge is symbolic" (1997 246).[14] However, despite these occurrences, we can be confident that Schlegel did *not* subscribe to a theory of the symbol (or at least a theory of the symbol comparable to his contemporaries) at this time. This is because in the 1820s – influenced by later theories of the symbol – Schlegel *corrected* his publications from the late 1790s. This is nowhere more apparent than in the revised version of his *Gespräch über die Poesie*. To quote Dieckmann's study of the relevant 'corrections' made to this work,

> Very consistently the term 'symbol' has been added, a term which is rare and quite unimportant in the 1800 version. Thus the title of the third part of the

[13] See Novalis 1997 26, 57, 67, 71, 87, 102, 105, 117, 121, 132, 165. These examples certainly belie the usual critical prejudice that Novalis avoided the term (O'Brien 1995 347).
[14] See also 1957 §1171, §2013.

> *Gespräch* is changed from *Rede über Mythologie* to *Rede über Mythologie und symbolische Anschauung*. At least six times in this very short *Discourse on Mythology* we find added to the word 'mythology' such expressions as: 'symbolic art, symbolic legend, symbolic world of ideas, symbolic knowledge, a symbolic science of the whole universe'. Moreover, there are several insertions of some length in the second version, some of which deal exclusively with problems of symbolism. The revision goes consistently through the entire *Gespräch* and is not limited to Part Three. (1959 276)

It is, Dieckmann goes on to suggest, the influence of Creuzer and Goethe's theories of the symbol which accounts for these revisions (283). As she insists, this implies that in the original 1800 version of the work, "Schlegel disregarded or ignored these discussions." (277) Perhaps the most notorious change was to alter the famous statement in the *Gespräch* that "all beauty is allegory" to "all beauty is symbolic".[15] Paul de Man in his influential critique of the symbol, "The Rhetoric of Temporality" (to which we will return repeatedly throughout this thesis), makes much of this alteration. For de Man, the fact that Schlegel uses allegory, rather than symbol, in the original edition is representative of the manner in which Schlegel's thought as a whole is opposed to all the symbol represents (1983 190-1).

These two case studies are therefore broadly negative in pinning down the transmission of the concept of the symbol through the work of Novalis and Friedrich Schlegel in the late 1790s. There is little here that heralds A.W. Schlegel's full-blown systematic treatment of the symbol.

[15] See de Man 1983 190.

2.1.5 1800 and Beyond

A.W. Schlegel's theory of the symbol is definitively expounded in his 1801 *Vorlesungen über schöne Literatur und Kunst*, given in Berlin to a private audience. Schlegel did more than any other to (as Sørensen puts it) "popularise and communicate" the concept of the symbol to a new generation of students (1972 168).

The passage in which Schlegel introduces the notion of the symbol occurs at a key juncture in his argument, at the beginning of the eighth lecture. The previous seven lectures had taken the form of a critical survey of all previous attempts at aesthetics. Schlegel now tries his hand at proposing his own aesthetic theory, and begins thus,

> According to Schelling, the beautiful is *the infinite represented in finite form*... I entirely agree with this definition, but I would prefer to define the expression in the following manner: the beautiful is a symbolic presentation of the infinite. Stated in this way, it becomes clear at the same time how the infinite can appear in the finite. (1997 209)

Obviously for this thesis, Schlegel's reference to Schelling's 1800 *System des transcendentalen Idealismus* (in which, as Schlegel implies, 'symbol' is not used) is intriguing. Schlegel uses Schelling's pre-*Identitätssystem* aesthetics as the springboard for developing a new theory of the symbol; in so doing, he designates the symbol as the hidden key to the whole *System des transcendentalen Idealismus*.

Moreover, the theory Schlegel here develops became the benchmark for later Romantic theory. He defines the symbol (following Goethe) as that which "bind[s] together and merge[s] even what is most distant" (210). He also cements the intimate relation between the symbol and mythology already suggested by Goethe and Meyer (1989 440-60). Moreover, not only does Schlegel use the term 'symbol' in a sustained manner and as part of a *system* of aesthetics, he gives it pride of place in his definition

of beauty – the crux of a series of lectures devoted to "*schöne Literatur und Kunst*". The mystery of beauty, Schlegel claims, can only be satisfactorily explained by means of the symbol, and further, "Poesy (taken in the most general sense as that which underlies all the arts) is nothing but an eternal act of symbolisation." (1997 210) All art is a process of symbolisation – such is Schlegel's radically new claim. It is no wonder Schlegel concludes that what is now needed not only in aesthetics but also in science in general is "research into the symbolic in our cognition" (211). Such an investigation, he states, will lead to "the most surprising discoveries" (212) – an unsurprising conclusion if this neglected concept does really form the basis of all artistic activity.

* *

On 3rd September 1802, Schelling wrote to A.W. Schlegel in reference to the latter's Berlin lectures. Schelling (as Fuhrman points out) would have encountered the manuscript to these lectures when he visited Schlegel in Berlin in May 1802 (*SB* 2:436); now, he requests a copy to help him write his own lecture course on aesthetics:

> Your manuscript would be of excellent service to me, so as to provide me with some orientation [in aesthetics]… Could you let me have your manuscript copied in Berlin at my own cost and send it here towards the middle of next month, or even leave it with me until then to get a copy of it here, in which case I would be highly indebted to you… I will make use of your work with thanks as long as my power of assimilation allows. (*SB* 2:436-7)

Schelling borrows Schlegel's manuscript to help him draft the *PdK*. That is, *he uses the work in which Schlegel puts forth his theory of the symbol to write his own theory of the symbol*. Thus, just as with Goethe, we can be fairly certain that A.W. Schlegel's theory of the symbol was a crucial stimulus to Schelling's own. Indeed, Schelling even writes to Schlegel a month later, having received the manuscript,

> Your manuscript on aesthetics gives me unnameable pleasure; it delights me to read it. Part of it I am in the process of having completely copied, another part I read with feather in hand. (*SB* 2:449)

Since Schelling admits here to writing his own lectures with Schlegel's open in front of him, there is no doubting that his theory of the symbol was written in *direct conversation* with Schlegel's. However, just as with Goethe, we should not conclude from this that Schelling *merely reproduced* Schlegel's theory. In fact, in their correspondence, Schelling is at pains to point out that he does not intend merely to 'plagiarise' Schlegel's thought, but to creatively transform it. I return to this issue at length in Chapter Four.

In Winter 1802, F.W.J. Schelling lectured on the *PdK* and proposed his own theory of the symbol. As with Schlegel, Schelling's fullest exposition of the symbol occurred in a series of lectures *that was only published posthumously*. Therefore, despite introducing the term to many students of philosophy, neither Schlegel nor Schelling's lectures on the symbol can be called popularisations as such. In 1805, however, a former student of Schelling, Friedrich Ast published his *System der Kunstlehre*, a work which is heavily dependent on his former teacher's work. Solger, another of Schelling's former students, also proposed an influential theory of the symbol later in the decade. By this time, 'symbol' was firmly established as a term of aesthetic criticism. Such later developments (including most prominently Hegel and

Coleridge's theories) come after Schelling's own thoughts on the symbol had long been formed. They are therefore outside the scope of this thesis.

* *

Such then are the major sources of Schelling's theory of the symbol. In this section, I have merely been concerned with charting the genesis of these early theories of the symbol and their relation to Schelling's *in regard to the history of ideas*. In what follows, I consider the *content* of these theories. Schelling's *divergence from rather than continuity with* his predecessors will thus become increasingly clear. Indeed, all I have demonstrated so far is that some influence from Kant, Goethe, Schiller and A.W. Schlegel was likely; *what* precisely this influence was has yet to be determined.

2.2 Elements of the Symbol

In the previous section I considered the development of the symbol *historically*, in this section I switch to considering the symbol *analytically*. More specifically, I will delineate the three basic structural features that defined a symbol during the *Goethezeit*. Of course, these features should not be considered as boxes into which everything needs to be fitted, but windows through which clusters of themes become evident. There are two 'first-order' properties which apply to the symbol in all media (that is, to linguistic, pictorial, musical symbols etc) and one additional property that applies specifically to symbolic *language*. I label these

features 'first-order', because, I contend, they are the necessary and universal structures by which a symbol becomes a symbol; yet, as I will argue, on their own and in the form in which I expound them below, they do not form a complete theory of the symbol. There is, therefore, always a second-level of interpretation required to theorise the symbol fully: it is here that theorists diverge significantly.[16]

2.2.1 Heautonomy

The symbol is an image which need not look outside itself for meaning. Unlike the sign or allegory, its referent is not external to it. It is thus self-contained or heautonomous. A number of different terms could have served just as well to describe this property. One such name, as we shall see, is organicism, but one could equally speak of the 'absoluteness' of the symbol, if one bears in mind (as many theorists of the period did) that *ab-solutum* has the etymological sense of something dissolved from all relations.[17]

'Heautonomy' is a term Kant employs in the third *Kritik* to designate a form of autonomous judgment that legislates only to itself (1987 5:185). While a merely autonomous being governs itself with a law that need not be peculiar to itself (like the categorical imperative, for example, which applies to all rational beings), a 'heautonomous' being governs itself by means of a law specific to itself. The term was later appropriated by Schiller, where it becomes central to his aesthetics – indeed, it is the basic property of beauty. In this thesis, I employ the term (taking my cue from Schiller) as one of the defining features of the symbol. *The symbol is therefore an autonomous image whose determining rule applies to itself alone*. Schiller writes of heautonomous beauty that it does not "require anything outside of itself, but

[16] Obviously, there are other ways to break down the symbol than what follows. See Todorov 1982 221, Sørensen 1972 264.
[17] See Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy 1988 56.

commands and obeys itself for the sake of its own law" (2003 167): it is a completely self-sufficient, autarchic whole. This characteristic of the symbol is basic to early elucidations of the concept. Heinrich Meyer writes in his initial 1797 essay, *Über die Gegenstände der bildenden Kunst*: "It must be demanded of every artwork that it composes a whole… [that] it expresses itself wholly. It must be independent… The object must be essentially grasped and understood without external assistance or auxiliary explanations."[18] Or as he puts it in a later work, symbols should aim to be "perfectly self-sufficient".[19]

The symbol is therefore a whole. What is more, it is an *organic* whole, in particular. Schiller again provides the precedent: in explaining the holism of the beautiful image, he resorts to the framework Kant introduced in his discussion of the organism in the *Kritik der Urteilskraft*. In §64-6, Kant argues that the organism is judged to "relate to itself in such a way that it is both cause and effect of itself" (1987 5:372): it both acts and is acted on without any reference to what is outside of it. It is causally self-contained. Its purpose is not imposed upon it by an external concept but lies "within itself and its inner possibility" (5:373). Its original cause, its form and its telos are immanent to its own being. The organism therefore exemplifies heautonomy. Schiller's appropriation of Kant's vocabulary in his aesthetics is based on the realisation that both the organism and the beautiful object are heautonomous in this sense. Theorists of the symbol, especially Schelling (as we shall see), followed Schiller on this point.

[18] Meyer in Sørensen 1972 145.
[19] Meyer in Sørensen 1972 145. See also Moritz in Sørensen 1972 113-9.

2.2.2 Syntheticism

The second first-order property by which the symbol is universally defined is 'syntheticism' – the bringing together of contraries, or, as Todorov puts it, the symbol's "capacity to absorb and resolve the incompatibility of contraries." (1982 159) Although Todorov goes on to contend that "Schelling contributed more than any other romantic author to the establishment of syntheticism" (184), we will in fact find that the term 'syntheticism' is extremely problematic in reference to Schelling; however, the basic idea of the unity of opposites must still be acknowledged as a universal first-order property of the symbol during this period.

Fundamental to the constitution of the symbol is its ability to gather into itself opposing principles; in it, what is usually distinct and hard to reconcile is thrown into unity.[20] The symbol achieved what for Novalis was "the highest task of the higher logic" – "to annihilate the principle of contradiction".[21] There are many different oppositions that theorists see united within the symbol; for example, in Schelling's *PdK* alone, there are references to the symbol as the unity of particular and universal, finite and infinite and schema and allegory.[22] Nor is Schelling alone in emphasising this aspect of the symbol: Solger also notes the symbol's ability to unify universal and particular (1984 128), idea and appearance (130) and imagination and reality (129).

Despite, however, the plethora of terms that the symbol is meant to unify, there is one general synthesis to which they all refer. The symbol unifies the real, particular and concrete symbolic image and the ideal, universal and abstract meaning which that image evokes. It is this basic synthesis of empirical being and intellectual meaning which describes most fully the reconciliation the symbol performs. As

[20] This is suggested by the etymology of the word, if nothing else: *σύμβολον* means a 'contract' or 'pledge' binding together individuals into a community (Gadamer 2004 63).
[21] Quoted in Todorov 1982 184.
[22] All discussed further in Chapter Eight.

Gadamer and de Man note, theorists of the symbol "refuse to distinguish between experience and the representation of this experience", between empirical fact and intellectual reflection upon it (de Man 1983 188, Gadamer 2004 69-70). Meaning and being become one in the symbol. Such is the import of Schelling's statement: "Meaning here [in the symbol] is simultaneously being itself, passed over into the object itself and one with it." (*SW* 5:411; 1989 49) This identity of meaning and being is ultimately what is meant by 'symbol' during the *Goethezeit*. In this thesis, I reserve the term 'syntheticism' for the symbol's capacity to unify opposites *in general*, while I dub the unity of meaning and being in particular 'tautegory'. I will explore tautegory at far greater length in the next chapter, since it is especially problematic in respect to the phenomenon of symbolic *language*. Heautonomy, syntheticism and tautegory are therefore the three first-order properties of the symbol during the *Goethezeit*.

2.3 Interpreting the Symbol

Heautonomy, syntheticism and tautegory are then the three principles basic to the symbol during the *Goethezeit*. However, these three principles do *not* constitute a theory of the symbol by themselves; in fact, I now want to argue, they *underdetermine* the symbol.

2.3.1 Absolute and Partial Tautegory

Take, for example, Schelling's statement that in the symbol "meaning is simultaneously being itself" – how is this to be understood? The first-order properties themselves give no clue to the *type or manner of unity* the symbol should display;

they merely require *that* there should be some kind of unity of being and meaning. Indeed, there are at least three different ways of interpreting such unity which each imply very different theories of the symbol. First, meaning and being could be said to *really* exist in separation, but merely be identified as one *by the subject*. This is a subjective, rather than real, unity: the subject judges *as if* meaning and being are one, whereas *objectively* this is not the case. Kant's theory of the symbol as well as Schiller's early aesthetics operate in something like this manner. Even when theorists assert that meaning and being are *objectively* unified, however, this assertion can be made in a number of ways. For example, many adherents to this view during the *Goethezeit* conceived of this union *only partially* – as a form of *synecdoche*, in which the being of the symbol is a part participating in the ideal meaning (the whole). On the one hand, the part (the symbolic image) is continuous with its meaning, and actually unified with it, but, on the other hand, the two are not absolutely identical – meaning still transcends being: the whole is still greater than the part. Yet, this is not the only way to understand the unity of meaning and being. Schelling's interpretation of this principle, for example, conceives of meaning as utterly immanent to being, and not at all exceeding it. His is a commitment to absolute tautegory. Here, the statement 'meaning is simultaneous with being' is interpreted as an absolute identity between the two, not as a synecdoche. Meaning *is* being and being *is* meaning, according to Schelling.

The two latter ways of interpreting the unity of being and meaning *objectively* are discussed fruitfully in Adams' *Philosophy of the Literary Symbolic*. The same structural properties of the symbol can be interpreted, Adams contends, in two opposed ways.[23] There is, on the one hand, a "miraculous" symbol, equivalent to the

[23] See also Frenzel 1963 96.

synecdochical symbol described above. This symbol, Adams writes, "is not identical with its [meaning] but a sort of fallen form of it." (1983 18) It exhibits a broadly Platonic structure in which the symbol participates in the intelligible realm, but still remains caught in the worldly sensuousness of the image. Meaning here exceeds being and so points beyond it.

However, Adams is at pains to stress, there is "a second type of romantic symbol" (1983 18) which has far more affinities to Schelling's interpretation. Adams writes, "In [this version of the] symbol, the universal becomes not something previously there to be contained but something *generated by* the particular, as the seed generates the plant." (19) The universal is produced out of the particular, rather than pre-existing it; the movement of the symbol is no longer a fall inward, but a productive development outwards. The emphasis in this second type is not so much on an artefact which bears traces of meaning beyond it, but rather of "symbolic activity" producing the infinite meaning it carries (20). The productive symbol constitutes its own meaning: meaning "is created in the image" and as such is "fully there" (57). Two-world Platonism is here rebuked in favour of a this-worldly conception of the symbol. Symbolic meaning does not point us beyond the world, but is part of our activity within it.[24] It is, I will argue, Schelling who breaks with the 'two-world' conception of the symbol most fully so as to claim that the symbol is productive.

The Kantian subjective symbol, the 'miraculous' synecdochical symbol and the productive symbol: these are three very different interpretations that can be given to the same first-order properties. They are conflicting models used to flesh out an identical symbolic structure.

[24] See A.W. Schlegel (1997 28) for a version of this sentiment.

2.3.2 The Birth of 'the Romantic Symbol' in the Twentieth Century

Despite the potential variety in theories of the symbol, much of the scholarly work on this topic fails to acknowledge this capacity for diversity at all. The label, 'the romantic symbol', has come to represent a monolithic, totalising tendency in modern scholarship: histories of the symbol during the *Goethezeit* are histories of how far some figures prefigure 'the romantic symbol' and how far others corrupt it. There is *one* interpretation of the symbol worthy of discussion, it is assumed, and this is '*the* romantic symbol'.

In this regard, it is difficult to escape the long shadow cast by de Man's "The Rhetoric of Temporality" (dubbed by Jonathan Culler, "the most photocopied essay in literary criticism"[25]). The criticisms of the symbol contained in this essay have dominated theory ever since; yet, what is most striking about this essay is its *disregard* for particular theories of the symbol. De Man fails to engage with the notion of the symbol in any of its concrete details – he ignores the history of its development and barely mentions German thinkers at all. Thus, the essay begins by rejecting the usual procedure of "retrac[ing] the itinerary that led German writers of the age of Goethe to consider symbol and allegory as antithetical" (1983 188). De Man does then proceed to name-check Goethe, Schiller and Schelling who "stand out" as exemplars of the symbolic tradition (189), but this is as much as he is inclined to write about these crucial figures. Instead, having catalogued a few figures who do not so easily fit into a history of 'the romantic symbol' (Goethe again, Hölderlin and Friedrich Schlegel) (189-91), de Man concludes with the following,

> To make some headway in this difficult question [concerning the validity of the symbol in literary theory], it may be useful to leave the field of German literature and see how the same problem appears in English and French

[25] Quoted in Godzich 1983 xvi.

> writers of the same period. Some help may be gained from a broader perspective. (191)

At this point, de Man abandons Germany altogether to concentrate on Coleridge's notion of symbol and Rousseau's practice of allegory. Of course, de Man is right to seek 'a broader perspective' to his question, but it must be asked at what cost does he largely ignore (let alone analyse) German theories of the symbol. Germany was the ground on which the symbol developed; it is also from earlier German manifestations that Coleridge developed his own theory.

De Man claims that the issues surrounding the theorisation of the symbol during this period "have [already] been treated at length [and so] we do not have to return to them here" (189). It is on the basis of this prior treatment that de Man feels able to write off German theories of the symbol. The only text, however, that he cites in this regard is Gadamer's *Wahrheit und Methode*. Yet, this is a work which itself devotes only a few pages to the question of the symbol in the *Goethezeit* (2004 62-70). Indeed, just like de Man, Gadamer too relies heavily on a previous study – in this case, Curt Müller's *Die Geschichtlichen Voraussetzungen des Symbolbegriffs in Goethes Kunstanschauung* (98).

It is worth pausing over Müller's work, for it marks one of the origins of twentieth-century fascination with the notion of the symbol and is (directly and indirectly) the source for much subsequent scholarship. One significant fact about Müller's book is its date, 1937, and the text does indeed bear traces of being written during the Nazi regime. For example, it stresses the symbol's power in forming communities that are to be privileged over all others and whose "bearer" embodies the general will (1937 17). Indeed, this concept of the irrational grace (or "cosmic feeling" (17)) bestowed on the privileged orients the whole outlook of the book.

Moreover, it is precisely this aspect which is subsequently taken up (in a critical mode) both by Gadamer and de Man. Thus, when de Man criticises the "tenacious self-mystification" and "regressive" nature of the symbol (1983 208), it is from Müller's original study that this view is ultimately derived. It is little wonder then that de Man denounces the symbol as fascistic!

This is not to deny that there are irrational and mystifying elements present in theories of the symbol during the *Goethezeit* – little research would be necessary to establish this fact. Rather, I am disputing the way in which these elements have been made *constitutive* of the symbol at this time, and so *one form of the symbol* is thereby considered to the exclusion of all others. A different model for critical discourse is required, a model that sees this one interpretation of the symbol for what it is – merely one, non-exclusive way in which it was conceived during the *Goethezeit*. This monopoly on the symbol running from Müller through Gadamer and de Man (but also through Sørensen and, most recently, Halmi) has reduced into a single, determinate form what was in fact an atmosphere of plural, competing understandings of the symbol. What the twentieth century has forgotten is that the symbol was, during the *Goethezeit*, a site of radical experimentation.

* *

Let me try to develop these criticisms of recent studies further through considering the case of Todorov's two studies of the symbol (1982, 1983). In many ways, Todorov attempts to escape the monopolising heritage outlined above and he explicitly makes clear that his basic methodological tenet is plurality:

> I have tried to establish a framework that makes it possible to understand how so many different theories, so many irreconcilable subdivisions, so many contradictory definitions, can have existed – each one including (this is my hypothesis) a measure of the truth. (1983 22)

Yet, when Todorov turns to the *Goethezeit*, such good intentions are forgotten:

> It is not possible here, nor would it be interesting, to present in succession… the theses upheld by each member of the [Romantic] group. There is one doctrine and one author, even if their names are several: not that each one repeats the others; but each one formulates, better than any other, some part of the same single doctrine. (1982 165)

Todorov does recognise the artificiality of this method ("Instead of 'finding' the past, I am constructing it"); he also acknowledges problems that arise out of homogenising these very different thinkers (for example, treating Goethe as a Romantic[26]). (167) Nevertheless, he remains resolute in bringing together all these figures under one interpretation of the symbol. Again therefore, what Goethe (for example) claims about the symbol becomes constitutive of the *symbol as such*. No room is permitted for competing conceptions. While Todorov at least tries to stay open-minded and non-prescriptive, in the end he – like so many of the other twentieth-century critics of the symbol – homogenises. It is for these reasons that the symbol in Romanticism has been transformed into '*the* romantic symbol'. Nicholas Halmi's recent *The Genealogy of the Romantic Symbol* (2007) is only the last in a series of studies presupposing one, monolithic theory of the symbol during the *Goethezeit*.

However, my contention is that this is an artificial imposition of twentieth-century critical theory onto the past. Of course, there are figures for whom 'the romantic symbol' of the twentieth century *was* the way they understood the symbol.

[26] Halmi follows Todorov in lumping Goethe in with the Romantics (2007 10), but this move has been severely criticised (Nygaard 1988 58, 74).

However, for the most part and especially prior to 1810, 'the romantic symbol' of twentieth-century critical theory is merely one interpretative strand of theorising the symbol.

2.4 An Introduction to 'the Romantic Symbol'

Having said all this, 'the romantic symbol' will be employed in this thesis as a convenient fiction, for it will be useful in what follows to show the ways in which Schelling's theory departs from this conventional interpretation. I will therefore retain a reference to 'the romantic symbol' in order to show more clearly how the Schellingian symbol is radically different from it. In order to achieve this end, in the final section of this chapter I provide an initial analysis of 'the romantic symbol' insofar as it is possible to isolate certain 'second-order' features of it. After this analysis, it will be easier to mark the ways in which the Schellingian symbol differs. The 'romantic symbol' is therefore (for the purposes of this thesis) one specific interpretation given to the three properties of heautonomy, syntheticism and tautegory.

2.4.1 Modes of Signification in 'the Romantic Symbol'

Goethe's early pronouncements are a good place to begin. He writes in his 1797 letter to Schiller,

> [Symbols] are eminent cases which in characteristic variety, stand as the representative of many others, embrace a certain totality in themselves… and

> thus, from within as well as from without, lay claim to a certain oneness and universality. (*WA* IV/12 243-4; Goethe and Schiller 1914 1:372-3)

Goethe outlines three ways in which the symbol lays claim to meaning: first, the symbol is an 'eminent case' and 'stands as the representative of many others'; second, it 'embraces a certain totality in itself'; and third, it 'lays claim to a certain oneness and universality'. First, therefore, the symbol acts like a conventional sign; such signs are substitutes for a class of objects: they can be used as a token (or 'representative') to refer to all other members of the same class. Signs are used to bring to mind all the objects which this sign represents. Thus, (in a rather convoluted manner) Goethe initially considers symbolic objects as a form of sign. Second, Goethe states that the symbol 'embraces a certain totality in itself': as opposed to a conventional sign, it has its own intrinsic worth and forms a whole. It is heautonomous. Third, Goethe speaks of the universality of the symbol – that is, the symbol also *partakes in* universality. The symbol participates in the animating idea which informs all particular phenomena. Thus, as well as *representing* the meaning of a class of objects like the conventional sign, the symbol *participates* in this meaning immediately, and so exhibits it as directly as it exhibits itself. The symbol is its own meaning, and so is tautegorical. These, then, are the three modes of signification Goethe initially identifies in the symbol. My contention is that they are more than this: they are the three modes by which 'the romantic symbol' as such signifies – as representative, as heautonomous and as participative or evocative.

The same three aspects are to be found a month later in Goethe's draft, *Über die Gegenstände der bildenden Kunst*:

> Subjects presented in this [symbolic] way appear merely to stand for themselves, but do, in fact, always signify what is deepest [*im Tiefsten bedeutend*], and do this on account of the ideal, which always carries a form

> of universality with it. When the symbolic refers to anything still outside of the presentation, it always does so in an indirect manner. (*WA* I/47 94; 1983 396; translation modified)

In the essay as a whole, Goethe concentrates extensively on the proper subjects of artistic representation and he delimits a number of subjects whose representations are to be dubbed 'symbolic'. In the above quotation, he proceeds to discuss the actual manner in which such symbolic representations operate. Symbolic representations, he claims, give rise to the appearance of heautonomy (such representations 'appear merely to stand for themselves'). However, despite this, symbols still do signify and they signify 'what is deepest'. What does Goethe mean here? He continues that symbols signify 'on account of' the ideal, which possesses 'a form of universality' that it brings to appearance. My reading of such an elliptical sentence (this was, of course, only a draft) is that symbols *evoke* the ideal form of what they represent (for example, symbolic sculptures of Jupiter *are* already the ideal representation of Jupiter).[27] Moreover, by so relating themselves to the ideal in this second (participative) manner, they possess their own meaning: they possess a universality that mere conventional representation cannot access directly.

These two forms of positive signification – representation and evocation – are quite different. The first is a conventional mimetic relation in which the symbolic representation faithfully imitates its object. Evocation, on the other hand, requires a close ontological relation between the symbol and the 'deep' meaning it signifies; here the symbol participates in universal meaning and brings it immediately to the surface. This is the Platonic aspect of 'the romantic symbol', manifesting another, 'deeper' realm.

[27] See Sørensen 1963 120-1 for a similar reading.

Thus, again, three moments are present in Goethe's description of the symbol: an initial moment of mere representation – in which the symbol cannot really be differentiated from a conventional sign; a second moment of heautonomy, the self-sufficiency of which stands in contrast to attempts at signification; and finally, a moment when a deeper evocation of universal meaning occurs. In this final moment, the symbol gains an ontological relation to the universal which takes the onlooker beyond mere representation. It is these three moments which form the basis of the 'romantic' interpretation of the symbol.

2.4.2 Double Intentionality

Ricoeur has defined this dual capacity to both represent and evoke meaning as the "double intentionality" of the symbol (1974 289).[28] Ricoeur claims that the symbol "presents a first or literal intentionality that, like every significant expression, supposes the triumph of the conventional sign over the natural sign… But upon this first intentionality there is erected a second intentionality." (289) He writes elsewhere,

> Contrary to perfectly transparent technical signs, which say only what they want to say in positing that which they signify, symbolic signs are opaque, because the first, literal, obvious meaning itself points analogically to a second meaning which is not given otherwise than in it. (1967 15)

This notion of a 'second meaning' is, I think, crucial in understanding the operation of 'the romantic symbol'.

The Kantian symbol provides the template for 'double intentionality'. In §59 of the *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, Kant argues that the symbol ultimately overcomes representation in favour of a deeper form of signification. §59 is entitled, "Beauty as a

[28] See also Müller 1937 14, Todorov 1982 203. One should more accurately speak of 'triple intentionality', since as well as representation and evocation, there is also 'the romantic symbol's refusal to signify at all (heautonomy).

Symbol of Morality" and the very title of the section is significant, for it boldly states the claim that Kant will go on to elucidate: beautiful representations, as well as obviously *representing* 'beautiful' objects, also *symbolise* an aspect of morality. Straightaway we are told that in the symbol the represented object is not the only referent, but something else is pointed to as well. The Kantian symbol has a 'double intentionality': while, on the one hand, beauty is predicated of the object of representation, on the other: "we refer the beautiful to the morally good" (1987 5:351-3). Thus, added to a process of representation, there is also a process of evoking the moral, supersensible realm.[29]

This double intentionality can clearly be seen in the examples Kant gives in §59 of the symbolic character of metaphysical terms. First, he points to the German *Grund* (cause, reason) which has its origins in the more prosaic meaning of foundation; second, *abhängen* the German for 'to depend' which has a primary meaning of 'to be held from above'. In both cases, the initial representative meaning of a sensible object is sublated in favour of a symbolic expression of something more abstract. As Marty puts it, "The first meaning of a word concerns what can be given in intuition. This term is then transposed symbolically to serve as a concept which cannot find a corresponding intuition." (1980 362) It is this process of symbolisation which allows intuitive exhibitions *to exhibit the supersensible as well as the sensible*, to signify in two ways simultaneously.

2.4.3 Partial Tautegory

'The romantic symbol' represents *and* evokes – the rest of this chapter is devoted to exploring how each moment of signification operates in isolation and how

[29] See further Zammito 1992 289.

both fit together. First, it is necessary to consider what is meant by 'evocation'. Goethe's early theory of the symbol is, as we have seen, obscure on this point – the symbol somehow *is* (or participates in) its own meaning. To get to the heart of what is going on, one needs to return to a distinction made earlier in the chapter (drawing on Adams' work) between partial and absolute tautegory. My thesis is as follows: 'the romantic symbol' is characterised by its commitment to *partial* tautegory – that is, being *is* meaning but meaning *is more than* being. Out of this partial identity almost all the defining features of 'the romantic symbol' emerge.

(a) Synecdoche

While for proponents of absolute tautegory (like Schelling) meaning and being are in utter identity, theorists of 'the romantic symbol' understand them in unity but only with the added qualification that meaning also *exceeds* being. There is a synecdochical structure at work here, and what is absolutely crucial about such a model is that it allows both a partial identification of being and meaning without in any way problematising the superiority and transcendence of meaning. Thus Galland-Szymkowiak defines the "paradox of the symbol" thus, "A particular thing or image should make fully visible a universal idea which still remains transcendent – and it can only ever make it wholly visible to the extent that it remains transcendent." (2007 326)[30] Being is meaning without thereby impacting on meaning's transcendence. The symbol still points beyond itself to a transcendent meaning (the neoplatonic employment of 'symbol' introduced at the beginning of the chapter is obviously a key influence here). Many German theorists interpret the symbol along these lines. Solger speaks of the sensible "clothing" of meaning the symbol provides (1984 129), of

[30] Significantly for this thesis: although she tries to read the Schellingian symbol through the lens of this paradox, Galland-Szymkowiak concludes that they are ultimately incommensurable, because Schelling denies transcendence. (342)

meaning "actively lowering itself into existence" (132), or even of symbolic meaning "emanat[ing] out into reality as a divine energy" (131). Explicit theological terminology is common. Ast speaks of the symbol as "the revelation and incarnation of God"[31] – that is, the descent of meaning into the sensible world.

This emphasis on descent gives rise to the model of *revelation* which is central to Goethe's theory. His definitions of the symbol make much of the idea of the descent of a universal idea into finite particularity:

> This is true symbolism, where the particular represents the universal, not as dream and shadow, but as a live and immediate revelation of the unfathomable. (*M* §314)

The universal descends into the particular and is revealed therein. In other words, the universal is both fully embedded in reality (fully unified with the particular) and also exceeds all particulars as their prior cause and archetype. This is synecdoche once more.

Moreover, a crucial consequence of such a synecdochical structure is that, in Sørensen's words, "the universal outweighs the particular" (1963 111).[32] This is particularly evident in Goethe's maxim, §569, "The universal and the particular coincide; the particular is the universal made manifest under different conditions." The two halves of this sentence express different truths: the first half affirms the identity of universal and particular. However, the second half of the sentence suggests a different view: universal is given priority over particular; the particular is the subsequent manifestation of a prior universal idea. The particular is little more than a copy of this archetype. Such is Goethe's Platonic model for reality: the particular participates in the universal, but the universal still exceeds the particular.

[31] Ast in Sørensen 1972 199.
[32] Todorov similarly speaks of "a superabundance of meaning" (1982 191).

* *

Tautegory – the union of image and meaning – is thus made possible through the participatory metaphysics on which 'the romantic symbol' is based. Yet, even this metaphysical backdrop cannot conceal the paradoxes in which *partial* tautegory results. Meaning is and is not being – from this initial contradiction flows a rhetoric of paradox in theories of 'the romantic symbol'. I have already introduced Galland-Szymkowiak's 'paradox of the symbol'; Goethe, moreover, contends,

> We are right to call such presentations symbolic… It is the thing itself, without being the thing, and yet the thing; an image summarised in the mirror of the spirit and nevertheless identical with the object. (*WA* I/41 142; translated in Todorov 1982 203)

Symbolic presentations are, are not and then are again what they present. This is a direct result of Goethe's synecdochical interpretation of the symbol. Goethe subscribes to partial tautegory, even if it means that the logic of his sentences is stretched to its limit and he hovers on the verge of nonsense. Partial tautegory leads to tensions, convolutions and even flat out contradictions. Such problems are typical of 'the romantic symbol' in general.

(b) Occasionality

There is a further consequence of this commitment to partial tautegory. 'Partial' is temporalised into 'occasional' – that is, the ambiguity of the identity of meaning and being is conceived temporally: meaning is *sometimes* equivalent to being. Tautegory only applies on occasion. Artistic media *sometimes* attain the level of the symbol, even if mostly such media are non-symbolic (residing merely at the

level of the sign). Symbolism is a state occasionally attained by artworks; it is by no means universal.

In consequence, theorists of 'the romantic symbol' do *not* rethink the nature of the sign – but merely *sometimes* add symbolic properties onto it. Signs occasionally deviate to become 'more than signs' (symbols). The conventional sign remains intact, for the symbol is at bottom a sign – but with extra modes of signifying *added onto* it (the result of a synthesis). I dub this method of describing the symbol as *additive* – on top of a conventional sign whose basic structure is left unchanged, there is grafted symbolic properties.

2.4.4 The Ineffable

Evocation is a consequence of partial tautegory and, as such, meaning both is and is more than being. The symbolic image refers to something which transcends it. In fact, theorists of 'the romantic symbol' go much further and claim that the symbol refers to (or participates in) something *ineffable*. 'The romantic symbol' evokes the ineffable.

For example, Kant conceives the symbol – as opposed to the schema – as exhibiting ideas of reason (the element of Kantian epistemology which transcends knowledge and can never be *directly* exhibited in intuition). It is Goethe, however, who emphasises this ineffability most, when, for example, he defines the symbol as "the momentary living revelation of the ungraspable" (*M* §314) or again as that wherein "the idea always remains infinitely operative and unattainable so that even if it is put into words in all languages, it still remains inexpressible." (*M* §1113) The symbol is conceived as that which makes present what ineluctably escapes the grasp

of our understanding. The meaning *revealed* in the symbol remains simultaneously *concealed*.

Henn has drawn attention to Goethe's persistent stress on a meaning beyond language – a sublimity which words are unable to capture (1994 252). This leads Goethe, according to Henn, to a validation of speechless awe in the face of the mysterious: "Silence allows Goethe to go beyond language and allude to that which is infinitely challenging." (252)[33] Moreover, Henn also points out, this silence which preserves the ineffability of the transcendent is precisely what *the symbol* achieves: "It was this ultimate effectiveness to express the mysterious and ineffable which attracted Goethe to the symbolic mode." (262) In this manner, Goethe writes of the symbol that "it determines and esteems nothing through words; it merely provides an indication so as to arouse the object in the imagination." (*WA* II/3 202) The symbol is the form of discourse which, according to Goethe, retains the required mystery that silence otherwise provides.

2.4.5 Analogy

'The romantic symbol' evokes the ineffable. How? The answer for Goethe, Kant and others is always – analogy. *The relation between image and meaning is always analogous*. Kant, for example, defines the symbol as "a *Darstellung* in accordance with mere *analogy*" (1987 5:352); in fact, at times, analogy and symbol are employed interchangeably (5:354). Goethe also turns straight to the concept of analogy as the means to understand symbols while still preserving their mystery (1988

[33] See *WA* IV/2 289, IV/6 36.

145). As Marache has put it, "The rule by which the symbol operates [is] analogy" (1960 116).[34]

There are two basic reasons analogy is appropriate here. First, analogy preserves the ineffability of what is referred to. Kant is especially insistent on this point: the object of the analogy "remains unknown to me in its intrinsic character, and hence I cannot exhibit it, but can exhibit only that relation." (2002 20:280) To think analogously is to preserve the mystery of the object of one's thought. Second, analogy mirrors (and is even a result of[35]) the paradoxes that hold between being and meaning when interpreted synecdochically. Analogy is defined by the very dialectic of being and non-being (of identity and difference) which characterises the partial tautegory of 'the romantic symbol'. Meaning is being and is more than being, just as the *analogatum* is and is more than the analogous image. Therefore, 'the romantic symbol' is interpreted as evoking the ineffable by means of an operation of analogy. Occasionally, conventional signs are transformed: they participate in their meaning – a meaning which is identified with the symbolic image but also exceeds it. This excess is the ineffable that can only be experienced analogously.

Indeed, analogy is important to Christian theology for these two reasons: it preserves transcendence and is also a product of the broadly Platonic metaphysics Christianity inherited. Christian theology traditionally has a synecdochical structures and it was precisely this tradition that theorists of 'the romantic symbol' tapped into when they too began to interpret the symbol synecdochically. It is for such reasons that Blumenberg has written, "Probably nothing in the terminology of aesthetics is as instructive in regard to the problematic of secularisation as is the concept of a

[34] This emphasis on analogy may seem contentious, especially within theology – due to the near monopoly of Thomist thought on all discussions of analogy. It is important, however, to emphasise that the spectre of Thomism is not relevant here, even though the concept of analogy is.

[35] That is, the epistemological employment of analogy is often a direct result of the participatory metaphysics on which 'the romantic symbol' is erected.

'symbol'." (1983 111) The symbol is an extremely visible example of how theorists of the *Goethezeit* recovered many of the thought structures of pre-modernity and redeployed them. Again, we see the impact of the neoplatonic tradition and its employment of 'symbol' for theorists of 'the romantic symbol'. Of course, there are many forms of analogy, and these conclusions cannot be applied to all of them[36]; however, Goethe, for example, directly cites and imitates Plotinus in formulating his own analogical metaphysics.[37] Thus, when Marache claims that the Goethean symbol is grounded in "a completely new sense of analogy" (1960 321), he could easily have written that it 'is grounded in a completely ancient sense of analogy'.

* *

The foregoing is a schematic description of the operation of 'the romantic symbol': on top of a conventional, representational mode of signification, a special, participatory mode is grafted. This participation depends on a partial interpretation of tautegory or (in other words) a synecdochical relation between meaning and being. It must be remembered, however, that this is only one of many competing interpretations of the symbol at the turn of the nineteenth century. Schelling, for example, interprets the three first-order properties (heautonomy, syntheticism, tautegory) in a very different way, and in consequence the Schellingian symbol is extremely different to 'the romantic symbol' – as we shall see.

[36] Kant's employment of analogy, especially, does not fit into this picture.
[37] Invocations of Plotinus' *Enneads* appear most famously at the beginning of the *Farbenlehre* (*WA* II/1 xxxi) and *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* (*WA* I/48 196). Goethe also writes in a draft of his autobiography, *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, "All at once [in 1782] – and as if by inspiration – Neoplatonic philosophers and especially Plotinus emotionally appealed to me in a quite extraordinary way… [and] for a long time [afterwards] Plotinus still clung to me." (*WA* I/27 382) In the *Farbenlehre* especially, Goethe utilises Plotinus as an aid for developing his concept of analogy.

CHAPTER THREE

LANGUAGE IN THE *GOETHEZEIT*

The previous chapter examined theories of the symbol in the years leading up to the *PdK*; this chapter explores in a parallel fashion theories of language which may have had some impact on Schelling as he drafted his lectures. Together these two chapters describe the contemporary context of Schelling's construction of symbolic language. The first section of this chapter sketches three lines of linguistic thought in the late eighteenth century which were important for Schelling's own understanding of language. However, the vast majority of the chapter is concerned with the more specific issue of how (or even whether) language is reconcilable with the notion of the symbol. The basic problem is whether tautegory is a suitable (or even possible) ideal for language. My concern is both with late eighteenth-century theorists (Kant, Goethe) who grappled with this issue and also with recent critics (de Man, Titzmann) who have attacked the very idea of a symbolic language by means of the simple criticism – 'language is just not like that'.

3.1 Trends in Linguistic Thought Before 1800

To begin therefore I consider tendencies in German philosophy of language in the late eighteenth century.

3.1.1 The Lockean Tradition

Recent work in the history of linguistics has emphasised the dominance of Locke's philosophy for eighteenth-century understandings of language.[1] While such contentions could be seen as problematic to the extent they downplay strands of eighteenth-century linguistic speculation that do not sit so happily with twentieth-century presuppositions, there is obviously much truth to them. In movements as diverse as the French Enlightenment, British Romanticism and Leibniz-Wolffian rationalism, Lockean linguistics was a common element. And the central feature of Locke's philosophy of language was the arbitrariness of the sign: "Sounds have no natural connexion with our *ideas*, but have all their signification from the arbitrary imposition of men." (1993 3.9.4)[2] Linguistic signs are formed when a subject chooses to use a set of sounds (or graphic marks) as the representative for another object. There is no pre-existing or natural connection between word and referent which determines the decision; the choice is completely conventional.

Acknowledgment of the arbitrariness of language was not particularly new in Western linguistic thought. Locke's novelty was to assert that language is *essentially* and *originally* arbitrary. The arbitrary sign, Locke contended, is not a corruption of an original, motivated relation between signifier and signified, and so in consequence there is no radical distinction between prelapsarian and postlapsarian language, since language is *defined* as arbitrary – even Adamic language consisted in unmotivated signs (1993 3.6.51).

[1] See Aarsleff 1982, 2006, Keach 1993.

[2] The eighteenth-century conception of the arbitrary sign must be kept separate from the post-Saussurean version. For the eighteenth century, language "depend[s] on the free choice of intelligent beings" (Wolff, quoted in Wellbery 1984 19).

The *Essay on Human Understanding* therefore marks a watershed.[3] Seventeenth-century philosophy of language prior to Locke conceived language as fundamentally motivated and merely presently in a corrupt state of unmotivation. The task for the philosopher was then to reform the corrupt language which he inherited so as to return it to its natural condition. While traces of this view remained in the eighteenth century (as we shall soon see), the vast majority of post-Lockean philosophy of language *accepted* arbitrary signs as a fact of human existence. Wolff, for example, defines the sign in a Lockean manner[4], and this definition also orientates every quest for the origin of language in late eighteenth-century Europe (whether Condillac's, Rousseau's, Süssmilch's or Herder's). Indeed, it is precisely this common presupposition of arbitrariness that Schelling will question in §73 of the *PdK*.

What is more, the arbitrary sign formed the basis of philosophy of language in late 1790s Jena. Novalis' *Fichte-Studien* reveal this clearly. In "the relationship of the sign to the signified", Novalis insists "the signifying [agent] is *completely free* in the choice of the sign… In *this* agent, both [sign and signified] are freely posited." (2003 §11) The subject is free to designate a meaning with whatever sound he chooses; as such, the sign is completely unmotivated – a "voluntary imposition" as Locke had put it (1993 3.2.1).[5] This broadly Lockean outlook was given its fullest elucidation within German Idealism by Fichte. In *Von dem Sprachfähigkeit und dem Ursprung der Sprache*, Fichte attempts to "deduce the use of arbitrary signs from the essential constitution of human nature" (1996 120) – that is, he provides a transcendental

[3] See further Aarsleff 2006 451.
[4] See Wellbery 1984 18-9.
[5] For a similar insistence in Friedrich Schlegel, see Behler 1993 90, 106-7.

account of the genesis of the arbitrary sign.[6] Language operates with a type of "sign which has no resemblance whatsoever to the object it is supposed to express." (120)

Fichte and Novalis are therefore to be located within a very different tradition of linguistic thought than theorists of the symbol. The former reject tautegory (the coincidence of meaning and being) in all its forms. Novalis and Fichte celebrate precisely the lack of an ontological connection between meaning and being. Friedrich Schlegel's very unsymbolic appeals to irony and allegory are ultimately grounded in the arbitrariness of the sign.[7] The symbol, on the contrary, is premised on a critique of the arbitrary sign to which Fichte, Novalis and Friedrich Schlegel cling. Theorising symbolic language was a marginal, critical enterprise, even in the *Goethezeit*. While the symbol has received most attention in twentieth-century critical theory, the Lockean arbitrary sign was the prevalent understanding of language at that time.

3.1.2 Natural Signs

Despite the widespread dominance of the anti-cratylic Lockean tradition in late eighteenth-century philosophy of language, traces of Cratylism did remain. In what follows, I describe three such traces: the natural sign, the *Logosmystik* conception of language and of course symbolic language.

The natural sign is a motivated sign – a leftover from a pre-Lockean linguistic worldview. Its persistence in eighteenth-century philosophy of language was due to the very problems that subscription to an unmotivated conception of language gave rise to. Mendelssohn describes these problems as follows,

[6] O'Brien concludes, "Fichte inverts the typical eighteenth century hierarchy of natural over arbitrary signs by viewing arbitrariness as the hallmark of 'true' language." (1995 92) On the contrary, as we have just seen, Fichte is here *typical* of eighteenth-century linguistics.
[7] See Seyhan 1992 69.

> Everything in the language of philosophers remains arbitrary. The words and the connections among them contain nothing that would essentially agree with the nature of thoughts and the connections among them... The soul finds nothing in the designation by means of which it could be guided to the designated subject matter... For this reason, the slightest inattentiveness makes it possible for thought to lose sight of the subject matter, leaving behind merely the empty signs. (1997 272-3)[8]

The arbitrariness of the sign hinders scientific progress, for, since the sign does not resemble the thing, the thing cannot be truly perceived from the sign alone. When the sign is given undue prominence, error ensues.

There is one overwhelming response to this state of affairs during the eighteenth century – to try and do away with language altogether. To progress to error-free knowledge, the arbitrary sign should negate itself. As Wellbery writes from the eighteenth-century viewpoint,

> Our ideal medium must be language. Not just any language, though, but a transparent one that sheds its semiotic character and yields without resistance to an intuitive-ideational process in the soul. It must be a language in which the signified idea is rendered present and is not held in absence by the arbitrariness of its signs. (1984 68)

What is needed is a non-linguistic language! It is this attack on language (which I label 'anti-discursiveness') which I consider in various forms throughout the rest of the chapter. One way in which anti-discursiveness manifests itself is in the ideal of the natural sign, which reincorporates a pre-Lockean nostalgia for Adamic language into a Lockean framework.

[8] Locke himself acknowledges these problems (1993 3.2.7).

Arbitrary signs have a merely conventional relationship instituted by the free choice of the subject; with natural signs, however, there is an actual objective reason for the choice of sign – the sign is naturally grounded in the thing itself.[9] The problem, however, is that there are very few examples of genuine natural signs (at least, on typical eighteenth-century philosophical assumptions). One example is onomatopoeia (Mendelssohn 1997 181): onomatopoeic sounds are natural signs because there is a natural connection between their own being and that of the referent; this is not a connection dreamed up and imposed by the subject, but one objectively already there pre-existing the subject. Cries of emotion, metaphor and mathematics are other examples. Natural signs are therefore those in which the sign is either contained within or is a natural consequence of the signified. In this way, the natural sign avoids the pitfalls of its arbitrary counterpart – it does not obscure the referent, rather it sheds light on it. Through the immediate relation the natural sign has to its referent, the mind manages to have a quasi-immediate relation to the referent as well. Through natural signs, Mendelssohn claims, "one enjoys the advantage of providing an essential and non-arbitrary designation for discovering and grasping the truth." (1997 265) There is little room for error.

It is because of these advantages enjoyed by the natural sign that Enlightenment semiotics often adhered to the imperative: transform arbitrary signs into natural ones! This was especially true within eighteenth-century aesthetics. Lessing contends for example, "Poetry must endeavour absolutely to elevate its arbitrary signs into natural ones" (1985 134). Indeed, Lessing's ultimate solution to this problem is drama, for in drama linguistic signs are performed; here, "the speech itself is an action… sign and object are not only similar, but coincide." (Wellbery

[9] See Mendelssohn 1997 177-8.

1984 225) Meaning is objectively connected to the sign in the drama, for here the meaning is performed *in and by* the sign.

Thus, within a generally Lockean framework, cratylic remnants remained entrenched. However, such cratylic traces occupied merely the fringes of theory and of language itself – drama, onomatopoeia and metaphor are some of the rare instances of the natural sign. They are very much an exception.

3.1.3 *Logosmystik*

Another cratylic tendency within eighteenth-century linguistics which remained firmly on the fringes is the mystical interpretation of language called *Logosmystik* (Apel 1963 20). *Logosmystik* refers to a disparate selection of thinkers who all placed language at the heart of theology. 'The Word become flesh' is made the model through which everything (including nature and human language) is to be interpreted. In Germany, *Logosmystik* has its roots in Eckhardt, Nicholas of Cusa and Luther, then flourished among Böhme and the Swabian pietists (like Oetinger) after the Reformation. In late eighteenth century Germany, it found its champion in J.G. Hamann.[10]

Logosmystiker therefore theologise on the experience of language. Language is so important to them because it disrupts "sound, practical human reason" (Hamann 2007 154). Hamann's treatise, *Neue Apologie des Buchstaben H*, is exemplary: he discovers in 'h' a scandal with which reason is unable to cope. Hamann pokes fun at contemporary calls to modernise German spelling (and in particular to drop the silent 'h' which appeared in the middle of many late eighteenth century German words)[11],

[10] Such a list may suggest that Hamann emerged out of nowhere, and in the German context there is some truth to this. However, Hamann's understanding of language is certainly influenced by other eighteenth-century figures such as Warburton and Louth.
[11] See Sheehan 1998 33-41.

for such calls presuppose that language can be brought under the control of the principle of sufficient reason (2007 150). Hamann counters that 'h' serves no rational purpose but still it survives – and this is because language has a religious and not a rational basis. 'H' indicates the divinity which underlies all linguistic use. Sheehan writes of Hamann's position,

> The *h* immoderately overflowed the parameters set by… orthography insofar as its use was irregular, unpredictable and thoroughly unrestricted by the confines of proper pronunciation… [It] was the very sign of superabundance and overflow in human language that harkened to God's hidden hand. (1998 36-8)

As the alphabetic representative of breath or aspiration, 'h' most closely resembles the divine spirit which animates all things. Hamann's remarks here, idiosyncratic as they seem, draw on a whole tradition of theological thought and most particularly on Böhme, who had already written in 1623,

> The ancient wise men, judicious in this tongue inserted a [silent] H in the name JEOVA… This was done with great understanding, for the H reveals the holy name, with its five vowels, in the outward nature. It shows how the holy name of God breathes itself out and reveals itself in the creature… [It is an] instrument of the divine.[12]

* *

At the centre of *Logosmystik* stands the principle: God's self-revelation is language. This has two corollaries: first, God's creation must be seen as a form of language and, second, human language is a form of God's revelation. In other words,

[12] Quoted in Sheehan 1998 37. See further Böhme 2001 215.

creation expresses the Word[13]; nature is therefore divine language in corporeal form – *Natursprache*. Nature must be understood on a linguistic model: its products must be interpreted like words, behind which lie meanings, and ultimately all such meanings must be traced back to the author of the text.[14] Natural science, on this model, becomes a form of hermeneutics. This model applies to humanity as well: anthropology also becomes a branch of hermeneutics – the *imago Dei* resembles the *sermo Dei*. Böhme writes, in man "the word of God speaketh, ruleth, liveth and willeth" (2001 195), and thus man "is the book of the Being of all beings." (198) However, humanity is also able to perpetuate and repeat God's revelation: God speaks in man and man's speaking is but the continuation of this originary word. As Baader wrote, "To speak is to use the language of God."[15] Divine revelation is redistributed in human language. A seventeenth century follower of Böhme sums up this line of thought,

> Therefore *God* has determined all nature through the art of speech, indeed His words are shown through all the secrets of nature; therefore whoever speaks rightly… speaks as God.[16]

Since *language* is the proper model for divine revelation, human language takes precedence over nature as the most significant site of God's presence in the world. Language is the aspect of creation which resembles God's original revelation most; it is the closest finite approximation to the divine, and so it is the point in the created world in which God is most revealed. For *Logosmystiker*, human words reveal the divine nature; they are natural signs of God.

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[13] There are, of course, thorny theological issues in play here, and different thinkers liken creation to the Incarnation to very different degrees. All thinkers in this tradition, though, posit some analogy between them.
[14] See Griffith Dickson 1995 139-43, Bayer 1983 59.
[15] Quoted in Susini 1942 2:241.
[16] Quoted in Ingen 2001 127.

There is a further consequence of the *Logosmystik* conception of language which is perhaps not as immediately obvious – this is the identification of language and reason. Since humanity itself is part of God's self-expression, man's act of thinking forms part of God's act of speaking. In other words, human reason is an expression of divine Logos. Hamann writes, "Language [is] the only, first and last organon and criterion of reason." (2007 208)[17] Language is the paradigmatic model through which thought is to be understood. Of course, the very fact that the Greek term, *Logos*, means both reason and language is made much of in this regard, for it exhibits the original identity of language and reason. Moreover, its famous use at the beginning of John's Gospel further adds to its prestige: reason, language and God's Incarnation in the world are all bound together in '*Logos*'. '*Logos*' is therefore the proof *par excellence* for the *Logosmystiker*: human language and human reason are forms of God's Word.

* *

Logosmystik entered a renaissance in Germany during the late eighteenth century. Not only did Hamann popularise this way of thinking, the first generation of Romantics enthusiastically championed many of the sources on which Hamann was drawing. Tieck, for example, proclaimed the virtues of Böhme in Jena in the late 1790s and seems to have introduced Schelling to his writings in 1799.[18] Simultaneously, in Munich Baader discovered Böhme and other mystics, devoting

[17] Baader held very similar views. See Susini 1942 2:236-43. *Logosmystik* was not the only tradition in which the identification of reason and language was maintained (Wolff and Rousseau, for example, say very similar things); it is, however, a particularly crucial one.
[18] On Tieck, see Mayer 1999 55-60; on Schelling, see Gutmann 1936 xlv, Mayer 1999 181-6.

much of his life to reissuing their works.[19] Schelling's friendship with Baader on moving to Bavaria in 1803 strengthened his acquaintance with the *Logosmystiker* (although he had been aware of the Swabian pietists since his days in the Tübingen Stift[20]). *Logosmystik* was alive and well at the end of the eighteenth century, and so was an important vessel for the transmission of cratylic interpretations of language.

3.2 Tautegory

Natural signs and the *Logosmystik* interpretation of language are two forms therefore in which Cratylism was preserved in the late eighteenth century. However, for our purposes, the most significant 'cratylic remnant' of German linguistic theory during the 1790s was the burgeoning discourse of symbolic language.

Yet, symbolic language did not merely assert a motivated relation between signifier and signified in opposition to the arbitrary sign; it flew in the face of arbitrariness by subscribing to tautegory – *the union of signifier and signified*. The relation between being and meaning in language, according to theorists of the symbol, is neither one of motivation or nonmotivation, but one of ontological equivalence. Being *is* meaning; the signifier *is* the signified. On this basis, theories of the symbol not only diverge from the Lockean arbitrary sign, but also from the natural sign and the sign of the *Logosmystik* tradition.

Yet, of course, with such a radical view of language come problems – foremost among them the simple question: *can* tautegory be legitimately applied to

[19] He published a new edition of Böhme's works in 1813 "so as to reawaken the mystic tradition." (Quoted in Benz 1968 7).
[20] See Benz 1968 20-1, 56.

language? One of the major issues for theorists of the symbol was the very possibility of symbolic *language*. If language is defined as sounds or images which refer to an external, intellectual meaning, then the idea of symbolic language begins to look self-contradictory. Gadamer for example describes the typical Western view of language as follows,

> *Pure indication*… is the essence of the sign… It should not attract attention to itself in such a way that one lingers over it, for it is there only to make present something that is absent and to do so in such a way that the absent thing, and that alone, comes to mind. (2004 145)

In other words, the process of signification stands at the centre of our experience of language; it is the means by which a signifier refers to a signified outside itself. The sounds of language (according to a standard picture) only convey meaning by extrinsically indicating first a concept in the mind and second the object in the world to which the concept refers. It is only by transcending itself first into the mind and then into the world that language operates successfully. Hence, the sign is not self-sufficient; it is not heautonomous: it requires something external to give it meaning. The sign's function is to point away from itself – in this it is completely opposed to heautonomy. This self-effacing 'essence' of language also problematises any claim to tautegory. In the sign, meaning remains separate from and external to the being of language. Such has always been the fundamental tenet of linguistics: meaning exists outside of being – they cannot be unified. The whole point of the sign is to be non-self-identical, to efface itself so as to point to some meaning external to it. Signifier and signified remain separate and cannot be fused into one another.

Hence, the task for theorists of symbolic language becomes to conceive another, alternative model for language, a model on which language can operate without giving rise to properties antithetical to the symbol. Only thus can the idea of

symbolic language be coherent. The requirement is for a language in which meaning and being are unified. It is this aim I dub 'tautegory'. Tautegory is a first-order property which particularly applies to symbolic *language* (rather than symbols in general), for standard linguistic theories are particularly virulent (as we have seen) in *separating* meaning and being, so that tautegory is far more contentious in the realm of language than it is elsewhere. Only a language which exhibits tautegory counts as a symbolic language.

The term 'tautegory' itself comes from the writings of the late Schelling who in his *Philosophie der Mythologie* employs it in an almost identical way to 'symbol' in the *PdK*.[21] Myths are tautegorical because they are symbolic. While Schelling uses 'tautegory' to refer to mythology alone, in this thesis I will extend its range to cover the whole linguistic realm. 'Tautegory' is an appropriate term because even its etymology ('expressing the same thing as itself') suggests the identity of signifier and signified. Thus in the *Philosophie der Mythologie* Schelling writes,

> Mythology… has no meaning other than the one it expresses… Mythology is entirely proper, that is, it must be understood just as it expresses itself, and not as if it thought one thing and said another. Mythology is not *allegorical*; it is *tautegorical*. For mythology, the gods are the beings that really exist; instead of *being* one thing and *signifying another*, they signify only what they are. (*SW* 11:195-6)

This ideal of tautegory is that which forty years earlier also motivates Schelling's construction of symbolic language.

* *

[21] See Tilliette 1970 1:466 for a comparison. The term was coined, however, by Coleridge prior to being appropriated by Schelling. In a footnote to the passage below (*SW* 11:196), Schelling acknowledges this. For Coleridge's usage of 'tautegory', see 1839 296, 1993 206.

It needs to be stressed just how radical Schelling and other theorists of the symbol's pursuit of tautegorical language is within Western linguistics. The symbol does not refer to a referent outside itself; it participates in and so shares its being with this referent. The symbol presents *itself* and does not refer to anything outside of itself. It does *not* efface itself – because it *is* its own meaning. Such a conception of language is not even cratylic.[22] This is because, while the motivated sign possesses a 'natural' link to its referent in the manner of a faithful mimetic copy, the symbol goes one step further to become part of (or, in some cases, identical to) its referent. The symbol is not just a copy of its referent; it *is* its referent. This novel reinterpretation of the signifier-signified relation plunged theorists of the symbol during the *Goethezeit* into new waters.

Theorising symbolic language hence became a special challenge. Theorists at the time were adamant that (in Frenzel's words), "The poetic symbol is not merely referential, but possesses intrinsic value. It cannot be exchanged, nor can it be substituted like 'x' in an equation… It is simultaneously what it stands for." (1963 35-6) Yet, having made such negative assertions, it becomes more difficult to envisage the actual positive model for symbolic language – that is, if it is neither a conventional sign nor a motivated one, what form of language is it? What other forms of language are there in which meaning is intrinsic? In this vein, Todorov writes (referring specifically to Moritz' work),

> Now is it not a generic character of every sign… to refer to something other than itself? Moritz thus needs to conceive of a new class of signs, characterised by their intransitivity. (1982 161)

[22] Even Cratylus – characterised as holding a really extreme position on language – admits "the name is not the same with the thing named" (Plato 1963a 430a). Indeed, Socrates himself suggests that such an admission is the bare minimum required for there to be any common ground in discussing language. He later exclaims, "How ridiculous would be the effect of names on things, if they were exactly the same with them!" (432b)

The task is to theorise a new class of intransitive signs – signs which do not refer to anything outside of themselves, but contain their own meaning. The task, then, is to conceive tautegorical signs – symbols. Each word must be an end in itself which enacts its own meaning and so requires nothing beyond itself.

3.3 The Possibility of Symbolic Language I: Responses from Critical Theory

The next three sections of the present chapter are dedicated to unravelling the mysterious idea of a tautegorical language. Or, more specifically, they examine various criticisms of this ideal and admissions of its impossibility. First, in this section, I will consider some recent criticisms within critical theory of the *Goethezeit* quest for tautegorical language. Then I turn to the fate of symbolic language first in Kant and second in Goethe – both, as we shall see, implicitly admit that symbolic language is impossible, and so linguistics is a domain into which the properties of the symbol can never be transposed. My purpose in considering these obstacles to symbolic language is to show how in fact they do not rule out symbolic language *tout court*, but *only one interpretation* of it. In short, it is only (I argue) when the 'romantic' interpretation of the symbol is transposed into linguistics that these criticisms or admissions of failure are valid. They are *invalid* for *other interpretations* of symbolic language. Ultimately, of course, my aim is to clear the way for both the possibility and the plausibility of *Schelling's* construction of symbolic language, since Schelling does not interpret it 'romantically' but in a very different manner.

3.3.1 The Naturalisation of the Semiotic

De Man's "The Rhetoric of Temporality" has provided – as we saw in the previous chapter – perhaps the most influential attempt to "put into question… the assured predominance of the symbol as the outstanding characteristic of romantic diction." (1983 198) He contends that theories of symbolic language were achieved by means of a violent "suppression" (207) of the essence of language. De Man concentrates his criticisms on tautegory: a symbolic language committed to tautegory is one that ignores, and even suppresses, the fundamental abyss that actually separates signifier from signified.[23] This gap exists at the very heart of linguistics, so to conceive of a language without it is to no longer conceive of language at all. For this reason, symbolic language "will never be able to gain an entirely good poetic conscience", but is rather a form of "tenacious self-mystification" (208). In contrast, de Man vaunts allegory's superiority, its "demystification of an organic world postulated in a symbolic mode" (222).

Indeed, the organicism of the symbol – its assertion of "the priority of natural substances" (196) – is fundamental to de Man's denunciation of tautegorical language, as another of his essays, "The Intentional Structure of the Romantic Image", makes clear. Here, de Man begins with Hölderlin's image in *Brot und Wein*:

> *...Nun aber nennt er sein Liebstes,*
>
> *Nun, nun müssen dafür Worte, wie Blumen, entstehn.* (1985 2:90-5, ll. 89-90)
>
> […But now he names his most loved,
>
> Now, for this reason, words, like flowers, must arise.]

According to de Man, this comparison of words to flowers sums up the underlying goal of symbolic language – *language aspires to be a natural object*. De Man writes, "This type of imagery is grounded in the intrinsic ontological primacy of the natural

[23] Benjamin provides an important precedent (1998 159-63).

object. Poetic language seems to originate in the desire to draw closer and closer to the ontological status of the object." (1984 7) Symbolic language aspires to the objective presence of nature; indeed, "Romantic thought and Romantic poetry seem to come so close to giving in completely to the nostalgia for the object that it becomes difficult to distinguish between object and image." (9) This, on first glance at least, seems to be the very point of tautegory: signs become the objects to which they refer; thus words become natural objects.

Moreover, de Man again criticises such objectification for overriding the 'essence of language'. He writes, "Words do *not* originate like flowers… It is in the essence of language to be capable of origination, but of never achieving the absolute identity with itself that exists in the natural object." (6) Natural objects are constituted by self-presence; language by irredeemable difference (by a permanent gap separating meaning from being). Tautegory therefore properly belongs to the natural object, and any aspiration to this condition by language is utterly futile. Symbolic language's "nostalgia for the natural object" is doomed to "ontological bad faith" (1983 211). Language *cannot* be given "material substantiality" (1984 2).

Titzmann also criticises this aspiration, which he dubs, "the naturalisation of the semiotic":

> The artwork approaches nature and nature the artwork… By means of the concept of the symbol, the difference between a semiotic field whose objects signify something and a natural field whose objects signify nothing is annulled. (1979 660)

Symbolic language is naturalised and this leads to an abandonment of its linguistic character. Language turns against itself in order to become nature. The consequence of this is simple: symbolic language is not to be read or interpreted, but *perceived* – the mere sensory perception of the symbol is enough; no hermeneutic work is

required on the part of the subject. As de Man puts it, language "is defined as 'symbolic' by the priority conferred on the initial moment of sensory perception." (1983 193)

3.3.2 Interpretations of Heautonomy

Both de Man and Titzmann consider this naturalisation of the symbol, and the resultant priority of perception, to be a consequence of *tautegory*. To unify meaning and being is, in their view, *necessarily* an imitation of the natural object – negating symbolic language's status as language. This, of course, is only compounded by the tendency to conceive this tautegory in organicist terms. In the very rhetoric used to articulate symbolic language, the naturalisation and de-semiotisation of language is already noticeable.

I agree entirely with the conclusions of this critique; however, the range within which they are valid is far more circumscribed than either de Man or Titzmann realise. It is *not* 'first-order' properties, like tautegory, *in themselves* which lead to these conclusions, but rather the *second-order interpretation* they are given by the 'romantic' interpretation of the symbol. The basis for distancing myself from de Man and Titzmann is, of course, the Schellingian symbol: Schelling's symbol shares first-order properties with 'the romantic symbol', but still manages to be discursive. Schelling's symbol is *non-perceptual*, whilst remaining *tautegorical*.

In Chapter Two, I argued that first-order properties radically *underdetermine* the symbol, and that a property such as tautegory (the union of signifier and signified) could be interpreted in at least three different, equally legitimate ways: the subject could take the signifier and signified *as if they were one* (the Kantian answer); the signifier could be absorbed into the signified, while the signified itself transcends it

(partial tautegory); or finally the signified and signifier could be utterly identical (absolute tautegory). I am making a similar argument in this chapter. 'The romantic symbol' is understood along the lines of a natural object – that is, the signified inheres in the signifier in much the same self-evident way that, for example, green inheres in grass: one need only perceive the latter to know the former. Schelling, however, understands symbolic language in a very different manner: it does *not display* its meaning like a natural object, but *produces* or *constructs* it, like a Euclidean problem. Schelling provides an opposing second-order interpretation of the symbol, and in consequence his invocation of a symbolic language remains coherent. *Neither* tautegory *nor* any other first-order property of the symbol is *itself* responsible for the anti-discursive nature of some theories of the symbol.

* *

What is it about how 'the romantic symbol' interprets symbolic language that brings about this process of naturalisation? The answer I contend is the way in which it interprets the first-order property of *heautonomy*. Heautonomy, as we saw in the previous chapter, is the self-sufficiency of the symbolic image. It needs nothing external. Now, there are obviously many ways in which entities can be a self-contained whole, and for the purpose of this thesis I distinguish between two: first, the way in which a logical argument or mathematical equation is heautonomous and second the way in which a perceived natural object (like a blade of grass) is heautonomous. The former I label a 'rationalist' interpretation of heautonomy and the latter an 'empiricist' interpretation of heautonomy. I explore them in turn by

considering an important proponent of each interpretation – Spinoza and Schiller, respectively.

1. Spinoza's epistemology hinges on a critique of ideas as 'impressions' received passively by the mind as it goes about 'seeing' what is outside it. On the contrary, Spinoza emphasises, ideas are *actions*; they are not passively received from without, but formed through the mind's own process of thinking.[24] This is also a critique of signs, but, in opposition to the more empirically-minded thinkers I am otherwise discussing in this chapter, Spinoza does not think signs are problematic because they are not representational enough (i.e. because attention sometimes focuses on them, rather than the thing itself), Spinoza thinks signs are *too representational*. To the extent that they point away from themselves, they are inadequate. As Jacobi has Spinoza say from the vantage point of 1785, "Truth cannot come from outside." (1994 205) Spinoza gives the example of a conclusion without premises to illustrate an inadequate idea (1994 IIP28D): the idea does not show its own 'working' – its states its truth, without explaining how this truth was reached. The adequate idea or syllogism, on the other hand, exhibits its own premises, and so requires nothing external to justify its truth. Spinoza's theory of adequate ideas therefore shares the very same criterion of heautonomy as all symbols during the *Goethezeit*. Only that entity which is self-sufficient, which contains its own meaning within itself, is to be esteemed, for it is absolute (IIP34). Adequate ideas are active and rationally self-sufficient – far from being modelled on a perceived natural object, Spinozist heautonomy is modelled on a rational argument.

[24] See Spinoza 1994 IID3, IIP43S.

2. Schiller, as I indicated in the previous chapter, was one of the pioneers in importing heautonomy into aesthetics. He interprets heautonomy through an analysis of the subject's aesthetic experience: in encountering beauty, the subject perceives something which has already formed itself. The sense data the subject receives is structured without the mind's activity being required. It is, in Schaper's phrase, "the appearance to the senses of intelligible perfection." (1979 112) An intuition of a beautiful object is an intuition already imbibed with form – the mind is merely passive in relation to it. A beautiful object is one that *merely* needs to be perceived to be known. It stands self-evident and 'ready-made' before the subject.

Each of these versions of heautonomy fed into different interpretations of the symbol. The rationalist variant informed the Schellingian symbol (as we shall see in later chapters) and the empiricist variant indelibly marked 'the romantic symbol' – and it is this latter influence I explore further in the rest of this chapter.

3.3.3 'The Romantic Symbol' and Anti-Discursiveness

My earlier claim concerning the regional validity of de Man and Titzmann's conclusions is dependent upon this contention that heautonomy is interpreted in different ways during the *Goethezeit*. The naturalisation of the semiotic which de Man and Titzmann both see as a consequence of the idea of symbolic language is in fact only a consequence of a symbolic language interpreted through an *empiricist* form of heautonomy. Their arguments solely apply to *'the romantic symbol'*, because only 'the romantic symbol' employs an empiricist version of heautonomy.

What is more – and again this cuts against the grain of de Man and Titzmann's arguments – the symbol did not somehow create this anti-discursive empiricism in the first place. On the contrary, 'the romantic symbol' was embedded within a prevalent

and long-standing trend within late eighteenth-century Germany of understanding language in an empiricist and so anti-discursive manner. Rather than the structure of the symbol giving rise to anti-discursive sentiment, anti-linguistic tendencies are *prior*: it is the tradition of anti-linguistic thought in the Enlightenment as well as the *Goethezeit* which was the motor behind the naturalisation of the semiotic and the priority of the perceptual. That is, it is anti-discursive sentiment which determines the way in which 'the romantic symbol' is interpreted, rather than *vice versa*.

One critic who has recently drawn attention to the development of an anti-discursive empiricism in the eighteenth century and its subsequent impact on the interpretation of the symbol is Halmi.[25] In *The Genealogy of the Romantic Symbol*, Halmi poses the following question, "What cultural questions or needs motivated the formulation of symbolist theory, and what cultural conditions (philosophical, scientific, political) affected the forms that that theory assumed?" (2007 26) In answer, one of the main narratives the book traces is a reaction against the alienation of science from everyday sense-experience. The *Goethezeit* inherited this "anxiety about discursive representation" (152): in the climate bequeathed by the Enlightenment, abstract thought and language were to be distrusted. 'I'll believe it when I see it' became the underlying ethos of the age; the sophistries of language were veils hiding the self-evidence of the phenomena. It was within such a worldview that 'the romantic symbol' began to be interpreted on the model of a natural object – a model that does away with the corrupt mediation of the semiotic function.

Attacks on language were the order of the day. We have seen this already in my discussion of the natural sign; however, I now turn to a discussion of symbolic

[25] Halmi – in line with de Man and Titzmann (who are both cited approvingly (2007 4, 13)) – asserts the influence of this tradition on the fundamental constitution of the symbol itself: "The privileging of sensible intuition demanded that the relation of signifier and signified be defined, paradoxically, in unitary rather than binary terms." (61). He explicitly places Schelling in this anti-discursive tradition (93, 153).

language in Kant and Goethe where we will see again (and this time in much more detail) that, while they took the eighteenth-century distrust of language to a new extreme, this remained a tradition they bought into, rather than an attitude they engendered themselves.

3.4 The Possibility of Symbolic Language II: Kant

In Kant's critical philosophy, the symbol undergoes a revolution. While for all philosophers earlier in the eighteenth century symbols were a form of discursive knowledge, Kant transforms them into a perceptual *Darstellung* – completely opposed to any discursiveness. He states categorically, "The intuitive in cognition must be contrasted with the discursive (not the symbolic). The former is… *symbolic*." (1987 5:352) The consequences for symbolic language are immense, especially considering the influence Kant's theory of the symbol was to have on later generations. Kant here erects the symbol on an empiricist interpretation of heautonomy – it is to be perceived, rather than constructed. In so doing, he inaugurates the specific 'romantic' interpretation of the symbol, a particularly *anti-discursive* interpretation. In this section, I describe how and why Kant made symbols perceptual at the expense of their discursiveness.

3.4.1 Pre-Kantian Symbolic Cognition

> Between Leibniz's *Meditations on Knowledge, Truth and Ideas* (1684) and Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (1790), the meaning of the *symbol* was radically transformed. From a mere arbitrary sign which is conventionally substituted

> for an idea, the symbol became intuitive presentation… Kant consciously (and in a historically decisive manner) announces a rupture from the meaning attributed to the symbol by the Leibniz-Wolffian school. (Galland-Szymkowiak 2006 73)

As Galland-Szymkowiak here implies, to understand the significance of Kant's transformation of the symbol and the 180° revolution in its meaning from discursive to perceptual, it is necessary to consider in more detail the position against which he was reacting. In Chapter Two, I introduced the distinction between symbolic and intuitive cognition within eighteenth-century German epistemology. The two basic properties of intuition are immediacy and particularity, whereas symbolic cognition is defined by its mediacy (that is, its dependence on signs) and its universality (its conceptual content). Moreover, it is the *arbitrariness* of the signs it employs which makes symbolic knowledge fallible, for (since the sign does not resemble the thing) the thing cannot be truly perceived from the sign alone. The sign obscures what it marks.

This problem with the sign, and so with symbolic cognition, began to be increasingly flagged up as the eighteenth century progressed. I have already noted this growing distrust of language. Much of the impetus for this growing suspicion of the mediated nature of signs was the influence of British empiricism on the German intellectual scene. If knowledge is rooted in an act of perception, the philosophical merits of signs (and especially *knowledge* through signs) become harder to justify. Empiricism gradually defamed symbolic cognition. Humans are at present (the story goes) limited to two kinds of knowledge: the intuitive but clear knowledge they receive through sense perception, and the distinct but symbolic knowledge achieved

by the understanding.[26] The former is limited to the subject's immediate environment; the latter prone to error. The ideal for Enlightenment philosophy therefore is knowledge that is both *distinct* and *intuitive*. This would give man possession of an infallible and universal science; knowledge would be immediately of the things themselves, unmediated by the sign, and yet not limited to the finitely perceptible. Man would gain God's infinite and indubitable power of perception.

How though – the question was repeatedly asked – is this ideal possible when science is intrinsically dependent on symbolic cognition? The answer was located in language, for it is the sign that separates symbolic from intuitive cognition. The imperative for the *Aufklärung* therefore becomes *to dissolve the sign without destroying science*. To quote Yuri Lotman, "The striving for de-semiotisation, the battle against the sign, is the basis of the culture of the Enlightenment."[27] Berkeley expresses this motivation most clearly,

> It were, therefore, to be wished that everyone would use his utmost endeavours to obtain a clear view of the ideas he would consider, separating from them all that dress and encumbrance of words which so much contribute to blind the judgment and divide the attention… We need only draw the curtain of words, to behold the fairest tree of knowledge. (1975 88)

Such was the empiricist critique of language which became ever more popular in eighteenth-century Germany.

[26] This distinction draws on the technical meanings of 'clear' and 'distinct' current in the Leibniz-Wolffian tradition. See Leibniz 1998 76-7.
[27] Quoted in Wellbery 1984 35.

3.4.2 Kant's Expulsion of Language

Kant's philosophical roots lie in these developments. His early philosophical trajectory mirrors others of his era – an ever increasing awareness of the empiricist challenge to rationalism. What, however, is surprising considering this context is Kant's neglect of the sign. Semiotics makes no appearance in the critical philosophy. In spite of his predecessors' obsession with the issue of symbolic cognition, *Kant is totally silent on the problem of signs*. There is no such thing as symbolic cognition for Kant. As Surber puts it, "Kant maintained a fairly consistent 'silence' on language as a philosophical question" (2000 316); each time a question of language occurs Kant pushes it back "below the threshold of genuine philosophical interest" (315). It was, indeed, such absences which left his work open to metacritical attacks by Hamann and Herder.[28]

I want to argue that Kant's total silence in this regard is due to the fact that *he solved the problem of the sign*, and he does this by taking the negative, empiricist attitude of the *Aufklärung* towards language to its logical conclusion. *He expels language from philosophy*. Perhaps the best indication of this is his dictum, concepts without intuitions are "empty" (1929 A51/B75), which sweeps away the very problem of symbolic cognition. Kant completely rejects its epistemological significance: symbolic cognition is premised on the possibility of knowing things without intuiting them; however, Kant counters, *only what can be intuited* can be known in any way; therefore, *there is only intuitive cognition*. Symbolic cognition is not cognition; it can provide no sort of experience.[29] Rather than man's finitude being marked by his

[28] Already in his 1784 *Metakritik über den Purismum der Vernunft*, Hamann (2007 205-18) uses the absence of a treatment of language in Kant's work to criticise the very basis of the critical philosophy.
[29] Although he still holds open the possibility of employing 'empty signs' for thinking, rather than knowing.

dependence on the sign as the Leibniz-Wolffian tradition contended, for Kant man's finitude is due to his dependence on sensible intuition.

There is one paragraph in §59 of the *Kritik der Urteilskraft* which confirms this impression. Here, Kant does at least mention language, if negatively. This is the point at which Kant makes explicit the shift of the term 'symbol' from discourse to intuition, by turning on its head the Leibniz-Wolffian distinction between symbolic and intuitive cognition. As we have just seen, philosophers of the eighteenth century conceived symbolic cognition in opposition to intuition due to its dependence on signs; Kant, however, completely disagrees with this usage: "The intuitive in cognition must be contrasted with the discursive (not the symbolic)." (1987 5:351) The major epistemological principle resides now *not* in the "contrast [of] symbolic with intuitive *Darstellung*", but rather in the fact that *symbols are a form of intuitive knowledge*, and so "must be contrasted with the discursive". Kant writes,

> The more recent logicians have come to use the word *symbolic* in another sense that is wrong and runs counter to the meaning of the word. They use it to contrast symbolic with *intuitive Darstellung*. For the latter (the intuitive) can be divided into *schematic* and *symbolic Darstellung*: both are hypotyposes, i.e. *Darstellungen*, not mere *characterizations*, i.e. designations of concepts by accompanying sensible signs. (5:351-2)

'The more recent logicians' are Kant's forebears in the Leibniz-Wolffian tradition who employed the term 'symbol' for symbolic cognition. Both symbol and schema, as intuitive *Darstellungen*, are to be distinguished from 'mere characterisations' – that is, signs. This is because, while Kant finds symbols and schemata philosophically significant and gives them crucial roles in his critical project, signs *remain extrinsic to philosophy*. Here is how Kant defines the sign:

> Signs contain nothing whatever that belongs to the intuition of the object; their point is the subjective one of serving as a means for reproducing concepts… They are either words, or visible (algebraic or even mimetic) signs, and they merely *express* concepts. (5:352)

Signs are merely subjective, arbitrary aids for communicating concepts. Kant relegates the problem of the sign to one of no philosophical importance: their only function is to 'reproduce' concepts already formed. The sign has nothing to do with epistemology whatsoever, but is solely a device for communicating already processed philosophical thought. *Therefore, there is no such thing as knowledge gained through discourse for Kant*. In this passage from the third *Kritik*, symbolic cognition disappears from philosophy. It is for this reason that Kant has almost nothing to say about language in his works.

Symbols are therefore to be opposed to language and to signs in general. To speak of symbolic language is a pure nonsense; instead, one must speak of symbolic *intuitions*. Kant takes the prevalent anti-discursive attitude of his era even further than it had been taken before: language (and especially any idea of symbolic language) is entirely banished from philosophy.

3.4.3 The Perceptual Symbol

The question naturally arises then as to what Kant means by symbolic intuition, and here one further development in the history of the symbol needs to be noted. As I discussed above, intuition in late eighteenth century Germany had two defining characteristics: immediacy and particularity.[30] Notable by its absence from this list, however, is perception or sensation. As Hintikka has argued, "There was no inseparable connection between the notion of intuition and sensibility in the writings

[30] Kant's notion of intuition definitely partook of both these properties – see 1929 A320/B376-7.

of most seventeenth and eighteenth-century philosophers." (1969 40-1) Indeed, Hintikka contends that to read our modern prejudices concerning *Anschauung* as perceptual vision back onto late eighteenth-century German thought would be a grave mistake (38-9). Perception was not (at least directly) associated with intuition. An obvious example here are the various forms of 'intellectual intuition' popular among seventeenth and eighteenth-century rationalists; the very fact they could use the Latin *intuitus* to describe this form of knowledge demonstrates the term's non-perceptual connotations. Hintikka concludes, there was no "direct conceptual connection" between intuition and perception (51).

Yet, *with Kant this changed*. One of the main tasks of the Transcendental Aesthetic in the first *Kritik* is to prove that all intuitions are perceptions, that intuition is solely grounded (for humans at least) in sensibility. In Hintikka's words, "Kant tries to show that all intuitions are sensible." (49-50) In light of this argument, Kant's designation of the symbol as a form of intuition can be further determined. Not only does the symbol become a form of immediate and particular presentation, but, owing to the argument of the Transcendental Aesthetic, it is now tied ineluctably to perception. *Symbols are, Kant claims, to be perceived*. Again, the radical shift from earlier uses of the term needs to be emphasised. For earlier eighteenth-century philosophers, symbolic cognition equated to knowledge through discourse, interpretation and concepts. All this is discarded by Kant: symbols are particular images that are *immediately perceived*.

This shift had enormous consequence for the history of 'symbol' in the 1790s and into the nineteenth century. The symbol is now opposed to linguistic activity and linked, instead, to sensation.

3.5 The Possibility of Symbolic Language III: Goethe

Goethe's work forms the culmination of this 'empiricist' tradition which naturalises the semiotic into an object of perception. What is more, as I pointed out in Chapter Two, it is in Goethe's writings that the symbol is first explicitly worked out in the form that will come to be known as 'the romantic symbol'. Thus, this section comprises an examination of the way anti-discursiveness and the specifically 'romantic' interpretation of the symbol come together in his writings. As we shall discover, for Goethe the symbol is a natural object in the world in which meaning is 'ready-made' and available to perception. What de Man labels 'nostalgia for the natural object' here reaches fulfilment.

3.5.1 Seeing Symbols

One of Goethe's most famous statements on the symbol arises from a perceived disagreement with Schiller:

> On a slight disagreement between us… I made the following reflections: There is a great difference whether a poet is looking for the particular that goes with the universal, or sees the universal in the particular. The first gives rise to allegory where the particular only counts as an example, an illustration of the universal; but the latter in fact constitutes the nature of poetry, expressing something particular without any thought of the universal, and without indicating it. Now whoever has this living grasp of the particular is at the same time in possession of the universal, without realising it, or else only realising it later on. (*M* §261)

Goethe polemicises *against* signification and *for* perception. While the allegorical poet 'looks for the particular that goes with the universal' (that is, has to exercise his

judgment concerning the appropriateness of a particular image to depict a general concept), the true, symbolic poet '*sees* the universal in the particular'. While the former requires intellectual effort in order to link particular to universal, for the latter the link is a matter of self-evident perception. Sørensen writes, "According to Goethe, the 'true' poet does not *search*, but he *sees*, i.e. his will and consciousness play in the moment of perception no active role; he comports himself intuitively." (1979 633) The subject remains *passive and receptive* when confronted with a symbol.

The immediate self-evidence of all meaning to perception is one of the most persistent themes in Goethe's scientific work. Maxim §575 reads,

> Everything factual is already theory: to understand this would be the greatest possible achievement. The blueness of the sky reveals the basic laws of chromatics. Don't go looking for anything beyond the phenomena: they are themselves what they teach, the doctrine.

Perception already carries universal meaning within itself – no work is necessary on behalf of the subject to provide 'the doctrine'; it is ready-made. Theory exists self-evidently in the perception of fact. It is for this reason Goethe wrote, "Thinking is more interesting than knowing; but more interesting than both is seeing." (*M* §1150) Goethe repeats again and again, perception is the major component in scientific method, while hypothesis-forming and reasoning are secondary. He conflates the conceptual and the perceptual to the extent that the idea *is* the perception and the perception the idea (*M* §39).

This is Goethe's interpretation of heautonomy. The universal is embedded objectively in the particular, independent of the subject, and the subject discovers it already pre-formed through perception. The symbol is a 'ready-made'.

3.5.2 Goethe's Attack on Language

One of the most notable features of the Goethean symbol is that it is *never* applied to literature; indeed, *Goethe never speaks (positively) of symbolic language at all*. Goethe's references to the symbol are almost exclusively made in the context of the *figurative* arts – and especially sculpture. This point has been forcefully made by Krueger (1990 53): in her extensive survey of Goethe's allusions to symbol and allegory, Krueger discovers only one exceptional "indication… that literary allegory might be suspect." (55)[31] As critics have pointed out (de Man 1983 189-90, Krueger 1990 59-60), much of Goethe's own literary output (especially the second part of *Faust*) uses allegory extensively, and so ignores his own apparent depreciation of the trope.

"The artistic symbol is plastic," states Benjamin (1998 164), and it is definitely true that the development of the symbol in the *Goethezeit* was bound up with the pre-eminence of sculpture in Classicist aesthetics. Niklewski (1979 95) claims that this preference for sculpture is due to its non-signifying *modus operandi*: sculptures do not (according to the tenets of Weimar Classicism) represent an external meaning; rather, their meaning inheres immanently. Sculpture was thus seen as paradigmatic of tautegorical representation. To become symbolic, art should imitate sculpture, put its meaning on display and make it available for immediate perception. On this view, however, literature (dependent on signs for the production of meaning) becomes inferior (Niklewski 1979 99). It is for these kinds of reason that Goethe ends up criticising the *reading process itself* as allegorical:

> There also exist works of art that scintillate through intellect, wit, gallantry, among which we also include all allegory: of these one can expect the least good, because they too destroy the interest in representation itself and drive

[31] See also Todorov 1982 204.

> the spirit back into itself, so to speak, and remove from its eyes what is actually represented. The allegorical distinguishes itself from the symbolic in that the former signifies directly, the latter indirectly. (*WA* I/47 94-5; 1983 397)

Allegory, and so literature, requires interpretation; it appeals to the intellect, whereas the symbolic sculpture appeals to the senses.

This depreciation of reading is confirmed when one takes into account Goethe's more general scepticism concerning language's capabilities – rarely has there been a poet who took such a dim view of his material! In the *Urfaust*, for example, language gets in the way of feeling; it obscures and veils emotional truth, leading to rationalistic falsehoods.[32] Instead of interpretation and signification, Goethe once more recommends the immediate self-presence of what is incommensurable with discourse. Similar attitudes surface throughout Goethe's corpus. His 1805 essay, *Symbolik*, begins with the statement that, "Neither things nor ourselves find full expression in our words", and ends with the statement that the highest type of symbol "based on intuitive perceptions alone, cannot occur in language." (*WA* II/11 167-9; 1988 26-7)[33] Goethe, it must be concluded, remained staunchly anti-discursive throughout his life.

It is no surprise therefore that critics have noted Goethe's unease with the idea of symbolic language. Nygaard writes for example,

> [For Goethe, words] tend to be more and more fully elaborated until they displace what they were meant to represent as the real centre of attention… All this evolves naturally from a consideration of the function of the sign in [Goethe's work], but is difficult to reconcile with some of the more fulsome platitudes commonly uttered about the Goethean symbol. (1988 64)

[32] See *WA* I/39 292, ll. 1143-50; 1987 ll. 3451-7.
[33] See further *M* §610, §720.

While Nygaard is here right to draw attention to Goethe's problems with the word, she goes awry in claiming this critique of language is in tension with his theory of the symbol. The Goethean attack on language is a part of the 'romantic' interpretation of the symbol to which he subscribes. Dismissal of language is the very basis of Goethe's own affirmation of the symbol. Rather than being a critique *of* the symbol, Goethe criticises language *in the name of the symbol*. Symbolism is established at the expense of symbolic language.

What is perhaps most striking about Goethe's position is how much it actually *resembles* de Man's criticisms of the symbol. Goethe too realises that 'the romantic symbol' is inassimilable to the essence of language. Where they differ of course is that de Man holds onto language rather than the symbol, while Goethe values the symbol over language. However, they *both agree* that language and 'the romantic symbol' are polar opposites and the abyss separating them can in no way be bridged.

* *

The story of the advent of 'the romantic symbol' is the story of the separation of symbols from discourse. When symbols are interpreted through an empiricist version of heautonomy, they become irreconcilable with language. Hence, theorists of 'the romantic symbol' opt for the symbol over language. Kant, for example, banishes language from philosophy, yet does not banish the symbol – instead, it is given a crucial place in the critical project. And this is because symbols are no longer seen as signs, but rather are opposed to signs – as intuitive images. Goethe brings this process to its culmination: language and signification are to be rejected in all their forms; only the self-evident object waiting to be perceived is a symbol. All that manifests a trace

of semiosis is non-symbolic. Symbolic language is rejected in the name of 'the romantic symbol'. De Man and Titzmann are therefore right to contend that 'romantic' symbolic language is a contradiction in terms; however, where they go wrong is, first, in not seeing the extent to which theorists of 'the romantic symbol' agree with them and, second, in not realising that there are *other* symbols which *are* more compatible with language.

PART TWO

THE *IDENTITÄTSSYSTEM*

CHAPTER FOUR

THE SYMBOL AND THE *IDENTITÄTSSYSTEM*

> Schelling treated the theory of the symbol only in his *PdK*… But, in fact, everything is a symbol… Philosophy is the symbolic science *par excellence*. (Tilliette 1970 1:404)

> The symbol is the paradigm for the *Identitätssystem*. (Niklewski 1979 86)

As the above quotations suggest, Schellingian symbolic language is intimately bound up with Schelling's philosophical project as a whole. Not only is it a rigorous working-out of his metaphysical and epistemological principles in the linguistic domain, it is also a motif which expresses most intensely many of the patterns of his thought. Part Two of this thesis is therefore devoted to a sustained reading of Schelling's *Identitätssystem*. I argue that to understand what is going on in Schelling's construction of symbolic language, one must embed it in his more general thought of the period.

4.1 Speculative Transformation

The idea that the Schellingian symbol can only be understood in relation to Schelling's philosophy as a whole may not seem controversial; however, in the context of scholarship on the symbol, it is. Traditionally, it has been assumed that the baroque intricacies of Schelling's philosophy are irrelevant to an understanding of the

meaning and role of his theory of the symbol.[1] And this, it is claimed, is because he *plagiarised* the symbol from his predecessors. Schelling copies Kant, Goethe and Schlegel, and so his own thought is irrelevant; what matters are the sources on which he drew.

In Chapter Two, I discussed these sources (Kant, Goethe, A.W. Schlegel), and argued that Schelling *was* considerably influenced by them. Indeed, Schelling's lectures on the *PdK* as a whole are not, on the face of it, his most original contribution to philosophy. In Fackenheim's words, "None of Schelling's works is so dependent on the ideas and research of others as his *PdK*." (1954 310)[2] We should remember for example, as I related in Chapter Two, that Schelling wrote the *PdK* with a copy of A.W. Schlegel's Berlin lectures in front of him, and he readily admits that access to this manuscript "spare[s] me much inquiry" (*SB* 2:436). There has seldom been such a clear-cut admission of plagiarism.

On the basis of this evidence, the overriding critical "temptation" (Fackenheim 1954 310) has been to write off Schelling's symbol as slavishly reproducing the work of his more innovative predecessors. And from this follows the conclusion that Schelling's own thought can be safely ignored by historians of the symbol. Sørensen, for example, claims, "It is scarcely worthwhile noting the many idiosyncrasies of this theory as laid out in the *PdK* for two reasons: first, as an aesthetician Schelling was extremely dependent on his predecessors and second, [his presentation] loses much in clarity [from those of his predecessors]." (1963 260-1) The Schellingian symbol is *merely a replica*: it may bring together disparate elements from Kant, Goethe and the Schlegel brothers, but its only merit is to thereby synthesise pre-existing material.

[1] Sørensen (1963), Titzmann (1979), Todorov (1982), Halmi (2007) all make claims about the Schellingian symbol without analysis of the *Identitätssystem*.
[2] Influences on the *PdK* include Moritz, Winckelmann, Vitruvius, Diderot, Rousseau, A.W. Schlegel, Goethe, Schiller, Jean Paul, Fiorello, Tieck, Wackenroder, Hemsterhuis and Geneli. See Tilliette 1970 1:439, 1:455, 1999 153.

There is nothing, it is claimed, truly innovative about Schelling's theory of the symbol.

* *

Yet, the evidence laid out above in no way proves (as critics have assumed) that Schelling thereby appropriates his sources unthinkingly. To claim this would be to misunderstand the nature of the scientific enterprise as Schelling conceived it. He is not concerned with plagiarising these pre-existent theories of art, but with *performing a speculative operation on them* – that is, with *transforming* them. Sørensen, for example, fails to recognise the properly philosophical work to which other theorists' ideas are subjected in Schelling's writings.

The letters Schelling penned to A.W. Schlegel (when requesting a copy of his lecture notes) not only make this perfectly clear, they can be read as a sort of manifesto for such *creative assimilation*:

> In the future, I will fully avoid establishing a *theory* of art… which must necessarily be empirical. Just as there are real or empirical things, there is real and empirical art, and to this *theory* refers. However, just as there are intellectual things, things *in themselves*, so too is there *art in itself*, of which empirical [art] is only the appearance. It is by means of this that there is a connection to philosophy of/on art [*Philosophie auf Kunst*]. You can easily discern how – in this way – my philosophy of art is able to be more a universal philosophy than a theory of art. In the former one can in no way speak of empirical art, but only the root of art, as it is in the absolute. (*SB* 2:435-6)

Schelling contends that, while his philosophy of art may have the same subject matter (art) as previous aesthetic theories, it differs from them fundamentally in *how* it considers it. He is concerned with the essence (not appearance) of art, and because of this his work can never be treated as one more 'theory of art'. Schelling's phrase '*Philosophie auf Kunst*' is particularly revealing: he is not concerned with discoursing about art or providing rules for artistic practice, but with performing a philosophical operation *on* art. Art and aesthetics form the material on which Schelling's speculation works.

It is for this reason that when Schelling goes on to note "my power of assimilation" (2:437), this is no admission of plagiarism, but a statement of his *creative* assimilation of Schlegel's ideas. Such ideas will be transformed from a mere empirical theory into genuinely philosophical speculation. The context of Schelling's comment that Schlegel's lectures will "spare me much inquiry" makes this transformation particularly clear:

> Your manuscript would be of excellent service to me, so as to keep me orientated and to bring me back to the intellectual from the empirical in art (which, according to your outline, you have sufficiently dealt with) – and so spare me much inquiry which would perhaps not have led me to the goal and would certainly have hindered the formation of the speculative. (2:436)

Schelling's focus is on developing the proper speculative account of art. For this task he needs material on which the 'speculative attitude' can labour, and A.W. Schlegel's Berlin lectures (as well as, by extension, all the other aesthetic theories on which the *PdK* is dependent) are a convenient, ready-to-hand source for this work.[3]

What is more, this is precisely the viewpoint Schelling took up within the *PdK* itself. Schelling eschews history of art or a technical theory of art in favour of "the

[3] See further Fackenheim 1954 310-1, Mayer 1999 16-7.

completely speculative science… one not directed toward the cultivation of the empirical intuition of art, but rather of its intellectual intuition." (*SW* 5:344-5; 1989 3) Philosophy of art "is the presentation of the absolute world in the form of art." (350; 7) *Philosophy* of art is inherently philosophical: it works on aesthetics until the latter manifests the genuine subject matter of philosophy – the absolute.[4] Schelling continues,

> Only to the extent that the science of nature or of art presents the absolute within it is this science genuine philosophy, *philosophy* of nature, *philosophy* of art… [Otherwise] the science under question cannot be called philosophy, but rather only a *theory* of a particular subject, such as a theory of nature or a theory of art. Such a theory could, of course, *borrow* its principles from philosophy, as for example the theory of nature does from the philosophy of nature. For just this reason, however – because it only *borrows* them – it is not philosophy. In the philosophy of art I accordingly intend to construe first of all not art *as* art, as this ***particular***, but rather *the universe in the form of art*, and the philosophy of art is *the science of the All in the form or potency of art*. Not until we have taken this step do we elevate ourselves regarding this science to the level of an absolute science of art. (368-9; 16)

Philosophy of art raises its subject matter into the absolute. It is this, Schelling maintains, that distinguishes his discussion of art from all previous aesthetics.

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We must not therefore write off the Schellingian symbol as derivative. While Schelling did draw on Goethe, A.W. Schlegel and Kant, he transformed (or, at the

[4] Hegel will express very similar sentiments; for a brief comparison of Hegel and Schelling's practices of speculative transformation, see Chapter Twelve.

very least, he claims to transform) their work in the very process of appropriating it. The Schellingian symbol is a symbol constructed from the viewpoint of speculative metaphysics rather than empirical theory.

There are two issues at stake here: one concerning the speculative grounding of the Schellingian symbol, another concerning the specific form this grounding takes. Indeed, this is implicit in the phrase 'speculative transformation' which I am using to designate the operation Schelling performs on the symbol: it is not just that what is empirical becomes 'speculatively grounded', in the process it is *also materially altered*. First, Schelling claims his is the first properly speculative grounded theory of the symbol. This is not to say – as Schelling points out – that previous theories did not 'borrow' their principles from philosophy. In fact, we have seen how 'the romantic symbol' presupposes specific metaphysical and epistemological models (like analogy). Schelling's point is, rather, they *merely "borrow"* such models from philosophy – where 'borrow' has a twofold significance: first, it implies that previous theories of the symbol hid their presuppositions to give themselves the air of being purely empirical (hence, 'the romantic symbol' *does* rely on metaphysical and epistemological presuppositions, but for the most part attempts to hide them behind a veil of empiricism); second, 'borrow' implies that previous theories of the symbol rely on such principles in a non-rigorous manner. They are not philosophically constructed from these principles by a direct, cogent process, but are erected unconsciously and (consequently) shakily on their unacknowledged metaphysical ground. Since the process of construction is unconscious, it is not rigorous.

Thus, Schelling claims to have produced the first theory of the symbol whose foundations are not merely "borrowed" but are premised rigorously. However, more than that (and this is the second point), Schelling also claims that his theory of the

symbol is *materially different* from previous theories, because it is premised on different (and, in Schelling's view, better) philosophical foundations. Schelling's *Identitätssystem* in general diverges considerably from other philosophies of its time, and – because it is constructed from the *Identitätssystem* in a rigorous manner – his theory of the symbol also departs considerably from previous theories of the symbol.

The conclusion to be drawn is that Schelling's theory of symbolic language depends heavily on his general philosophical assumptions. The symbol is bound up in his metaphysical and epistemological innovations of that period and cannot be dissociated from them. The critical prejudice is therefore false: acquaintance with Schelling's philosophy *is* a necessary prerequisite for understanding his construction of symbolic language. It is for this reason Part Two of the thesis is devoted to this end.

4.2 Schelling's Peculiarity

However, this is to anticipate. So far we have merely considered Schelling's programmatic statements which imply the peculiarity of his theory of the symbol; we have yet to record any evidence that this is in fact the case. Thus, it is worth pausing to see if there is any preliminary evidence for taking Schelling's claims seriously. The purpose of this task is twofold. First, exhibiting (even if only provisionally) the peculiarity of the Schellingian symbol shows that Schelling did not plagiarise his predecessors, and so the context of his construction of symbolic language (the *Identitätssystem*) is worth taking seriously. Second, such a procedure also 'cashes out' much of what I claimed in Part One of this thesis: Schelling's symbol is unlike any

other; he interprets the three first-order properties (heautonomy, syntheticism, tautegory) in a unique manner. Thus, the following example will hopefully hint at the accuracy of my argument in Part One.[5]

In Chapter Six, I will argue that at the centre of the *Identitätssystem* stands the doctrine of quantitative differentiation – that is, the metaphysical rejection of all forms of qualitative negation in favour of a conception of differentiation through differing degrees of intensity. Schelling repeats this doctrine within his construction of the symbol; thus, he rejects the qualitative distinction erected by Goethe between symbol and allegory as well as the qualitative distinction established by Kant between symbol and schema. In its place Schelling erects relations of quantitative intensity between symbol, allegory and schema.

Schelling's description of Dante's *Divine Comedy* as a "partial mythology" (*SW* 5:156*;* 1988b 242) makes this position clear. Dante occupies an intermediary position between symbol and allegory – a position impossible if the two were dichotomously opposed. Schelling writes,

> To present the ideas of philosophy and theology in symbols was impossible [for Dante] because there was no symbolic mythology in existence. No more could he make his poem completely allegorical, because it would then no longer be historical. Therefore it had to be a completely unique mixture of the allegorical and the historical. (155; 241)

That is, "a completely unique mixture" of the allegorical and the symbolical, as Schelling makes clear in the following paragraph:

> Dante's poem is not allegorical in the sense that the figures simply stand for something else, without being independent of this meaning and thus

[5] Of course, this is not to say that what follows is the only difference between the Schellingian and 'romantic' theory of the symbol, nor even the most significant one. However, it is a useful introduction to what makes the Schellingian symbol so 'peculiar'.

> something in themselves. On the other hand, none of them is independent of the meaning in such a way that it becomes one with the idea itself, and more than allegorical of it. There is thus in Dante's poem a quite unique middle point between allegory and symbolic-objective forms. (156; 242)

The *Divine Comedy* stands between the two modes of *Darstellung*; in Sørensen's words, it "mediates between the extreme possibilities of pure allegory and pure symbol." (1963 257)

Why is this significant? In short, because such a 'middle point' is inconceivable for any other theorist of the symbol. Goethe is the relevant point of contrast, since he insisted on the symbol/allegory dichotomy most forcefully. For Goethe, symbol and allegory are strictly opposed: "The allegorical distinguishes itself from the symbolic in that the former signifies directly, the latter indirectly." (*WA* I/47 95; 1983 397) Symbol and allegory form a binary between which no mediation is possible: a middle term between direct and indirect signification is not available. There is only symbol or allegory. In consequence, Schelling's reading of Dante makes no sense from a Goethean standpoint. Yet, it does make sense from the standpoint of Schelling's own *Identitätssystem*. That is, only by considering the 'metaphysical' differences between Schelling and Goethe's philosophies can this anomaly be explained. In short, the relation between allegory and symbol for Schelling is a *quantitative* rather than a *qualitative* one.[6] Allegory is not the flip-side of the symbol; it is instead a lower intensity of symbolism. Schelling's universe is not one of binaries (universal or particular, direct or indirect), and on this basis Schelling's seemingly incongruent claim about Dante makes perfect sense.

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[6] See further Wanning 1988 87-8.

Schelling therefore establishes a three-term series of schema/allegory/symbol in which the terms are not qualitatively, but quantitatively distinguished. This difference illuminates Schelling's substantive departures from the Kantian-Goethean orthodoxies. Schelling writes,

> That *Darstellung* in which the universal means the particular or in which the particular is intuited through the universal is *schematism*. That *Darstellung*, however, in which the particular means the universal or in which the universal is intuited through the particular is *allegory*. The synthesis of these two, where neither the universal means the particular nor the particular the universal, but rather where both are absolutely one, is the *symbolic*. (*SW* 5:407; 1989 46)

Schelling's three-term series grafts Goethe's symbol/allegory dichotomy onto Kant's symbol/schematism dichotomy. This is often used as evidence of the Schellingian symbol's derivative status. Schelling's only claim to originality is to have brought together Kant and Goethe's theories of the symbol. Yet, in deploying Goethean allegory and Kantian schematism in this passage, Schelling is not endorsing or synthesising them, but implicitly criticising them. The Goethean symbol is criticised for being too schematic and the Kantian symbol for being too allegorical. Neither of them, Schelling implies, attains the true indifference point between universal and particular.

In Chapter Two, I quoted Sørensen's telling assessment of the universal/particular relation in Goethe's theory of the symbol: "The universal outweighs the particular." (1963 111) This is precisely Schelling's criticism of Goethe. By utilising Kant's conception of schematism, he suggests that the opposition Goethe establishes between symbol and allegory is really only the opposition between schematism and allegory. For Goethe, either the particular is prior (in which case the

exhibition is allegorical) or the universal is prior, and while Goethe designates this latter case 'symbolism', Schelling argues that it cannot in fact be symbolic, because it does not manifest the requisite identity of meaning and being, of universal and particular required by the properties of tautegory and syntheticism. Therefore, *Goethe's symbol is merely schematic*. Thus, when Schelling writes, "The dominating element in the schema is the universal, although the universal in it is intuited as a particular" (*SW* 5:407; 1989 46), he could easily be describing the Goethean symbol under the guise of schematism. The Goethean symbol does not exhibit the identity of universal and particular; it is therefore not symbolic enough. Goethe forecloses on the possibility of a third point of indifference and Schelling criticises him for it.

On the other hand, Schelling uses Goethe's category of allegory to criticise the Kantian symbol. In Kant's theory of the symbol, a particular *Darstellung* is forced to represent an idea of reason by means of a process of analogy. In the *PdK*, Schelling describes this kind of process as follows, "In allegory the particular merely *means* or *signifies* the universal." (409; 47) There is again no identity between meaning and being, universal and particular: Kant's symbol is in no way tautegorical. Meaning and being remain separated, and in consequence the former is only won from the latter by means of an artificial process of analogous reasoning. Symbolism in Kant is constituted by the very process by which Goethe defines allegory – "looking for the particular that goes with the universal." (*M* §261) The Kantian symbol is in fact allegorical.

Schelling uses Kant and Goethe to attack each other: the Goethean symbol is shown up by Kant as merely schematic, while the Kantian symbol is shown up by Goethe as merely allegorical. In this manner, Schelling *attacks* (rather than plagiarises) the two major theories of the symbol on which he was drawing. His

theory of the symbol does not copy these previous theories, but it is instead constituted through a *critique* of them. Schelling – as we saw earlier in the chapter – does not appropriate his sources unthinkingly; he transforms them. The Schellingian symbol cannot therefore be aligned with 'the romantic symbol'; it is in fact premised on a critique of 'the romantic symbol'. Such is the preliminary evidence for its peculiarity.

4.2 Reading and Misreading the *Identitätssystem*

The next three chapters embark on a reading of Schelling's *Identitätssystem*, a reading that will bear fruit in Chapter Eight when I show how it necessitates the 'peculiarity' of the Schellingian symbol. As a preliminary to this, in what follows I provide three maxims which orientate my reading of the *Identitätssystem*.

First, the *Identitätssystem* is not a precursor to the Hegelian system. Often, Schelling's *Identitätssystem* is read as a deficient version of the dialectical absolute idealism which Hegel later perfected. Schellingianism is an abortive first sketch of Hegelianism. One strain of this "pro-Hegelian prejudice" (Tilliette 1987 112) portrays Schelling as a 'poetic' or 'unconscious' philosopher whose initial explorations were later systematised by the mature Hegel.[7] Even Schelling-scholars have sometimes conceived the *Identitätssystem* as a "blurred image" of Hegelianism (Vater 1984 85).[8] There are of course undeniable connections between Schelling and Hegel's philosophies; however, the idea that Schellingianism is a 'blurred' form of

[7] See E. Harris 1995 191-8, Lukács 1975 249, 1980 134-5. Hegel is of course partly responsible for this view (1896 3:512-44).
[8] See further Vater 1984 85-91. For an antidote, see Uslar 1968 503, Esposito 1977 9.

Hegelianism is one I combat in this thesis. In short, Schelling's *Identitätssystem* is irreducible to and incomparable with Hegel's system; it pursues very different ends and employs very different means to achieve its ends. The relation between Schelling and Hegel's system of philosophy is a differend, not an *Aufhebung*.[9]

Second, the *Identitätssystem* does not merely repeat earlier German Idealist insights. There is of course some continuity between Schelling's early works and his *Identitätssystem*; in fact, Schelling's Preface to his 1801 *Darstellung* makes precisely this point:

> No one should think that I have altered my system of philosophy. For the system that appears here for the first time in its fully characteristic shape is the same one that I always had in view in the different earlier presentations, which I constantly used as my personal guiding star in both transcendental and natural philosophy. (*SW* 4:107-8; 2001a 344)

Yet, the very same Preface also makes the opposite point. Schelling criticises his earlier work and claims to only now have attained the true system:

> I regard each of them [that is, the earlier presentations which were limited to either transcendental philosophy or *Naturphilosophie*] as nothing more than a one-sided presentation of that system… With the present exposition I situate myself at the indifference point between them. (108; 344)

It is only with the 1801 *Darstellung* that Schelling is at last able to present the fundamental system and its "first principles… *for the first time*" (113; 348; my emphasis).

Vater is therefore right to point out that "the Preface has a double, if not contradictory, burden: to convince the reader that Identity Philosophy is not new…

[9] See Toscano 2004 126. In consequence, I will not be concerned in this thesis with defending Schelling's position against Hegel's criticisms in the *Phänomenologie*.

and that it is new".[10] In this thesis, I emphasise the latter point. My description of Schelling's philosophy will begin with the 1801 *Darstellung* and make no sustained reference to what preceded it or even how the post-1801 views emerged out of Schelling's earlier writings. There are a number of reasons for this emphasis: first, the *break* that the *Identitätssystem* constituted in relation to Schelling's earlier work has not been sufficiently emphasised in the critical literature; second, outside of the Preface to the 1801 *Darstellung*, Schelling is at pains to emphasise the rupture in his thinking in 1801; third, while the earlier works may be helpful in understanding Schelling's *Identitätssystem*, they are *not necessary* for such comprehension (i.e. almost all the works written between 1801 and 1805 attempt to be self-sufficient presentations of the entirety of the Schellingian philosophy); finally (and more pragmatically), space does not permit me from being diverted into discussions surrounding the origins and development of Schelling's *Identitätssystem* – the purpose of this thesis, to repeat, is a full grasp of §73 of the *PdK*, not of the *Identitätssystem* as a whole.

The third and final maxim which will orient my reading runs as follows: the *Identitätssystem* is not significant merely in relation to Schelling's later philosophy. On this reading, the *Identitätssystem* is some sort of botched attempt at system-building which – in the very process of failing – provides the negative stimulus for Schelling's much more interesting (or so it is claimed) later work. Schelling's metaphysics of the period is a *reductio ad absurdum* of speculative philosophy, giving rise to the 'positive philosophy' of the 1820s and beyond.[11] This interpretation is a product of the renaissance of Schelling's later philosophy: whereas traditionally the *Identitätssystem* was seen as the apogee of Schelling's development and the later

[10] Michael G. Vater, "Translator's Introduction" to Schelling 2001a 339.
[11] Schelling himself was the first person to read his *Identitätssystem* in this light (*SW* 10:123-5; 1994c 133).

philosophy an afterthought, current opinion is exactly the reverse. This has made reading the *Identitätssystem* in light of the later philosophy extremely popular, leading critics to concentrate exclusively on the apparent failures and aporia of the *Identitätssystem*.[12] White, for example, states categorically,

> That Schelling never published the system of identity in its entirety suggests that the system is fatally flawed; examination of the system confirms the truth of what the publication record suggests… Schelling's strict science ultimately fails in that there are fundamental problems that it can neither avoid nor solve, the major goal of the following analysis is to reveal those problems, for they determine the further course of Schelling's development. (White 1983 74)

Schelling's *Identitätssystem* need not, however, be read for the benefit of his later philosophy; it need not be seen as a failure. If Schelling's *Identitätssystem* is understood on its own terms, a very different picture emerges.

All three hermeneutical maxims are therefore concerned with the integrity, distinctness and even singularity of Schelling's thinking at this period. And it is only through such a reading strategy that what is distinctive about Schellingian symbolic language will gradually be revealed.

[12] For example, critics point to the supposed 'problem of the finite' and emphasise disproportionately Schelling's small treatise, *Philosophie und Religion*. See White 1983 93-101, Beierwaltes 1983 95, Vater 1984 40, Bowie 1993 87-90, Challiol-Gillet 1996 33-7, Brito 2000 51-8.

CHAPTER FIVE

SCHELLING'S METAPHYSICS

"Philosophy is entirely within the domain of the absolute and never goes outside it." (*SW* 5:278; 1966 73) The *Identitätssystem* is a philosophy of the absolute, and in consequence is characterised by nothing more than its metaphysical ambition. This chapter is concerned with outlining this metaphysics by means of answering the question, 'in what does reality consist?'. I begin by stating four names Schelling gives reality, before treating at length the immanence and monism of that reality. In the second half of the chapter, I then examine how this reality is constituted, contrasting Schelling's conception with Platonic emanation and transcendental representation.

5.1 Names for Reality

Schelling gives four preliminary answers to the metaphysical question, 'in what does reality consist?' To begin, I merely state them and only in later sections will their significance become clear. Schelling employs all four terms practically interchangeably: while different works favour different terms, they are all at bottom synonymous. Moreover, none of the names is privileged as the *proper* name for reality; each of them is equally improper (I return to this issue in Chapter Twelve).[1]

[1] It is worth making clear from the start that, just because these names are 'improper', it does not mean they are inadequate (that reality somehow exists above and beyond them). This is not apophaticism. There are in fact five such improper names, because of course 'reality' should itself be included in this list.

1. *The absolute*. Schelling inherits the first, most common name for reality in the *Identitätssystem* from his German Idealist forebears. The absolute is reality – the two terms are synonymous (*SW* 4:129; 2001a 359).
2. *Identity*. As one might expect from a 'philosophy of identity', a defining name for reality is *identity*. The proposition 'A=A' stands at the heart of Schelling's philosophy of this period, and reality is defined both *by* and *as* this law of identity: "The ultimate law… for all being is the law of identity, which with respect to all being is expressed by A=A." (*SW* 4:116; 2001a 350)
3. *Indifference*. Reality also bears the name of 'indifference'. The term emerged from Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*, specifically the study of magnetism; it designates the neutral point on the magnet where neither of the poles dominates. A number of critics have attempted to distinguish between Schelling's use of identity and indifference (Courtine 1990, Wanning 1988, Fischbach 1999) and there are perhaps some slight differences: for example, indifference is often employed with respect to form (so more in epistemological contexts) and identity with respect to essence (so more in metaphysical contexts). However, basically the two are used synonymously: reality is defined as identity *and* as indifference.
4. *God*. Before mid-1802 and after 1806, God does *not* name reality; instead, God is a determinate entity within reality. This is still true as late as the *Fernere Darstellungen* (*SW* 4:417). However, between late 1802 and 1805, God does become synonymous with reality. Reality is given a theological name at this juncture – even if Schelling's 'God' of this period bears little relation to any other religious or even philosophical formulation of the divine.

5.2 The Immanence of the Absolute

'In what does reality consist?' As we shall see, Schelling's contemporaries usually interpreted this question as a question about the fundamental principle on which reality rests. Schelling, however, interrogates the very presuppositions of such foundationalism. His question after 1801 is no longer 'what grounds reality?', but 'does reality have grounds?'.

5.2.1 Before and After 1801

Schelling's very early work, especially the 1795 treatise *Vom Ich*, is derivative of much early German Idealism in its search for one, sole ground of reality. Schelling follows Fichte in employing the term 'absolute' to designate this ground and, in consequence, the main thrust of his work before 1796 is geared towards determining precisely in what the absolute consists. In *Vom Ich*, for example, the absolute ground is characterised as infinite (§8), one (§9), indivisible (§11), substantial (§12), omnipotent (§14) and existing eternally outside of time (§15). As such a list indicates, Schelling transfers the properties of the traditional deity onto his post-critical 'absolute I': the absolute is for Schelling (at this stage) a supersensuous principle residing above and beyond reality.

Ineffability is one consequence of this transposition. In *Vom Ich* in particular, Schelling insists repeatedly on the ineffability of the absolute ground of reality. Concepts, discursive thinking and even consciousness in general are unable to grasp it.[2] As critics have pointed out[3], Schelling here approximates to a crude form of negative theology, and his epistemological advocacy of a mystical act of intuition as

[2] See especially *SW* 1:178; 1980a 78 – 191; 85 – 216; 110.
[3] Tilliette 1987 66-70, Beierwaltes 2002 395-8.

the only means to discern this absolute (*SW* 1:181-2; 1980a 85) certainly owes much to such traditions. The result is that Schelling establishes an utterly *equivocal* relation between reality and the absolute. Nothing from the world of ordinary experience can in any way compare to what is experienced in intellectual intuition. Schelling's early philosophy situates the supersensible beyond and above the sensible. This is an extreme formulation of a 'two-world' metaphysics in which reality and the ground of reality exist as qualitatively opposed realms.

Unsurprisingly, Schelling's first forays into philosophy came under heavy criticism. In October 1796, J.B. Erhard published a caustic review which attacked both the ineffability of Schelling's absolute and also the very search for an absolute which his early project presupposes.[4] Hölderlin expressed similar concerns to Schelling at this time.[5] Schelling took such criticism to heart. Two months later he published an *Antikritik* in which he disingenuously claims that he knew all along foundationalism was to be avoided, but was merely presenting his work in foundationalist language to aid an uncomprehending public (*SW* 1:242-3; 1980a 127-8). Moreover, he did thereafter move away from the position of *Vom Ich*: he never again wrote of the absolute as a transcendent, ineffable principle, nor did he ever again pursue the German Idealist search for grounds so naïvely. The next few years are full of attempts (which do not concern us here) to begin philosophy without foundations. It was only in 1801, however, that Schelling came upon a satisfactory position that overcame Erhard and Hölderlin's objections.

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[4] See further Frank 2004 48-9.
[5] See Frank 1992 108-15, 2004 107-8.

In 1801, Schelling abandoned all search for grounds; he abandoned 'the absolute' as the name for something which conditions reality; he abandoned, in fact, all distinction between the absolute and reality. From 1801 onwards, there was no more 'two-world' metaphysics. The ground of reality is not beyond reality but is itself reality. The *Identitätssystem* effectively commences with Schelling's claim, "Absolute identity is not the cause of the universe, but the universe itself." (*SW* 4:129; 2001a 359) Combating philosophy's "long and profound ignorance about this principle", Schelling rediscovers the 'true' relation the ground of reality holds to reality itself – one of absolute immanence. "Absolute identity is the universe itself" (129; 359); "outside [of it] is nothing, and in it is everything." (115; 350) The absolute is identical with reality and reality is identical with the absolute. In short, "*Everything* is absolute." (*SW* 4:387)

Of course, as the above quotations make clear, Schelling remained committed to the term 'the absolute', but it plays a very different role in his post-1801 philosophy. For Fichte and the early Schelling, 'the absolute' names the ground of reality as something distinct from reality itself; it implies some form of distinction between them. After 1801, 'the absolute' *does not in any way* name something distinct from reality; *it is reality itself under a different name*. The two names ('the absolute' and 'reality') designate "merely different views of one and the same thing." (*SW* 5:366; 1989 14-5) Schelling thus subverts the vocabulary of German Idealism for his own purposes: he appropriates it for the sake of a philosophy of immanence, and in so doing changes its meaning.

5.2.2 Immanence and Monism

Schelling rejects the view basic to his early work (and the majority of the tradition which preceded him) that the foundation of reality is *transcendent* of the reality it grounds. On the contrary, he insists that the absolute "cannot be considered as separated from everything that is." (*SW* 4:125; 2001a 357) It is for such reasons he calls "the sole true method of philosophy… the one under which everything is absolute and nothing is the absolute." (*SW* 4:406; 2001b 393) There is no one, single foundation above or beyond reality ('nothing is *the* absolute'); instead, reality itself is its own ground ('everything is absolute'). *The ground of reality is reality*.[6]

The absolute immanence of the ground of reality to reality itself is a constant defining principle of Schelling's philosophy between 1801 and 1805. One consequence is that being is *univocal*. There are no separate realms or worlds; there is no qualitative hierarchy in the cosmos. "I absolutely do not," Schelling insists, "acknowledge two different worlds, but rather insist on only one and the same, in which everything… is comprehended." (*SW* 4:101-2) There is but one world and this is the absolute. From the 'two-world' metaphysics of *Vom Ich* and the equivocal relation it maintained between the sensible and supersensible, Schelling has therefore reversed his position: everything is encompassed univocally in one immanent realm.

The basis for Schelling's commitment to absolute immanence is his monism. Everything is the absolute and the absolute is everything – and (between 1801 and 1805 at least) this 'is' should be taken in the strongest possible sense. Reality is therefore characterised by its unity and ultimate oneness: "All that is is, to the extent that it is, One… *There is everywhere only One Being, only One true Essence*" (*SW* 6:156; 1994b 153) All is one for all is absolute. One obvious problem with this

[6] The heautonomy of the organism provides Schelling with a model for such self-grounding.

monism is that 'the absolute' is singular whereas 'all' is plural. Only in the next chapter will this tension ultimately be reconciled; however, a preliminary answer can now be given: it is a presupposition of much classical metaphysics that the One and the All are convertible. This is the very meaning of the slogan so important to Schelling and his generation – *hen kai pan* (the one and the all). Schelling interprets it to mean, the One is the All and the All is the One: "Absolute identity is absolute totality." (*SW* 4:125; 2001a 357)[7]

As will become clear over the forthcoming chapters, one consequence of this monism is that in Schelling's universe there are *no* discrete individual substances. According to Schelling, finite individuals are illusions (which is not to say that the finite, or even individuals, *per se* are illusions). They conceal the essential oneness of reality. Our everyday belief in a plurality of finite beings is misguided. Hence, he states categorically, "Considered in and of itself, nothing is finite… No finitude exists anywhere." (*SW* 6:161; 1994b 156) In short, *there is only the absolute*. Therefore, to say that 'the absolute is equivalent to reality' requires qualification. This is not 'reality' as one ordinarily understands it – the reality of commonsense. "In its relationship to common sense the world of philosophy is in and for itself an inverted world." (*SW* 5:13; Hegel and Schelling 1985 283)[8] Schelling maintains that commonsensical views of the world fundamentally *distort* and *misrepresent* reality. In consequence, reality is ultimately different from what it phenomenally appears to be.

5.2.3 The Here-and-Now

It is worth giving further examples of Schelling's resolute rejection of transcendence, since many critics still attribute to him some sliver of transcendence or

[7] See Uslar 1968.
[8] See further *SW* 4:362; 2001b 377.

remnant of a 'two-world' metaphysics. Vater, for example, labels Schelling's *Identitätssystem* "otherworldly in its direction" (1984 91). Schelling's absolute, Vater claims, exists "*behind* appearances" (44), invisible and ineffable (76). However, Vater's criticisms entirely miss the point: of course, for "finite cognition" (91) Schelling's absolute is otherworldly and ineffable, but Schelling repeatedly argues that, for finite cognition, *all absolutes are otherworldly*. Schelling attacks those (like Kant and Fichte) who separate the absolute out from reality and think of it as beyond consciousness, beyond appearances and beyond nature. He calls "the unconditional requirement that *the absolute be kept outside oneself*… the fundamental error that has lurked unchallenged at the base of almost all recent philosophical efforts." (*SW* 5:109; 1985 368) Similarly, he attacks those previous philosophers who have assumed that "the absolute remains an idea, a Beyond." (5:12; Hegel and Schelling 1985 281)[9] When one adopts the proper philosophical viewpoint, one realises that *reality and the absolute are identical*.

Another helpful example is found in Schelling's polemics against Eschenmayer in *Philosophie und Religion*. Eschenmayer contends that the *Identitätssystem* (and indeed all philosophy) remains incomplete without a theological supplement. He asserts the radical transcendence of God against Schelling's immanentist conception of the absolute:

> It is as little possible to overcome the main antithesis between the *here-and-now* and the *Beyond* as it is true that all antitheses in the sphere of knowledge are revoked in absolute identity… The *here-and-now* is [that in] which knowledge is chained to the finite… The *Beyond*, on the contrary, implies the freedom of all directions and the immortal life of genius.[10]

[9] See Beiser 2002 559-60.
[10] Eschenmayer, quoted in Lukács 1980 156-7.

The absolute is not enough; the *Identitätssystem* is incomplete, Eschenmayer argues. A transcendent deity remains a necessary addition to all philosophy.

Schelling's response is simple: Eschenmayer is wrong. To conceive of God transcending the absolute is to misconceive the nature of the absolute: "The person who posits another *God* above the absolute of reason has not genuinely understood [the absolute] as absolute." (*SW* 6:21) There is nothing *beyond* the absolute, because to posit something beyond in this manner would limit the absolute's unconditional absoluteness. To posit a transcendent God would be to negate the absolute: "The inquiry into what is above and beyond the absolute implies, in my view, an immediate contradiction." (51) Hence, all there is is the immanence of the absolute – and Schellingian reality is free from transcendent entities.

The foundation of Schelling's *Identitätssystem* is therefore to be sought in its rejection of all foundations. The very idea of an *archē* on which reality depends is vehemently rejected by Schelling after 1801; reality is instead self-grounding and so immanent.

5.2.4 Early Modern Metaphysics of Immanence

The historical resonance of Schelling's commitment to immanence may already be clear to some readers; however, in the present section, I want to make Schelling's appropriation of *early modern* metaphysical sources more explicit. Schelling found in Spinoza and Bruno (to name the two crucial figures) allies and precursors in his pursuit of a philosophy of immanence. Spinoza and Bruno began the modern epoch by dismantling the hierarchy of being which pervades Renaissance metaphysics; they erected a plane of immanence on which to think reality. Transcendence was eliminated in favour of monism.

Schelling's engagement with Spinoza was long and eventful; however, relevant here is solely Schelling's adulatory attitude between 1801 and 1805.[11] Time and again, we must look to Spinoza to understand Schelling's thought, for he is present in the very detail of the *Identitätssystem*.[12] Similarly, there is no doubting the influence Bruno had on Schelling's thought of this period. It is unlikely that Schelling had access to Bruno's thought firsthand, but Jacobi's extended summaries of *De causa* in the second edition of the *Spinoza-Briefe* had a marked impact.[13] The main piece of evidence is Schelling's *Bruno*: not only is the title a direct homage to the Italian philosopher, but also within the dialogue itself the character who espouses Schelling's own views is named 'Bruno'. As Lukács observes, Schelling "made Giordano Bruno the patron saint of his philosophy" (1980 137).

The crucial question becomes: what was so important to Schelling in Spinoza and Bruno's writings? There are, I contend, three elements to an answer.

1. Renaissance thought is structured by an ontological hierarchy that is neoplatonic in origin. Beginning from God, reality is constituted by a series of descending realms of being. Modernity commences, crudely speaking, with the abolition of this hierarchy, and it is in the work of Bruno that we first witness this.[14] Bruno extends Copernican cosmology into ontology: no rigid hierarchy constrains being any longer. Thus, one of Bruno's central refrains (borrowed from Cusa, but transformed in the process) is "the centre is the circumference" (1998 89). There is no centre – no foundation of meaning which orients all other points: centre and

[11] For example, the *Fernere Darstellungen* form, in Tilliette's words, an "unconditional elegy to Spinoza" (1970 1:410).
[12] For Schelling's most explicit acknowledgements of Spinoza's significance, see *SW* 4:113; 2001a 348 – *SW* 2:71; 1988a 53-4. At the end of the 1804 *System*, the *Ethics* is appropriated almost verbatim. Reality is temporarily named substance (*SW* 6:551) and the good is identified with increase in activity through the cultivation of adequate ideas (555).
[13] See further Vieillard-Baron 1971 416-9, Otto 2003, Boenke 2003.
[14] I here follow Blumenberg 2002, Michel 1973, Ingegno 1993.

circumference are indiscernible. No overarching ontological schema of value differentiates them. Bruno "discards all idea of hierarchy" (Michel 1973 87). Therefore, when Schelling attacks transcendence, he is closely following in the footsteps of early modern metaphysicians who were also intent on a philosophy of immanence.

2. At the heart of this critique of Renaissance thought lies what Zourabichvili has labelled the "strategy of the chimera". According to Zourabichvili, Spinoza (and also, I would contend, Bruno) "uses old terms in new ways such that a new subversive notion is created." (Gangle 2010 26)[15] Spinoza and Bruno employ traditional philosophical vocabularies "in ways that shift or distort their traditional senses, imposing unfamiliar meanings." (26) Bruno's use of the Cusan maxim, 'the centre is the circumference', is a case in point: a key concept is taken from the philosophical tradition to be utilised *against* this tradition. Originally formulated by Cusa to safeguard divine transcendence it is now mutated in Bruno's work to subvert divine transcendence. Myriad examples could also be cited from Spinoza's *Ethics* – foremost among them, Spinoza's use of 'God'. In being equated with nature, for example, God cannot remain a transcendent entity, but rather becomes an immanent principle. Spinoza and Bruno subvert the philosophical tradition by mutating its vocabulary and concepts for the sake of immanence. We have already seen something similar at work in Schelling's *Identitätssystem* with the notion of 'the absolute'. While retaining the vocabulary of his and Fichte's earlier thought, Schelling now subverts its meaning: no longer is the absolute the ground of reality, it is instead reality itself. This is the same process of mutation at work in Spinoza and Bruno. Another name for this process

[15] Gangle is here paraphrasing Zourabichvili 2002 112.

is 'speculative transformation', which I considered in the previous chapter in relation to aesthetics. There we saw how Schelling transforms the aesthetic tradition in the name of an absolute account of art. Schelling, Spinoza and Bruno all speculatively transform the philosophical tradition they inherit.

3. Being becomes univocal in Bruno, Spinoza and Schelling. In Spinoza's *Ethics*, this univocity becomes immanence. Substance (or God) is *not* an occult force standing behind its phenomenal manifestations nor a thing-in-itself external to appearances. Substance *is* its phenomena; it exists only in the phenomena themselves. As Bruno puts it,

> God is no exterior intelligence making the universe turn in circles; it has to be worthier for him to be an internal principle of movement, that is, the very nature, the very space, the very soul which possesses all animated beings.[16]

This is a fundamental law of early modern metaphysics: what is exists only in being manifested – there is nothing more than such manifestations.[17] Concerning Spinoza, for example, one critic has written,

> It is important to note that, if Spinoza's God is a reality which underwrites the possibility of the material world, it is not because there is something essential to his nature which does not find total expression in that world… There is in this God no reality which fails to find expression under each of his attributes. (Lloyd 1996 41)

Such is the model of reality with which Bruno and then Spinoza replace the neoplatonic hierarchy of being. In it, *the ground of reality is reality*. The similarities to Schelling should be evident: Schelling too conceives the ground of reality as immanent to reality itself. Just as Bruno and Spinoza conceive God as the immanent principle of all things, so too does Schelling.

[16] Quoted in Védrine 1967 328.
[17] See Deleuze 1990 27.

5.3 The Form Essence Distinction

Schellingian reality is not static: "The absolute is by nature an eternal act of producing. This producing is its essence." (*SW* 5:482; 1989 99-100) The task of the rest of this chapter is to comprehend *how* the absolute produces itself. In the previous section, I discussed the immanence of the Schellingian absolute; what is now at issue is *how* the absolute is immanent, the process of self-constitution it undergoes so as to exist immanently. I argue that a description of this process ultimately leads to a discussion of the complete rejection of the categories of *representation* and *emanation* by Schelling during the *Identitätssystem*.

5.3.1 The Dynamic Law of Identity

One of the defining characteristics of the absolute is identity. The absolute *exemplifies* the law of identity (A=A), but also *produces* this law in the first place. To understand this, the distinction between form and essence needs to be introduced. Schelling sees the absolute as comprised of two elements – an essence and a form. While these two elements are utterly identical (as we shall see at length in what follows), the philosopher is able to isolate them individually, distinguishing between the quintessential identity which constitutes the essence of the absolute and the form of identity in which this essence subsists. That is, reality consists in two types of identity: essential identity and formal identity.

(a) Essential Identity

Reality is *in essence* indeterminate identity. If one formulates the law of identity notationally as 'A=A', then essence corresponds to the symbol, '=' (the two

'A's are inessential).[18] This is why Schelling is insistent that 'A=A' does not best articulate the absolute, if too much focus is placed on the 'A's and not the '='. The law must not, in other words, be understood in a *synthetic* manner, as the bringing together and making equal of two distinct elements ('A' and 'A'), nor even as a tautology (or repetition) of 'A' (*SW* 4:142; 1984a 142). Only the equal sign ('=') refers to the essence of the absolute:

> The proposition A=A, conceived universally, says neither that A on its own ***is***, nor that it is as subject or predicate. Instead, *the unique being posited through this proposition is that of* ***identity itself****, which accordingly is posited in complete independence from A as subject and from A as predicate*. Since abstraction is made from the being of A in its own right, and also from its status as subject and predicate, the sole thing remaining from which abstraction cannot be made, which is therefore really posited in this proposition, is absolute identity itself. (*SW* 4:117; 2001a 351)[19]

(b) Formal Identity

It is a fundamental presupposition of the whole *Identitätssystem* that essence cannot exist without form nor form without essence. Existence involves both. Thus, while the philosopher is able to isolate one or the other, this is an artificial operation which bears no resemblance to what actually is. The two are *in fact* indissociable. Essence always exists formed – there are no exceptions.

[18] Terminologically, I here follow Tilliette 1970 1:328. There are questions concerning the status of this mathematical symbolism: is it metaphorical or literal? Can the absolute really be adequately expressed in this way or is it merely an illustration? I provide an answer to such questions in Chapter Twelve.
[19] The editor adds, "[The] A in the subject position and the other in the predicate position is not what is really posited; what is posited is only the identity between the two." (117)

Thus, the absolute does not exist as pure essence (not merely as '=') but as formed, and this form is the law of identity.[20] In short, '=' exists as 'A=A'. A further mathematical analogy is helpful here: '=' on its own is not a well-formed mathematical proposition, and to that extent the pure utterance of equality ('=') is meaningless. Only a well-formed proposition is a meaningful proposition, and so '=' must take on determinate, articulated forms, such as 'A=A'.[21] The same is true of reality: it must exist as well-formed, as determinate.

What is absolutely crucial here is that 'A=A' *expresses the very same truth* as '=' – identity. Both the essence and form of the absolute are expressions of identity; it is just that essence expresses such identity quintessentially, whereas form does so in a determinate manner. Form and essence express the same truth and so they *are identical* (*SW* 4:120; 2001a 353). In the absolute, there is no distinction between essence and form; they are both expressions (one essentially, one formally) of identity.

5.3.2 The Ineluctable Formation of the Absolute

The absolute exists as formed. Marquet glosses Schelling most clearly on this point. "Identity must itself take on form", he writes (1973 228), continuing, "All manifestation always takes place *in* something, in a *form*." (284) The absolute "is irredeemably engaged in its form." (258) There is therefore no such thing as the unformed absolute; there is no such thing as essential identity free from formal identity. The absolute (or reality or identity or God) *always* and *necessarily* exists as formed:

[20] A=A "belongs not to its essence but only to the form or mode of its being." (*SW* 4:120; 2001a 353)
[21] See *SW* 4:120; 2001a 353.

> The proposition A=A expresses a being, that of absolute identity; this being, however, is inseparable from its form. So there is here a unity of being and form, and this unity is the supreme existence. (*SW* 4:126; 2001a 357)

This is another way of affirming immanence: just as Spinozist substance does not exist *apart from* its modes, so too the Schellingian absolute always exists in form and never as a formless abyss. Reality is always already determinate.

In other words, form and essence are identical. The essence of the absolute does not exhibit anything which is not in turn exhibited by form. Both articulate identity in equally adequate (if divergent) ways. Mathematical symbolism is helpful once again here: '=' (essential identity) is very literally reproduced fully and adequately in 'A=A' (formal identity) without anything being lost or distorted. Between form and essence, there is no alienation, no diminution, no distortion, and no loss; there is merely a relation of strict identity between them.[22] It is for this reason Schelling speaks in the 1801 *Darstellung* of "the identity of identity" (4:121; 2001a 354).

Form is essence. Nothing indeterminate exceeds the determinate. There is no essence hiding behind reality; rather, identity is fully and adequately expressed in what is. As such, everything is manifest in reality; nothing remains hidden behind the manifestations. 'A=A' is a full and complete translation of the essence of the absolute into an *adequate* form. There is *no ineffable 'behind' or 'beyond'* to what is expressed that never manifests itself; there is no hidden transcendence.

[22] As Courtine puts it, "Essence takes form and assumes a figure proper to it. By this, one must understand that essence is not sheltered behind form nor reserved within it, but it passes completely into form." (1990 125)

5.4 Schelling's Critique of Representation and Emanation

What then of the relation between essence and form? So far I have spoken in terms of an 'adequate translation' or a 'complete expression' of essence in form; yet, however natural such a way of speaking may seem, we will discover that it is precisely such terminology that Schelling puts into question. In other words, Schelling departs from conventional ways of understanding the relationship between elements of being. There are schematically two 'conventional ways of understanding' such a relationship – representation and emanation. Schelling rejects them both, and this rejection stands at the heart of his whole *Identitätssystem*.

On a representational paradigm, form mirrors or copies essence; it is a qualitatively different repetition of the essence that still attempts to be as faithful as possible to it. The logic is that of original and copy. A corollary of representation is therefore correspondence: the extent of the correspondence between form and essence is the criterion by which the success of the representation is to be judged. What is at issue is therefore how 'adequately', 'fully' or 'completely' form mimics essence. The key presuppositions of the representational paradigm are the pre-existence of essence to form (since form must try to capture what already exists), the superiority of essence to form (since form depends on essence but *not* vice versa) and the ideal of *mimesis* (form must become as similar to the pre-existing essence as possible). In consequence, representation is built on failure – the likely failure of form to adequately imitate essence. Form is typically inferior to or a diminution of essence; it certainly never improves upon it.

Although emanation is a very different model, it has very similar presuppositions. On this paradigm, form emanates from essence – essence's very act

of existing necessarily leads it to produce form from itself. This outflow of form is an inferior repetition of essence, and so form is a derivative product of essence's existence. Again, therefore, emanation presupposes the pre-existence of essence to form and the superiority of essence to form. On the other hand, unlike representation, emanation rejects the model of *mimesis* in favour of production (since form *is* essence repeated on an inferior scale). Yet, even here there are similarities to representation: emanation too is built on failure – form can only ever be inferior to essence, never adequate. Form necessarily exists on a lower, more derivative level of being.

Schelling rejects both these models. He rejects the metaphysical assumption common to both paradigms that some elements of being are necessarily inferior versions of others, that there is a hierarchy of being. Both models contravene his commitment to the univocity of being: there is no hierarchy in reality, no necessary superiority of originals over copies.

In the following section, I treat Schelling's rejection of representation and in the next Schelling's rejection of emanation. In order to do so thoroughly, however, I also consider these two paradigms in the guise of their most celebrated practitioners – Kant and Plato. The rejection of representation is the rejection of Kant and the rejection of emanation a rejection of (at least some forms of) Platonism. Only through understanding these wider critiques does the extent of Schelling's elimination of these two forms of thinking from his philosophy become clear.

5.4.1 The Rejection of Representation

Schelling breaks with transcendental philosophy in his *Identitätssystem*. Of course, put in such a bald form, this thesis is insufficient: there is much in Schelling's work between 1801 and 1805 that is thoroughly indebted to Kant. However, this does

not gainsay the fact that Schelling consciously attempts in the *Identitätssystem* to discard the paraphernalia of critical idealism in favour of a metaphysics of production. We must take seriously, I am arguing, Schelling's contention of 1799 that "philosophically [Kant] is dead" (*SB* 2:189). Indeed, when Fichte read the 1801 *Darstellung*, he did not consider it a new version of transcendental idealism; instead, he wrote, "What must one say of this new – transfigured! – Spinozism?"[23] While Fichte's tone is disputable, his contention that Schelling's *Identitätssystem* is a 'new Spinozism' – rather than a post-critical system – is not. Attacks on critical philosophy can be found throughout Schelling's work of the period[24], and one of the philosophical motivations behind such attacks is his rejection of the post-Kantian search for grounds.

A transcendental argument is one which discovers the universal and necessary conditions of experience. Its premise is that there are conditions of experience graspable in isolation from experience itself. Kant therefore begins the first *Critique* with the following claim, "I entitle *transcendental* all knowledge which is occupied not so much with objects as with the mode of our knowledge of objects" (1929 A11/B25), a claim which presupposes that 'the mode of our knowledge' can be distinguished from its content. Transcendental cognition is of the conditions of our experience, and not of our experience itself. Moreover, the search for metaphysical grounds has the same transcendental justification as that for conditions of experience – both refocus philosophy away from reality to what makes it possible. However, as we have already seen at length, *Schelling breaks with this very search for grounds*. He rejects the idea of a condition of reality in order to focus on reality itself. Reality has no ground outside of itself. In consequence, transcendental philosophy's obsession

[23] Quoted in *SB* 2:384.
[24] For Kant, see *SW* 4:350-3; for Fichte, 353-6.

with the conditions of reality becomes redundant. This is the key claim of the *Identitätssystem*.

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This is one reason why Schelling rejects transcendental thinking; moreover, it is also the basis from which Schelling launches his attack on representation. Representation is a fictional ground which Kant (and then Reinhold) falsely privilege.

According to Kant, experience always proceeds through representations. Representation is a necessary condition for the possibility of experience. Dickerson, for example, has labelled Kant a "representationalist": all conscious states are representations and nothing present to the mind escapes being represented. Representation is thus "a primitive property of the mental", the ground on which Kantian epistemology is built. (Dickerson 2004 4-5)[25] Reinhold promulgated this view in 1790s Jena, making representation "the ultimate and proper foundation of philosophy" (1985 67). That is, he locates the ground of reality in the structure of representing: "The science of the *entire faculty of representation as such*… [is] the common foundation to both *theoretical* and *practical* philosophy." (67) Reinhold's argument for this is simple: "I can never reach out to a rose which would be different from my impression of it, which would not occur in my representation". There is therefore no experience that is not structured by representation. Representation, Reinhold concludes, is "the source of all knowledge"; it is "the ultimate thing that we cognise and for that reason cannot be derived from anything more primitive." Representation is a primitive "fact of consciousness". (56-7)

[25] See also Rockmore 2002 345-6.

While Fichte and Schelling temporarily succumbed to Reinhold's search for grounds, they always disagreed vehemently with the ground Reinhold himself suggested. From 1794 onwards, both Fichte and Schelling are adamant: representation does not ground reality. Instead of remaining satisfied with the brute fact of representation, Fichte and Schelling both attempt to *find the conditions of representation itself*. They attempt to surpass Reinhold in discovering "the principle for explaining the origins of our representation" (*SW* 1:412; 1994a 110). The most pressing question for Fichte's early philosophy, for example, is, "Whence arises the system of representations?" (1982 31)[26] What are the conditions for the 'fact' of consciousness? Fichte's answer is the self-positing of the I, the activity by which the self first constitutes itself. "The self is originally a doing" (1982 66) and this doing is the "act by means of which representations are produced" (1992 98). Hence, beneath Reinhold's *fact* of consciousness (*Tatsache*), Fichte discovers a more primordial *act* of consciousness (*Tathandlung*). Representation is therefore a derivative structure of the mind dependent for its possibility on an original act, a positing of the self as itself.

Fichte and Schelling's philosophical trajectory begins with a *critique of the category of representation*. They critique Reinhold's fact of consciousness for reasons similar to those which motivate theorists of the symbol to criticise signs. This early attempt to ground philosophical thought in a category other than representation could be one philosophical motivation for Schelling's later adherence to the symbol. Moreover, an argument could be made in favour of Schelling proceeding further in this regard than Fichte (Esterhammer 2000 83-4). Schelling, unlike Fichte, realises that *a critique of representation necessarily implies a critique of all signs*. When Fichte attempts to deduce the transcendental necessity of the arbitrary sign in *Von*

[26] See Rockmore 2002 350-4.

dem Sprachfähigkeit und dem Ursprung der Sprache[27], he fails to pursue the consequences of the critique of representation he and Schelling both wage against Reinhold. Schelling, however, does move from this critique of representation to an attack on the arbitrary sign, and so to a theory of the symbol.

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It is worth pursuing Schelling's attitude towards representation further into the *Identitätssystem*, for here we find exactly the same dismissal of the representational relation as philosophically insignificant, and a similar attempt to discover a different model for reality. Like Heidegger[28], Schelling objects to the implicit premise of representation (expressed in the German, *Vor-stellung*) that the subject is to be set over and against the object. The general name Schelling gives this kind of assumption is 'reflection'. Reflection designates all that is wrong with our habitual mode of thinking, and ultimately this wrongness boils down to the creation of oppositions, including the subject-object opposition.

It is in the opening salvos of the 1804 *System* that this critique is most evident. Schelling begins, "[The] very distinction between a subject and an object in knowledge constitutes the fundamental error in all knowledge." (*SW* 6:137; 1994b 141) Such a distinction gives rise to both representation and correspondence. Schelling, on the contrary, asserts, "Our own proposition states the *opposite* of this; namely, that there exists neither a subject *as subject* nor an object *as object*." (138;

[27] See Chapter Three.
[28] See Bowie 1993 60-1 for a comparison.

140)[29] Hence, representation is rejected – that is, "We now abandon forever that sphere of reflection that discriminates between the subject and the object." (140; 143)

Such is one more example of Schelling's continual rejection of representation, and it is for this reason Toscano dubs Schellingian thought "the first philosophy in the wake of Kant to undo, in great part through his appropriation of Spinozism, the strictures of representational dualism." (1999 69) Representation is no longer a plausible candidate for how reality operates; it is no longer the defining ground of what is. Representation is rejected in all its variants and consigned to reflection as an *inadequate* way of understanding how the world works.

5.4.2 The Critique of Emanation

Another model for reality is emanation. Such a model is rooted in the Platonic tradition; therefore, Schelling's dismissal of emanation is bound up in his partial rejection of Platonism. The *Identitätssystem* has frequently been read as a revival of Platonic thought. Schelling's contemporaries called it "the neoplatonism of our times"[30], and this sentiment has been repeated in recent scholarship.[31] While there is of course some truth to this assessment, it is not the whole story. On the one hand, Schelling does welcome the influence of *one type of Platonism* on his ideas, but, on the other hand, he also rejects *another strand of Platonic philosophy*. That is, Schelling (following Spinoza and other early modern philosophers) rejects otherworldly, apophatic Platonism in favour of the 'one-world', immanentist Platonism found in the *Timaeus*.[32]

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[29] For further analysis of this argument, see Frank 1985 119-21 and Beiser 2002 590-2.
[30] J.F. Winzer, quoted in Beierwaltes 1972 107.
[31] See (for example) Beiser 2003 71.
[32] The implication that Platonism has been transmitted into modernity in two forms – a 'two-world' metaphysics and a 'one-world' physics – has its origins in Lovejoy's *The Great Chain of Being*: "There

Schelling makes it very clear to his readers that he rejects 'two-world' Platonism and he does so by parodying it. The dialogue *Bruno* opens with a presentation of a classic 'two world' outlook. The arguments made in the opening pages by the character Anselm (in itself a significant name – suggesting perhaps that it is not merely Platonism, but a whole theological tradition that is here under scrutiny) result in a dualistic worldview of the sort usually associated with Plato. Yet, this is a position immediately undermined by Schelling. As soon as the eponymous hero of the dialogue, Bruno, begins to speak, he distances himself from this metaphysical position. Indeed, Bruno's subsequent presentation of the one, true philosophy is a critique of the inadequate Platonism Anselm exemplifies.

Anselm's worldview is dualistic: he establishes a stark opposition between archetype and copy. The task for the philosopher is "to show men the archetypes of all that they are accustomed to seeing in images." (*SW* 4:233; 1984a 134) Anselm sounds in fact a lot like Schelling's early self in *Vom Ich*. Yet, now Schelling parodies this otherworldly strain of Platonism. From the moment Bruno begins to speak, his reluctance to endorse Anselm's viewpoint is clear. "[I] beg your forgiveness," Bruno apologises, "if I expound the one true philosophy I know, rather than [what you requested]." (234-5; 135) Bruno is insistent on the need to tone down Anselm's rhapsodic invocation of the supersensible. Of course Bruno still espouses a form of Platonism, but the difference remains crucial: there is no more dualism; archetypes and copies are one and the same thing. As Schelling writes elsewhere, "The innermost mystery of creation" consists in the "the divine identification of original and copy which is the true root of every being." (*SW* 4:394; 2001b 386)[33]

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are two conflicting major strands in Plato and the Platonic tradition… otherworldliness and this-worldliness." (1936 24)

[33] See further Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy 1988 108, Wanning 1988 70, Courtine 1990 128-9.

Vater has argued at length for the significance of this internal critique within the dialogue,

> [Bruno] disassociat[es] himself from the simple Platonic dualism Anselm espoused. Whereas Anselm thinks in terms of simple oppositions such as time and eternity, soul and body, archetype and individual thing, Bruno will put forth an analysis of things in terms of three elements [the potencies]… The difference is most clearly seen in the case of the relationship between concept and thing. Anselm presents them as simply opposed, while Bruno sees them as… distinct aspects of the individual thing… As the discussion unfolds it will become apparent that Bruno (Schelling's *persona*) is no dualist.[34]

Vater is even blunter elsewhere,

> [When] Bruno assumes direction of the discussion, [he] immediately disassociates himself from the peculiarities of Anselm's way of thinking… He thus distances himself from Anselm's Platonism, and from the simple dichotomy of the eternal and the finite that the latter's argument presumed. (1984 23)

In short, within *Bruno*, 'two-world' Platonism deconstructs itself into Schellingianism.

This dramatisation of the differences between Anselm and Bruno is Schelling's clearest statement of his relation to Platonism. Indeed, it is also a dramatisation of the difference between Schelling's extremely dualistic early work and his anti-dualistic position in the *Identitätssystem*. Schelling here confronts his earlier self in the guise of Anselm, and refutes him successfully. His Platonism is not to be mistaken for the classic 'two-world' Platonism for which Anselm is the mouthpiece.

[34] Translator's Note to Schelling 1984a 231.

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The model of emanation is grounded in the very 'two world' metaphysics Schelling rejects. The distinction between copy and archetype is brought about by the process of emanation. Pre-existing archetypes produce inferior copies of themselves, and these subordinate and dependent entities constitute the material world. Schelling's rejection of the archetype/copy distinction, as well as his attack on 'two world' Platonism in general, implies the elimination of a model of emanation from his system. However, one need not rest content with such implicit attacks, for Schelling is very explicitly disdainful of emanation as well. In *Philosophie und Religion*, for example, he denounces the "illegitimacy" of emanation, especially as it appears in "the works of the neoplatonists" (*SW* 6:35-7).[35] Emanation is designated an inadequate, reflective model for reality.

Indeed, not only is emanation rejected in this manner, but all conceptions of the self-externalisation of reality are vehemently and continually scorned. As we saw earlier in the chapter, the absolute is in no way the cause of reality, but is reality itself. One significant result of this principle is Schelling's commitment to the following: the absolute is not involved in a process of generating 'entities' outside of it, neither by emanation, creation nor self-externalisation. God "does not bring about anything, for he *is* everything." (*SW* 7:157; 1984b 256) *The absolute never steps forth from itself* – such a principle holds unconditionally, no matter how such externalisation is conceived. The One does not become the All; it already is the All from all eternity:

> The most basic mistake of all philosophy is to assume that absolute identity has stepped beyond itself and to attempt to make intelligible how this

[35] Of course, the extent to which Schelling's description of emanation resembles any neoplatonic version of the doctrine is open to doubt. See further Beierwaltes 1983 95-9.

> emergence occurs. Absolute identity has surely never ceased being identity… True philosophy consists in the demonstration that absolute identity has not stepped beyond itself and everything that is, insofar as it is, is [the absolute] itself – a proposition that Spinoza alone of all previous philosophers acknowledged… There is here no transition, no before and after. (4:119-20; 2001a 353)

All there is is the absolute and the absolute does not produce anything else. It is 'the most basic mistake of all philosophy' not to have realised this, and to have repeatedly tried to deduce or derive reality from some pre-existing, fundamental ground.

5.5 Schelling's Alternative

Representation and emanation are found wanting; what is the alternative? The task of the present section is to elucidate a third, alternative model for the form/essence relation. The foundation on which Schelling's alternative is built is the principle (discussed earlier) that formation is inescapable. In consequence, essence is not prior to form – neither temporally nor logically. Instead, the opposite is true: essence is completely dependent on form. Schelling, that is, reverses the traditional binary of Western thought in which form is seen as derivative of essence, to posit form as prior. *Essence depends on form*; essence is produced through form. It is here we return to Schelling's statement, "The absolute is by nature an eternal act of producing." (*SW* 5:482; 1989 99-100) Essential identity is the product of this act and

formal identity is that through which it is produced. The absolute exists by producing its own essence through a process of formation.[36]

The major consequence of this model is that there is no pre-existent essence against which all subsequent productions can be measured. Correspondence no longer applies: there is nothing archetypical to which productions can refer back. All there are are various forms which produce essence. To talk of a form 'adequately', 'fully' or 'completely' expressing essence is therefore nonsense, for there is no benchmark such forms can adequately, fully or completely represent. *There is no more adequacy* on Schelling's metaphysical presuppositions. All that remains are different intensities with which essence is produced, where 'intensity' does not refer back to the perfect intensity of the original essence. All this will become clearer in the next chapter when I discuss Schelling's doctrines of quantitative differentiation; suffice it say that the process of potentiation (or the intensification of form) is not a means of returning to a pre-given perfection but is rather an infinitely increasing production of essence.

The point can be illustrated by means of a disagreement between Schelling and Fichte. After reading the 1801 *Darstellung* in which the above argument is proposed, Fichte countered: the absolute as absolute cannot be formed, for such formation would diminish its absoluteness. He therefore warns Schelling, "The absolute would not be absolute if it existed in any specific form." (*SB* 2:381; Fichte and Schelling 1997 89) However, this comment betrays a complete misunderstanding of the thrust of the *Identitätssystem*, for it tries to force Schelling's logic of production back into a logic of emanation or representation. Fichte argues that to form the absolute would be to lose something of its essence, that formation is always necessarily a process of alienation. This is precisely what Schelling rejects. Formation

[36] The importance of 'production' is a constant throughout Schelling's career. It gives rise to the imagery of *procreation* which Schelling uses to describe the constitution of reality. See *SW* 5:405; 1989 44 – *SW* 2:189; 1988a 151.

does not distort a pre-existing essence; it is what produces essence in the first place. Determinate forms therefore not only *can* express the essence of the absolute, essence can *only* be (and so must be) expressed in a determinate form. It is on this principle that the *Identitätssystem* stands or falls. Formation constitutes (rather than loses) essence. Schelling thus writes in a later work (implicitly responding to Fichte's comment), "The true [absolute] is not formlessness, but is delimited in itself, is finished *by* itself and is thus perfect." (*SW* 7:143; 1984b 246)

In short, whereas representation and emanation presuppose the failure and inadequacy of their forms, Schellingian philosophy conceives form as always *excessive*.[37] The produced essence is always *more than* it was prior to production (for, prior to production, it did not exist). Determination is not a prison which stops us reaching what matters most; what matters most is in fact first *produced* in the very act of determination. Formation can never be a diminution, alienation, distortion or loss of essence, for there is no essence prior to form. Schelling here agrees entirely with Goethe's criticism of Plotinus,

> A spiritual form is by no means diminished by emerging into appearance, provided that its emergence is a true procreation, true propagation. What is begotten is not inferior to the begetter, and indeed, the advantage of live begetting is that what is begotten can be superior to that which begets it. (*WA* I/48 196; 1989 420)

Such then is the relation of essence to form: each form produces essence to a greater or lesser degree of intensity. Every form we encounter (and that we are) is a means of producing essential identity. Moreover, these forms do not succeed or fail at producing identity in comparison to some pre-existing standard; instead, there is a perpetually excessive surplus of essence. At the heart of the *Identitätssystem* therefore

[37] See Tilliette 1970 1:260.

stands the process of formation. Everything depends on it: reality is constituted by this process, essence produced by it. The whole of Schelling's philosophy between 1801 and 1805 revolves around the question of form.

5.6 Three Models for Production

Reality produces itself – such is the basic claim of Schelling's *Identitätssystem*. So far I have considered this act of self-production in relation to the form/essence distinction, however there are other, complementary ways in which Schelling describes this process. There are three I consider further in this section: the model of self-affirmation, the dialectic of *Ineinsbildung* and the self-knowledge of the absolute. Schelling seemingly sees no contradiction between all the different models, and they do broadly articulate a very similar idea – the immanent self-constitution of reality; however, each has its own emphasis and consequences which do not always sit well with the other models. Foremost here is the question of difference (what is difference and how does it relate to the identity of the absolute?); the various answers Schelling gives to this question engender the different strands of the *Identitätssystem*.

5.6.1 Self-Affirmation

The first model is the simplest: the absolute affirms itself and in so doing reality is constituted. While Schelling does use this kind of language in the 1801 *Darstellung*, it is the 1804 *System* which insists most forcefully on it. "God," Schelling writes, "is His own absolute affirmation" (*SW* 6:148; 1994b 148), continuing, "He is only to the extent that He *affirms Himself*." (151; 150) The act of

production we were considering in the last section is here described as the self-affirmation of the absolute: the absolute affirms itself *as identity*, and this affirmation is simultaneously the formation of reality and the production of essence. To affirm identity is to articulate it and so to give it a form in which it exists. Identity exists as formed through this eternal act of self-affirmation.

This model is quite different from a dialectic process of achieving identity through mediation. No mediation or negation is necessary here, merely the immediate affirmation of identity as identity.[38] By structuring this model around the image of affirmation, Schelling banishes negation. This has significant consequences for the status of difference in the *Identitätssystem*. In short, since reality affirms itself immediately as identity, difference is excluded. Schelling thus claims, "The absolute is absolute only through the absolute exclusion of difference from its essence." (*SW* 4:375) Self-affirmation excludes difference.

Yet, this is in need of qualification, for it is only *qualitative* difference which is excluded in this manner; *quantitative* differentiation, on the other hand, *can* be reconciled with the absolute's self-affirmation. The next chapter is devoted to the whole issue of quantitative differentiation; what is at issue now is *how* quantitative difference is reconcilable with the model of self-affirmation, and the answer to this question is to be found in the concept of *refraction*. Schelling proposes a version of the ancient idea of 'the great chain of being', the manifestation of being across a spectrum of different entities: "The absolute manifests and actualises itself across degrees of being… The absolute shines… like a diamond with a thousand faces." (Maesschalck 1989 83) Schelling conceives this 'spreading out' of the absolute over

[38] See Groves 1999 34.

reality along the lines of the refraction of light.[39] The result is a "refraction of identity" (Tilliette 1970 1:404). The self-affirmation of identity is refracted throughout reality, giving rise to quantitative (not qualitative) differences. Reality *can* affirm itself as identity while still leaving room for some form of difference.

5.6.2 The Dialectic of *Ineinsbildung*

While the beginning and end of the *Identitätssystem* are marked by the stark simplicity of the model of self-affirmation, the years 1802 and 1803 are characterised by the intricacies of dialectic. This dialectical process revolves around the concept of *Ineinsbildung*, introduced in the *PdK* as follows,

> The splendid German word 'imagination' [*Einbildungskraft*] actually means the power of *mutual informing into unity* [*Ineinsbildung*] upon which all creation is really based. It is the power whereby something ideal is something real, the soul simultaneously the body, the power of individuation that is the real creative power. (*SW* 5:386; 1989 32)

'All creation' rests on a process of 'mutual informing into one' or *Ineinsbildung*. Imagination is thus no longer a faculty, it no longer resides in the subject; rather, the power of forming into one, *Einbildungskraft*, is an ontological process.

On this model, the absolute's act of self-production is a process of forming itself into one. The presence of *Bild* (form) in *Einbildungskraft* is key, for here Schelling provides concrete detail on how the process of formation takes place. A philosophy of *Einbildungskraft* charts the *Bildung* of the absolute – the production of its essence through formation, and this formation is thereby conceived as a kind of unification:

[39] See *SW* 6:441, 7:172.

> The absolute… converts itself… as sheer identity into the real, into the form, and conversely, in equally eternal fashion, resolves itself as form, and to that extent as object, into the essence or subject. (*SW* 2:62; 1988a 47)

Reality is formed in two stages: first a multiplicity of forms are created and second they are identified. The two moments are thus the differentiation of all reality and its subsequent[40] re-identification. Schelling also dubs this process subject-objectivisation: reality is first made subject and then made object (and so the indifference of subject and object).[41]

Ineinsbildung is a two-stage process in which what occurs in the first stage is negated in the second. Difference is first posited and then negated. On the first model of self-affirmation, difference was excluded from the absolute since identity was immediately affirmed as identity; on this second model, however, a moment of difference is part of the process by which the absolute is self-constituted. Identity is affirmed "*across* or *thanks to* difference" (Courtine 1990 116). Schelling here approaches (and was perhaps influenced by) Hegel's definition of the absolute as "the identity of identity and non-identity" (1977a 156). Mediation is also central: the absolute is not immediately affirmed as identity (*per* the first model), rather it only achieves identity by means of an intermediary stage of differentiation. In Vater's words, "*Ineinsbildung* is an intermediation of strict identity." (1976 288) Identity expands into difference, and then reverts back into identity – and together these two movements comprise the process of *Ineinsbildung*.

Schelling frequently uses the image of 'reflection' to designate such mediation. Reality must be reflected into difference to regain identity, and so the

[40] This is logical, not temporal (*SW* 4:417).
[41] *SW* 5:317-8; 1966 115 – *SW* 2:62-4; 1988a 47 – *SW* 4:391; 2001b 384.

reflected world of appearances is a necessary stage in this becoming identical.[42] Only once reason is able to recognise (as if in a mirror) essential identity dispersed amidst this multiplicity of forms is the dialectical process complete.

5.6.3 The Self-Knowing of the Absolute

There is also a third model Schelling employs – absolute knowing. "The self-affirmation of God may also be characterised as a process of self-knowledge", he writes in the 1804 *System* (*SW* 6:168; 1994b 162).[43] This is of course the most idealist of Schelling's ways of describing reality: reality is constituted through an epistemological process of knowing. The absolute becomes an idea of itself, and (in so doing) it determines and forms itself.

This epistemological model immediately raises the question: *who knows?* Schelling answer is concise, if polemical: "The fundamental error in all knowledge is ever since Descartes the '*I* think, *I* am'. Thinking is not my thinking, and being not my being, for everything is only God's or the All's." (*SW* 7:148; 1984b 250) The absolute knows. In the 1804 *System*, Schelling stresses this need to abstract epistemology from the individual subject,

> In *reason* all subjectivity ceases… In reason, eternal identity is at once the knower and the known – it is not *me* who recognises this identity, but it recognises itself, and I am merely its organ. Reason is *reason* precisely because its knowledge is not subjective; instead, an identity in it comes to recognise itself as the self-same. (*SW* 6:142-3; 1994b 144)

Schellingian epistemology therefore treats the self-knowledge of the absolute *alone*; all individual knowledge is merely 'its organ'. The individual is *not* the subject of

[42] See Courtine 1990 128.
[43] See also 168; 162.

knowledge: “Reason is not a faculty… There is no reason at all which we could have, but only a reason which has us.” (*SW* 7:148; 1984b 250) All there is is God in his eternal act of self-knowing, and this self-knowing is one more way of elucidating the immanent self-constitution of reality.

* *

Reality has many names (identity, indifference, God, the absolute), but no hierarchical structure, nor anything that transcends it. It is notionally distinguished into form and essence, but, unlike traditional metaphysics, form is not dependent on a pre-existing essence, but is what produces essence in the first place. This can be described variously as the self-affirmation of reality, the *Ineinsbildung* of essence and form or the self-knowing of reason. Such is a summary of Schellingian metaphysics; it is the task of the next chapters to show the ways in which these abstract principles impact concretely on Schellingian symbolic language.

CHAPTER SIX

QUANTITATIVE DIFFERENTIATION

Schellingian symbolic language is derived rigorously from the principles of the *Identitätssystem*, so only by reconstructing these principles can it be properly understood. I continue this reconstruction in the present chapter. In my account of Schelling's metaphysics in the previous chapter, I spoke of 'reality' in a rather abstract manner. Questions remain therefore concerning the type of individuals which populate Schellingian reality and how they are to be reconciled with his *monism*. It is to such questions I turn in this chapter. In the first section, I consider the nature of the entities which comprise Schellingian reality; they are to be understood, I argue, as *Darstellungen* or ideas. In the second section, I turn to the question of reconciling individual existence with monism, and contend it is precisely Schelling's theory of quantitative differentiation that allows him to do so. Finally, using the resources provided by my examination of quantitative differentiation, I give readings of first reflection and second the *Potenzlehre*.

6.1 Ideas

At the beginning of the previous chapter, I posed the following metaphysical question: in what does reality consist? To this question, I gave the answer: it consists in a process of immanent self-constitution. Yet, a more concrete and straightforward

answer has yet to be given, and it is this I give in the present section. In short, reality consists in ideas.

6.1.1 Beyond Epistemology

The claim that reality consists in ideas is Schelling's most *idealist* moment during the *Identitätssystem*. This assertion seems to suggest that metaphysics is reduced to epistemology, so all reality can be analysed in terms of mental entities. Yet, to read Schelling thus would be to misunderstand him, because, while Schelling certainly draws on idealism for his vocabulary, he transforms the notion of idea so that it is no longer something merely ideal, but the *identity of real and ideal*. It is not the case that metaphysics is reduced to epistemology therefore, but rather the language of epistemology is a crucial resource on which Schelling draws to explicate reality metaphysically. Just as the model of the self-knowing of the absolute is a metaphysical description of reality (as we saw in the previous chapter), so too is idea freed from subjectivity and from its usual reference to mental (purely ideal) entities.

This can best be seen in terms of the sources Schelling draws on for his *Ideenlehre*. 'Idea' obviously has a Platonic ring to it[1]; yet, unlike traditional interpretations of Plato, Schellingian ideas do not exist in an intellectual heaven distinct from the world of appearances; copy and archetype cannot be separated (as we saw in the previous chapter). They are not withdrawn entities only known in intellectual contemplation, but immanent entities *within* the world. In fact, the Platonic terminology hides a Spinozist meaning as well.[2] Spinozan ideas are acts by which substance affirms itself ideally; they are immanent affirmations of substance in

[1] See *SW* 6:185-6; 1994b 173-4. Leibnizian monads are also a crucial precedent, see *SW* 2:64; 1988a 48. The term 'idea' is missing from the 1801 *Darstellung* and makes its first appearance in the 1802 *Platonic dialogue*, *Bruno*.
[2] See *SW* 4:373, Vater 1984 12, Marquet 1973 278.

thought. The same is true for Schelling: ideas are productions of essence in determinate forms. The major difference between Schelling and Spinoza here is that Spinozan ideas are purely ideal, whereas Schellingian ideas are defined as the identity or indifference of ideal and real. They are metaphysical entities, not purely epistemological ones.

6.1.2 The Proliferation of Identity

In the previous chapter, I began to consider the process of formation through which reality constitutes itself and essence is produced. Essential identity exists as formal identity, as the law of identity (A=A). An obvious question to which I then alluded is how formal *identity* can give rise to the irreducible multiplicity of everyday life. There are many answers to this. First, Schelling does not think that such multiplicity is ultimately irreducible: our commonsense assumptions about a plurality of finite substances are misguided. Second, he contends, in line with much of the metaphysical tradition, that the One and the All are convertible. Third and most significantly, Schelling insists that form (even formal identity) is not singular; there is a plurality of formal identities in existence. It is false to maintain that the law of identity can only be expressed in one form; rather, *all forms express the law of identity*. There are two different claims implicit here: first, more than one form expresses the law of identity to exactly the same extent as 'A=A'; second, all forms express the law of identity to different extents. Schelling is committed to both these claims, as we shall see: his theory of ideas presupposes the first claim and his conception of *Darstellungen* the second. I deal with the first claim in this section.

* *

In the previous chapter, I noted Schelling's appeal to the concept of refraction. Reality's self-constitution is refracted into multiple instances of identity. This is how plurality arises in the Schellingian cosmos. In Tilliette's words, "Identity unfolds into an efflorescence of forms, a streaming forth and profusion." (1999 147)[3] Reality is not merely formed as A=A, but also B=B or Z=Z etc – a multiplicity of expressions of the law of identity are engendered when reality constitutes itself. In fact x=x (where 'x' stands for any value) is perhaps the most accurate formula for reality's self-constitution. This proliferation of identities was not available to Fichte and the early Schelling, since they conceived of the absolute on the model of the I, and in consequence the statement I=I held a privileged position – it possesses more truth than any other statement of identity. For Schelling after 1801, this is just not true: all identity-statements are *equally* valid. Schelling's *Identitätssystem* is *indifferent to content*; all that matters is the extent to which formal structures exhibit the law of identity, i.e. the extent to which they approximate to x=x.

Schelling designates these various manifestations of the law of identity 'ideas'.[4] Ideas are what constitute reality; they are the absolute as it is produced in the universe. They are therefore what compose reality when it is properly viewed. Schelling is committed to the view that everything individual that exists (when reality is viewed adequately) is an idea: "Every particular object is in its absolute status idea." (*SW* 4:405; 2001b 392) He writes elsewhere, "True being is only in the ideas." (*SW* 4:389) All ideas express, in essence, the same thing – identity – and they all do so maximally. That is, all ideas are completely 'adequate' manifestations of the law of

[3] See also Grant 2006 172.
[4] See *SW* 6:191; 1994b 177.

identity: they are 'perfect' manifestations of the indifference of the absolute in idiosyncratic – but parallel – forms.[5]

6.1.3 The Nature of Ideas

Formal identity is the identity of two terms, A=A. These two terms are generated by reality's act of self-constitution, and they are generated as equal to each other. Ideas therefore exist as the identity of two terms – for example, the identity of real and ideal, finite and infinite or universal and particular (*SW* 6:184; 1994b 172). Moreover, because ideas are what are produced by the absolute under the form x=x, in them form and essence are identical. They exemplify formal identity (x=x), and so both their form and their subsequently produced essence are defined by the property of identity. "Form and substance are one in the idea." (193; 179) Such is Schelling's point when he calls the ideas "the absolute positing of infinite reality" (191; 177), or when he more explicitly (and rhapsodically) writes,

> [Ideas] furnish the unique possibility of comprehending absolute profusion within absolute unity, the particular in the universal, and precisely by that also the absolute in the particular – blessed beings, as some designate the first creatures who live in the immediate sight of God, which we shall more accurately say, are gods themselves, since each is for itself absolute, and yet each is included in the absolute form. (*SW* 4:405; 2001b 392)[6]

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[5] The scare-quotes around 'adequate' and 'perfect' are reminders that in fact Schelling's metaphysics (I argued in the previous chapter) does away with adequacy and all other evaluative terms based on correspondence. Thus, in what follows, I resort to other terms like 'intense' and 'maximal' which do not imply a comparison with a pre-existing benchmark.
[6] See further *SW* 2:64; 1988a 48.

There are a number of points which follow from this determination of the ideas. First, it implies that the correct view of reality *equates* the finite and infinite, the real and the ideal. Ideas (and therefore reality itself) consist in the identity of these binaries; they never exist in separation. There is, for example, nothing purely finite or purely infinite: "The infinite in and for itself and the finite in and for itself… are really only one." (*SW* 4:385) All things are finite *and* infinite. Thus Schelling speaks in terms of "infinite finitude" (*SW* 4:248; 1984a 148): the finite can only be said to exist at all insofar as it is infinitely finite; there is no finitude *as such*. The same is true of the relation between real and ideal. "We could never assert that a purely ideal being existed, nor a purely real one either." (254; 155) Instead, as the 1804 *System* phrases it, "The ideal is immediately also the real" (*SW* 6:149; 1994b 148). Nothing is purely mental or purely physical, but all things include both domains of being. Indeed, Schelling goes so far as to write, "The first step to philosophy and the condition without which it cannot even be entered is the insight that the absolute-ideal is also the absolute-real." (*SW* 2:60; 1988a 44)[7] Schelling's position here is a form of panpsychism (and panphysicalism) modelled after Spinozan parallelism: all that exists in the physical world is a mental entity as well, and conversely there are no purely mental entities but only mental entities which simultaneously possess physical existence. All things are "both real and ideal at every point" (*SW* 5:219; 1966 13). Again, we see the identity of epistemology and metaphysics in Schelling's philosophy: 'idea' is *not* a purely epistemological term, but the identity of real and ideal.

Second, it follows that *the correct way of looking at reality is that which perceives ideas and only ideas*: "What is genuinely real in all things is strictly their

[7] See *SW* 5:216-7; 1966 9-10.

idea." (*SW* 6:183; 1994b 172) Ideas are the only material out of which reality is (or even can be) formed. What is ordinarily seen as merely finite is, in fact, *an idea in which the finite is simultaneously infinite*. Vater writes, "Neither the finite nor the infinite is intrinsically real… The eternal ideas alone are real, and they are the indifferent subsistence of the finite and the infinite." When common sense claims to discern purely finite, phenomenal individuals, it perceives "but images of ideas, ideas perceived from the limited standpoint of reflection." (1984 31) It is reflection (a distorted form of thinking) which inhibits us from recognising the ideational nature of reality. "Ordinary reflection," Schelling insists, "which is the opposite of philosophy, remains necessarily in an antithetical relation to the universal and the particular." (*SW* 6:185; 1994b 173)[8] From the standpoint of reason as opposed to reflection, *the logic of reality is the logic of ideas*. This is a 'both…and…' logic – infinite *and* finite, real *and* ideal, whereas reflection attempts to separate and oppose this original identity. It stops us realising 'all is idea'.

All beings are ideas; therefore, all beings are both finite and infinite, both real and ideal; and philosophy "is simply the capacity to see the universal in the particular, the infinite in the finite, the two combined into a living unity" (*SW* 4:362; 2001b 377). Schelling thus concludes, "Philosophy has but one sole object of study, the idea." (*SW* 4:243; 1984a 143)

6.1.4 *Darstellungen*

Ideas are forms of reality, when that form is equivalent to x=x. However, they are not the only individuals to populate the Schellingian cosmos. There are in fact all kinds of individuals, even if ultimately they are all reducible to the ideas. In short (and

[8] Indeed, to oppose the finite to the infinite and thus to misconceive ideas is, for Schelling, the basic error exhibited by "the empty philosophising of the mass of men" (*SW* 4:384).

to summarise an argument I make later in the chapter), 'x=x' exists in different amounts, and this distinction in quantity is what differentiates entities. The ideas are those forms in which 'x=x' is manifest to the maximum possible extent; however, this implies that 'x=x' is *not necessarily* manifested maximally: other individuals manifest 'x=x' to lesser extents; they are dimmer versions of the ideas. This is the second claim I set out above: forms can exhibit identity to different extents and this is another way by means of which multiplicity arises. Therefore, for Schelling there are two ways multiplicity is engendered – extensively and intensively. Extensively, there are different forms of the law of identity and these different forms are designated ideas; moreover, there are also different intensities of each idea, and such determinate intensities also subsist as individuals.

Significantly, Schelling labels all individuals – both ideas and their intensively dimmer variants – as *Darstellungen*. In so doing, he draws on Kantian terminology. Kant's epistemology could crudely be summarised as a description of the mechanisms by which a human subject produces *Vorstellungen* (representations of an object). Yet, alongside *Vorstellung*, there is another form of 'presentation': this is *Darstellung*. Gasché distinguishes the two thus,

> As opposed to *Vorstellung* or representation which Kant uses very broadly to designate the mode in which something is given to a subject, *Darstellung* has a technically very concise and limited meaning… Presentation, or *Darstellung*, is intuitive, sensible presentation of pure concepts. (1990 91)

Darstellung designates a sensible presentation that *exhibits* a concept or idea; it is thought made sensible, given objective existence or reality. In short, each *Darstellung realises* a concept. In *On the Progress of Metaphysics*, Kant writes under the heading, "How to Confer Objective Reality on the Pure Concepts of Understanding and Reason",

> To represent a pure concept of the understanding as thinkable in an object of possible experience is to confer objective reality upon it and in general to present [*darstellen*] it. Where we are unable to achieve this, the concept is empty, i.e. it suffices for no knowledge. (2002 20:279)

Thinking is not enough for Kant; it is a mere playing with concepts. To really matter and become objectively valid, concepts and ideas need to realise themselves in intuition. '*Darstellen*' designates this process of 'conferring objective reality on concepts' by 'exhibiting' them in intuition. *Darstellungen* are therefore ways in which concepts take on shape and figure. They are the original *Bildung* of concepts into intuitions, their temporal and spatial figuration.[9]

Schelling follows Kant closely. There are, however, crucial differences. First, Schelling completely eliminates the category of *Vorstellung* from his philosophy: we have already rehearsed this rejection of representation (especially Kantian representation) in the previous chapter. There are therefore only *Darstellungen*.[10] Second, Schelling does not merely consider *Darstellung* as an epistemological category; he extends its range to cover all entities whatsoever (not merely mental ones). All individuals are *Darstellungen*. This, as we have seen, is quite consonant with the *Identitätssystem* as a whole, which frequently transfers epistemological categories into metaphysical discourse. Third, *Darstellungen* for Schelling are not merely the immediate exhibition of concepts as they are for Kant, but rather the immediate exhibition of identity. Essence is formed into *Darstellungen*; thus each *Darstellung* is a manifestation of absolute reality. Finally, of course, in line with Schelling's more general metaphysical polemics, Schelling disagrees with the 'revelatory model' on which Kantian *Darstellung* is based whereby a pre-existing

[9] See Beaufret 1973 103-4, Flach 1982 455, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy 1988 31.
[10] See Helfer 1996 9.

concept emerges into time and space; instead, Schelling refigures *Darstellung* around his own metaphysical model in which form is prior: therefore, *nothing* pre-exists *Darstellungen* – identity, reality, the absolute are all produced out of them.

To the question, 'in what does reality consist?', the simplest Schellingian answer is thus, *Darstellungen*. They are the individuals that populate Schelling's universe; forms which exhibit essential identity to various extents.

6.2 Quantitative Differentiation

All *Darstellungen* exhibit essential identity; therefore they all have exactly the same content. How then are they to be differentiated? This is a problem that all monisms face; Schelling, however, makes things more difficult by also adhering to the qualitative identity of all forms as well. All forms are ultimately the same, since they all – to various degrees – are formulations of the law of identity. In consequence, Schelling permits *no* qualitative differences whatsoever, neither in terms of essence nor in terms of form. The only possible mode of differentiation left is *quantitative* – it is 'to various degrees' which is the crucial differentiator in Schelling's cosmos.

Quantitative differentiation is often seen as an albatross around the neck of Schellingian philosophy – from Hegel's dismissals of the concept in the *Phänomenologie* and the *Logik*[11] to Beiser's recent failure to take it seriously (2002 568). Plessner's reaction is typical: it is "an unwisely chosen concept." (1954 73) However, in what follows I will present what is usually seen as a weakness as a key

[11] Vater (1984 83-5) summarises Hegel's criticisms.

strength; I will follow Zeltner in asserting that quantitative differentiation "is a cornerstone of the *Identitätssystem*." (1975 87)

6.2.1 Theories of Judgment

To begin to understand Schelling's theory of quantitative differentiation, it is first necessary to take a short detour through theories of judgment in German Idealism. For Schelling during the *Identitätssystem*, all judgment is *thetic judgment*, and in consequence there is no such thing as synthetic or antithetical judgment.

Post-Kantian German philosophy identified three forms of judgment: thetic, antithetic and synthetic. For example, Fichte's account of judgment runs as follows,

> Just as there can be… no synthesis without antithesis, so there can be neither without a thesis – an absolute positing, whereby an A (the self) is neither equated nor opposed to any other but is just absolutely posited. (1982 113)

When I=I is "posited absolutely" (93), this is a thetic judgment, and such a judgment is the fundamental presupposition for all other judgments. It is the ground of thought. In a thetic judgment, "the self posits itself absolutely as infinite and unbounded." (225) Thetic judgment is therefore characterised by its indeterminacy. Such judgments also give rise to "the category of reality" (100): being is one of its consequences.[12]

For Fichte, equally necessary for consciousness is a second form of judgment – antithetical judgment (A≠A). As soon as the I constitutes itself, it immediately distinguishes itself from the not-I: "The essence of reason consists in my positing myself, but I cannot do this without positing a world in opposition to myself." (1992 83) In other words, to know what something is it is necessary to separate it from what it is not. To be something determinate it is necessary *not to be* other things. *Omnis*

[12] See *SW* 1:221; 1980a 114.

determinatio est negatio, as Spinoza famously put it. Division is therefore a necessary precondition for *synthetic judgment* (A=B) to take place. Predication is possible only after an antithetical judgment has taken place. Fichte writes, "Nothing is known regarding what something is without the thought of what it is not."[13]

For Fichte and the early Schelling, this account of the threefold generation of judgments provides a definitive answer to Kant's guiding question, 'how are synthetic judgments possible?'. Owing to their discovery that "thesis precedes antithesis, and that both precede synthesis", they both claimed to have "now answered [Kant's question] in the most universal and satisfactory manner" (*SW* 1:195; 1980a 95). Schelling sums up this line of thought clearly in his *Philosophical Letters*, "*Synthesis* comes about only through the manifold's opposition to the original unity." And he continues a page later, "Synthesis as such is thinkable only under [the] condition… that it be *preceded* by an *absolute* unity." (1:294-6; 1980b 164-5) Both a primordial thesis and then an antithesis are needed for synthetic judgments to be possible.

One of the tasks of transcendental philosophy (as Fichte and the early Schelling understood it) was to recover the original, grounding thetic judgment underlying all antithesis and synthesis.[14] Philosophy aims at re-presenting the ground of thinking. Schelling insists in 1795, "In theoretical as well as in practical respect, reason aims at nothing but absolutely thetic theorems, equal to the theorem I=I." (*SW* 1:229; 1980a 118) He is even clearer a year later, "All philosophy demands absolute thesis as the goal of all synthesis. Absolute thesis, however, is thinkable only through absolute identity. Hence, [philosophy] necessarily strive[s] for absolute identity." (1:327-8; 1980b 187) Thesis is absolute identity; it takes the form of A=A; and philosophy's task is to regain this primordial state of indifference.

[13] Quoted in Frank 2004 87.
[14] This is another version of the quest for grounds I discussed in the previous chapter.

* *

One of the most fundamental implications of Schelling's *Identitätssystem* is that: *there are only thetic judgments*. This is, in many ways, a development from his earlier view. The goal of philosophy has now been reached, and so all it need do is repeat the original thetic judgment. While in 1795 Schelling wrote, "Where there is thesis there is I, and where there is I there is thesis" (*SW* 1:225; 1980a 116), in 1801 the I has become the absolute and all there is is the absolute; hence, his statement would now read, 'Everywhere there is the absolute, everywhere there is thesis.' "We never emerge from A=A," is the guiding thread of the *Identitätssystem*.[15]

Perhaps the easiest manner in which to see Schelling's commitment to thesis and thesis alone is his rejection of synthetic and antithetic forms of judgment. For example, the absolute is not a synthesis of A and A, but the point of indifference which generates these very terms to begin with. The absolute is not a result, but the origin (*SW* 4:128; 2001a 359). Throughout his *Identitätssystem*, Schelling remains true to the insight that what reflection perceives as the synthetic, third moment which unites two pre-existing contraries is, in fact, their "common root", the original first moment: "What appears in experience as third is in itself again the first." (*SW* 2:107; 1988a 83-4)[16] Schelling vehemently attacks synthesis as "an absurd putting-together of opposites." (*SW* 4:379). Indeed, he maintains that "all objections that have been raised against the system of identity rest on this misconstrual" – seeing reality as "a

[15] This statement is found in a footnote added by the editor of the *SW*. It continues, "All difference consists just in this: A=A is posited in one direction or tendency." (*SW* 4:137; 2001a 365) See also Troxler 1988 34.

[16] See also *SW* 6:182; 1994b 171. All of this holds for the model of self-affirmation discussed in the last chapter, rather than for the dialectic of *Ineinsbildung* which still retains a moment of antithesis and synthesis (as its designation 'dialectic' suggests).

product of synthetic thought". (*SW* 6:163-4; 1994b 158) Synthesis, that is, is the error which hinders universal recognition of the *Identitätssystem*'s cogency.

This also holds true of antithesis: it is not a distinct form of judgment to thesis, but merely an inadequate manner of conceiving such thesis. Since the absolute is the thetic positing of identity and identity alone, there is no room for negation (or, at least, *antithetical, qualitative* negation) in Schelling's universe.[17] Identity, Schelling makes clear, "cannot be negated anywhere and in no manner" (*SW* 6:179; 1994b 169). He writes elsewhere, "Reason posits neither the negation of opposites nor even any opposites… Negation is not posited." (*SW* 7:154; 1984b 253-4)[18]

Having excluded synthesis and antithesis, only the model of the thetic can be used to describe reality. This point is stressed in the 1801 *Darstellung*:

> Each A=B considered in itself or as referred to itself is an A=A, therefore something absolutely self-identical. – Were this not true, there would be nothing real, since everything that *is*, subsists only to the extent it expresses absolute identity under some determinate form of being. (*SW* 4:133; 2001a 362)

As Schelling puts it succinctly a page later, "An A=B is an A=A", and this is because "*what is in existence* is always and only indifference" (134; 363).[19] Synthesis (A=B) is reduced to a form of thesis. Schelling's hope expressed in 1795 that all syntheses *should* become theses *is now realised*. There are no longer any synthetic propositions, only thetic ones. As Schelling puts it elsewhere in the work, "Absolute identity can never be abolished as absolute identity." (119; 352)[20] There is nothing which is not part of the absolute positing of the absolute: "The same identity is posited

[17] At least, when setting aside the dialectic of *Ineinsbildung*.
[18] The aphorism continues, "Not the negation, therefore, for then the unity would be a merely negating and therefore conditioned unity." See also *SW* 6:179; 1994b 169.
[19] In 1804, Schelling similarly writes, "B=A dissolves into A=A." (*SW* 6:209; 1994b 190)
[20] See *SW* 6:156; 1994b 153.

throughout… even [in] A=B." (137; 365) This line of thought is summed up in a passage from the 1804 *System*:

> The infinite substance produces, in an infinite fashion, only the absolute *thesis*, just as it itself is only absolute thesis… [In reflection] instead of the thesis, the synthesis is produced, and what is first in the absolute or in itself is third in the replica; this is the universal law of all reflex. (*SW* 6:228-9; translated in White 1983 85)

* *

This theory of judgment has one crucial consequence for Schelling's theory of differentiation: individuals are not generated through a synthetic procedure of determination. The Spinozist maxim, *omnia determinatio est negatio*, is firmly rejected. Thetic judgments comprise all that there is, and therefore *the only thing that can distinguish one entity from another is the intensity with which the thesis is posited in different cases*. This is a classically monist point: there is only one substance that comprises all there is; the only differentiating attribute, therefore, is the degree to which this substance is instantiated. This is what Schelling means when he speaks in the second edition of the *Ideen* of "degrees of the absolute" (*SW* 2:64; 1988a 48), or when he writes in the *Fernere Darstellungen* of "different grades of identity" (*SW* 4:431) or of individuality arising out of "a partial positing of infinite reality" (387). It is also what Grant means when he speaks of "the quantity of identity" each entity possesses for Schelling (2006 174) or of the fact that "there can be no differences in kind, but only in degree." (147)[21]

[21] See also §61 of the 1804 *System* for a remarkable passage in this vein (*SW* 6:212-4; 1994b 192-4).

6.2.2 Quantitative Differentiation

Two things have now hopefully become clear: first, differentiation is a matter of form rather than of essence, and, second, it is a matter of *the degree* to which the individual produces essential identity. Quantitative differentiation follows quite simply from these two points.

The *locus classicus* for Schelling's actual formulation of the theory of quantitative differentiation is the 1801 *Darstellung*. §23 reads, "None other than quantitative difference is at all possible between subject and predicate." (*SW* 4:123; 2001a 355) Such a thesis has two corollaries. First, "Any qualitative difference between the two is unthinkable", because "it is the same equal absolute identity that is posited as subject and object." (123; 355) That is, qualitative difference is impossible, because subject and predicate are the same thing: A=A is universal and no qualitative distinction holds between 'A' and 'A'. Second, Schelling continues,

> Since there is no possible difference between the two in terms of being itself (because they are equally unconditioned as subject and object, thus the same in essence), there remains only a quantitative difference, i.e. one that obtains with respect to the *amount* of being, such that the same identity is posited, but with a predominance of subjectivity or objectivity. (123; 355)

What is crucial in distinguishing entities is the 'amount of being' (or, in Grant's paraphrase, "quantity of identity" (2006 174)). Individual *Darstellungen* are not to be thought of as distinct subjects and objects *but as various grades of the production of the absolute*.

Schelling here spells out explicitly much of what we have already discerned in his thought: he is a monist, therefore in essence all things are one (that is, are absolute identity itself); moreover, this essential identity is always posited *as* identity (i.e. in formal identity). The only possible difference is the different 'amounts' with which

such identity is posited. It is this difference in intensity which gives rise to distinctions between subject and object. Difference is quantitative. The same series of moves is made throughout Schelling's *Identitätssystem* often using different terminology, but always making the one basic point: *for a rigorous monism, quantity is the only way to distinguish individuals*. Hence, rather than the Spinozist 'all determination is negation', Schelling proposes the dictum, 'all determination is quantification'. There is no negation here, merely, in Groves' words, "the reiterated [thetic] affirmation of [reality's] own existence" (1999 34). That is, differentiation occurs through *excess* and *surplus*: all beings are excesses; it is just how much they are excesses which distinguish them. It is "this idea so shocking and bizarre of a 'surplus'" (Tilliette 1970 1:260) which marks Schelling's *Identitätssystem* apart from so many other philosophies. Difference is a product of exuberance; there is no lack, no failure, just different amounts of excessive production.

* *

Schelling often speaks of quantitative differentiation in terms of "relative identities" (4:264) or "relative points of indifference" (414). In other words, the various different intensities with which essential identity is produced can be roughly schematised into three groupings: a preponderance of the subjective intensity, a preponderance of the objective intensity, and "a perfect quantitative balance of subjectivity and objectivity" (*SW* 4:127; 2001a 358). The *Potenzlehre* will be founded on this threefold grouping. This is the "threefold mode of appearing" in which one and the same identity is made manifest in three different 'amounts' (*SW* 4:413). Schelling makes this clear in §54 of the 1804 *System*: "The particularity of all finite

things… can be grounded either in a reciprocal dominance of one factor [real or ideal] over the other or in the equilibrium of the two… These are the only possible differences." (*SW* 6:209-10; 1994b 191)

Schelling's famous magnetic line depicts these three quantities of being:

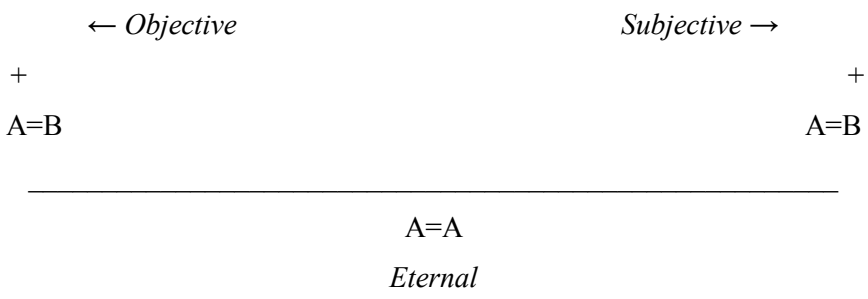

Figure 1: The Magnetic Line (*SW* 4:137; 2001a 365)

The middle point is that of relative indifference; on the right side, there is an excess of the subject position (hence the '+' over the 'A'); on the left side, there is a preponderance of the predicate position or of the object (hence the '+' over the B). As Schelling himself writes in respect to this diagram:

> Absolute identity's form of being can thus be universally conceived through the image of a *line* where the very same identity is posited in each direction, with A or B in the opposite directions, while A=A itself falls at the point of equilibrium. (We signify the predominance of one factor over the other by the + sign)… The same identity is posited throughout the line, and even at $A=B^{+}$… Thus we never leave the form of subject-objectivity, we never emerge from A=A. All differentiation consists just in this: A=A is posited in one direction or tendency. (137; 365)

Each point on the line is an affirmation of the self-same identity[22]; however, each point posits different intensities of this identity, and these intensities can be grouped into three "directions or tendencies": the subjective, the objective and the indifferent. The direction to the right of the middle indicates an increasingly positive intensity of indifference; the left of the middle designates an increasingly negative intensity of indifference.[23] The middle point is that of relative indifference.

One consequence Schelling draws from the above depiction of the magnetic line is the *overall indifference* of the cosmos. While each point on the line specifies a specific 'amount' of indifference, equilibrium reigns in the All, since these quantitative differences balance each other out to form a total quantitative indifference. Schelling writes

> Our assertion is this: if we could view everything that *is* in the totality, we would perceive in the whole a perfect quantitative balance of subjectivity and objectivity… however much in the perspective of the individual a preponderance might occur on one side of the other. (*SW* 4:127; 2001a 358)

* *

Schelling's theory of quantitative differentiation is *neither* analogical *nor* dialectical, and this is because *there is no qualitative differentiation in Schelling's philosophy*, or in other words *there is no negation in Schelling's philosophy*. Analogy is founded on a conception of qualitatively distinct realms of reality, and this alone is enough to see that Schelling cannot hold to a theory of analogy. Things are not analogously related, for everything is the same! Phenomena exhibit different degrees

[22] "Identity recurs at all possible stages, changing in form only." (*SW* 5:272; 1966 66)
[23] See *SW* 4:124; 2001a 356, where Schelling speaks in terms of "a positive or negative power of A".

of what is identical, and as such cannot participate in the complex and delicate balancing of sameness and difference on which theories of analogy, participation and emanation are founded. As Grant has emphasised in his recent work on Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*, Schelling is not "another analogizer" (2006 155).[24] A similar story can be told in respect to Schelling's dismissal of dialectic: dialectic is motored by negation – by the repeated negation and so sublation of qualitatively distinct *Gestalten*. Again, Schelling cannot in any way subscribe to this: differentiation is not for him a product of reiterated negation, but rather of reiterated affirmation or production. Uslar writes, "The inner movement of Schellingian absolute identity is fundamentally different from Hegel's dialectical movement… And the fundamental difference is that Schelling conceives the inner movement of the absolute *without negation*." (1968 503) Uslar continues, the basis of Schellingian thought "is not a negation of the negation, but the finite potentiation of an identity of identity." (507)[25] Quantitative differentiation sets the *Identitätssystem* apart.

6.3 Reflection Revisited

At this point in the chapter, it is worth returning to the problem of reflection and the manner in which it distorts reality, for Schelling insists that ignorance of quantitative differentiation forms the precondition of all reflection. It should be pointed out from the beginning that there are holes in Schelling's theory of reflection. First, Schelling never decides whether reflection is a property of thinking or being – that is, does the philosopher distort reality or is reality already distorted? He often

[24] See also Grant 2006 19, 54, 184.
[25] To repeat, this is not so obviously true in respect of Schelling's own dialectic of *Ineinsbildung*.

speaks as if the former is the case, but, as we know, he also rejects the idea that anything but the absolute knows. Ultimately, we should not be surprised at this ambiguity, since we have already seen at length the indissociability of metaphysics and epistemology (being and knowing) for Schelling. Second, there is a correlate problem concerning the origin of reflection: is it an avoidable error or a necessary feature of reality? I incline towards the latter, since Schelling also names the first potency (on which more later in the chapter) the potency of reflection (4:418), suggesting thereby that reflection is an ineluctable part of the distribution of being; however, this does not square with the genealogy of reflection I am about to describe. Once again, Schelling is not clear on this point.

Everything is in essence identical: "Identity is universal, all-pervasive and all-encompassing." (*SW* 4:256; 1984a 157) The entities which produce this identity maximally are named ideas; they express "clear unclouded identity itself" (*SW* 4:128; 2001a 358). All distinction is formal and so inessential: there are no distinct substances, nor any *qualitatively* distinct entities. There are just different quantities or degrees of this self-same identity. Schelling writes, "We have a single fundamental pattern repeated with continual quantitative variations." (*SW* 5:341; 1966 140)

In line with all other rigorous monisms, such a worldview leaves no room for falsity. In *Bruno*, for example, Schelling contends, "No falsehood is possible in nature." (*SW* 4:222; 1984a 124) Even false thoughts must be productions of absolute identity. The question, then, naturally arises: in what way are they false? And the answer is simple: they possess a *low* 'amount of being', a minimal degree of productivity. *False thoughts are what least produce essential identity*. So, again, there is no qualitative distinction between the true and the false, but only a quantitative one:

true and false opinions differ in the intensity to which they affirm reality – they differ in degree.

What is important here is that there is no dualism of rupture between reason and reflection.[26] Qualitative thinking is *not* a different *Gestalt* from quantitative thinking; rather, qualitative difference is reinterpreted by Schelling as a small amount of quantitative difference. This is the reason reflection is designated the first potency: it is not excluded from Schelling's worldview as *purely* false, but is seen merely as *less intense*. As always there is a spectrum of positions, not a binary or hierarchy.

In order to see the working of reflection in detail, it is worth looking at two examples of error in Schelling's philosophy and how they need to be interpreted as expressing reality to a low degree.

6.3.1 Qualitative Opposition

The best place to start is the very error Schelling is combating with his theory of quantitative differentiation – a worldview that postulates a plurality of qualitatively distinct substances. It is quite easy to see why such a view only expresses the absolute to a minimal degree. Ideas are the most intense products of absolute identity, because they are structured around the identity of real and ideal, finite and infinite. They are based on identity. They therefore express the nature of the absolute to a maximal extent. Qualitative oppositions, however, are structured around the very opposite notion – the inequality of two things. They presuppose the pervasiveness of antithetical judgments: substance A ≠ substance B. This is, according to Schelling, "an arbitrary separation of the individual from the whole effected by reflection" (*SW*

[26] I am following Tilliette (1970 1:371), *pace* Fischbach (1999 228) and Lukács (1975 441-3).

4:125; 2001a 357).[27] Such oppositions express the disunity of all things. Qualitative opposition articulates itself therefore in direct opposition to identity, and so this view of the world produces almost none of the absolute's nature (essential identity). Productivity of qualitative opposition → 0. In Schelling's own words, distinction "appears as opposition only to one who finds himself outside indifference, who fails to view absolute identity itself as primary and original." (128; 358-9)

Qualitative opposition is therefore a complete misrepresentation of the nature of reality. It is the very worst way of thinking about the world.

6.3.2 Causality

The second 'error' I examine – causality – is a corollary of qualitative opposition. Causality is a product of a world conceived oppositionally, and therefore shares with oppositional thinking a lack of productivity.[28] The notion of causation[29] is premised on a distinction between cause and effect: the two must first be thought of as self-sufficient in themselves and excluding each other for it to make sense to think of them as coming occasionally and accidentally into contact. Causation presupposes distinct substances, thus a worldview of qualitative oppositions. Causal thinking "tears apart the infinite identity of the idea… and puts the separated factors into a relation of cause and effect." (*SW* 4:283; 1984a 181)

Hence, in the *Fernere Darstellungen*, Schelling is quick to dismiss any form of cognition that assumes causal relations between things. Any "type of knowledge

[27] Schelling continues, "But in itself this separation simply does not happen, since everything that *is* is one."

[28] Schelling often designates temporality another correlate of oppositional thinking, and so another error of reflection (*SW* 4:115; 2001a 349 – *SW* 4:251; 1984a 151). This is because what is organically and intrinsically connected in the absolute is separated out and connected merely causally in time. However, such claims are extremely problematic when it comes to the possibility of history (and in consequence theology). See Zeltner 1975 103, Wanning 1988 36.

[29] By 'causation' Schelling means efficient, mechanistic causation of the sort holding between two colliding billiard balls – "lifeless motion" as he pejoratively calls it (*SW* 4:315; 1984a 209).

which in general rests on the law of mechanism" is labelled "an eternal and flowing source of error" (*SW* 4:343-4). Genuine philosophy is based on the rejection of causation: "The main criterion [by which absolute cognition is discerned] is the complete avoidance of the causal law and that worldview in which it is valid." (345)

6.3.3 A Genealogy of Reflection

Reflection is a form of oppositional thinking. "Reflection works only from oppositions and rests on oppositions," as Schelling himself puts it (*SW* 4:113; 2001a 348). In the previous chapter, we saw this in regard to the category of representation – the fact that the subject is said to represent the object presupposes that subject and object are originally opposed and distinct. Such a presupposition, however, is precisely what Schelling questions and we can now understand why. The category of representation fails to acknowledge the *quantitative* differences which hold between individuals. Reflection (and so representation) is to be defined as *minimally expressive thought* (*SW* 4:298; 1984a 195). Reflection is the very worst way of thinking about reality, for it fails to affirm the identity at the heart of all things. "Reflection dismembers absolute unity." (251; 151) In the 1804 *System*, Schelling puts it as follows,

> The idea is the complete identity of the particular with its universal. Ordinary reflection, which is the opposite of philosophy, remains necessarily in an antithetical relation to the universal and particular. It knows the universal and the particular only as two relative negations, by conceiving of the universal as the relative negation of the particular [and] the particular the relative negation of the universal. (*SW* 6:185; 1994b 173)

No identity or indifference is made manifest by reflection.

What is more, according to Schelling (and this will become increasingly important as we consider the theological dimensions of the *Identitätssystem*), the pervasiveness of reflection has its roots in Christianity: "The modern world is in general a world of antitheses… [and] dualism [is] an inherently necessary and necessarily recurrent expression of the modern era." (*SW* 5:272-3; 1966 66-7) It is a particularly modern (or post-Classical) phenomenon. The binaries of sensible and supersensible, human and divine, matter and spirit, body and soul which so define modern thought are all products of reflection, of a way of thinking which qualitatively distinguishes and opposes pairs of phenomena.[30] This cultural inheritance *must*, Schelling presses, be rejected wholesale. This is the urgent task facing thought. In other words, reflection has "only *negative* value" (*SW* 2:14; 1988a 11)[31], and Schelling never stops working towards its elimination. His attitude to reflection is summed up in the following,

> As soon as man sets himself in opposition to the external world… reflection first begins; he separates from now on what Nature had always united, separates the object from the intuition, the concept from the image, finally himself from himself… *Mere* reflection, therefore, is a spiritual sickness in mankind, the more so when it imposes himself in dominion over the whole man, and kills at the root what in germ is his highest being… Identity. (*SW* 2:13-4; 1988a 10-11)

[30] See *SW* 4:314-5; 1984a 209.
[31] This is a significant difference between Schelling and Hegel even before 1807.

6.4 The Potencies

Let us return to the magnetic line. As we saw, Schelling conceives of three different types of 'relative identity'. These three groups are the three different manners in which the absolute is produced, and are designated more technically, 'the three potencies'. As Plessner puts it, "The respective degree of identity of subject and object is signified by the word 'potency'." (1954 73) Or, in Zeltner's words,

> Potency designates determinate forms or modes of being of absolute identity, corresponding to their respective quantitative difference of subjective or objective. Absolute identity remains unchanged itself; what changes is only the mode, the way of being. (1975 88)[32]

The three potencies therefore correspond to the three moments on the magnetic line: the third potency (named, 'the eternal') affirms the absolute *indifferently* (and so corresponds to the ideas); the first potency emphasises the finite or the objective pole, while the second potency emphasises the infinite or the subjective pole.

6.4.1 The Recursion of the Potencies

The magnetic line is so important to Schelling, because it exhibits one of the most crucial properties of the potencies – their infinite recurrence. "All potencies repeat themselves." (*SW* 4:419) If one takes any point on the line, the same structure which is present over the whole line will there recur in miniature: "The same identity is posited throughout the line… What holds for the line as a whole, holds too for each individual section of it unto infinity… The constructed line is divisible unto infinity." (*SW* 4:137-8; 2001a 365) For example, on the right hand side of the line (which in

[32] See *SW* 5:365-6; 1989 14.

general is subsumed under the first potency), the same three potencies recur in miniature, and so the structure of the magnetic line as a whole is reproduced on this smaller scale. To quote Schelling once more,

> Each point of the line, depending on how it is viewed, is the indifference-point and pole or its opposite… Every point can also serve as indifference-point relative to some other, or become now one, now the other of the two opposed end-poles, depending on how I divide the line. (138; 366)

This process takes place *ad infinitum*, which is, of course, the case with magnets too: any part of a magnet recapitulates the same polar structure (i.e. with one end magnetised to the North, the other to the South and a point of indifference in between); hence, no matter how small one breaks up a magnet, the parts will still take on the properties of the whole. It is for this reason the magnetic line "is the symbol for a potency as such." (139; 367)

In terms of the theory of the potencies itself, it is quite evident why they must repeat themselves *ad infinitum*. The first potency, for example, in emphasising the finite (or objective), does not exhibit *just* the finite element of the ideas, but rather *it exhibits identity finitely*. Hence, identity is still the one and only content and essence of reality, merely expressed in a different way: "Absolute identity is in the individual under the same form under which it is in the whole… It is *entirely* in every individual." (132; 361) Each potency recapitulates the structure of identity: each potency thus re-presents all three potencies while still emphasising one. In consequence, "The original identity is maintained in each of these three identities." (*SW* 4:425) The threefold grouping of relative identities is implicit within each particular potency.

It is this property of infinite recursion which gives rise to the baroque Porphyrian trees which plague Schelling's works (as well as works on Schelling). For

example, reality as a whole can be split into three potencies[33]: the finite which corresponds to the natural world, the infinite which corresponds to the ideal world and the point of indifference between the two which corresponds to reason. Within the natural world, the three potencies recur as matter, light and organism; within the ideal world they recur as thought, act and art. To take just art as our example: within the realm of the artwork, the three potencies recur again: as "formative art" (i.e. non-verbal art), verbal art and a problematic third term. Both types of art are again split into three. To take the example of formative art alone, it is formed of the three potencies of music, painting and sculpture, and music, for example, is in turn split into three: rhythm, modulation and melody. And, of course, in principle this splitting could go on endlessly: "Just as this three-in-oneness expresses itself in the whole of philosophy, so too it is, in turn, expressed in every single part of it." (424)

This portioning up of reality is one of the most problematic-seeming elements of Schelling's philosophy; and critics from Hegel onwards have not stinted in mocking it.[34] However, it is crucial to see the necessity of infinite recursion within the *Identitätssystem*. If identity is all there is and this identity always manifests itself in a threefold manner, then all productions of the absolute will have three elements to them. Everything that exists (as we have seen) is a quantity of identity, and, as such, possesses exactly the same properties as any other quantity of identity. Hence, musical rhythm is just as much subject to the law of the threefold appearance of identity as light or as action. "Everything that is is reducible to three potencies." (340)

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[33] The following schema is a generalised one; different formulations have their own idiosyncrasies. See Tilliette 1970 1:417-21.
[34] See Hegel 1977b §51-3.

The *Potenzlehre* is not an inchoate dialectic. The theory of the potencies and dialectical thought are absolutely incommensurable, and this is because the former is grounded on a quantitative and the latter on a qualitative conception of reality. Dialectics, it is true, often has a threefold structure, but these three elements are successively produced by means of negating the previous elements in the series. There is a relation between them of opposition and sublation. No such structure applies to the theory of the potencies: each potency possesses a degree of productivity which is more or less than the others. The differences between them are strictly quantitative. Moreover, in consequence, while the dialectic is a *process* where each element succeeds the previous one, this is not necessarily true of the potencies. Potencies can co-exist. "The potencies must be thought as contemporaneous", as Marquet rightly points out (1973 225).[35] Schelling's theory of the potencies is not a preliminary version of anything, but a fully-fledged understanding of the way reality works, which is to be set in opposition to dialectical understandings.

6.4.2 The Three Potencies

All three potencies are present in all things, even if one potency dominates there. So, for example, the first potency is that of finitude; it corresponds to the natural world. However, there is also an element of the ideal world where the first potency predominates (thought), as well as aspects of the natural world in which the other potencies predominate. We return here to Schelling's insistence that nothing is purely finite or purely infinite, purely real or purely ideal. Everything is a compound of the two, or, more precisely: *in everything all three potencies recur*. To speak, then,

[35] See further Zeltner 1975 88, Tilliette 1970 1:377, 422-4. Marquet also rightly points out that, as the *Identitätssystem* progresses, Schelling becomes increasingly fond of thinking of the potencies as a historical sequence. See Marquet 1973 319-23, Fischbach 1999 248.

of the natural world as real or even to speak (as Schelling himself often does[36]) of an 'ideal world' is to reduce what is complex to what is simple. The natural world does *not precisely correspond* to the first potency; in the natural world, the finite is dominant, but is still only one aspect of the threefold mode in which the absolute expresses itself. There is no simple one-to-one correspondence between entities and potencies: all entities are a compound mixture of all three potencies. One potency may be more fully present in any one entity, but the other two will always be found somewhere in the mix.

Again, we see that there is no such thing as a finite entity or pure finitude for Schelling. Everything that exists is a mixture of finite, infinite and eternal: "All potencies are once again contained in all things." (*SW* 4:418) In short, a crucial principle of the *Identitätssystem* is the necessarily compound nature of all things.

* *

What differentiates the three potencies is the different extent to which they produce identity. "These unities," Schelling writes, "each of which signifies a definite degree of embodiment of the infinite into the finite, are represented in three potencies." (*SW* 2:68; 1988a 51)[37] That is, the potencies are grouped according to amounts of intensity, and each potency produces the absolute more intensely than the last.[38] 'Potency' is a mathematical term synonymous with power or indices: each potency expresses a determinate power of reality ('reality squared' and so forth). Yet,

[36] See *SW* 2:65; 1988a 49 or *SW* 4:417.
[37] See further Grant 2006 174, Vater 1984 46.
[38] In regard to the first two potencies, Schelling wavers between a Leibnizian position and a Spinozist position. On the former, the second, ideal potency expresses more of the absolute than the first potency (*SW* 5:306; 1966 103). On a rigorously Spinozist position, ideal and real express the absolute to the same, parallel degree (*SW* 4:416).

we must be clear that there is no such thing as reality prior to potentiation: "Identity… is always potentiated" (Zeltner 1975 88). As Schelling puts it, "The absolute is beyond all powers or it is strictly devoid of power" (*SW* 6:212; 1994b 192), by which he means that the absolute 'as such' is a fiction (and a pernicious one at that); it is nothing or 0.[39] In other words, nothing exists outside of form. Reality, beginning from nothing, gradually potentiates or affirms itself into more and more intense forms until finally the surplus reaches its maximum (in the idea or the eternal).

The third potency (the eternal) therefore produces essential identity to the maximum possible extent. It is self-evident why this is the case: the third potency is that in which neither the subjective nor objective dominates, but both are expressed equally. It is the potency of relative indifference, and hence the point where indifference is most produced. The third potency manifests most reality; it is therefore most productive of the absolute. In all things, it is equivalent to *the idea of* that thing. Because the eternal is the point of greatest productivity, it is what will be of most interest in what follows. I will be especially interested in those entities in which the eternal is dominant: organisms, art, reason, philosophy and theology. To take the example of the organism: in the organism, the first two potencies of the natural world (matter and light) are made indifferent to one another. "Matter is entirely light and light entirely matter." (*SW* 2:107; 1988a 138) The organism is, Schelling continues, the "highest marriage of matter and form… the production of the real indifference point in the real world." (107-8; 138) The organism takes what is emphasised in the first potency and what is emphasised in the second and makes them equivalent. For this reason, "The organism [is] the highest expression of nature" (108; 138). As we

[39] The potencies can thus be formulated as 0^2, 0^3… 0^n.

shall see, Schelling makes very similar claims about the other entities in which the third potency predominates as well.

6.4.3 *Bildung*

As a final coda to this chapter, there is a further consequence of Schelling's *Potenzlehre* I would like to draw attention to, and that is *an implicit theory of Bildung* that the foregoing has suggested.

Crudely put, Romantic and Idealist theories of Bildung can be summed up in Friedrich Schlegel's fragment: "Every good human being is always progressively becoming God. To become God, to be human, to cultivate oneself are all expressions that mean the same thing." (1971 §262) *Education is a process of divinisation*. More concretely, this usually involves the imperative that the individual human raise himself up above the particular thrown situation in which he finds himself, so as to access what is universal. Moreover, it is art, religion and philosophy which are the three most common media through which it is recommended to pass in order to annul one's particularity and access what is universal. Such is the goal of human life – a process of *Bildung*, of self-formation towards the absolute.[40]

There is a parallel demand in Schelling's *Identitätssystem*: the call to maximise one's productivity, to generate essential identity to the greatest possible extent. As Schelling puts it, "The degree of perfection or of the reality of a thing increases to the extent that it corresponds to its own absolute idea and to the fullness of infinite affirmation." (*SW* 5:381; 1989 29), or again, "To strive towards blessedness = to strive as a particular to partake of absoluteness." (397; 39) And Troxler similarly mentions in his lecture notes, "the striving of the individual after absolute being."

[40] See Gadamer 2004 8-17.

(1988 36)[41] It is the notion of 'striving' that is important here – a dynamic process through which productivity is maximised. Schelling is most explicit in the 1804 *System*. §63 reads, "The degree of reality held by each thing as such is in proportion to its approximation of the absolute identity" (*SW* 6:212; 1994b 193), and in elucidating this claim, Schelling suggests that this 'approximation' is not a static state of affairs; rather, there "is a *progressively* more perfect reflection of the universe" (213; 193; my emphasis). Schelling here implies a dynamic process through which each *Darstellung* cultivates its productivity. Moreover, this is made explicit in the next paragraph when Schelling adds, "The proportion in which the particular… *becomes* more akin to the universe is the same as that in which the nothing or the privation *is being overcome or diminished* within the universe." (214; 194; my emphases)[42] Again, the verbs are dynamic: degree of approximation to the absolute is *not* set in stone; phenomena can intensify such approximation. Such is "the endeavour of… all difference to return to identity." (*SW* 2:106; 1988a 137)

In short, the imperative for *Darstellungen*, according to Schelling, is to become ideas, since ideas are those entities which most express identity. Each entity must strive to cultivate the third potency within it, and to foster the eternal until it becomes its dominant potency (as in organisms and artworks). This is the Schellingian theory of *Bildung* – "a gradual intensification of all form" (*SW* 5:147; 2008 285).[43] Form is indeed key here, for the 'amount' of essential identity produced is directly dependent on formal identity. Therefore, the form of a *Darstellung* is central to its cultivation of the third potency. Forms must approach the law of identity

[41] See further *SW* 4:395; 2001b 387 – *SW* 4:233; 1984a 134.
[42] See also *SW* 5:381; 1989 29 – 384; 31.
[43] Schelling explicitly links this cultivation of identity with traditional conceptions of *Bildung* in *Über die Methode*: science provides "training for rational thinking" and also "guides the mind directly to the vision which in a continuous self-creating process *leads us to identity with ourselves* and thereby to a truly blessed life." (*SW* 5:238; 1966 31; my emphasis)

as closely as possible, for in so doing they approach the form of ideas. The task for all *Darstellungen* is therefore to articulate identity more intensely. "The challenge," the conclusion to *Bruno* states, "[is] to cultivate the sturdy seed of this principle of indifference to its fullest flower", for this will bring about "the inevitable divinisation of mankind". (*SW* 4:328-9; 1984a 222)

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The whole *Identitätssystem* is marked by quantitative differentiation. This doctrine leads Schelling to discard synthesis, antithesis, analogy and dialectic. All differences are excesses of affirmation in either the finite, the infinite or the eternal. Schelling's *Potenzlehre* in which each potency designates one type of excessive affirmation also evolves from this theory. Reality consists, according to Schelling, in ideas and their refracted forms; all these entities are *Darstellungen*, exhibiting reality determinately, and the only way in which they are differentiated is the quantity or intensity with which they do so.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONSTRUCTION

I now turn to Schelling's epistemology. As always my task is to excavate the principles underlying his peculiar interpretation of symbolic language. In the present chapter, it is Schelling's employment of construction which is most significant for this task. The term 'construction' is a frequent one in Schelling's oeuvre between 1801 and 1805. One of the most important essays of the period is entitled, *Über die Construktion in der Philosophie*, and argues at length, *pace* Kant, that construction holds a central place in the philosophical enterprise. Similarly, one of the *Fernere Darstellungen* is again entitled, *Von der philosophischen Construktion*. I argue that by resorting to construction Schelling reveals the extent to which his epistemology draws on the constructive tradition of early modern philosophy. Schelling stands at the end of a long line of constructive thinkers, running through Descartes, Hobbes and Spinoza. The role construction played in modern thought is often neglected; yet it formed (at least until 1805) a valid, irreducible alternative to more frequently-stressed sources of knowledge (perception, deduction and dialectic).

7.1 A Brief History of Construction from Euclid to Fichte

7.1.1 The Entrance of Construction into Modernity

To claim Schelling derives construction from early modern philosophy is *prima facie* a strange claim, for the term's more famous origins are to be found in

ancient Greek geometry. However, what distinguishes the modern appropriation of construction is its redeployment in philosophy: while it remains tethered to geometry in ancient Greek thought, in modernity construction is gradually set free to become an ideal for *all* science. In this first section, I elucidate this process.

Euclid's *Elements* repeatedly emphasises the need to 'construct' geometrical figures; indeed, the very first three propositions of the whole work ask for constructions. Such propositions are called 'problems' (as opposed to 'theorems' which operate by means of logical deduction, not construction).[1] One of the main differences between theorems and problems is the tag which ends the proposition. Instead of the famous 'QED' (*quod erat demonstratum*), many problems end 'QEF' (*quod erat factatum* or, in the original Greek, *ὅπερ ἔδει ποιήσαι*). Problems are to be 'done' (produced or generated[2]) so as to exhibit the required property. Problems are *productive*, rather than *deductive*. While therefore Euclid's *Elements* is usually read as an exercise in deduction (beginning from a set number of definitions and subsequently deriving the properties of figures from these definitions alone), such a reading neglects the problems. The question is therefore: why does Euclid sometimes resort to construction rather than deduction? Why is logic sometimes insufficient?

Numerous answers to this question have been given over the centuries. In early modernity, however, one solution dominated – the Menaechmean.[3] On the Menaechmean interpretation of geometry, *construction is proof of existence*. As one commentator puts it, "In the geometry of the *Elements*, the existence of one object is always inferred from the existence of another by means of construction… [There is] an identification of existence and constructibility." (Mueller 1981 15) Constructions make *assertoric* claims that theorems are unable to. By constructing figures, the

[1] See Heath 1926 125.
[2] All terms originally used in this context. See Funkenstein 1986 299.
[3] I here follow Lachterman 1989. On Menaechmeus, see Heath 1926 125.

geometer demonstrates their *actuality*; he exhibits the reality of the figures he is using in his work – something that theorems (which operate solely on the level of necessity) are unable to do.

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With Descartes, both the 'problematic' and the 'constructive' nature of knowledge is placed centre-stage.[4] As Lachterman succinctly puts it, "For Descartes QED is always a pendant for QEF." (1989 156) Construction thus becomes the new ideal of knowledge in early modern thought. It is summed up in Vico's famous adage, *verum et factum convertuntur*:

> *Verum et factum convertuntur* – the identity of truth with doing, or of knowledge with construction – had been seen in the Middle Ages, at best, as the character of divine knowledge. In the seventeenth century, it became also the mark of human knowledge… A new ideal of knowledge was born – the ideal of knowledge-by-doing or knowledge-by-construction. (Funkenstein 1986 12)

Thus, while Ficino writes during the Renaissance, "Divine thought produces its objects according to reasons, like the spirit of geometry produces its figures from itself"[5], the seventeenth century adds that humanity has access to this initial production in geometry, and this allows the practitioner to – as it were – replay in their own constructions the initial creation of things.

It is in Hobbes that the fullest appropriation of Euclidean geometry is to be found. Indeed, Hobbes even uses construction to criticise Euclid, for, he claims, the

[4] Both Funkenstein (1986 316) and Lachterman (1989 4) see this as symptomatic of modernity's concern for action over contemplation. In Lachterman's words, "The mind is first and last *poietic*."
[5] Quoted in Gueroult 1974 2:480.

latter's definitions are not 'problematic' enough: they are inadequate because they do not *rehearse the construction* of the figures they define: "If the first principles, that is to say the definitions, contain not the generation of the subject, there can be nothing demonstrated as it ought to be." (1845 7:184) Figures must be defined in terms of what is necessary *to produce them*; they must be defined in terms of their cause. Such is a "genetic definition": it is to define something by the method of its construction.

For Hobbes, genetic definitions are not merely the province of geometry; they also belong to ethics and political philosophy – that is, everything of which man is the creator. Since we have the power to generate institutions and codes of behaviour, we are also able to construct them in philosophy:

> Geometry therefore is demonstrable, for the lines and figures from which we reason are drawn and described by ourselves; and civil philosophy is demonstrable, because we make the commonwealth ourselves. (183)

Political philosophy, like geometry, is a constructive enterprise.

However, while construction is the *starting-point* of philosophy, it is not the only method employed therein. Synthesis (or deduction) is also a crucial element in Hobbes' vision of philosophy: after an initial moment of construction, "the whole method of demonstration is *synthetical*" (1:80). Philosophy proceeds from cause to effect, but *in order to reach the causes in the first place, it must begin by practicing genetic definitions*. Such definitions construct the fundamental causes on which the rest of the demonstration rests. Philosophy requires an initial moment of construction.

7.1.2 Spinozist Construction

There is no doubting that Spinoza was markedly influenced by Hobbes' conception of philosophy, and especially his demand for genetic definitions.[6] Just as Hobbes maintained that the whole of a science could be deduced from one cause constructed by means of a genetic definition, so too did Spinoza, as we shall see. However, Spinoza radically extends the terrain beyond what Hobbes sees as legitimate for genetic definitions: while Hobbes limited this method to geometry and moral and political philosophy, Spinoza extended it to *all domains of knowledge*. All causes are in principle constructible, and this is because, insofar as the idea of God is constructible, everything can be deduced from it, since everything follows logically from God's essence. At stake in the *Ethics* therefore is the formulation of a genetic definition of God. In order to begin, the *Ethics* must construct God and then deduce everything from such a construction:

> Just as geometry obtains its genetic knowledge by constructing its figures and then deducing from them everything that necessarily follows, so too philosophy will construct the essence of God and, from that genetic definition, will deduce all that it is possible to deduce. (Gueroult 1974 2:473)

However, this is not to say construction itself plays much of a role in the *Ethics*. Spinoza always employs the Euclidean tag QED, and never QEF. He takes from Euclid, more than anything else, the idea of the theorem and its deductive structure, rather than anything to do with the problem.[7] Deduction dominates the *Ethics*. There is a good reason, however, for this lack of construction: constructions exhibit how things are produced, how they follows from their cause; yet, for Spinoza, all things follow from one sole cause in the very same way – they all follow

[6] See Gueroult 1974 2:481-5.
[7] See König 1976 1010.

necessarily and immediately from God. It would therefore be redundant for Spinoza to continually keep offering constructions. They would be unnecessary repetitions. Once the readers of the *Ethics* have seen the way in which God is the cause of one thing, they have seen it all!

Nevertheless, there is still one construction that is absolutely necessary for the *Ethics*. This is the very beginning of the work. Here, construction is initially required in order to reach the idea of God in the first place. Deduction requires a 'prologue' – the initial construction of God as cause. In order to begin the deductive process, one initial construction is necessary that exhibits God as the absolute and unique cause of reality. The *Ethics*, that is, does *not* (as is usually asserted) begin with the idea of God, but rather begins with the *construction of the idea of God*. To understand Spinoza's use of construction, one must therefore look to how the *Ethics* begins.

The opening of the *Ethics* from the first definition through to IP11 is a *genetic definition of God*. Spinoza had already stated in the *De emendatione intellectu*,

> To unite and order all our perceptions, it is required, and reason demands, that we ask, *as soon as possible*, whether there is a certain being, and at the same time, what sort of being it is, which is the cause of all things, so that its objective essence may also be the cause of all our ideas, and then our mind will… reproduce nature as much as possible. For it will have Nature's essence, order and unity objectively.[8]

This is Spinoza's fullest programmatic statement of his method. He emphasises deduction: from the idea of God, our mind can 'reproduce nature'; however, he also acknowledges that what makes deduction possible in the first place is acquiring the idea of 'the cause of all things' as quickly as possible. Philosophy, Spinoza makes clear, cannot *begin* with God, but must *proceed to God in the fastest possible way*. As

[8] Quoted in Allison 1987 42. My emphasis.

Deleuze puts it, "The synthetic method *invents or feigns* a cause [in order to begin]… We should recognise [in this] a minimal regression which allows us, *as quickly as possible*, to reach the idea of God as the source of all other ideas." (1990 161)[9] Spinoza thus proceeds in the first propositions step-by-step through a 'genesis of the divine', rehearsing the manner in which substance constitutes itself.[10] And from this one construction alone, Spinoza is in a position to deduce the whole of reality.

7.1.3 Kant and Construction

In the previous sections I narrated how 'problem' and 'construction' became crucial not only for how mathematics was understood in early modernity, but also for philosophy. This process continued into late eighteenth-century Germany, and only in 1780 was Kant able to halt the 'rise of construction'. However, far from changing the constructive way in which philosophy was understood, Kant's misgivings spurred his successors on to integrate construction into philosophy even further. Construction is an indispensable element of any account of German Idealist philosophy.

What does Kant mean by 'construction'? Obviously, we already know roughly what he means: it is to *make* or *produce* a concept. He defines it as follows, "To construct a concept means to exhibit *a priori* the intuition which corresponds to the concept." (1929 A713/B741) There are three aspects to construction, according to this definition: the act of exhibiting, the intuition which is exhibited and the a priori manner in which this is done.

First, construction is a form of *Darstellung*: it provides a sensible figure for a mathematical concept; what is more, this concept is *immediately* produced in intuition through construction. There is a *direct, intrinsic* relation between the concept of an

[9] See further 136-7.
[10] For detailed accounts of this process, see Gueroult 1974 1:37-8, Deleuze 1990 75-6, Macherey 1996 157.

isosceles triangle and an exhibition of one. Mathematics makes its concepts as intuitions.

The second element of construction is intuition. In Chapter Two, we began to look at some of the properties of intuition in the eighteenth-century philosophical tradition. First, intuition is immediate (as opposed to symbolic cognition); second, an intuition is a particular (whereas concepts are universal). It follows that to exhibit a concept in intuition is to *particularise* it. This shift to the singular provides the geometer with information mere concepts cannot provide. Kant writes,

> I must not restrict my attention to what I am actually thinking in my concept of a triangle; I must pass beyond it to properties which are not contained in this concept, but yet belong to it. Now this is impossible unless I determine my object in… pure intuition. (1929 A718/B746)

In so doing, "we succeed in arriving at results which discursive knowledge could never have reached by means of mere concepts." (A717/B745) So, Kant contends (in line with Euclid) that exhibition gives us access to more properties than concepts alone. Yet, Kant also points out that to 'singularise' a concept *is not enough*. An intuition must both be a single object, "and yet nonetheless, as the construction of a concept (a universal representation), it must in its representation express universal validity for all possible intuitions which fall under the same concept." (A713/B741) This is the paradoxical crux of construction: the individual figure must represent the general concept. That is, here universal and particular coincide: the universal concept is *fully and directly* instantiated in the particular intuition.

The final element of Kantian construction is its a priori character. It is not any intuition which can exhibit a mathematical concept, but specifically an a priori one. As Kant insists, "For the construction of a concept, we therefore need a *non-empirical* intuition." (A713/B741) Mere empirical depiction is insufficient; instead, a *pure*

intuition is required. Mathematical construction is not an experience; it occurs in a purer, a priori medium.

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Just as important as Kant's understanding of construction is his *prohibition* of its use in philosophy. The *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* rejects the assimilation of construction into philosophy (the goal which had orientated so much pre-Kantian thought). Kant's Discipline of Pure Reason thus begins, "*Philosophical* knowledge is the *knowledge gained by reason from concepts*; mathematical knowledge is the knowledge gained by reason from the construction of concepts." (A713/B742) Philosophy and mathematics are to be fundamentally distinguished with respect to *construction*: while the philosopher is unable to use this method, the mathematician has to use it.

The reason for this is, in short, that *philosophy does not produce intuitions*. It remains entirely at a conceptual level, whereas mathematics 'hastens' to intuition. Kant states, "Philosophy confines itself to universal concepts; mathematics can achieve nothing by concepts alone but hastens at once to intuition, in which it considers the concept *in concreto*." (A715/B743) Kant emphasises the purely *analytic* method of philosophy: nothing 'new' can ever be discovered by the philosopher. "It would be therefore quite futile for me to philosophise upon the triangle… I should not be able to advance a single step beyond the mere definition." (A718-9/B746-7) The mathematician does not have this problem: through construction new information becomes evident. It is thus the inaccessibility of construction which means that mathematics "can never be imitated by" philosophy (A726/B754).

7.1.4 Fichtean Autoconstruction

As with many other Kantian prohibitions, it fell to Fichte to begin to question the separation of philosophy and construction.[11] Throughout his career, Fichte places construction at the heart of the *Wissenschaftslehre* (even if often only implicitly)[12] and (more importantly for our purposes) he also proposes a new variant of the concept – self-construction. The philosopher sits back to watch *reality construct itself*.

This is best garnered from a letter Fichte wrote to Schelling in November 1800 – just a few months before Schelling embarked on the *Identitätssystem*. Here, Fichte characterises science as self-construction:

> Science… must certainly posit nature as *absolute*, and must have nature *construct itself* by means of a *fiction*; similarly, transcendental philosophy has consciousness construct itself *through the same type of fiction*. (*SB* 2:291; Fichte and Schelling 1997 74)

As Breazeale points out, in his reply Schelling "enthusiastically accepted" this model for philosophical methodology (2002 187), writing, "I am fully in agreement" (*SB* 2:297; Fichte and Schelling 1997 77). In consequence, what Fichte here writes is key to understanding the role construction will play in Schelling's *Identitätssystem* and, in short, he recommends letting nature or consciousness construct itself. Construction is *not* a method which the philosopher imposes on reality; it is a *process that reality itself is already undergoing*. Something constructs itself and the philosopher charts this process. Construction therefore shifts from *methodological* to *ontological* import. Breazeale describes the role of the Fichtean philosopher thus, "The philosopher… sets the original I 'in motion' and simply sits back to *observe it in its self-construction* and to *describe* what he thus 'observes' in 'inner intuition'." (2002 192)

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[11] See Lachterman 1989 16.
[12] See Ende 1973, Breazeale 2002 175-6, Helfer 1996 61-9.

However, this account needs qualification, since Fichte does not pursue it whole-heartedly. He still distinguishes between the self-construction of reality and the *reconstruction* the philosopher performs in order to recapture this original construction. In Ende's words, "Fichte opposes the original construction of the I and of being to reconstruction in philosophy… He designates philosophy as the reconstruction of original knowing." (1973 43) Schelling, as we shall see, collapses this distinction, so that the self-construction of the absolute is indistinguishable from philosophical construction.

7.2 Schelling's *Auseinandersetzung* with Kant

Schelling's programmatic article, *Über Construktion*, begins with a manifesto commitment to construction in epistemology:

> Since philosophy can neither surpass the narrow limits of Kantian criticism, nor advance upon the path inaugurated by Fichte to a positive and apodictic philosophy without rigorously introducing the method of construction, the following text sketches and presents with the greatest clarity that central point upon which the scientific fulfilment of philosophy depends. In the future, the doctrine of philosophical construction will constitute one of the most important aspects of scientific philosophy: it is undeniable that due to the lack of a concept of construction many philosophers' participation in the advances of scientific philosophy are hindered. The drive to a rigorous construction, developed from first principles, is the most powerful means against a certain false liberality… Construction is a powerful means against

> the muddle of all perspectives which confuses the true and false and makes them indistinguishable. (*SW* 5:125; 2008 271)

Only through construction can philosophy truly claim to be a science; only through construction can the true and the false be distinguished. Construction is the *sine qua non* of epistemology and philosophical method in general. It is the only means, Schelling insists, of going beyond Kant and beyond Fichte. Schellingian epistemology is, in consequence, thoroughly constructive.

With such an argument, Schelling explicitly and purposefully allies himself with the early moderns. Spinoza especially is the key point of reference for his understanding of construction:

> The great example that Spinoza bequeathed philosophy, through his usage of the geometrical method, instead of spurring on the perfection of that method, actually had the opposite effect… If Spinoza erred [however], it is because he did not go far enough back in his construction. (126-7; 272)

Schelling intends to reverse the anti-Spinozist – and that means anti-constructivist – tendencies of modern thought by resurrecting the constructive procedures preserved in Spinoza's geometrical method. In order to achieve this, he embarks on a detailed refutation of Kant's separation of philosophy and construction. To begin therefore, I rehearse Schelling's arguments against Kant.

7.2.1 Criticisms of Kant

While generally hostile to Kant, Schelling does still appropriate much from the former's understanding of construction (*SW* 5:127-8; 2008 273). Key here is Kant's definition of construction "as the identification of *concept* and *intuition*" (128; 273). Construction, Schelling glosses, "must express itself, on the one hand, as an intuition that is singular and concrete and, on the other hand, as a construction of a concept that

is universally valid for all possible intuitions belonging under the same concept." (128; 273) And in so glossing, he endorses Kant's definition of construction as the identity of universal and particular.

There are still three basic criticisms, however, Schelling makes of Kantian construction. First, Kant allows for the possibility of a non-empirical intuition in geometry, but this, Schelling argues, suggests that non-empirical (specifically intellectual) intuition is possible in other domains as well. Kant should, that is, draw the obvious inferences that, first, there are non-empirical intuitions corresponding to philosophy as well as geometry and so, second, construction is possible in philosophy (128-9; 273).

Second, Schelling argues that the distinction Kant draws between mathematics and philosophy is one *wholly immanent to mathematics itself*. He does so on the basis of one specific definition of Kant's: "Philosophical knowledge considers the particular only in the universal, mathematical knowledge the universal in the particular." (1929 A714/B742) Schelling responds,

> Arithmetic expresses the particular in the universal, geometry expresses the universal in the particular. Thus it is evident that all oppositions made possible through the antithesis of the universal and the particular fall under mathematics itself and that philosophy is not in opposition to mathematics. (5:130-1; 2008 275)

Schelling has a point. While Kant's understanding of arithmetic is the subject of much debate, many commentators agree with Schelling that Kant sees symbols, such as '7' and '+', as universals which express particulars.[13] It is on this basis Schelling argues that Kant's above definition of the difference between mathematics and philosophy does not hold, for mathematics itself has a branch which considers the particular in

[13] Llewelyn (1990 182) cites Kant (1929 B205) in support of Schelling's view.

the universal. The essence of philosophy, Schelling then claims, cannot lie where Kant thinks it did in either of these determinations (universal in particular or particular in universal), but rather in a third option, and the only possible third option, according to Schelling, is the complete equivalence of universal and particular. This is the standpoint which characterises philosophy, the standpoint of indifference: "When each side must be *either* a presentation of the universal in the particular *or* the particular *in the universal*, then philosophy is *neither* of these, but rather the *presentation of their unity in absolute indifference*." (131; 275)

Third, Schelling argues that Kant fails to discern this 'third option' (indifference), because his conceptual armoury is lacking one significant notion: 'idea'. Ideas, as we know, exhibit precisely the indifference of universal and particular Kant is searching for in his discussion of construction. Kant tries to discover a particular intuition which is the complete and immediate instantiation of its universal concept – to Schelling, he is searching for the idea. "Concepts will not be constructed in any other way than as ideas" (133; 277), since construction is "always the absolute and *real* equalisation of universal and particular" (131-2; 276) and only ideas exhibit this identity. The "struggle" between the universal and particular, Schelling concludes, "can *only* be solved through the construction *of the idea*." (135; 278; my emphases) By recovering the notion of an idea, Schelling is able to not only discover the archetypal construction where universal concept and particular intuition coincide, but also show how philosophy (the study of ideas) has a construction proper to it alone.

7.2.2 Philosophy and Mathematics

Schelling therefore rejects Kant's dichotomy between constructive mathematics and non-constructive philosophy. Philosophy is constructive too. What, then, is the difference between mathematical and philosophical construction? In short, Schelling conceives of a three-term "parallelism" (Tilliette 1995 189) in which philosophy, geometry and arithmetic are all constructive *but each in different ways*. This trinity corresponds to the three potencies:

> [Arithmetic] expresses the unity of the finite and the infinite in the infinite, or the unity of pure identity, [geometry] the same unity in the finite, or the unity of difference. Philosophy, however, can have but one method, since it expresses its construction neither in the one nor in the other potency but only in the eternal, in unity considered in and for itself. (*SW* 4:399; 2001b 390)

In arithmetic, the infinite potency dominates, in geometry the finite and in philosophy the eternal. These are the three possible modes of construction.

This leads to a situation where philosophy and mathematics are not antithetical (as in Kant), but rather mutually inform one another. Mathematics is the science (the only science, in fact) which prepares us for philosophical argumentation. Schelling quotes with approval the Platonic dictum, "Let none enter who is not initiated into geometry" (*SW* 7:143; 1984b 246), and is particularly partial throughout the *Identitätssystem* to geometrical examples to illustrate philosophical points.[14] Mathematics and philosophy have a particularly close, symbiotic relationship, and this is because they are both constructive disciplines. "The two are fully alike," Schelling makes clear, "in terms of their type of cognition." (*SW* 4:347-8)

As constructive, mathematics (as well as philosophy) shuns less productive ways of thinking about the world, like *causality*. Mathematics "transcends the law of

[14] For a justification of this procedure, see *SW* 6:165-6; 1994b 159-60.

causality which dominates ordinary knowledge (many so-called 'sciences'); it rises into the realm of pure identity." (*SW* 5:253; 1966 47) Mathematics and philosophy are alike in the attention they give the identity of universal and particular – the realm of ideas.[15]

There is nonetheless no doubting for Schelling *philosophy's superiority* to mathematics: "The peculiarity of philosophy as a science is that it is wholly and immediately itself in the absolute, whereas mathematics in general and geometry and arithmetic in particular are only the fruits of true philosophy." (*SW* 4:348) Mathematics is only "relatively absolute, since neither space nor time is the idea of all ideas, but each is only a separate reflection of it." (*SW* 5:252; 1966 46) Geometry deals with "sensibly reflected" ideas (*SW* 5:128; 2008 273) and arithmetic with 'conceptually reflected' ones – neither with ideas *as such*.[16] Mathematics treats absolute identity only indirectly, through the first two potencies. Only philosophy elevates itself to the third potency so as to encounter ideas *directly and immediately* – the ideas, that is, "reflected purely and in themselves." (129; 274) Philosophy takes place in the eternal, in reason, and so constructs ideas as such – free from distortion. Schelling writes,

> *Construction* is, first and in general, exhibition of the particular inside absolute form, and *philosophical construction in particular*, the exhibition of the particular within form considered without qualification – not as itself ideal or real, as in the two branches of mathematics – but form as intuited in itself or intellectually. (*SW* 4:408; 2001b 394)

It is this specifically *philosophical* form of construction which I now explore.

[15] See 248-56; 42-50.
[16] See Verra 1979 35.

7.3 Absolute Construction

For Schelling, construction is the very definition of absolute knowing, "the sole true method of philosophy" (*SW* 4:406; 2001b 393). As we saw above, Schelling opens his article, *Über Construktion*, claiming that a 'rigorous method of construction' is absolutely necessary for philosophy to progress, that 'the doctrine of philosophical construction' will soon be 'one of the most important aspects of scientific philosophy' and that only through the introduction of this doctrine can the true and the false be properly distinguished. "Philosophy," Ende glosses, "first becomes a science through construction." (1973 55)

7.3.1 The Production of Ideas

What then defines *philosophical* construction? It consists in the *production* of ideas. Construction (as we have repeatedly seen with earlier thinkers in this chapter) is a process of making, of poiesis; indeed, Schelling explicitly states (following this tradition), "All construction is productive." (*SW* 5:150; 2008 287) What the method of construction produces, moreover, is the absolute itself. Philosophy "produces the absolute", Schelling insists in the *Fernere Darstellungen* (*SW* 4:391; 2001b 385). Or, more technically, the absolute constructs itself and it does so in the ideas. We return here to the inseparability of metaphysics and epistemology in Schelling's philosophy: the self-construction of the absolute is just one more way of describing its self-affirmation or self-knowing. Just as the absolute affirms itself in the ideas, so too it constructs itself in them. The ideas are the product of this eternal act, the objects in which the absolute constitutes itself.

Construction therefore belongs both to epistemology and ontology (*SW* 4:118; 2001a 351). Reality constitutes itself by constructing ideas. Art provides a key example of this: it does not *re*-present the absolute, but is productive of it. Art exemplifies the poietic nature of the whole of Schellingian epistemology and simultaneously the whole of Schellingian metaphysics:

> Poesy has optimally received precisely the name *poesy*, that is, of *making* or *creating*, since its works appear as an act of producing instead of a condition of being. This is why poesy can be viewed as the *essence* of all art… Poesy is the creating agent of the *ideas*. (*SW* 5:631-2; 1989 202)

7.3.2 The Indifference of Construction

Absolute construction takes place in the third potency. It is *maximally productive* of the absolute – that is, the absolute fully produces itself in the ideas. Yet, it must be asked: what evidence does Schelling have that this is so? Why is construction the most productive form of knowing? The answer lies in the intensity of indifference that absolute constructions produce. Indifference is discernible here in its most intense possible form. More concretely, Schelling points to four different sets of (what are normally thought of as) oppositions which are made one in construction. Enumeration of these indifferences provides the proof of the superiority of philosophical construction over all methodological alternatives.

First, there is the indifference of universal and particular. Schelling states, "Construction as such is… always the absolute and *real* equalisation of universal and particular." (*SW* 5:131-2; 2008 275-6) This is of course the very indifference which Kant identifies as the essence of construction in the first *Kritik* and likewise it is what defines construction for Schelling. The universality of the concept and the particularity of the intuition are not to be distinguished. In geometry this identity is

subordinated to a preponderance of the particular intuition and in arithmetic it is subordinated to the surplus of the universal concept, whereas "in philosophy it achieves a point of absolute indifference." (131; 275) As such, "To identify… the universal and the particular is the spirit of true philosophy." (*SW* 7:143; 1984b 245)

Second, Schelling also stresses the identity of thought and intuition in constructions. This again follows quite simply from Kant and Schelling's definition of construction. In construction, an a priori intuition becomes equal to its concept, for the intuition fully and immediately manifests this concept.[17] Hence, Schelling praises Kant for "consistently describ[ing] construction as the identification of *concept* and *intuition*." (*SW* 5:131; 2008 273)

Third, Schelling points to the indifference of constructing activity and constructed product. Absolute knowledge occurs at "the point at which constructing and constructed, thinking and thought come together as one. Only this point can be called the *principle* of construction." (134; 277)[18] This is another way of speaking of the identity of the subjective and objective in construction: "Absolute knowing is not one in which subjective and objective are united as opposites, but one in which the entire subjective is the entire objective, and *vice versa*." (*SW* 2:61; 1988a 46) Or, as Schelling puts it even more explicitly, "Subjectivity and objectivity are absolutely one, and there is no construction in which they are not one." (*SW* 4:363; 2001b 378)

Fourth, construction brings about the identity of possibility and actuality. For early modern exponents of construction, construction is a proof of existence: what is possible (i.e. without contradiction) becomes actual in construction. For Schelling too, possibility and actuality are one in construction: "The mind recognises… what it knows as *absolute* possibility to be absolute reality as well." (*SW* 2:202; 1988a 162)

[17] This also results in the identity of form and matter (*SW* 5:126; 2008 272).
[18] See Ende 1973 53-4, Verra 1979 34.

Moreover, Schellingian construction also exhibits the necessity of its object: what is constructed *has* to be so constructed.[19] Possibility, actuality and necessity are all indifferent in construction.[20]

7.3.3 Construction and the Absolute

Construction is therefore the complete and immediate *Darstellung* of the absolute in one determinate form. It is an idea, for in absolute construction the third potency (that of the eternal and the ideas) dominates. Construction maximally produces the indifference of the absolute in an idea. Moreover, of course, such ideas are for Schelling the building-blocks of reality; hence, "The absolutely One is constructed in the absolute point of indifference, and this construction is presented in the *reflex* as the totality of a real universe and as the totality of an ideal universe." (*SW* 4:420) *The absolute constructs itself as reality*.

This reality is (in essence) *one*, and so therefore is all knowledge. Knowledge is monistic just like being, therefore Schelling insists on "the identical absoluteness of all constructions in philosophy." (*SW* 4:410; 2001b 395) All constructions are constructions of the absolute by the absolute, and so (no matter what idea is constructed) they are all ultimately identical. Schelling emphasises this point in his correspondence with Fichte,

> Both of us admit but this one and only absolute knowledge, which is the same and ever recurring in all cognition, and which it is our common task to present and to reveal in all knowledge… Once this knowledge is formally established and rooted as the sole theme and principle of philosophical

[19] See further Verra 1979 34-6.
[20] One binary, however, which is not necessarily indifferentiated in construction is the ideal/real relation; there are preponderantly real and preponderantly ideal constructs. This will become crucial in the coming chapters.

> speculation… [philosophy] will repeat and bring to light in infinite forms and shapes only the one, the absolute. (*SB* 2:326; Fichte and Schelling 1997 80)

All knowledge is of the absolute, and, while there are infinitely manner forms this knowledge can take on, its essence will be forever the same: identity. In consequence, *what* constructions construct is not at issue, rather *the degree* to which they construct it is; in other words, while the essence of every construction is identical, its form is not – and this form crucially is the cause of the intensity with which the essence is generated. Philosophy no longer has an issue with subject matter; its overriding concern is the form in which that one subject matter is produced. This will become increasingly clear in the coming chapters.

We must remember here Schelling's metaphysical commitment to the fact that the absolute can be formed and become determinate *without thereby losing any of its absoluteness*. Construction is a case in point: the constructed idea "receives the entire absolute into itself and even in uttermost particularity it becomes entirely absolute again." (*SW* 4:405; 2001b 392)[21] What is constructed is a particular idea; however, this idea manifests the identity of ideal and real, subject and object, universal and particular, and it does so in the fullest and most complete possible way. The construction maximally produces the identity of the absolute. Thus, Schelling writes in the *Fernere Darstellungen*, "The particular [idea] is itself exhibited within the absolute only insofar as it contains the *entire absolute* exhibited within itself." (393; 386) Essence always exists in determinate forms; the absolute always exists in determinate constructions. This, as I have repeatedly stressed, is the heart of Schellingian thought.

[21] In consequence, Schelling sees no contradiction in affirming a plurality of formally differentiated absolutes. See Wanning 1988 38.

Construction is a form of *absolute knowing*. In other words, in construction form – knowing – is equivalent to essence – what is known – and both are the absolute. Schelling insists upon this point in *Fernere Darstellungen*,

> The absolute unity of thought and being… is the absolute's eternal form, the absolute itself… Consequently, formally absolute cognition is necessarily a knowing of the absolute in itself. Thus there is an immediate cognition of the absolute and this is the first speculative cognition, the principle and ground of possibility of all philosophy. (368; 381-2)

There is nothing above or beyond philosophical constructions, for the form of knowing is equal to what there is. There is nothing that such constructions do not comprehend – no remaining mystery. And this is because reality is first produced in construction; it does not pre-exist construction, but comes to be through it. Essence does not exceed form; reality does not exceed constructions.

7.4 Intellectual Intuition

One concept noticeably absent from my description of Schellingian epistemology thus far is intellectual intuition – the most controversial and notorious element of the *Identitätssystem*. Partly this is a rhetorical strategy: so many prejudices are bound up with this concept, it seems better to elucidate Schelling's epistemology without it. Partly my reasons are substantive: it is my contention that during the *Identitätssystem* intellectual intuition was subordinated to the method of construction, and this implies Schelling's rejection of his own previous 'ecstatic' notion of it.

7.4.1 The Redeployment of Intellectual Intuition

Intellectual intuition is the concept most associated with Schellingian philosophy and is usually seen as its greatest weak-point (from Hegel's criticisms of intellectual intuition proceeding "like a shot from a pistol" (1977b §27) to Lukács' claim (1980 147) that, through it, irrationalism first entered modern philosophy).[22] It must be admitted that Schelling *is* committed to a form of intellectual intuition throughout the *Identitätssystem*. "Intellectual intuition is the beginning and first step to philosophy," Schelling writes at the beginning of the *Fernere Darstellungen* (*SW* 4:348), and in *Über die Methode*, he goes even further claiming, "Without intellectual intuition no philosophy!" (*SW* 5:255; 1966 49) However, what is at issue here is not Schelling's continuing commitment to the term, but rather its meaning.

The first thing to note is the *break* which occurs between Schelling's classic use of intellectual intuition in *Vom Ich* and its deployment in his later philosophical work. In the former, intellectual intuition falls foul of all the criticism to which it is often subjected: it is a mystic experience of creative freedom beyond concepts and language, an experience of the noumenal which transcends everyday phenomenal experience. Schelling seems at times to conceive it as an 'intellectual vision of the noumenon', a perception beyond ordinary sense perception (1:181; 1980a 85). In Chapter Five, I discussed the 'two-world' metaphysics on which this use of intellectual intuition is grounded and I also charted the manner in which after 1795 this 'two-world' metaphysics is discarded by Schelling on the back of the poor reception of *Vom Ich*. The same is true of the mystical interpretation of intellectual intuition offered in that work (although this process of discarding was less clear cut).

[22] See also di Giovanni 1987 657, 661, Groves 1999 26, 33. Beiser (2002 579) offers a much needed corrective.

That there was a break in Schelling's view is evident from the 1801 *Darstellung*. In it, the term 'intellectual intuition' (or anything remotely resembling it) does not occur at all.[23] As Tilliette has claimed, "This remarkable absence is probably part of his latent – or nascent – rupture with Fichte, an indirect means of distinguishing himself." (1995 176) Tilliette continues,

> Are we right to underline the exclusion of intellectual intuition from the *Darstellung*? Yes, if one is making clear that intellectual intuition has finished its Schellingian career as transcendental intuition and productive intuition [the forms it takes on in the *System des transcendentalen Idealismus* and the *Naturphilosophie* of the late 1790s]. No, if one observes that it continues to appear in neighbouring texts where it is synonymous with absolute knowledge; but it undergoes an eclipse in others, and in general begins its decline. (186)

Hence, as Tilliette implies, when intellectual intuition does reappear in Schelling's writings in the Summer of 1802, it is in a much subdued and faded form.[24]

Schelling *reinterprets* intellectual intuition during the *Identitätssystem*. At the very moment it re-enters his philosophy in the *Fernere Darstellungen*, he is emphatic: it does so as a reformed concept, one no longer open to the charge of mysticism:

> Most people understand by 'intellectual intuition' something incomprehensible, mysterious, but with no more reason that one would have in thinking the intuition of pure space something mysterious, disregarding the

[23] The same is true of Schelling's next major work, *Bruno*, although this may well be due to its avoidance of epistemology altogether (*SW* 4:221; 1984a 123). Ironically, it is probably the influence of Hegel that led Schelling to reintroduce the term back into his philosophical vocabulary in the *Fernere Darstellungen*. In his *Differenzschrift* published in late 1801, Hegel had stated (posing as Schelling's disciple), "Intellectual intuition is the absolute principle of philosophy, the one real ground and firm standpoint in Fichte as well as in Schelling." (1977a 173) The irony of course is that Hegel later became famous precisely for his critique of Schelling's adherence to intellectual intuition.

[24] See further Tilliette 1970 1:258-9, 1995 188.

> fact that all outer intuition is possible only *in* and through this intuition. (*SW* 4:369; 2001b 382)

In short, his new version of intellectual intuition is not the same concept as appeared in *Vom Ich*. It has now been shorn of its ecstatic and transcendent characteristics – "divested of its mystical resonance", in Tilliette's words (1987 117).

The question then becomes, of course, having described what it is not: what *is* intellectual intuition during the *Identitätssystem*?

7.4.2 The Priority of Construction

A common interpretation[25] sees intellectual intuition as an original epiphanic moment of insight which is then translated into systematic form through the process of construction. Schelling himself lends credence to this view in his popular presentation of the *Identitätssystem*, *Über die Methode*: "Philosophical construction interprets what is grasped in intellectual intuition." (*SW* 5:255; 1966 49) On this view, intellectual intuition is a primary insight, which employs construction as a secondary means of clarifying and communicating this insight.

However, to subordinate construction in this way (as merely a means to elaborate systematically the insight attained in intellectual intuition) is to misinterpret the significance construction has not just for Schelling, but also for the whole early modern philosophical tradition. Construction is not posterior to intuition but the overarching methodology within which intuitions are produced. Let me quote once more Kant's definition of construction: "To construct a concept means to exhibit *a priori* the intuition which corresponds to the concept." (1929 A713/B741) Construction is the means by which intuition is produced and it determines the type of intuition so produced and its relation to the concept. Intuition is not prior to

[25] For example, Beiser 2002 585-6.

construction; rather, it is a component part of the process of constructing. This is the view Schelling adopts in *Über Construktion* and *Fernere Darstellungen*: the self-construction of the absolute is the means by which it knows itself; it is not secondary to an initial act of self-intuition. Indeed, the grandiose claims Schelling makes for construction in the opening lines of *Über Construktion* make little sense on the above view.

7.4.3 Perception and Production

Schelling's post-1801 concept of intellectual intuition can further be determined in terms of its productive and hence non-perceptual character. This property will play a crucial role in the next chapter when I chart the differences between the Schellingian symbol and 'the romantic symbol'.

Intellectual intuition is open to being interpreted as something perceptual. It is easy to think of it as a form of perception directed no longer at the sensory realm, but at the archetypical realm. Intellectual intuition perceives archetypes, just as sensory intuition perceives sensible objects. Again, Schelling does encourage this manner of interpreting intellectual intuition; he calls it "a faculty for seeing things solely as they are in the idea" (*SW* 5:256; 1966 50) or "the capacity to see the universal in the particular." (*SW* 4:362; 2001b 377) Moreover, commentators have often drawn on these remarks: Beiser defines Schellingian intellectual intuition as "the capacity to perceive archetypes" (2002 586) and Tilliette suggests (in a discussion of Schellingian construction) that "to think is to see." (1995 188)

However, this language of perception misrepresents the thoroughly *productive* nature of intellectual intuition in the *Identitätssystem*. Intellectual intuition does not perceive ready-made ideas; *it produces those ideas in the first place*. Schelling insists,

"Intellectual intuition… produces the absolute." (*SW* 4:391; 2001b 385) In Vater's words, intellectual intuition "name[s] the supplier of reality, the creative force, the fact of ontological foundation… Intellectual intuition is the self-realisation of the idea of God in reason." (2000 228-32) This is about as far from a model of perception as one could get.

This is in many ways an obvious point. Scholars of Fichte's work have been stressing the corresponding non-perceptual nature of Fichtean intellectual intuition for decades. However, in light of the above, it does seem necessary to emphasise that the ideas are *not* perceived by the absolute in its self-knowing, but *produced* by it. There is no eternal heavenly realm to contemplate (as a crude version of Platonism would have it). We saw this in Chapter Five in respect to Schelling's Platonism: while Schelling may talk in terms of a distinction between archetype and copy, they are in fact identical – the act of 'copying' is the very same act which constitutes the ideas in the first place. Ideas only come into being by being known by the absolute (and, we must remember, *only* the absolute knows).[26]

[26] It is surprising that scholars have not made more of Hintikka's work. While his conclusions for Kant's philosophy of mathematics remain controversial, the comments he makes concerning the meaning of 'intuition' in late eighteenth-century Germany seem to me invaluable. Earlier in the thesis, I discussed Hintikka's contention that, in the late eighteenth century, intuition is *not* perception. The following conclusion can be drawn from this: intellectual intuition is *not* a mutated version of sensory perception, it is not modelled after it in the slightest. Rather, the opposite is true: perception is only a secondary offshoot.

7.5 Overview: The Nature of Schellingian Construction

To conclude, it is worth summarising what construction means for Schelling. Kant's definition of construction reads, "To construct a concept means to exhibit *a priori* the intuition which corresponds to the concept." (1929 A713/B741) Schelling reinterprets this definition through his adherence to early modern traditions of philosophy. He holds onto Kant's conviction that intuition is the product of construction, while *Darstellung* names the process; however, following early modernity and *pace* Kant, Schelling insists philosophy *can* construct. Moreover, following Spinoza, Schelling contends that what is exhibited in each construction is not merely a concept (as Kant thinks), but is God. God (or the absolute or identity or indifference) is the content of all construction. The multiplicity of different constructions is not therefore a result of different content, but rather different forms and so different intensities of identity.

What is at stake in the difference between constructions (for example, between mathematical and philosophical constructions) is the intensity of production. However, an obvious question arises here: how does a construction guarantee a high intensity of production? How can one be sure that one's philosophical construction is truly philosophical and so truly absolute? We have seen that once the construction is generated, one is able to assess its absoluteness by means of the amounts of indifference it manifests. Yet, the question remains: how does one guarantee absolute construction in the first place? This is a variant of the question many have asked of Schelling: how does one begin? As Hegel famously wrote, the *Identitätssystem* proceeds to the absolute like a shot from a pistol without justifying how or why it gets there (1977b §27). Later critics have been just as concerned with such questions:

Schelling is seen to fall "head over heels into the absolute" (Beiser 2002 588).[27] Indeed, as we have seen, Schelling insists that philosophy begins in the absolute and remains there. How can this be the case? In other words, how can philosophical constructions guarantee their own absoluteness from the very beginning?

In the months leading up to the *Identitätssystem* and most famously in his essay, *Über den wahren Begriff der Naturphilosophie*, Schelling gives a very clear answer to this question. *Abstraction* is the necessary condition for philosophising: one must begin by abstracting from all potentiated phenomena to reach the unpotentiated starting point from which all proceeds:

> One must *reduce the object of philosophy to a lesser potency* and to begin once more to construct with this object reduced to its first potency… By this abstraction, I arrive at the concept of the pure subject-object, from which alone I can raise myself to the conscious subject-object. (*SW* 4:85-6)

Once such a process of abstraction has taken place, the philosopher is then in a position to chart the self-construction of reality. The problem, however, is that despite a half-hearted appearance at the beginning of the 1801 *Darstellung* (*SW* 4:114-5; 2001a 349), abstraction plays little part in the *Identitätssystem*, and indeed by the 1804 *System* the term has solely negative connotations (*SW* 6:192; 1994a 178). What therefore does Schelling substitute for abstraction as the means of guaranteeing absolute philosophy? The answer to this question will only be given at the end of this thesis – much more needs to be elucidated before I am able to show the practice needed (in place of abstraction) to guarantee absoluteness.

* *

[27] See also Challiot-Gillet 1996 29, Fischbach 1999 219-24.

This, therefore, is Schelling's epistemology. There is no sharp line to distinguish where it stops and metaphysics begins; rather, the two disciplines are merely two ways of describing the same thing: the self-construction or self-production of the absolute. As in geometry, this process of construction results in figures which exhibit the absolute; however, unlike geometry (and arithmetic), such figures are not reflected in space or time, but exist as pure ideas in the realm of the third potency, the eternal. Ideas are the maximal self-constructions of the absolute.

PART THREE

SCHELLING'S CONSTRUCTION OF SYMBOLIC LANGUAGE

CHAPTER EIGHT

§39 OF THE *PDK*

In the first two parts of this thesis, I considered the two contexts in which Schelling's construction of symbolic language should be located: first, efforts by other contemporary thinkers to theorise symbolic language; second, Schelling's own philosophical system of the period. Both contexts are crucial to what follows and I return to them repeatedly. In Part Three, I now turn to what Schelling actually has to say about symbolic language. This part comprises three chapters: in the present chapter, I first provide a commentary on Schelling's remarks about the symbol in general – how it is defined, the role it plays and the peculiar interpretation he gives it. Chapter Nine is an intermediary chapter in which I consider some common misperceptions of Schelling's attitude to language. I argue that a construction of symbolic language is both possible and necessary for the *Identitätssystem*. Finally, in Chapter Ten, I provide a commentary on §73 of the *PdK*, bringing all the previous material to bear on the claims Schelling makes about symbolic language.

The present chapter, then, treats Schelling's more general comments on the symbol, especially his introduction of the term in §39 of the *PdK*. In the first section, I analyse his definition of the symbol; in the second, I provide a specific example of symbolic form – mythology; finally, I elucidate the ways in which this definition differs from 'the romantic symbol'.

8.1 Schelling's Definition of the Symbol

8.1.1 The Symbol as *Darstellung* of the Absolute

The proposition defended in §39 of the *PdK* reads, "*Darstellung* of the absolute with absolute indifference of the universal and the particular *within the particular* is possible only symbolically." (*SW* 5:406; 1989 45) A page later, Schelling goes on to state, the symbol "constitutes the absolute form." (407; 46) In making these two claims, Schelling brings the symbol into contact with two crucial elements of his *Identitätssystem*: his doctrine of formation and notion of construction. In terms of the latter claim, the symbol is defined as the absolute (or most productive) mode in which the absolute is exhibited: *the absolute constructs itself most fully in the symbol*. This is obviously a key claim; however, initially, I want to concentrate on the former point – that the absolute *forms itself* into a symbol.

The metaphysics of the *Identitätssystem* posits two elements to reality – essence and form. There is one essence, so whatever exists does so by expressing this essential identity to a greater or lesser extent. All there is is this one essence in quantitatively different amounts. What determines these different amounts is form, and the idea of the necessary formation of the absolute is, as we have seen, a lynchpin of the *Identitätssystem*. Reality (or the absolute) always exists in a determinate form; moreover, this form is *in no way* a diminution of its being; nothing is lost here. Instead, formation is an *intensification* of essential identity. There is no apophatic beyond which is lost in the becoming-formed of the absolute. This formation can also be articulated in epistemological terms: each form constitutes a specific *cognition* the absolute has of itself. It is for this reason that 'form' is synonymous with *Darstellung*, for it is the way in which the absolute exhibits itself as knowledge. Finally, it is

necessary to remember that there are numerous (in fact, infinite) quantitatively different forms the absolute can take on and all these forms intensify the indifference of the absolute to various degrees. Schelling categorises the different types of intensity into three groups which potentiate reality to different extents – the finite, the infinite and the eternal potency. The eternal or idea is the maximal intensification of the absolute. By calling the symbol "absolute form", Schelling obviously aligns it with the final, eternal potency – and we will flesh out this correspondence in detail in what follows. Even more significant is the mere fact that Schelling designates the symbol a 'form' or "mode of *Darstellung* [*Darstellungsart*]" (407; 45) at all. 'Symbol' names, one must conclude from this, one way in which the absolute forms itself – a way in which reality is potentiated and essential identity produced.

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Before moving on, it is necessary to note a distinction. The term 'symbol' only appears in the *PdK* in a discussion of how *art* can be conceived as the self-formation of the absolute. That is, when he introduces the concept of the symbol, Schelling is clear that it applies only to indifference manifest within the *particular* or (what is the same thing) to the idea as it exhibits itself *really*. In this respect, 'symbol' occupies a very specific place in Schelling's aesthetics. Yet, in Chapter Four, I insisted on the symbol as a leitmotiv for the *Identitätssystem as a whole*. 'Symbol' is *one* name out of many, but it is a name which is particularly revealing about the inner workings of the *Identitätssystem*. And, in fact, Schelling himself does also make this claim. He explicitly draws his readers' (or listeners') attention to the fact that symbol, allegory and schematism "are also universal categories" (410; 48). In this way, Schelling

admits the term 'symbol' can be applied more universally than to just art; indeed, the series allegory/schematism/symbol can designate any tripartite manifestation of entities whatsoever:

> One can say that nature merely allegorises in the corporeal series… In light, in contrast to the corporeal series, nature schematises, and is symbolic in the realm of the organic… Similarly, thinking is simply schematism; all action, in contrast, is allegorical; art is symbolic. This distinction can also be applied to the sciences. Arithmetic allegorises… Geometry can be said to schematise… Finally, philosophy is the symbolic science among these. (We will return to the same concepts during our construction of the individual forms of art. Music is an allegorising art, painting schematises, the plastic arts are symbolic. Similarly, in poesy lyric poetry is allegorical, epic poetry demonstrates the necessary inclination to schematisation, and drama is symbolic.) (410-1; 48)

Organisms, artworks, philosophies, sculptures and dramas are all specifically *symbolic* ways in which reality forms itself. Not only art, but also natural objects and scientific discourse can be labelled symbolic. It is for this reason that in what follows I will switch interchangeably between sculpture, drama or philosophy (to name but three) as examples of the symbol. I am not particularly interested in why Schelling selects these particular phenomena; my concern is far more with how these examples illustrate the more general theoretical structure of the Schellingian symbol.

Thus, Schelling argues, since symbol, allegory and schematism name the three modes in which the absolute exhibits itself, they can therefore be applied to all kinds of phenomena (just like the potencies on which they are based). For this reason, we must distinguish between a narrow application of the symbol and a broader one – both

of which Schelling sees as legitimate. It is of course the latter, broader version with which my thesis is primarily concerned.

8.1.2 Allegory, Schematism and the Magnetic Line

To demonstrate his definition of the symbol as absolute form, Schelling constructs a three-term series comprising schematism, allegory and symbol. Each of these terms designates one specific form of the absolute, one particular mode of *Darstellung*. Here is how Schelling introduces them:

> That *Darstellung* in which the universal means the particular or in which the particular is intuited through the universal is *schematism*. That *Darstellung*, however, in which the particular means the universal or in which the universal is intuited through the particular is *allegory*. The synthesis of these two, where neither the universal means the particular nor the particular the universal, but rather where both are absolutely one, is the *symbolic*. (*SW* 5:407; 1989 46)

In allegory, Schelling writes, "the universal is intuited through the particular" – that is, the indifference between universal and particular is masked, and the particular rises to prominence (as that on which the universal depends). The particular is *immediately* accessible and only through it is knowledge of the universal attained. The particular dominates and contains the universal within it. The example Schelling gives of this mode of exhibition is the allegorical interpretation of myth in which the particular events of the story are read as referring to entities of more universal significance: the behaviour of Eros in *Eros and Psyche*, for instance, is meant to represent the capriciousness of love. (409-10; 47-8) The universal is not exhibited but only reached by means of an act of interpretation through the particular. Allegory signifies "ideas by means of real, concrete images." (549; 148)

While the particular predominates in allegory, the opposite is true for schematism – indeed, the two forms are "the reverse" of each other (409; 47). In schematism, "the particular is intuited through the universal"; hence the universal dominates ("the dominating element in the schema is the universal." (407; 46)). This predominance again conceals indifference. The universal is what is immediately given and the particular only mediated through it.[1] The example Schelling gives is "the mechanical artist" who produces particulars only according to their type (that is, mediated through a universal concept):

> The schema is the rule guiding his production, but he intuits in this universal simultaneously the particular itself. 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. (407-8; 46)

The particular (the image) is contained within the universal and is a product of it.[2]

Finally, in the symbol, "neither the universal means the particular nor the particular the universal, but rather… both are absolutely one." (407; 46) Universal and particular exist here in a state of indifference in which both are immediately and directly expressed to the same extent and neither predominates.

Two things require note here. First, one should be extremely wary of the use of the term "synthesis" in this connection. Schelling is fond of it in the *PdK*, and he even goes on to label the symbol "the synthesis of two opposing modes, the schematic and the allegorical" (407; 45-6). However, this was a lecture course not written for publication, and Schelling's published writings should always have the last word. In these, as we saw at length in the previous three chapters, there is *no such thing* as

[1] Here, Schelling explicitly acknowledges the influence of Kant's definition of schematism (although Goethe's definition of allegory was presumably no less influential) (407; 46).
[2] Elsewhere, Schelling gives the example of numbers (576; 165).

synthesis for Schelling: to speak of synthesis is to speak from the standpoint of reflection – a minimally expressive mode of philosophising. The rule, 'What is third for reflection (i.e. the product of synthesis) is first for reason (i.e. the point of indifference)' is a basic one for Schelling at this period.[3] Thus, it seems more in keeping with the *Identitätssystem* as a whole to employ the term 'indifference point' instead of 'synthesis' here. Indeed, later Schelling makes clear in reference to mythology, "Its essential nature is neither allegorical nor schematic, but *the indifference of both*: the symbolic." (410; 47-8; my emphasis)[4]

Second, as I began to argue in Chapter Four, schematism, allegory and symbol can only be thought of as qualitatively distinct (and so capable of being synthesised together) *from the viewpoint of reflection*. From a genuinely philosophical point of view, on the contrary, there is no such thing as qualitative opposition, but only the 'preponderance' or 'surplus' of certain elements. Hence, strictly speaking, the modes of *Darstellung* – schematism, allegory and symbol – are different *intensities of absolute form*. In schematism the universal predominates, in allegory the particular, but symbol is the most intense form, in which the indifference of universal and particular is manifest to the maximum possible extent. The symbol produces essential identity most intensely because it approximates most closely to formal identity.

* *

From these qualifications, it follows that allegory, schematism and symbol correspond to the three potencies in Schelling's *Identitätssystem* – finite, infinite and eternal, respectively. Schelling stresses this point, "One can view the succession of

[3] See Chapter Six, also Wanning 1988 91-3.
[4] Similar language can be found in many other passages (for example, 571; 162).

the three forms of *Darstellung* also as a succession of potencies." (410; 48) In consequence, just like the potencies, they can be depicted on Schelling's magnetic line:

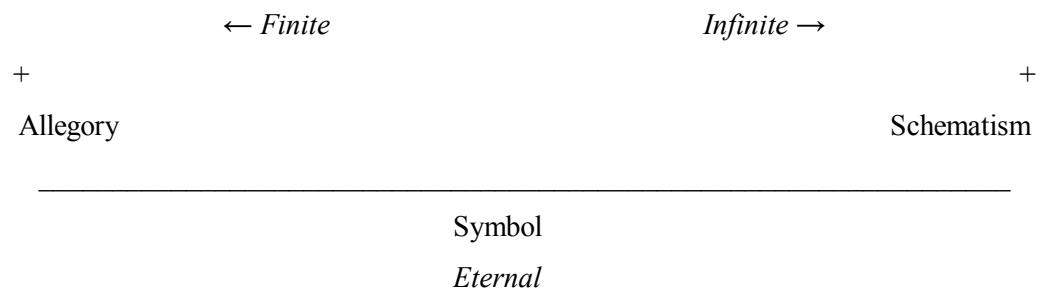

Figure 2: Symbol as Magnetic Line – First Version

Allegory, schematism and symbol name the three potencies. They correspond to the three different types of self-formation of reality: the one which expresses the finite element of reality disproportionately (allegory), the one which expresses the infinite element of reality disproportionately (schematism) and the one which produces reality *as* indifference (symbol).

Yet, this is not the full picture, because Schelling goes on to distinguish a fourth category in §39 (and this strongly implies a fifth as well):

> We also must distinguish each of these three from the *image* [Bild]. The image is always concrete, purely particular, and is determined from all sides such that only the definite factor of the space occupied by the original object prevents it from being identical with the object itself. (407; 46)

The image is a *Darstellung* which is *particular* to the greatest possible extent. In it, all trace of universality (and, in consequence, of the particular's identity with the universal) is seemingly erased. Indeed, Schelling claims the only thing distinguishing a particular object from its image is the different area of space each occupies. The

image is therefore allegory taken to such an extreme that the universal element drops out of view. It is for this reason Schelling calls the image "mere *meaningless being*" (411; 49). One must be careful here to remember Schelling's insistence on the *composite nature* of all things: everything is a mixture of the three potencies, and in nothing do any of the potencies disappear entirely; however, having said that, the image exhibits the infinite and eternal potencies to the *minimal* extent possible. Hence, to all intents and purposes, they are erased.

Moreover, although Schelling does not make it explicit, this entails a corresponding notion which designates that in which universality predominates to the greatest possible extent, and thus in which the finite and eternal potencies are only minimally present. This, we can infer, is *the concept*, "mere meaning" as Schelling describes it (412; 49). The concept is that which stresses universality at the expense of particularity to such a great extent that many previous philosophers assumed it did not contain any reference to particularity whatsoever. The concept is an exaggerated form of schematism.

Thus, a five-term series is created which can be depicted on the magnetic line as follows:

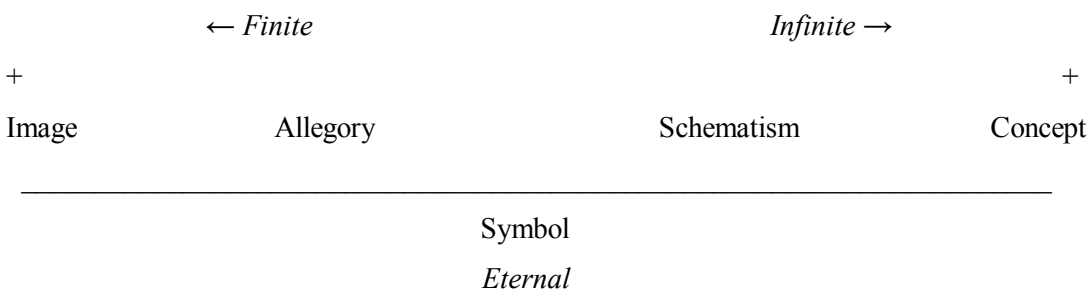

Figure 3: Symbol as Magnetic Line – Second Version

What both these versions of the magnetic line have in common is the symbol's position as the centre or point of indifference between the two poles of allegory/image and schematism/concept. It is the most intense mode in which the absolute can exhibit itself. In the next section, I discuss why this is the case.

8.1.3 The Symbol and Indifference

What evidence is there for locating the symbol at the point of indifference between schematism and allegory – that is, what evidence is there for its definition as 'absolute form'? The answer to this (in parallel to the answer given in the previous chapter concerning absolute construction) is that *the symbol manifests indifference most fully*. It is a "*Darstellung* with *complete indifference*" (*SW* 5:411; 1989 49). This has a twofold aspect – indifference is produced both *intensively* and *extensively* to the maximum extent: there are extensively numerous indifferences which the symbol manifests and it manifests them all intensely. As we have seen, 'syntheticism' or the positing together of opposites is a primary characteristic of all varieties of the symbol during the *Goethezeit*; it is therefore not surprising that Schelling locates the point of indifference of binaries in an entity termed 'the symbol'.

The first and foremost indifference which the symbol manifests is that between meaning and being – that is, (what I have called in this thesis) the symbol's tautegory. The symbol is the point of indifference between meaning and being; neither predominates: "Meaning here is simultaneously being itself, passed over into the object itself and one with it." (411; 49) It is for this reason Schelling resurrects the previously forgotten name for the symbol, *Sinnbild*: "The German language renders the word *symbol* [*Symbol*] excellently with the term *Sinnbild*." (412; 49) For the symbol is an image (*Bild*) whose meaning (*Sinn*) is one with it; it is "as concrete and

self-identical as the image, and yet as universal and significant as the concept." (412; 49) Image and concept should therefore be added to the list of elements made indifferent in the symbol, as too should their corollaries, objective and subjective.

Another crucial indifference equally stressed by Schelling is that between universal and particular. This follows directly from the previous indifference: the being of the symbol (its image-element) is particular, whereas its meaning is universal; hence, just as the symbol manifests the indifference of meaning and being, so too it expresses the indifference of particular and universal: "The universal is completely the particular and the particular the universal." (411; 48) For Schelling, therefore, the universal *does not* exceed the particular in any way, but is *entirely* identical to it. From this also follows the indifference between finite and infinite, as well as (more obliquely) that of possibility and actuality (623; 196).

This, then, is the evidence for the absolute nature of symbolic form. First, the symbol exhibits numerous indifferences – being and meaning, image and concept, subjective and objective, particular and universal, finite and infinite, possibility and actuality. Second, it exhibits each indifference completely and immediately. That is, *both extensively and intensively* indifference is made manifest in the symbol to the greatest possible extent, i.e. absolutely. It is an *absolute* exhibition of the *absolute*. Symbols are indifferent forms of reality; they consist in *formal identity*. This is the very ideal to which all forms in the Schellingian cosmos aspire, because formal identity is maximally poietic – it produces essential identity as intensely as possible.[5]

However, a qualification is necessary. There is one indifference the symbol does not *necessarily* manifest – the indifference of real and ideal. That is, Schelling conceives the possibility of predominantly real and predominantly ideal symbols.

[5] In consequence, as we know, essence and form are thus identical (575; 165), for they are both *identity*.

Mythology (as we shall soon see) is an example of the first kind: it is symbolic, but still rooted very much in the real. The extent to which symbols identify real and ideal thus becomes the criterion by which to differentiate and assess them. In fact, Schelling claims, there is *only one symbol* which identifies the real and the ideal fully, and this is *symbolic language*. It is a claim to which I return in Chapter Ten.

8.1.4 Schematism, Allegory and the Operation of Reflection

One name for reality in the *Identitätssystem* is indifference; in other words, Schelling is a rigorous monist, and so there is one thing and one of its names is 'indifference'. Therefore, *only what manifests indifference is real*. Conversely, any entity in which such indifference does not pertain *at all* is impossible. In short, Schelling's position is that *everything is symbolic*. All reality is indifferent, and so must be (to that extent) symbolic. What does this mean for allegory and schematism? Basically, they merely name lesser degrees of symbolism. Allegory and schematism are not distinct modes of presentation in their own right in which no indifference pertains between being and meaning; instead, they are less intense forms of symbolic exhibition – in which being and meaning are indifferent *in a lower intensity*.

Lower intensity (as we have seen in the previous chapters) is a result of reflection. Reflection is a mode of thinking or being in which the indifference of the absolute is not produced to a very high degree, and hence the symbolic nature of all things is *concealed*. Reflection designates the less intense ways in which reality manifests itself. Allegory and schematism are therefore forms of reflection. When the universal predominates in schematism or the particular in allegory, this predominance implies imbalance between the two terms – as well as a partial separation of them.

This imbalance lessens the intensity of the schema or allegory's production of essential identity.

Implicitly criticised here is the concept of signification. As we saw above, in the definition both of schematism and of allegory, signification (or the process of one thing 'meaning' another) is emphasised: the universal signifies the particular or the particular signifies the universal. For one thing to signify or mean another, Schelling implies, there needs to be a disequilibrium and a partial separation between them: for the universal to mean the particular, the universal must be something different from the particular. The two cannot be identical if signification is to make sense. Three statements Schelling makes concerning allegory are pertinent here: first, "It is actually nothing in and for itself, but is significant only in its relationship to [its referent]" (*SW* 5:453; 1989 79); second, "The particular *only* means or signifies the universal *without being it itself*" (410; 48; my emphasis); third, "What is actually portrayed signifies or means something other than itself, and suggests something different from itself" (549; 148). The non-identity between being and meaning which Schelling draws attention to in each comment is a failure to produce identity. Non-identity – and therefore the notion of signification based upon it – is a less productive way of understanding reality.

A connected criticism is that signification requires some form of causality. If the particular signifies the universal, there is implicitly a causal relation between them: the particular is the cause of the universal's appearance. However, as we have seen, causality is an inappropriate concept by which to describe reality, according to Schelling. It is a misdescription, a minimally productive manner of conceiving the way the world works. Since signification relies on causality (however minimally), it

must be a relatively useless way of describing what is. Signification articulates reality badly.

In short, the problem is that allegory and schematism (as well as signification in general, their common presupposition) both retain traces of a *representational* paradigm. As we have seen, representation is premised on the separation of being and meaning, and moves causally from one to the other. As such, it relies on a view of the world governed by qualitative opposition (between being and meaning) and by casual explanation. Schelling is adamant in his rejection of both these tenets. Moreover, allegory and schematism – since they both separate (to some extent) meaning from being and move from one to another in a causal chain – share common ground with representation.[6] Unlike the symbol, they both distort what really is.

One concept that is remarkably absent from both §39 and §73 of the *PdK* is *the sign*. Indeed, one has to wait until the 1810s to find Schelling make explicit the critique of the sign which is already implicitly present in the *Identitätssystem* (*SW* 8:439-54). Such an implicit critique can be reconstructed because the sign is a composite of two elements that *are* important to §39 – the image and the concept. The sign is that entity which moves causally from pure image to pure concept by means of signification. Unlike the symbol, allegory or schematism, there is no intrinsic connection here between meaning and being, but a purely *extrinsic* one. The sign combines in a causal (hence non-productive) manner the least productive way of conceiving being (the image) with the least productive way of conceiving meaning (the concept). It is thus the most distorted or reflective way of exhibiting reality.

[6] Allegory and schematism, it must be emphasised, are not particularly severe cases of representation, since meaning and being are here only quantitatively distinguished, and the causal connection between them is only implicit.

On the contrary, the symbol does not signify[7]: "The finite is simultaneously the infinite itself, and does not merely signify it." (*SW* 5:453; 1989 79) Elsewhere, Schelling repeats, "It does not merely mean or signify its objects." (707-8; 261) Indifference is immediately manifest and there is no need for a causal relation to be instantiated. Everything necessary for the symbol's meaning is immediately evident in its being – signification and indeed all forms of reference and representation are discarded. Both sign and symbol exhibit some sort of identity between being and meaning, but, whereas the sign's identity is the most extrinsic and mediated connection between image and concept conceivable, the symbol presents the two in their primordial indifference. It is "at once completely idea and completely thing." (621; 195)[8]

8.1.5 Symbol, Philosophy and Ideas

The symbol is one name for the absolute mode in which the absolute exhibits itself. As we saw at length in the previous chapter, this absolute mode of exhibition also bears the name 'construction'. Hence, the symbol describes the self-construction of the absolute. We can see this in §39 itself: what Schelling here dubs symbolic ("*Darstellung* of the absolute with absolute indifference of the universal and the particular") closely resembles his definition of construction (discussed in the previous chapter). Symbolic exhibition is thus a *construction* of the absolute in a particular *Darstellung*.

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[7] *Pace* Niklewski 1979 77-87.

[8] 'Idea' is here being used non-technically by Schelling. The above reading depends heavily on the theory of quantitative differentiation. If one were to give more weight to the dialectic of *Ineinsbildung*, on the other hand, a slightly different picture (in emphasis at least) would emerge, in which allegory and schematism become *component parts* of symbolism – the moments of *Einbildung* and *Wiedereinbildung* in the overall process of *Ineinsbildung*. 'Synthesis' would indeed be a more appropriate term for Schelling to use in this context. See Barth 1991 154-9.

This is made clear in the manner in which Schelling lines up arithmetic, geometry and philosophy with allegory, schematism and the symbol. He writes,

> Arithmetic allegorises, since it signifies the universal through the particular. Geometry can be said to schematise, to the extent that it designates the particular through the universal or general. Finally, philosophy is the symbolic science among these. (*SW* 5:411; 1989 48)[9]

There are (as we saw in the previous chapter) three forms of construction, depending on whether the intuition generated in the constructive process is reflected through space, time or not at all. Schelling here aligns these three constructive sciences with allegory, schematism and symbol.

The symbol is therefore proper to philosophy. Symbolism is the genuinely philosophical way of exhibiting the absolute.[10] It is for this reason Schelling concludes the first part of his essay, *Über das Verhältnis der Naturphilosophie zur Philosophie überhaupt*, as follows,

> What *abides* is only what supersedes dichotomy… From it alone can a true universe of knowledge evolve, an all-encompassing structure. Only what proceeds from the absolute unity of the infinite and finite is immediately capable *per se* of symbolic presentation. (*SW* 5:115; 1985b 373)

As Schelling elsewhere puts it, philosophy is "the symbolic science" (*SW* 5:576-7; 1989 166).[11]

As the most intense form of construction, the one which corresponds to philosophy, symbolism is construction in the third potency – in the eternal. We have, of course, sufficiently demonstrated this already; what needs adding here is that this is

[9] The details of this quotation are extremely problematic. If number is schematic (see note 2), why is arithmetic allegorical (indeed, elsewhere, Schelling does seem to think arithmetic schematic (576; 165))? Moreover, if a geometer constructs spatial diagrams (which are particular) to represent universal truths, how can he schematise?

[10] This applies to the broad notion of the symbol alone. Schelling explicitly opposes the narrow notion to philosophical *Darstellung* (406; 45).

[11] I will return to the relation between philosophy and symbolism at length in the next chapter.

a construction of *ideas*. To exhibit the absolute *symbolically* is to exhibit *ideas*, to construct "the eternal in visible form" (364; 13). *The symbol of a thing is its idea*. This is crucial: symbolism is not an abstraction from reality or an embellishment of it; it is the only means of *attaining what is as it is*.[12] Symbolism is real like nothing else is. Thus, in Robinson's lecture notes on the Jena *PdK*, we read the following: "The symbolic is the absolute in itself." (1976 161)

8.2 The Example of Mythology

In this next section, I explore further the main example Schelling gives of symbolism: mythology. This brief discussion is not meant to exhaust Schelling's ideas on mythology (even as they are presented in the *PdK*); rather, my concern is with using Schelling's conception of mythology as an *illustration* of the previous, rather abstract discussion of the symbol.[13]

The theory of the symbol in §39 is embedded within the section, "Construction of the Content of Art", which is in turn devoted to a discussion of mythology as the proper content of art ("Mythology is the necessary condition and first content of all art" (*SW* 5:405; 1989 45)). The link between symbolic exhibition and mythology is made explicit by Schelling in the following bald statement, "Mythology as such and every poetic rendering of it in particular are to be comprehended neither schematically nor allegorically, but rather *symbolically*." (411;

[12] For anyone who has not raised himself to the level of the symbol, 'reality' "*is* no true reality at all, but is rather in the true sense nonreality." (390; 35)

[13] My discussion of 'speculative transformation' in Chapter Four is again pertinent here: there are many ways in which Schelling's discussion of mythology is dependent on Goethe, the Schlegels and Moritz (indeed, with respect to Moritz Schelling says as much (412; 49)); however, this should not deflect us from the main *philosophical* purpose of Schelling's construction of mythology.

48) Indeed, Schelling writes with respect to the construction of the symbol in §39: "This proposition is thus the principle of construction of mythology as such." (406; 45)[14] From such comments, it is clear why an examination of mythology provides an aid to understanding Schelling's theory of the symbol.

8.2.1 What is Mythology?

The first question that needs to be asked is what Schelling means by 'mythology'. Indeed, in his correspondence with Fichte, he makes much of the peculiarity of his use of this term: "If I make the claim that there are myths in the Old Testament and someone responds by asking how that could be if it teaches the unity of God, would it be my fault if this person cannot hear the word 'mythology' without associating it with the trivial notion of a theory of the gods?" (*SB* 2:353; Fichte and Schelling 1997 88)

In the *PdK*, Schelling provides a comprehensive history of myth beginning with Homer, passing through the Christian sacraments and ending with *Naturphilosophie*. In what follows, however, I will focus merely on *Greek mythology* for this serves as Schelling's paradigm. Yet, Schelling's concern is not with Greek mythology as a whole: he has no interest in the stories of heroes or even in the concrete detail of the *Iliad* or *Odyssey*; instead, he limits myth to exhibitions of 'the gods'. §37 reads, "*The entirety of the poetic renderings of the gods*, by acquiring complete objectivity or independent poetic existence, *is mythology*." (*SW* 5:405; 1989 45) However, this is no mere arbitrary limitation, for Schelling designates as 'god' anything which manifests indifference absolutely. This becomes clear in §28: "These same syntheses of the universal and particular that viewed in themselves are ideas,

[14] See further Hennigfeld 1973 71.

that is images of the divine, are, if viewed on the plane of the real, the *gods*." (390; 35) The term 'god' is the correlate of 'idea': both are constructions of the absolute in the third potency.[15] What is more, such a definition of 'god' should not surprise us. I pointed out at the very beginning of my exposition of Schelling's metaphysics that 'God' is one of the names Schelling gives reality. Just like 'the absolute' or 'identity', 'God' is a way of designating what is. Therefore, it seems natural that Schelling gives such significance to the gods and mythology – mythology treats what is, just as philosophy, theology or natural science does.[16] Thus, Schelling comments, myths "were more real for the Greeks than every other reality" (391; 35). To exhibit the gods is the very same task as to exhibit identity, reality or the absolute. Gods are synonymous with ideas, so mythology is synonymous with philosophy.

Schelling is most explicit on this point with respect to sculptural presentations of mythology:

> Sculpture in and for itself… must portray gods, for its particular task is precisely to portray the absolutely ideal simultaneously as the real, and accordingly to portray an indifference that in and for itself can be found only in divine natures. One can thus say that every higher work of sculpture in and for itself is a deity, *even if no name yet exists for that deity*. Furthermore, sculpture, if left only to itself, would have portrayed as realities all the possibilities residing in that highest and absolute indifference, and thereby quite independently would have filled the entire circle of divine figures and even invented the gods if they had not already existed. (621-2; 195; my emphasis)

[15] Schelling claims in *Philosophie und Religion*, "The true mythology is a symbolism of ideas" (*SW* 6:67), and in so doing neatly brings together my three foci: ideas, mythology and the symbol.
[16] See Dietzsch 1975 399.

Schelling is not interested in the named Pantheon of Greek gods, but in any absolute *Darstellung*, even those which are as yet nameless.[17] Mythology is the presentation of symbols already named and still to be named.

8.2.2 Ideas Intuited Really

In its narrower sense, the symbol is the absolute exhibited *in the real*; in parallel, mythology is a presentation of the ideas *within the real*. Mythology is synonymous with the ideas, but from the perspective of the real – that is, mythology intensifies the real element of ideas at the expense of their ideal element. Schelling writes,

> The universal symbolism or universal *Darstellung* of the *ideas* as real is thus given in mythology… Indeed, the gods of mythology are nothing other than the ideas of philosophy intuited objectively or concretely. (*SW* 5:370; 1989 17)

Myths are therefore *real* symbols: they exhibit the indifference of meaning and being, but through an excess of the real. They still exhibit other indifferences (and so are symbolic); however, they do not exhibit the indifference of real and ideal *as* an indifference, but rather stress the real over the ideal (hence, are *real* symbols).

We should be careful here to remember the qualifications to which I subjected Schelling notion of intuition in the last chapter. Myths are the ideas 'intuited' in the real, Schelling claims. However, to intuit the absolute *really* in mythology is *not* to perceive something already there; it is to *construct* the absolute. Mythology is therefore not a conglomeration of already existing works of art; it is an *activity* by which the absolute exhibits itself absolutely. This is what Schelling means when he speaks of mythology as "absolute poesy" (406; 45) – the poeisis of the absolute as it

[17] *Pace* Jähnig 1969 2:191.

forms itself into particulars. He writes, "Mythology is nothing other than the universe in its higher manifestation, in its absolute form, the true universe in itself, image or symbol of life and wondrous chaos in the divine *Einbildungskraft*." (405-6; 45) The reference to 'divine *Einbildungskraft*' is key: mythology is part of the manner in which the absolute manifests itself through the informing of finite and infinite. Mythology is one moment of the absolute's self-formation, and a *particularly absolute* moment at that (since it is symbolic). I will return to this 'productive reading' of mythology when I consider Schelling's interpretation of heautonomy below.

8.2.3 Limited Absoluteness

Mythology also makes particularly clear one key tenet of Schelling's *Identitätssystem* as a whole: in myths, *the absolute limits itself without thereby diminishing its absoluteness in any way*. §30 of the *PdK* reads, "The determining law of all gods is pure limitation on the one hand, and undivided absoluteness on the other." (*SW* 5:391-2; 1989 35) In other words, "Within… limitation every form receives into itself the entire divinity." (392; 36) Elsewhere, Schelling dubs this "the essence of all art" (639; 207) and "the law of beauty" (Robinson 1976 160). It is this, Schelling insists, which gives rise to "the enormous significance of the gods", for this law is "the means by which art acquires separate, self-enclosed figures for portrayal, and yet within each figure simultaneously the totality, the entire divinity." (*SW* 5:392; 1989 36) Mythology as such is defined as "*Darstellung* of the absolute within limitation without suspension of the absolute" (405; 45).

The gods therefore exemplify a key aspect of Schelling's *Identitätssystem*: that formation is an intensification of the absolute, not its diminution. He writes,

> [The gods] are possible only through fantasy [*Phantasie*] which brings the absolute and limitation together and forms into the particular the entire divinity of the universal… According to the same law the universe forms and moulds itself… [Its] consistent and pervading law is absoluteness in limitation. (393; 37)

Schelling elsewhere states baldly, "The mystery of all life is the synthesis of the absolute with limitation." (393; 36) 'Absoluteness in limitation' is a key-phrase for mythology, the symbol and also the *Identitätssystem* as a whole: it summarises the fundamental process which all reality undergoes – and mythology and symbols undergo in an exemplary manner.[18] This is the process by which the absolute in-forms itself (*sich einbilden*) into ideas, which do not inadequately hint at an absolute beyond, but which are the absolute itself in an intensified form.

Of course, from the point of view of a theory of correspondence which privileges the original over the copy, this may look like a paradox (for example, when Schelling writes of a "simultaneously limited and unlimited intuition of the absolute" (*SW* 5:394; 1989 37)). Yet, from the perspective of a *constructive epistemology*, it is not. It is worth remembering Euclid and Kant's claim that through constructing a triangle one knows more of it than through its concept alone. Construction is a generative procedure, and this model lies at the basis of the law of 'absoluteness in limitation': *to determine the absolute is generative*. Myth is *not* an imperfect reproduction of reality, but an intensification or potentiation of it.[19]

It is because mythology exemplifies the law of absoluteness in limitation that Schelling conceives it as the most intense exhibition of the absolute possible in art. Mythology is symbolic – it exhibits the absolute absolutely *in determinate forms*.

[18] See Barth 1991 149.
[19] See Wanning 1988 77-83.

8.2.4 The Indifference of Mythology

Mythology is symbolic – an absolute exhibition of the absolute – and, as one would expect, it thus displays the same properties as the symbol: heautonomy, syntheticism and tautegory.

The heautonomy of mythology follows directly from the law of absoluteness in limitation. Each mythological *Darstellung* is absolute; each is a universe or self-enclosed world; that is, each god, according to Schelling, is a totality – sufficient unto itself and requiring nothing external. Hence, each god should exist "first of all for its own sake… [It] should be absolute according to its own nature and should not exist for the sake of any purpose external to it." (*SW* 5:411; 1989 49) Or again, "Each is in and for itself what it is… None is there for the sake of another or in order to signify the other." (402; 42) This is what Jähnig dubs "the *Totalitätscharakter* of Greek mythology" (1969 2:184)[20] Each god in itself is ultimately heautonomous.

The syntheticism of mythology also follows directly from the law of absoluteness in limitation. Since every god is an absolute *Darstellung*, it produces the requisite indifference of opposites. Myths combine universal and particular (*SW* 5:403; 1989 43); finite and infinite (453; 79), and possibility and actuality (391; 35). Indifference is expressed – as in the symbol – both extensively and intensively to the maximum possible extent.[21]

Finally, and obviously, since mythology stands at the point of indifference of all the above oppositions, so it does too in terms of the indifference between meaning and being. Myths are therefore tautegorical. Indeed, Schelling's most famous remarks about meaning passing into being occur in reference to mythology in particular (although, of course, in the context of his discussion of the symbol):

[20] Furthermore, as a collective as well the gods also exhibit heautonomy: they form "a second *world*" (*SW* 5:414; 1989 51). See Hennigfeld 1973 78.
[21] Except in the case of the real and the ideal already discussed.

> [It is] *not* that Jupiter or Minerva *means* or *signifies* this or *is supposed* to signify it. This would completely destroy the poetic independence of these figures. They do not *signify* it; they *are* it themselves." (400-1; 42)

The gods are "*real* beings that *are* simultaneously that which they signify." (410; 48) Schelling continues (as I have repeatedly quoted in this thesis),

> Each figure in [mythology] 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. (411; 49)[22]

The gods of mythology are symbols *par excellence*.

8.3 Schelling's Interpretation of the Symbol

It is now time to turn explicitly to a sustained comparison between the Schellingian and 'the romantic' symbol. To do so, I discuss in turn the three 'first-order' properties set out in Chapters Two and Three of this thesis (heautonomy, syntheticism and tautegory).

8.3.1 Heautonomy

Just like 'the romantic symbol' and indeed all other theories of the symbol during the *Goethezeit*, Schelling envisages the symbolic image as heautonomous. That is, it is self-enclosed and self-sufficient. It is *ab-solute* in the original meaning of the term – absolved from all relations.

[22] As Challiol-Gillet puts it (summing up nicely why I have dubbed this property of the symbol 'tautegory'), "The god does not signify the universal, it is itself the universal. This is what Schelling will later name the tautegorical aspect of mythology, which is here its symbolic aspect." (1996 41)

The major respect in which Schelling makes this point (as we have seen) is in terms of signification and reference. The symbol does not signify anything outside itself; it does not have an external referent. Its meaning is self-sufficient. Art in general, for example, is "a construction of a world as self-enclosed and as perfect as nature itself." (*SW* 5:351; 1989 8) As such, the symbol is to be valued for its own sake; it is not utilised for any external purpose, but contains its own telos. It is "without any external purpose" (357; 9). This is precisely the meaning of heautonomy: the symbol sets its own rule for itself and is thus incomparable to anything external. Schelling thus calls attention to "the independent life" of the symbol: all symbols "acquire a life within themselves" (461; 85), they have "independent poetic existence." (405; 45) The symbol "is something that exists and endures on its own power, a being *in itself* that does not merely mean or signify something else." (461; 85)

To this extent, of course, the Schellingian symbol displays the very 'first-order' properties which are also manifest by 'the romantic symbol' and all other symbols of the *Goethezeit*. However, differences appear when we begin to consider *how* the Schellingian symbol exhibits these properties – that is, *for what reason* and *by what means* it is heautonomous.

At stake here is the distinction between rationalist and empiricist interpretations of heautonomy – is heautonomy a result of *construction* or *perception*? Does the symbol manifest heautonomy *like a blade of grass or a logical argument*? It should be clear from the foregoing that I consider Schelling to come out firmly on the side of the rationalists: his is a constructive (not a perceptive) heautonomy. Perhaps the best place to get a handle on this is an early discussion of the notion of construction. In the Appendix to his 1798 *Abhandlung*, Schelling compares

philosophical practice to the mathematical construction of a straight line in intuition. Schelling contends that both philosophy and mathematics are valid a priori because they *produce their own objects*:

> [The geometer] will be concerned only with his own constructions. This line, the object of this primordial construction, *exists* nowhere *outside* of this construction but is only *this construction itself*. The same is to be the case in philosophy… Whatever originates for [the philosopher] by means of [the initial] construction is *nothing outside* of it, and it *exists* only to the extent that he constructs. (*SW* 1:447; 1994a 134-5)

Schelling conceives of philosophy's constructive procedure as one which generates a form of heautonomy – that is, the constructions are self-enclosed, without external reference. The construction does not refer to anything outside of it, but has validity only within the process of construction. Schelling continues,

> By virtue of this primordial construction, the philosopher obtains a product; however, this product exists nowhere *outside* of this construction, just as the straight line postulated by geometry exists only to the extent that it is primordially constructed and is *nothing outside* of this construction. (448; 135)

That is (translated into the language of the *Identitätssystem*), the absolute constructs itself and in so doing exists solely within its constructions. The *Darstellungen* which are products of this process of self-construction are completely self-sufficient; they form an absolute whole in themselves, with no reference to anything outside.

We see here how closely the experience of heautonomy is tied to that of construction in Schelling's philosophy. In consequence, the similarities to the rationalist, rather than the empiricist, tradition of heautonomy should be clear. Just like Spinoza, Schelling models the wholeness of construction on a process of

geometrical reasoning in which the conclusion is wholly immanent to the act of postulating – it is not a form of immediate vision.

* *

The issue can be further elucidated in terms of the respective theory of the organism presupposed by empiricist and rationalist heautonomy. All theories during the *Goethezeit* liken the symbol to an organism[23]; however, while, for theorists of 'the romantic symbol' (like Goethe) the organism is something encountered *ready-made*, for Schelling the organism is the *product* of a process of potentiation. Whereas theorists of 'the romantic symbol' consider the organism as a *given*, Schelling treats it *genetically* as one way in which the absolute exhibits itself absolutely. In short, heautonomy is experienced as a *making*, not as something already made.

The *productive* nature of symbolisation is emphasised by Schelling. We have already seen this in the connection he draws between mythology and poiesis. In Robinson's lecture notes, it is stressed further,

> In art the mystery of creation becomes objective, and art is for this reason absolutely creative or productive. For the absolute in-formation which is objective in the production of art is the source of everything, and the production of art is thus a symbol of divine production. This principle of the absolutely immanent power of creation is that which produces. (1976 158)

Art is one mode of the self-affirmation of the absolute. The absolute forms itself and this process of construction is also art and symbolisation. In this regard, Schelling

[23] Schelling, for example, speaks in this vein of "the organism of art" (357; 9).

draws attention to the etymology of poetry as a form of poeisis – a productive or constructive activity.[24]

In a similar vein, Adams stresses symbolising activity over the symbolic product in his discussion of the Schellingian symbol: it is this constructive procedure which is important to Schelling, not the entity produced. Helpfully, Adams criticises Copleston's interpretation of Schelling as a 'two-world' Platonist (1975 7:123-5):

> [Copleston] implies that the absolute in Schelling is somehow Platonically previous to nature, where it would be better to state the absolute is generated as idea… This is a fundamental difference between Schelling and Plotinus, for Schelling emphasises always… the living *process* as the source of reality. (Adams 1983 59)

This is a view that we have seen borne out at length in Chapter Five, and Adams goes on to apply it to Schelling's concept of the symbol:

> For the development of a theory of the symbolic, a dynamic rather than a Platonic or Plotinian Schelling is the important one. The dynamic Schelling finds in the intercourse of subject and object, rather than a window into a Platonic sort of archetype, the actual construction in each instant of a particular reality *behind* which there is nothing. The act of consciousness [or, more precisely, the self-cognition of the absolute] is a making. (62)

The Schellingian symbol is an act. It thus fits into Adams' category of the "second type" of symbol in which "the universal becomes not something previously there to be contained but something *generated by* the particular as the seed generates the plant." (19)[25] Drawing on Blake, Adams labels this form of symbol, "prolific" (23) – a productive and creative process, rather than something encountered passively ready-made.

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[24] See Chapter Seven.
[25] See further my discussion of Adams' work in Chapter Two.

The above therefore provides some indications that Schelling subscribed to a rationalist, not an empiricist, version of heautonomy and that this makes his interpretation of the symbol peculiar (compared to 'the romantic symbol'). However, these indications are by no means conclusive, and we will return repeatedly to this issue in the forthcoming chapters. Indeed, it is only in the final two chapters when I argue that Schelling speaks of symbolic *practices* (not symbolic objects) that it will ultimately be demonstrated that Schelling's interpretation of heautonomy is constructive.

8.3.2 Syntheticism

We should now be in a position to understand just *how inappropriate* Todorov's term 'syntheticism' is when applied to the Schellingian symbol. There is *no* synthesis in Schelling's *Identitätssystem*, and this is just as true for the symbol as for anything else. Synthesis is a minimally productive mode of reflection – one not adequate to describe the self-formation of the absolute (especially not in its symbolic mode). Of course, this is not to deny that there is much in Schelling's theory of the symbol reminiscent of syntheticism – the positing together of what are conventionally considered as opposites. As we have already seen at length, universal and particular, subjective and objective, infinite and finite, actuality and possibility are all posited together in the symbol. What Schelling says of Dante's *Divine Comedy* is valid of art as a whole (and, indeed, all things): "It is the most indissoluble mixture, the most complete interpenetration of everything." (*SW* 5:686-7; 1989 239) However, *the symbol is a point of indifference rather than a synthesis*. This is what is key – and what differentiates the Schellingian symbol so fully from 'the romantic symbol'. Synthesis presupposes an already existing opposition between two terms (whether

universal and particular or real and ideal); yet, this is precisely what the *Identitätssystem* denies.[26] No qualitative opposition exists in the Schellingian cosmos: all there is is indifference expressed in different intensities. Universal and particular are originally indifferent, and are only seen as oppositional from a limited, minimally productive perspective. 'What is third for reflection is first for reason' is the guiding motif here: the identity of opposites is not the derivative result of a process, but what already is. Thus, Schelling conceives the identity of opposites in a manner very different from conventional syntheticism and so from 'the romantic symbol'.

8.3.3 Schelling versus 'the Romantic Symbol'

For 'the romantic symbol' (as I discussed in Chapter Two), the sign is primary; the symbolic mode of signification is only *sometimes grafted onto* it. That is, the symbol is precisely the result of a *synthesis*, the endpoint of a process in which the sign is the initial given state. Schelling, however, completely departs from this model. For him, the symbol is *primary*, and the sign a 'derivative' product of a process of distortion. The symbol is the norm and the sign the exception – this distances the Schellingian symbol decisively from the 'occasionality' of 'the romantic symbol'.

Indeed, according to Schelling, all there is is the symbol, and sign, allegory and schematism (even image and concept) are merely less intense forms of the symbol. Thus, the symbol is not just the norm, it is *the only state* in which meaning and being can exist. There can be no purely extrinsic or causal connection, no relation of signification; only indifference which masks itself relatively under these different labels. Again, the complete divergence of such a model from 'the romantic symbol' (for which indifference is *a state of exception*) must be insisted upon.

[26] Although, again, this is not quite true if one stresses the dialectic of *Ineinsbildung*.

* *

Another aspect of 'the romantic symbol' Schelling rejects is partial tautegory. Theorists of 'the romantic symbol' remain enthralled to a view of meaning which conceives it as (partially at least) *external* to the image. This is the significance of the synecdochical metaphysics on which 'the romantic symbol' is grounded: the particular image participates in the meaning, yet, at the same time, meaning always *exceeds* the particular. It is always both inside and outside the symbolic image. Synecdoche is, however, not a legitimate figure for Schelling's metaphysics: here, meaning and being primordially exist in *complete and utter identity*. Any claim that this identity is even partially incomplete is a falsification of reality. Meaning cannot exist separate to being in any way whatsoever; there is only complete identity between them. Thus, Schelling writes, being and meaning "are absolutely one" in the symbol (*SW* 5:407; 1989 46) – something neither Goethe (who conceives the universal as exceeding the particular) nor any other theorist of 'the romantic symbol' could claim. Synecdoche is not an option for Schelling.

Another way of phrasing this solution is that theorists of 'the romantic symbol' remain tethered to the category of signification. Thus, the symbol's participation in a universal meaning is still conceived along the lines of a form of signification. Schelling, however, rejects signification as a model for the relation of being and meaning. The relation between them is one of indifference, not signification. It is for this reason Schelling is so keen to reclaim the term, *Sinnbild* – meaning and being are here represented as fully identical (412; 49).

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Finally, what of the analogous evocation of the ineffable so dear to theorists of 'the romantic symbol'? Todorov envisions "inexpressibility" as one of the basic features of all theories of the symbol during the *Goethezeit* (1982 221), as do many other scholars.[27] We are now, however, in a position to see the falsity of this claim, because Schelling (at least) did not subscribe to symbolic inexpressibility. His symbol does not evoke the ineffable and there is no model of analogy on which it is based. Indeed, we have seen at length that there is *no such thing* as the ineffable or analogy in the Schellingian cosmos. The absolute fully exhibits itself in determinate forms; nothing is lost. Moreover, Schelling's rigorous commitment to monism means no dialectic of sameness and difference is to be found either ontologically or epistemologically in his philosophy. He is committed to univocity and construction, which both dispense with relations of analogy. These tenets are rigorously repeated by the Schellingian symbol. The absolute is completely present in each symbolic *Darstellung* – there is nothing outside the symbol.

What is more, while Schelling does equate symbolic meaning with the concept of infinity, his interpretation of the symbol is not in any way irrational or suprarational; indeed, the presence of the infinite in and as the finite is the very definition of *reason* for Schelling![28] For many, there may still remain a question concerning the discursiveness of the symbol; however, I will argue in the next two chapters that the symbol in fact provides the very paradigm for Schellingian discourse. Hence, the meaning present in the symbol exceeds neither reason nor language; it is fully expressible. Jähnig makes this point clearly (emphasising – as I have not – its relevance to Schelling's discussion of art in the *System des transcendentalen Idealismus*),

[27] See also Müller 1937 6, Sørensen 1972 264, Titzmann 1979 652, Halmi 2007 93. For further criticisms of this view, see Hayes 1969 280-1.
[28] See Barth 1991 160.

> This consideration of Schelling's notion of the symbol in the *PdK* should serve to ensure the keeping apart of Schelling's definition of the fundamental character of art in the *System* as an "unconscious infinity" from any irrationalist misconceptions. The property of 'infinity'… here has the sense for Schelling of the resoluteness and determinateness of *form* in Greek and all 'Classical' art. 'Infinity' and 'unconsciousness' do not imply a Romantic condition of nocturnal dreams or obscure-mystical premonitions… but the mystery of daylight clarity. (1969 2:193)

Jähnig continues, art's "meaningfulness [occurs] *within* clarity, *within* the determinate." (352) There is nothing inexpressible about Schelling's symbol. It is for this reason the evocation of the ineffable by analogy so fundamental to 'the romantic symbol' is both unavailable as an option to Schelling and also an option he specifically avoids in his interpretation of the symbol.

8.3.4 Tautegory

All I have written above concerning Schelling's rejection of 'the romantic symbol' applies in turn to tautegory. According to Schelling, meaning and being are identical prior to separation, and, indeed, they never truly separate. The sign is a distortion and a tautegorical relation of meaning and being is the norm. In Chapter Three, I discussed the radicality of the idea of identity between meaning and being in the history of theories of language; yet, Schelling goes one step further than most proponents of tautegory: he does not just envisage the possibility and occasional actuality of tautegory, but claims, *there is only tautegory*. He thus takes up a far more radical position than any other theorist of the symbol. He utterly rejects the 'occasionality' of conventional theories of the symbol, in which language (or art in general) is for the most part a sign but occasionally attains the status of symbol.

Instead, the symbol is the basic – and, in the end, sole – mode in which language or art can exist. In short, unlike theorists of 'the romantic symbol', Schelling makes the symbol *the essence of language*. In §73 of the *PdK*, language is not presented as incidentally symbolic on occasion, but *is defined by the symbolic*. Language, he writes, "is the most appropriate symbol of the absolute or infinite affirmation of God" (*SW* 5:483; 1989 100) – an absolute *Darstellung* of the absolute *in essence*.

Again, it needs to be stressed just how much of a departure this is from the norm. I described in Chapter Three the extent to which theorists of 'the romantic symbol' struggle with the idea of *symbolic language*. Not only do they fail to find much evidence of it[29], they have conceptual difficulty conceiving of its very possibility. The idea of symbolic language for Goethe, especially, is a contradiction, for the symbol is defined in an anti-linguistic manner. Symbolic language becomes a paradox. For Schelling, this is not the case. Language is not only problematically or paradoxically symbolic; it is symbolic *in essence*. Language is defined as a fundamentally symbolic phenomenon. Indeed, Schelling goes one step further still: language is *the most* symbolic phenomenon; the phenomenon which fits most snugly with his theory of the symbol. Symbolic language is not the most problematic, but the *paradigmatic* manifestation of the symbol.

At the moment this is merely a claim. It will be the purpose of the next two chapters to show both how symbolic language is possible for Schelling and what it actually looks like. In what follows, I therefore interrogate Schelling's claim that the essence of language is symbolic in order to flesh out his radical interpretation of tautegory.

[29] See Halmi 2007 3-4, 133.

CHAPTER NINE

LANGUAGE IN THE *IDENTITÄTSSYSTEM*

In the previous chapter, I began to consider Schelling's radical interpretation of tautegory (the identity of being and meaning) and the consequences this has for his theory of language. One of the most important consequences, I argued, is that language is *essentially* symbolic, and this differentiates Schelling completely from other theorists of the symbol of his time. While theorists of 'the romantic symbol' define the symbol in a manner which makes it very difficult to reconcile with linguistic processes, this, I claim, is not the case for Schelling. Yet, for the moment this is merely a claim. The prejudice of contemporary critical theory is that to define language as symbolic is to define it in a manner antithetical to language's operations. The onus is therefore on me to demonstrate the *necessity*, the *possibility* and the *actuality* of symbolic language in Schelling's *Identitätssystem* – and this is the task of the next two chapters. In the present chapter, I outline Schelling's *need* for a construction of rational language and also why his philosophy of this period does not fall foul of the anti-discursive criticisms usually levelled against it. I demonstrate that Schelling's treatment of language and his philosophy as a whole *allows for* a properly symbolic language. In the next chapter, I look at Schelling's construction of symbolic language itself by giving a detailed commentary on §73 of the *PdK*.

In the first section, I focus on the practice of philosophy as a key example of a language that reveals the absolute. In the second section, I consider a number of objections concerning the possibility of a specifically discursive *Darstellung* of the absolute on Schelling's philosophical premises. My task here is negative: to

undermine objections usually made against the status of language in Schelling's philosophy.

9.1 The Necessity of Symbolic Language

My aim in this chapter is to consider in detail the role language plays in Schelling's *Identitätssystem* in general. With this aim in mind, it is first necessary to elucidate the reasons why I claim Schelling's construction of symbolic language *is so crucial* to the project of the *Identitätssystem* as a whole – that is, why Schelling needs his theory of symbolic language and needs to remain committed to it. In short, the reasons why this is so are the absolute status of philosophy and the absolute status of poetry – two tenets central to Schelling's enterprise. Schelling needs a theory of symbolic language otherwise he cannot justify the superiority of philosophy to mathematics or the pre-eminent position given to poetry as an expression of the absolute. In what follows, I focus solely on the example of philosophy, but a parallel exposition could also be given for poetry.

9.1.1 The Absoluteness of Philosophical Language

In the previous chapter, I examined Schelling's adherence to the idea that some *Darstellungen* by which the absolute exhibits itself are maximally productive – in other words, are *symbolic*. I also considered Schelling's claim that philosophy is one example of this. This commits him to the view that phenomena, like philosophy, which occur in language (and therefore operate discursively) *can* and *do* maximally express the absolute. Language, that is, is no obstacle to the absolute's self-exhibition.

Obvious examples of Schelling's commitment to such an argument are the very titles of the 1801 *Darstellung* and the 1802 *Fernere Darstellungen*. They do not employ this key term from Schelling's philosophy (*Darstellung*) for nothing. Schelling believes his philosophy is one of the modes in which the absolute exhibits itself, and, more than this, he believes it is one of the modes in which the absolute's self-exhibition is *most intense*. The *Identitätssystem* is *the* system of philosophy – a philosophy that has become absolute and, in consequence, is a maximal *Darstellung* of the absolute. In other words, it is a symbol. Schelling writes,

> Philosophy, then, is the presentation of the self-affirmation of God in the infinite fertility of its consequences… Philosophy is the presentation of totality as it emanates immediately from God's self-affirmation as His own, eternal identity – hence it is presentation of totality as the One, and all philosophical and rational cognition is grounded in *this* identity of totality and oneness. (*SW* 6:176-7; 1994b 167)

In the *PdK*, Schelling is even more explicit, "Philosophy is merely reason that has become or is becoming aware of itself… Philosophy is the immediate or direct *Darstellung* of the divine." (*SW* 5:381; 1989 29) Philosophy is therefore a paradigmatic example of a linguistic symbol (or symbolic language): a discursive yet maximal *Darstellung* of the absolute.

Schelling departs here from some of his contemporaries. As I noted in Chapter Seven, for Fichte, philosophy is a *re*-construction of the absolute's original constructions. The absolute I constructs itself primordially in the individual I and it is the task of the philosopher to *re*construct this primordial activity. This was also Schelling's view of the role of the philosopher in his 1800 *System des transcendentalen Idealismus*: philosophy is a derivative enterprise concerned with *replaying* or *re-presenting* what has already taken place. This is not, however,

Schelling's view after 1801: philosophy here is one more *original Darstellung* of the absolute; it is just as primordial as the absolute's exhibition in the self, in art or in nature. Philosophy is part of the absolute's self-exhibition, rather than a derivative redescription of this process or its results.[1] To repeat Schelling's words from the *PdK* (quoted above), "Philosophy is the immediate or direct *Darstellung* of the divine." The *Identitätssystem* is therefore a symbol of the absolute, in the technical sense I explored in the previous chapter – and so it requires a form of language that can be symbolic as well.

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In Chapter Seven, I rehearsed Schelling's claims for the superiority of philosophy over mathematics. Geometry exhibits the absolute allegorically, arithmetic schematically, but philosophy does so *symbolically*. As such, its constructions are reflected neither into space nor into time, but occur as *intellectual* intuition. Such assertions of philosophy's superiority depend, however, on the ability of its medium (language) to exhibit the absolute symbolically (as pure, unreflected intellectual intuition). Language needs to be capable of bearing symbols.[2] Schelling's description of "divine philosophy" in his correspondence with Fichte makes this clear,

> It will… bring to life in infinite forms and shapes only the one, the absolute. Whatever it touches will immediately become holy by virtue of its touch, and this knowledge will transform everything into the divine itself… Yet it will

[1] I here diverge from a number of critics who conceive Schellingian philosophy as a "repetition" or "reflection" of divine self-affirmation (Fischbach 1999 239, Courtine 1990 120-1). Schelling's originality is to have rejected this derivative status of philosophy.

[2] Moreover, one could infer, language also needs to be identified with intellectual intuition – a suggestion I make in the next chapter.

> be only a presentation, in thought and in works, of the One. (*SB* 2:326; Fichte and Schelling 1997 80)

Philosophy produces 'the one, the absolute' in 'infinite forms and shapes' – such 'forms and shapes' are the articulated concepts and expressions which constitute the language of philosophy. Language *as the form of philosophy* must allow the one essence of all thought to be produced in ever more intense and potentiated ways. The *Identitätssystem* itself is no exception, and as the thesis progresses, it will become increasingly clear that one of Schelling's overriding concerns at this period is to fashion a scientific language (or form) maximally productive of the absolute, a symbolic language that does justice to philosophy's subject matter.

The *Identitätssystem* therefore requires a theory of symbolic language in order to justify its own possibility as philosophy. It is for this reason that, just prior to his construction of symbolic language in §73 of the *PdK*, Schelling comments on the significance of this proposition *to all of philosophy* (not just aesthetics):

> We must remind ourselves here that the philosophy of art is actually general philosophy itself, except presented in the potency of art… [Therefore] we can assume here only certain propositions as being given by general philosophy, and not prove them ourselves. In this respect we preface our discussion with the following borrowed propositions. (*SW* 5:480; 1989 98)

Such "borrowed propositions", Schelling goes on to stipulate, include §70, §71 and §73 – this last paragraph being Schelling's construction of symbolic language. Such a construction (although it occurs within the *PdK*) *belongs to philosophy in general*. Indeed, in §73 itself, Schelling explicitly states, "The proof of this proposition also belongs in general philosophy." (482; 99) The task of constructing symbolic language is a basic requirement for philosophy as such (not one restricted to aesthetics). For

philosophy as a whole to get off the ground, Schelling needs to prove that there is symbolic language and that philosophy employs it to exhibit the absolute absolutely.

It should also be noted that *the same is true for theology*. For theology to gain its proper stature, i.e. for it to become 'absolute theology' (the topics of Chapter Eleven and Twelve), it requires a discursive medium which does not hinder its exhibition of reality – that is, *theology too needs symbolic language*.

* *

However, all these reasons for the *necessity* of Schelling subscribing to the idea of symbolic language run up against obstacles. Many critics see the metaphysics and epistemology of Schelling's *Identitätssystem* as prohibiting the very idea of a rational or symbolic language. There are a number of tenets of Schelling's philosophy at this period (like his commitment to intuition) which stop him, it is claimed, from being able to entertain a *symbolic* language or in fact any *discourse* about the absolute at all. In order therefore to demonstrate the possibility of exhibiting the absolute *in language*, it is necessary to put paid to these misconceptions concerning what is perceived to be the anti-discursive set-up of Schelling's *Identitätssystem*. That is, in the second half of the chapter, I analyse and refute objections along these lines often levelled at Schelling.

9.2 Language and Intuition

One common misconception of Schelling's *Identitätssystem* is that his recourse to the notion of *intellectual intuition* excludes language and discourse. Beierwaltes expresses a typical, critical view:

> For Schelling, it is true… that [the absolute] is inconceivable and difficult to express, for language… is inadequate to the expression of indifference… [Indifference] requires an intellectual intuition congenial to unity or the mystical *ekstasis* as the medium of evidence which, it is true, is prepared by discursive thought, but which stands above this. (1983 99)[3]

We have dealt with this characterisation of intellectual intuition as anti-discursive at length in Chapter Seven. There I argued that, although this anti-discursive interpretation might well be true of Schelling in 1795 when mystical intuition seemed to transcend all discursive forms, it is not at all true of Schelling's employment of the concept between 1801 and 1804. Schelling here appeals to intellectual intuition *in muted form* as a component of the process of construction. There is *no* need to consider this an anti-discursive move.

9.2.1 The Critique of Jacobian Intuition

One way of charting Schelling's shift *away* from an anti-discursive interpretation of intellectual intuition is through his growing hostility to Jacobi. At the turn of the nineteenth century Jacobian 'faith' was the very epitome of an immediate awareness of reality that bypasses any form of mediation (whether syllogistic or discursive). Faith is the paradigm for all attempts at that period to escape from 'the prison of language'. Moreover, it is certainly true that Schelling's conception of

[3] See also Tilliette 1970 1:368-72, Halmi 2007 148-53.

intellectual intuition in *Vom Ich* is modelled closely on Jacobi's epistemology. Its subtitle (*Über das Unbedingte im menschlichen Wissen*) is Jacobian in inspiration, and Jacobi receives a number of glowing references within the work as well (1:156; 1980a 67 – 216; 109). More importantly, Schelling follows him closely in rejecting concepts, argumentation and all forms of language as expressive of the absolute. Schellingian intuition *at this period* is an act that transcends words. *However*, after the turn of the century, Schelling became increasingly sceptical about, and then outright hostile to, Jacobi's thought.[4] While many of Jacobi's problems remained crucial to Schelling, after 1801 the answers Jacobi provided were deemed incorrect.

It is in the publications of the *Kritische Journal* that Schelling's vitriol against Jacobi is most often vented. Schelling lists "the preaching of Jacobi" as one particularly virulent form of contemporary "dogmatism" (*SW* 5:109; 1985 368-9). Faith, Schelling and Hegel write more specifically, "has no scientific significance and has no interest either." (5:6; Hegel and Schelling 1985 277) As Tilliette contends, throughout the *Identitätssystem* Schelling stresses "the problems… issuing from Jacobean mysticism" (1970 1:313), continuing, "The irrational… and the suprarational are foreign to this epoch." (411) Behind all these attacks lies Jacobi's anti-conceptual, anti-discursive interpretation of faith. Schelling rejects it: from 1801 onwards, he is after something different – an interpretation of intellectual intuition *compatible with language*.

9.2.2 The Critique of Fichtean Seeing

Another way of articulating Schelling's distance from anti-discursive interpretations of intellectual intuition is by means of his thesis that all entities are

[4] See *SB* 2:239.

composite. Everything is a mixture of the three potencies (finite, infinite, eternal) in different amounts, and so all things express both particular and universal, finite and infinite and concept and intuition (except that in different things the stress falls on one aspect). This is as true of intuition as it is of anything else. Intellectual intuition is not merely perceptual, but a compound of perception and concept. Genuine intuition, Schelling insists, "is all at once the finite, the infinite, and the eternal." (*SW* 4:293; 1984a 189-90) Intuition of the absolute is not merely a 'seeing' (as it is commonly conceived), but the indifference of 'seeing' and concept.

This becomes clear in Schelling's critique of Fichtean epistemology. By philosophising through 'seeing', Fichte begins with something impoverished and even fictional. Hence, when Fichte writes to Schelling (in criticism of the 1801 *Darstellung*), "One cannot start out from *being*… rather, one must start out from seeing" (*SB* 2:341; Fichte and Schelling 1997 82), Schelling responds by claiming that to begin with seeing means one can *never attain anything more than mere seeing*: "The necessity to proceed from seeing confines you and your philosophy to a thoroughly conditioned series in which nothing of the absolute remains." (348; 85) In contrast, Schelling insists, "The identity of ideal and real ground = the identity of thought and intuition. [This is] the highest speculative idea: the idea of the absolute, where intuition is thought and thought is intuition." (348; 85)

Philosophy presupposes that intuition is *not* merely intuitive in a limited sense (in which it is opposed to what is conceptual and discursive). Intuition must rather designate something absolute: *not* mere seeing, but the indifference of seeing and thinking. There is therefore no reason why Schelling's appeal to intuition would exclude language; instead, there is every reason to conjecture it *includes* language. To emphasise subjectivity and the process of seeing over thinking (as Fichte does) is to

relegate being "to the realm of belief", and Schelling asks Fichte, "Is this not sufficient proof that your notion of knowledge is not the absolute, but rather that it remains in some way conditioned knowledge?" (348-50; 85-7) By stressing the perceptual, 'seeing' element in cognition, Fichte traps himself in subjectivity and is unable to attain the absolute.

In *Bruno*, Schelling expands on this critique. Intuition "can only be that truly real element wherein thought and being are forever indistinguishable." It is "the absolute identity of thought and being." Whenever Fichte conceives reason as a mere 'seeing', he "distort[s]" it. Fichtean seeing, Schelling continues, "is not truly intuition, but only a distorted and confused reflection thereof." (4:292-3; 1984a 189-90) Intuition, for Schelling, is not something merely perceptual and anti-discursive, but a compound entity that encompasses discursive elements.

9.2.3 Hegelian Discourse

One means by which many commentators criticise Schellingian intuitionism for excluding discourse is by stressing Hegel's supposed 'improvements' on Schelling. While Schelling remained in thrall to an anti-discursive intuitionism, the story goes, Hegel managed to introduce discursiveness back into philosophy. For example, di Giovanni writes, the Hegelian "kind of discursiveness has nothing to do with the intuitionism of Schelling." (1987 663) Schelling is forced to construct reality by means of intuition, di Giovanni claims, "that is to say, not *discursively*." (661) By rediscovering the labour of the concept and the negation which motors thought, Hegel transformed philosophy back into something capable of being presented in language.

In order to realise how false (or, at least, oversimplistic) such a picture is, one need only look at Schelling's own response to the *Phänomenologie*. He writes to Hegel in 1807 after having read the Preface,

> I admit that as yet I do not comprehend the sense in which you oppose 'concept' to intuition. By concept you can mean nothing other than what you and I have called 'idea' whose nature it precisely is to have one aspect whereby it is concept and another whereby it is intuition. (*SB* 3:471-2; translated in Vater 1984 96)

Schelling insists that his notion of the *idea* is *already discursive*. Hegel's recourse to the concept *adds nothing* to what is already present in his *Identitätssystem*; it is in fact a regressive move which establishes a dualism between intuition and concept where previously there had been identity. The idea – as the indifference of concept and intuition – already contains a universal, conceptual and so discursive element, as well as a particular element. There is no need to separate the concept out from this to provide a necessary supplement. 'The idea' is sufficient and contains within it all the properties that the Hegelian concept could ever exhibit, including discursiveness.

9.2.4 The Discursive Understanding

A similar criticism is often made by means of the term 'the discursive understanding' and this is again meant to show Schelling's philosophy to be anti-discursive. 'Discursive understanding' is contrasted to 'intuitive reason', implying that Schelling valorises a form of thought (reason) which leaves no room for language. Language belongs to the subordinate understanding alone. During his *Identitätssystem*, Schelling is meant to have associated the low level of cognition engendered by the understanding with the epithet 'discursive': discourse is thus disparaged along with the understanding. Lukács, for example, writes, that "the

antithesis of discursive and intuitive plays a downright crucial role in Schelling's philosophy", implying that intuition here occupied the superior position at the expense of discourse (1980 140). "Language is the tool of the understanding and dependent on images", as Vater puts it (1984 60).[5]

However, the phrase 'discursive understanding' *does not occur* in Schelling's works between 1801 and 1805 (apart from one minor exception which I discuss below). It is an invention of later commentators and is just not Schellingian. It is the term 'reflection' which Schelling associates indelibly with the understanding and disparages as a minimally productive form of cognition. Of course, the rejection of reflection is also a rejection of a certain type of discourse, one based on signification and the qualitative opposition between image and concept in the sign; however, *symbolic* language is precisely what is left unscathed by this, for symbolic language belongs to reason, not the understanding. To therefore dub the understanding 'discursive' is to have too narrow a conception of discourse. Schelling conceives of a form of discourse (opposed to the conventional sign) which is *not* a product of reflection or the understanding, but is a genuinely expressive *Darstellung* of the absolute.

[5] See further Vater 1984 58, 60, 1991 231-2, Llewelyn 1990 184, Barth 1991 152.

9.3 Schelling's Other References to Language

Another reason why Schelling's philosophy is often taken to be anti-discursive is the fact that – apart from a few crucial exceptions – Schelling's passing remarks about language between 1801 and 1805 are very often negative and slighting.[6] Such remarks are often used as evidence for Schelling's inability to account for language as a positive means of exhibiting the absolute.

9.3.1 *Bruno* and *Philosophie und Religion*

In *Bruno*, for example, Schelling makes two negative remarks about the capacity of language. First,

> No mortal discourse, however, is capable of adequately praising this heavenly wisdom or of measuring the profundity of the intelligence that is perceived in [the celestial] motions. (*SW* 4:272; 1984a 171)

Second,

> It is difficult to express the inner essence of the eternal in mortal words, since language is derived from images and is created by the understanding. (302; 199)

It is of course this second quotation which has led critics to speak of the 'discursive understanding' in Schelling's philosophy. However, both of these quotations are rather non-technical in their evocation of "heavenly wisdom" and "mortal words", and we must remember that the *Bruno* as a whole mimics Platonic dialogues, often at the expense of faithfully transcribing Schelling's own thought of the time. We should not

[6] It is worth emphasising that I am only interested in Schelling's references to language between 1801 and 1805. There are of course plenty of other discussions of language in his work both before and after these dates, but these lie outside the remit of this thesis.

take some of its rhetorical flourishes too seriously. Schelling, however, also makes a very similar point in *Philosophie und Religion*:

> Whoever has encountered this force of evidence which resides in the idea of the absolute and it alone and which no human language has the power to express will consider that all [Eschenmayer's claims concerning faith] do not belong to such an idea. (*SW* 6:27)

It is necessary to stress here that I am not claiming Schelling subscribed to symbolic language consistently throughout his *Identitätssystem*: discussion of it and of the symbol in general belongs almost exclusively to the *PdK*, and Schelling seems oblivious of the potential these concepts offer him both before[7] and after this period. It may well be, therefore, that other statements from within the *Identitätssystem* gainsay it.

Nevertheless, Schelling's emphasis on '*mortal*' or '*human*' language in the above passages from *Bruno* and *Philosophie und Religion* should give us pause for thought. Such phrases are obviously meant to be contrasted with the language of the gods. 'Gods' here is both a Platonic rendering of the Schellingian absolute, but also should recall Schelling's definition of the gods discussed in the previous chapter. 'Gods' in this latter sense are *Darstellungen* which exhibit the indifference of the absolute to the highest possible extent: the divine is for Schelling what is most indifferent in reality. The gods name those entities which express the absolute most fully. To speak of 'mortal words' is therefore to implicitly leave open the possibility of divine or absolute language. Indeed, this is precisely what commentators who dub the understanding discursive forget: the understanding is discursive only in a mortal,

[7] For example, in his 1801 lectures on metaphysics, Schelling calls language "a product of reflection" (Troxler 1988 40).

human or non-absolute manner. Schelling certainly does not rule out a higher, more productive form of discourse.

What is more, there are passages scattered through the *Identitätssystem* where Schelling does write of language positively and in a manner very reminiscent of §73 of the *PdK*. In *Über die Methode*, for example, Schelling designates language a "spiritual medium" (*SW* 5:225; 1966 19), and goes so far as to speak of "language as a direct expression of reason and, as such, an object of scientific construction." (246; 39) The 1804 *System* also makes positive claims about language's capabilities in a short, but highly suggestive passage. Language is designated the proper expression of reason (*SW* 6:491) and "the highest in nature" (492). "It is," Schelling continues (employing obvious Christic overtones), "the Word which has become flesh, the infinite, eternal affirmation which resounds in the universe." (492)

9.3.2 §39 of the *PdK*

A bigger problem for our purposes is a passage from the *PdK* itself where Schelling seems to relegate language *as such* to a low level of significance. Here one can neither counter that these remarks belong to a different period of Schelling's thinking nor that they are merely rhetorical flourishes. This demotion of language occurs in §39 of the lecture course – the very section in which Schelling constructs the symbol and which I discussed at length in the previous chapter. When defining his notion of schematism (which, we remember, is a less productive mode of *Darstellung* than symbolism), Schelling gives a number of examples of schematic exhibition, one of which is language:

> Our act of thinking the particular is actually always schematisation of that particular, we really need only reflect upon that perpetually active

> schematism at work even in language in order to secure an intuition of it. In language, too, we make use of merely universal designations even for the designation of the particular. To this extent even language itself is nothing more than a perpetual schematisation… Language itself is, of course, completely schematic. (*SW* 5:408; 1989 46-7)

Schelling here asserts categorically – and in complete opposition to his construction of language later in the lecture course – that language never attains the level of a symbolic exhibition of the absolute, but remains *purely and perpetually a schematic Darstellung*. Indeed, on this view, philosophy itself – as a linguistic description of the absolute – becomes merely schematic, and equivalent (*not* superior) to arithmetic in its ability to express the absolute. This characterisation of philosophy (and the same could be said for all forms of linguistic art) seems to refute Schelling's own pronouncements on its superiority to arithmetic and other schemata. Schelling here rules out the possibility of symbolic language, and in so doing rules out the possibility of a maximally expressive philosophy (and also, by extension, theology and poetry).

Yet, on the other hand, one can well understand Schelling's temptation to define language as merely schematic. Schemata apply universal designations to particulars indifferently. It seems plausible to understand language along the same lines: the universal term 'house', for example, applies to particular houses, no matter what their idiosyncrasies. The universal here predominates, operating *at the expense of* the particular. Particulars are *subsumed under* universal terms. This is of course a view of language based on a model of representation, where a universal term *stands for or represents* a group of particular images – and such a representational conception of language is incompatible with Schelling's definition of the symbol. Language, according to §39, is a less productive (that is, reflective) mode of being. Symbolic language is here ruled out, for language is understood as incompatible with

the symbol. This schematic determination of language is another resource therefore for those critics who see Schellingian philosophy as incompatible with language. It is also the passage in which the Schellingian symbol resembles other theories of the symbol (especially the 'romantic' interpretation) most closely.

From these considerations, it should be clear that this cannot be Schelling's final word on the nature of language. And indeed it is not: Schelling returns to the question of language in §73 of the lectures and there embarks on a full construction of language. It is here that he realises the need for a far more positive construal of language than he has heretofore given – that is, he realises the need for a construction of *symbolic language*. It should also be noted in this regard that the *PdK* was never intended for publication; it is therefore unsurprising that there are contradictions between different parts of the lecture course, and rather than attempt to reconcile them, it is perhaps more helpful to treat such inconsistencies as evidence of Schelling's philosophical development – his gradual realisation of the necessity of a theory of symbolic language, and so the gradual abandonment of his characterisation of language as schematic.[8]

9.4 The Inevitable Mutism of the *Identitätssystem*

Finally, in this chapter, I want to consider one more set of arguments which are meant to demonstrate Schelling's dismissal of language and his commitment to an anti-discursive philosophical position. Two very similar arguments have been proposed by Tilliette and Beiser, both purporting to show how the presuppositions of

[8] For an attempt to reconcile §39 and §73, see Hennigfeld 1984 21-4.

the *Identitätssystem* force Schelling into a dilemma between either (a) remaining consistent to these presuppositions and so abandoning any *talk about the absolute* whatsoever or (b) talking about the absolute but reneging on some of these central presuppositions. I contend, on the contrary, that this is a false dilemma, borne out of a mistaken interpretation of the *Identitätssystem*. I wish to refute the suggestion that Schelling commits himself to an inescapable *mutism*.

The problem Beiser and Tilliette both locate in the *Identitätssystem* arises out of Schelling's commitment to talking about the absolute and so his consistent refusal to resort to apophatic practices. To talk about the absolute is to determine it or (at the very least) to apply predicates to it. Yet, to say 'A=p' (a statement of predication) is precisely not to say 'A=A' (a statement of the law of identity), and, since identity alone defines the absolute, such a statement of predication falsifies and distorts the absolute identity which defines the essence of the absolute. In short, (A=p) ≠ (A=A), and so language is incompatible with Schelling's absolute. At stake is thus the possibility of any form of predication from the Schellingian viewpoint.

Beiser, for example, writes,

> Schelling's Parmenidean vision… forbids the possibility of all intellectual discourse about the absolute. The proper conclusion to draw from it is that we cannot say anything at all about the absolute, because to do so would be to ascribe some property to it, which is to posit some difference within it. To attribute some property to the absolute is to divide it, because any property has its determinate meaning only in contrast to its negation. *Omnis determinatio est negatio*, Spinoza said, and Schelling agreed. But if this is so, then the sum and substance of absolute wisdom should be nothing more than A=A. After uttering this empty tautology the philosopher should, like all better mystics, observe a strict silence. (2002 568)

In a similar passage, Tilliette remarks,

> Absolute identity is determined only negatively… 'Pure unadulterated identity' is, so to speak, withdrawn, inaccessible. It is above definitions and predicates. At the moment of utterance, philosophy of identity seems sworn to a fixed mutism. (1970 1:328)

Tilliette later concludes, "The dilemma is patent: either mutism and the sterility of the absolute or an impure melange of contrasts." (366) That is, either Schelling remains committed to his rigorous monism of absolute identity (in which case language becomes impossible) or he relaxes the rigour of his metaphysics and so language become possible.[9]

There are two reasons why I object to these arguments: in both cases, it is a case of the critics not realising the significance of crucial tenets in Schelling's *Identitätssystem* – in the first case, the importance of the form/essence distinction, and, in the second, the importance of quantitative differentiation.

First, the role of form. Having argued that Schelling is forced through the consistency of his monism into a mystic silence, Beiser continues,

> But Schelling never had the makings of a Trappist. True to his prodigal and prolific nature, he provides a rather elaborate account [in the 1801 *Darstellung*] of the various potencies of the absolute… How could Schelling justify such a theory in the face of his vision of the absolute as pure oneness, utterly undifferentiated unity? His response to the difficulty is to distinguish between the *essence* and the *form* of absolute identity… All knowledge of the absolute, and so all discourse about it, belongs to its form rather than its essence. (2002 569)

[9] See similar arguments in Beierwaltes 2002 397, Knittermeyer 1928 316.

It is, Beiser suggests, the form/essence distinction which can ultimately save Schelling from mutism. However, crucially, Beiser finds this distinction "tenuous and artificial" (569). Hence, Schelling is (or at least should be) cast back into mystic silence. The problem with Schelling's theory of form, according to Beiser, is that if form is determinate it once again falsifies the essence of the absolute and, in consequence, is in no way adequate to the absolute's indeterminate essence. Predication falsifies identity once more, and so again talk about the absolute becomes impossible. Beiser writes,

> Any form whatsoever – even the very sparse form limited to the distinction between the subject and predicate of A=A – involved some distinction and so could not grasp, but only falsify, absolute identity itself. The main problem is that the absolute, as pure indifferentiated unity, cannot have any form at all, any specific manner of being, given that all determination involves negation. This means, however, that all discourse about the absolute must stand outside it, so that it has a purely imaginary status, consisting in nothing more than arbitrary and artificial abstractions of the understanding. (569)

In his conclusion, Beiser returns to this problem which he considers unresolved within the *Identitätssystem*: "Schelling places the discursive knowledge of the finite subject *outside* the absolute, and even condemns it to the realm of illusion." (592-3)

One of the problems with Beiser's criticisms is his comparison of Schelling's thought to the mystical and apophatic traditions. More apt would be a comparison to Spinoza or Bruno. The assessment Beiser makes of Schelling's philosophy that 'the absolute, as pure indifferentiated unity, cannot have any form at all, any specific manner of being, given that all determination involves negation' seems absurd in the context of early modern metaphysics: is Spinozist substance hindered from existing in specific modal forms merely because it is monistic? For Spinoza, there is no

contradiction between a monistic conception of substance and substance existing determinately in its attributes and modes – and the same is true of Schelling.

We must remember two things: first, Schelling's complete rejection of representation and, with it, correspondence and adequacy. Form in no way needs to correspond to or adequately represent essence. This is not how the two are related. Beiser and Tilliette both conceive of the absolute as an entity existing behind appearances, to which language tries vainly to adequately correspond. We have seen at length in this thesis, however, that this is not the case: Schelling rejects a transcendent absolute, the model of correspondence, representation and so the criterion of adequacy. Second (and relatedly), it is necessary to recall Schelling's commitment to 'absoluteness in limitation' – to the fact that formation is a generation of absoluteness, not a diminution of it. Forms are merely more or less intense productions of absolute indifference; they do not fail to represent correctly some transcendent entity named 'the absolute'. Nothing exists above, beyond or outside of form. Determination, in this respect, is a *production* of absoluteness, not its *falsification*. As forms approach indifference, they generate more and more absoluteness, until the idea or symbol is attained. To speak of forms falsifying identity misses the point that this identity exists *only in forms*.

This is only half the story, however, and does not fully refute Beiser and Tilliette's claims. The full picture only emerges with the introduction of Schelling's theory of quantitative differentiation. Twice in the above passages Beiser has recourse to the Spinozist maxim, *omnis determinatio est negatio*.[10] Yet, in Chapter Six, I rehearsed Schelling's rejection of this principle at length. Beiser assumes that to determine is to negate, but this is precisely what Schelling's theory of quantitative

[10] Beiser is not the only commentator to claim Schelling subscribes to this dictum during the *Identitätssystem*. See also Bowie 1993 63, 71, Frank 1985 124.

differentiation rejects. In consequence, he reconceives determination as a type of affirmation. Differences in determination depend on the intensity with which this affirmation is made. To determine the absolute is not to falsify its absoluteness, but to affirm this absoluteness to a certain generative extent. As late as 1807, for example, Schelling insists, "Definiteness of form in nature is never a negation, but always an affirmation." (7:303; 1953 334) All determination is quantification: this is the Schellingian principle which replaces its Spinozist forebear. Schelling replaces the binary of affirmation or negation with a quantitative scale of different degrees of affirmation of identity.

In *German Idealism*, Beiser is overhasty in his dismissal of Schelling's doctrine of quantitative differentiation (2002 568); he does not realise the extent to which it alters the very structure of determination and predication. On this model, 'A=p' is not a negation of a pre-existing absolute, but an affirmation and intensification of it. Language can talk about the absolute without falsifying it, because language (as a determinate form) is one of the ways in which the absolute is produced in the first place.

* *

From all these considerations, it should be clear that Schelling was able to readily admit the possibility of talk about the absolute, that this was a perfectly coherent admission on his metaphysical tenets. This is because the *Identitätssystem* is founded on two metaphysical principles which critics have seriously neglected: the ineluctable formation of the absolute and quantitative differentiation. It is these two principles which make possible Schelling's construction of symbolic language. The

absolute is necessarily formed and this is an intensification of its absoluteness, rather than a diminution; moreover, determination of the absolute (which is a necessary consequence of discoursing about it) does not falsify identity, but rather affirms it in a specific intensity. These principles provide the reasons why any *Darstellung* can be symbolic and not merely reflective: it can fully produce the absolute in limited form. Although all *Darstellungen* are *determinate*, this is *in no way* a loss of absoluteness; instead, "absoluteness in limitation" structures the *Identitätssystem*. What is more, there is no reason why such considerations concerning *Darstellungen* in general should not apply to linguistic *Darstellungen* in particular.

To understand precisely *how* symbolic language operates, however, it is necessary to turn to §73 of the *PdK*, where Schelling provides a detailed construction of a language of the absolute. This is the task I embark on in the next chapter.

CHAPTER TEN

§73 OF THE *PDK*

§73 of the *PdK* puts paid to a common critical prejudice. It is a widely-held assumption that Schelling (and the other German Idealists) has nothing interesting to say about language at all: German Idealist philosophers, it is claimed, ignore language. However, this is just not the case. While Kant, it is true, does seem oblivious to questions of language (as I argued in Chapter Three), Fichte, Schelling and Hegel all devote small but significant passages of their philosophical output to interrogating the nature of language. §73 of the *PdK*, Fichte's essay on the origin of language and the sections devoted to language in Hegel's *Enzyklopädie* (and more implicitly "The Religion of Art" section of the *Phänomenologie*), all demonstrate German Idealist engagement with language. Indeed, Surber has plausibly argued that it is later commentators on German Idealism (rather than the Idealists themselves) who are guilty of neglecting language. "None of the standard histories of German Idealism itself," he writes, "make any significant mention of linguistic issues either as figuring in Idealist thought or as impacting prevailing interpretations of it in any significant way." (2000 305) What is more, all studies that do discuss philosophies of language in German Idealism "have generally remained at the margins of the scholarly mainstream and have as yet had little significant impact on it" (305).

This point is nowhere more true than in Schelling scholarship. Only a handful of scholars[1] have engaged at all with Schelling's construction of language in the *PdK* and, as Bär points out, the baleful state of critical awareness of his philosophy of language is further evidenced by the fact that these scholars are ignorant of each

[1] Coseriu 1977, Hennigfeld 1984, Wanning 1988, Rosenau 1990, Bär 1999, Surber 2000.

others' existence.[2] Schelling's engagement with language in the *PdK* deserves better treatment than it has so far received. Only by paying attention to §73 will critical ignorance of German Idealist philosophy of language begin to be overturned.

In this chapter, I therefore provide a commentary on Schelling's construction of symbolic language in §73 of the *PdK*. Here we discover how in fact symbolic language is constituted. The previous nine chapters have prepared the way for our understanding of this construction: we are now in a position to appreciate its contemporary context, the metaphysical and epistemological principles underlying it, the general theory of the symbol out of which it derives and finally its systematic necessity and possibility. All that is now needed therefore for §73 to make sense is a statement of the additional twists Schelling provides in the section itself.[3]

10.1 From Ideal Symbol to Symbol of Symbols

§70 presents the context in which Schelling's construction of symbolic language takes place. It returns to the subject matter of §39 (Schelling's construction of the symbol in general), and recapitulates some of the conclusions reached in the earlier section. Like §73, §70 is also a "borrowed proposition", demonstrating (as I argued in the previous chapter) the importance of Schelling's theory of the symbol to his *Identitätssystem* as a whole. §70 reads,

> The absolute becomes objective in the phenomenal realm by means of the three unities to the extent that the latter are… [taken] in their relative

[2] "Schelling's philosophical and philological significance remains scarcely acknowledged. The fact that Henningfeld obviously does not know Coseriu's essay and Wanning is ignorant of them both appears symptomatic." (1999 144)
[3] Unless otherwise stated, all quotations in this chapter are from *SW* 5:482-6; 1989 99-102.

> difference as potencies, thereby becoming symbols of the ideas. (*SW* 5:480; 1989 98)

Schelling goes on to maintain (summarising his earlier argument in §39) that the absolute "produces itself" as "a particular unity" which thereby "becomes a symbol of [itself]." Each symbol is an "image" or "objectification" of a "primal idea", and Schelling defines such objectification as follows, "The essence of all particularity *is* within the absolute itself, but this essence manifests itself through the particular." (480-1; 98) From all this, Schelling concludes there are entities within the real world (organisms, for example) and entities within the ideal (like art) which – as particular – still maximally express the absolute (i.e. the eternal predominates in them). They are real and ideal symbols, respectively. Nothing is lost in so becoming particular, rather absoluteness is generated in limitation. Schelling has thus summarised his theory of the symbol from §39.

In the next two propositions, Schelling turns to the *material* forms which act as real symbols of the absolute. These real symbols constitute the forms of the *formative arts*, especially sculpture. It is because matter can become symbolic and maximally express the absolute that sculpture can also be a symbol. Sculpture expresses the absolute so well, precisely because its medium is able to bear symbolic expression. Having thus dealt with "the real side of the world of art", Schelling turns to the verbal arts and their medium, language, to produce a parallel construction. This therefore is the context to Schelling's construction of symbolic language: having summarised the significance of *symbolic Darstellungen* for his philosophical project, Schelling attempts to construct a form of language that is able to permit the verbal arts to be symbolic in the same way as sculpture is.

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However, in §73 itself, Schelling goes a step further than this context would suggest. He does not merely show that language is an ideal symbol in parallel to matter as a real symbol; he, in fact, demonstrates that language is a symbol situated at the point of indifference between ideal and real. Language is not just an ideal symbol; it is *the* symbol which overcomes any distinction between real and ideal – and so it expresses the indifference of the absolute to an even greater extent than any other symbol. It is the symbol of symbols – the "indifference of indifference… the identity of identity" (Bär 1999 165).[4]

Language becomes a more paradigmatic symbol than matter, and this forms the basis for Schelling's conjecture that poetry and linguistic symbols are generally superior to material symbols. Language replaces nature as the paradigm for Schelling's philosophy.[5] Yet, language's superiority is merely quantitative, for Schelling here dissolves any qualitative difference between real and ideal (or formative and verbal) arts – all art forms are in fact quantitatively different manifestations of symbolic language (Wanning 1988 159-61). Indeed, language forms "the structure of the absolute" (163), so all symbols (including all artworks) are ultimately linguistic. Language is not (as for theorists of 'the romantic symbol') the most problematic symbolic phenomenon, but the most exemplary symbol. In what follows, I chart this shift in more detail.

[4] See also Wanning 1988 160-1, 166.
[5] I discuss this further in the final chapter.

10.2 The Indifference of Real and Ideal

10.2.1 Language as Symbol

The proposition defended in §73 reads, "The ideal unity, as the resolution of the particular into the universal, of the concrete into the concept, becomes objective in *speech* or *language*." The task of the section is thus to construct language as ideal symbol of the absolute; moreover, Schelling here indicates that he will do so by showing how language unifies particular and universal, concrete image and concept. He continues, "Language constitutes the… resolution of the concrete into the universal, of being into knowledge." Language, that is, is *symbolic*: as the indifference of particular and universal, it exhibits syntheticism; as the indifference of image and concept, it exhibits tautegory. Language, Schelling insists, is a symbolic phenomenon and this is why it is an appropriate medium for poetry.

How does language exhibit these indifferences? Such is the question which dominates §73. That is, why does the eternal predominate in language, or how does language exhibit both particular and universal, image and concept as indifferent? The answer is that language is *both ideal and real to exactly the same extent*: it is not just an *ideal* symbol, but *the* symbolic form (and the only symbolic form) which indifferentiates ideal and real. Schelling writes,

> Viewed from the one side, language is the direct expression of something *ideal*… in something *real*, and is to that extent itself a work of art. Yet viewed from the other side it is just as definitely a work of nature, since it is the one necessary form of art that cannot be conceived as being invented or generated by art. Hence, it is a natural work of art.

Language is equally real and ideal – a work of nature and a work of art. To this extent, the context surrounding §73 is (as I argued above) misleading: language is not a

purely ideal phenomenon to be contrasted with matter which is real. What is more, language should not even be confined to the *PdK*: while art (the subject matter of the *PdK*) is predominantly ideal, language is not. Philosophy of language is more than just philosophy of art; it treats a more indifferent and hence more productive domain of being, situated at the very heart of the *Identitätssystem*.

Language is the absolute in-formation of real and ideal. This guarantees its status as symbol. It manifests, rather than conceals, indifference and so in it the eternal predominates. Language is thus an entity of the third potency, an idea; it is, in short, a symbol.

The fact that language is the only symbolic form to fully indifferentiate real and ideal has the further consequence that *language manifests reality most*. In Wanning's words, "Nothing more intense is possible within the *Identitätssystem*." (1988 166) In language, the third potency dominates, so to describe something in language is to produce it in the most intense possible manner. Entities exist most intensely in words, or put differently, the idea or symbol of an entity is its name. Such a striking conclusion strengthens Schelling's claims to the *superiority* of philosophy, theology and poetry: as discursive forms of thought, they are able to produce reality more intensely than anything else.

10.2.2 Language and Reason

The importance of Schelling's description of language as both a work of nature and a work of art should not be overlooked. This is a remarkable statement. As we know, according to Schelling, reality can be divided into two series of potencies: the series of real potencies runs matter, light, organism; the series of ideal potencies runs knowledge, action, art. Although Schelling's construction of language occurs in

his *PdK*, he here makes clear that (as I have just mentioned) language should not be subsumed under the potency of art; indeed, it should not be restricted to the ideal series of potencies at all. Language is not just a work of art; it is also a work of nature: unlike any other phenomenon (with one exception), it must be considered *both ideally and really*:

> From a finite point of view… language shows itself as belonging to either nature of the ideal world, and can thus be designated… as either organism or artwork. Considered absolutely, it exhibits more than any other phenomenon the unity of the real and the ideal and thus is considered as a direct consequence of absolute identity itself. (Bär 1999 165-6)

Language is not limited to one series of potencies or the other, but transgresses the very potency-determinations that constrict all other phenomena. Language operates *trans-potency*. Bär depicts this situation thus,

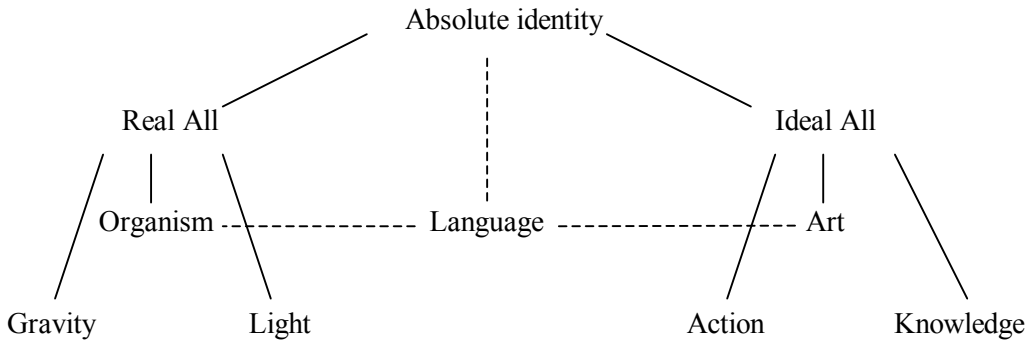

Figure 4: The Place of Language in Schelling's System (1999 166)

In fact, the only other phenomenon given a comparable status in the *Identitätssystem* is *reason*. Reason, like language, cannot be constrained within one potency (or even one series of potencies) alone (5:378-9; 1989 27). Language and reason are the two exceptions to Schelling's doctrine of potencies. It is therefore unsurprising that Schelling makes much of the similarities between the two in §73.

Language moves beyond both the predominance of the real found in matter and the predominance of the ideal in art to the third, eternal potency (where real and ideal are indifferent), and, in so doing, it attains the same status as reason. It is "for this reason", Schelling infers, "language and reason (which is precisely absolute knowledge, the knowing of the ideas) have one and the same expression in most languages." Schelling here draws attention to the linguistic (and presumably conceptual) identification of language and reason in most thought-forms. He insists forcefully on the need to see language as not only occupying a status equal to that of reason, but as existing in *identity with reason*. Rational language is a tautology: reason is necessarily linguistic and, what is more, this language in which reason necessarily and universally occurs is the symbolic language Schelling constructs in §73. It is not only the case therefore that Schelling lays claim to a language adequate to reason, he sees reason itself existing *as* this form of language.

10.2.3 Language as Intellectual Intuition

It is worth pausing here to make a conjecture which, although nowhere explicitly endorsed in Schelling's writings, seems a natural consequence of this construction of language: *intellectual intuition is, for Schelling, to be identified with symbolic language*. Let us recall the role intellectual intuition plays in Schelling's *Identitätssystem*: knowledge is construction and this construction involves 'laying out' a concept in pure intuition – indeed, the very notion of 'idea' itself implies that knowledge exists simultaneously as both conceptual and 'laid out'. In geometry and arithmetic, the intuition is reflected through space and time, respectively; however, philosophy is superior to mathematics, because its ideas are constructed in pure, unreflected intellectual intuition. Yet, what precisely is this intellectual intuition?

Geometry, for instance, is spatial because it is a *Darstellung* of mathematical concepts in space; the 1801 *Darstellung*, on the other hand, 'lays out' its ideas *in language*. On such evidence, it seems plausible to suggest that language is here synonymous with the unreflected intellectual intuition in which philosophical constructions take place.[6] The medium in which philosophy is performed is symbolic language.

This is, however, extremely surprising considering the prejudices of most commentators. As I discussed in the previous chapter, Schelling's intuitionism is supposed to bar him from discourse; his commitment to intuition is to be opposed to Hegel's reintroduction of discursiveness into philosophy. We have seen this to be false. In fact, we now discover Schelling considers *intuition as a form of discourse*!

10.3 The Genesis of Symbolic Language

In the following paragraphs of §73, Schelling attempts to construct the real and the ideal elements of language separately, before bringing them together. To summarise Schelling's argument: he points to the shortcomings of phenomena in which the real predominates (nature) and of phenomena in which the ideal predominates (art), in order to show how language combines both real and ideal *so as to avoid such limitations*. Whereas pure matter and pure concept fail to express the absolute fully, language – as the indifference of the two – succeeds.

Schelling begins with a summary of his metaphysics: "The absolute is by nature an eternal act of producing. This producing is its essence. Its producing is an

[6] Again, it is important to emphasise the limited connotation of *Anschauung* in Schelling's era. *Anschauung* does not mean perception, but merely an immediate and particular form of knowing. Language too is non-perceptual for Schelling, but is an immediate and particular *Darstellung* of the absolute. It does not seem strange to conclude therefore that language is the highest form of intuition (in this restricted sense); it is the medium in which the absolute constructs itself.

absolute act of affirming or of knowing, where two sides constitute the two postulated unities." Reality produces itself, and such production generates the indifference of two terms – for example, the indifference of the universal and particular or of the ideal and the real. Each of these terms is equivalent to the absolute and to all the other terms.[7] However, the entities which are produced by the absolute can still exhibit a surplus of one of these terms – that is, the absolute's indifference is always expressed in a specific intensity. If the real predominates, then, "as a particular unity, [the absolute] no longer appear[s] as idea or as self-affirmation, but rather as something affirmed, as matter." Schelling concludes therefore that matter can act as a *Darstellung* of the absolute: "The real side as a particular unity becomes the symbol of the absolute idea."

Yet, Schelling is quick to insist that, while matter is a symbol, it is still not fully expressive of the absolute. This is because matter does not maximally exhibit the indifference of one pair of terms in particular – *the real and ideal*. He depicts this relative failure as a form of 'concealment': matter is only an allegory of the absolute; its surplus of the real *masks* the absolute's indifference. Matter lacks an ideal element; it lacks meaning, and so subsists as mere meaningless being. In consequence, the eternal potency, in which indifference is most intensely manifest, fades into the background, hidden behind the prominent *real* aspect of matter. This excess of the real therefore becomes a "husk or covering" hindering meaning from becoming manifest. Hence, Schelling writes, "The real side as a particular unity becomes the symbol of the absolute idea here, *which only through this husk or covering becomes recognised as such*."[8] The predominance of the real in matter lessens its ability to

[7] Hence, Schelling specifies that the real "is the entire idea, the entire infinite self-affirmation."
[8] My emphasis.

express the absolute; the absolute must be recognised somehow *despite* this concealment.

In the next paragraph, Schelling goes on to show how a similar failure of expression occurs in predominantly ideal phenomena, like paintings. This time, however, it is not due to concealment that the absolute is not maximally expressed. Thus, *unlike* matter, there is no husk: "Wherever the ideal unity itself, as a particular unity, functions as the form for the idea – in the ideal world – it is not distorted into something else." However, ideal phenomena are still only "relatively ideal", for the real stands outside of and opposed to such pure ideality. It is still only the second potency which predominates (still not the third potency of the eternal). In consequence,

> It remains ideal, yet such that it leaves the other [real] side behind and thus does not appear as something absolutely ideal, but rather merely as something relatively ideal that possesses the real outside of itself – standing over against it.

The real is partially excluded.

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Having pointed out the shortcomings of matter and art, Schelling then turns to the genesis of symbolic language. What the predominantly ideal entity lacks, Schelling makes clear, is a means of objectivisation. It remains caught at the subjective pole of the magnetic line and requires some form of "body" in order to shift towards indifference. We should remember in this regard Schelling's notion of the *Bildung* of all *Darstellungen*: everything that exists strives to maximise its productivity and so strives towards indifference. Schelling writes,

> As purely ideal, however, [the ideal entity] does not become objective, but rather returns to the subjective and is itself the subjective. Thus it necessarily strives *yet again* toward a covering, a body, through which it may become objective without detriment to its ideality. It integrates itself again through something real.

The ideal must take up the properties of the real within itself without thereby annulling its ideality. The *Darstellung* strives to manifest the indifference of ideal and real, to be simultaneously universal meaning and particular body. This striving thus culminates in a meaning which objectifies itself *without thereby concealing itself* behind its objective form. It takes on an appropriate body which does not obscure the ideal, but is precisely what allows the ideal to reveal itself. A "transparent" (or even translucent) material form now bears the concept.

Absoluteness in limitation is thereby achieved. Schelling concludes,

> In this integration the most appropriate symbol of the absolute or infinite affirmation of God arises, since this affirmation *here* represents itself through something real without ceasing to be ideal (which is precisely the highest requirement), and *this* symbol is language, as one can easily see.[9]

Schelling here resumes his theory of the symbol. The symbol is "the most appropriate" or most productive *Darstellung* possible – it exhibits the absolute in a particular to the maximum possible extent. Such is "the highest requirement" (what Schelling elsewhere calls "the law of beauty") – *absoluteness in limitation*. Yet, now Schelling claims, this highest requirement is achieved most completely in language, and language alone. Only language exhibits the absolute in a determinate form to such

[9] A similar summary is given later in the lecture course, "Regarding the basis and significance of language itself, let me refer you to §73 where we proved that it is the most appropriate symbol of the absolute cognitive act, for this act appears in language on the one hand as *ideal*, not real, as in being, and yet integrates itself on the other hand through something real without ceasing to be ideal." (635; 204)

an extent that the real and ideal are thereby manifest as indifferent: "Language [is] the infinite affirmation that expresses itself in a *living* fashion". The ideal is expressed or objectified in language, but in a way that does not encase it behind meaningless being. It is expressed in language in a way which intensifies its meaning. Such is "the sublime significance of language."

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Therefore, Schelling here goes beyond what was intimated in §39 and so contends that not only that language *can be* symbolic, but that language is *the very paradigm of the symbol*. That is, *symbols are linguistic*! Language here names the only entity which attains the point of indifference between real and ideal, and which in consequence becomes "the most appropriate symbol of the absolute". Language is the symbol *par excellence*.[10]

Again, it needs emphasising how far Schelling's views are from those of his contemporaries. Kant distanced the symbol decisively from all 'mere characteristics'; for Goethe also language was the most problematic symbolic phenomenon (his use of *sculpture* as the paradigm for the symbol made it very difficult for him to envisage how language could really be symbolic). We are not in a position yet to claim that Schelling fully overcomes these difficulties; however, what is clear from this passage is the extent to which Schelling *thought* he had overcome them. His system culminates in language.[11]

[10] See Bär 1999 167.

[11] It is for this reason critics have claimed: "Language must appear as the very crux of his *Identitätssystem*" (Surber 2000 322), Schelling "gave language a special place and function" (Bär 1999 167) or "Schelling's philosophy of art ends in a philosophy of language" (Seidel 1976 111).

Moreover, we also see here the extent to which Schelling repudiates those critics who see no room for language in the *Identitätssystem*. Language can be symbolic, an absolute *Darstellung* of the absolute, Schelling here asserts. It is 'the most appropriate *symbol* of the absolute' – neither allegorical, nor schematic. This construction of language makes possible the superiority of philosophy to mathematics and the pre-eminence of poetry.

10.4 The Origin of Language

Yet, this is still mere assertion. Schelling does claim that "one can easily see" the symbolic nature of language, for it does indeed seem uncontroversial to define language as the real embodiment of ideal meaning, concepts conveyed in images. However, this is to say very little, since *everything* in the Schellingian cosmos is some mixture of real and ideal – there are no purely real or purely ideal entities. We could then further claim, as the above argument implies: language is the *indifference* of ideal and real, of concept and image. The evidence for this further claim seems lacking, however: the sign, for example, possesses image and concept in equal amounts, but these are related extrinsically and causally (rather than through indifference). Schelling, of course, claims language is a "symbol", but we need to discover *how* exactly it is symbolic.[12] Why is language founded on the symbol, rather than the sign?

[12] The problem is compounded when Schelling appeals to the following as an illustration of the identity of meaning and being in language: "Concrete and nonconcrete elements are one here; the most palpable element may become the sign for the most abstract." This use of the term 'sign' demonstrates that what Schelling here claims concerning symbolic language is also true of language founded on the sign. They both unite meaning and being – the sign does it extrinsically, the symbol intrinsically. The question

Unfortunately, Schelling does not provide a single explicit argument to demonstrate this. As I mentioned in Chapter Eight, it is only after 1809 that one can find Schelling explicitly criticising the sign in favour of another model for language. However, it is clear from §73 of the *PdK* that Schelling does also hold a similar view at this earlier date, as can be seen most explicitly in his intervention in the controversy over the origin of language. At the end of §73, Schelling appends some comments on this question:

> At this point I would like to make some brief remarks concerning the variously posed question concerning why reasonable beings opted specifically for language or voice as the immediate body of the inner soul.

Schelling immediately articulates his disagreement with the premise of the whole debate as it had been carried out throughout the eighteenth century: "Yet even the question itself views language as an arbitrary choice or invention… Yet language is not that accidental. There is a higher necessity." In consequence, "Both assertions – that it arises as an invention of human beings, through freedom, and by divine instruction – are false" – that is, Schelling rejects both the typical answers to the question of the origin of language. The theological response of Süssmilch that language is a result of divine instruction and the Condillacian solution that it is a product of human freedom are both wrong. They form a false dilemma, an antinomy resting on an incorrect presupposition – arbitrariness.

The arbitrary nature of the sign, and so any unmotivated relation between signifier and signified, is therefore categorically rejected by Schelling. There is a "higher necessity" to how language operates. The conjectures of earlier linguists do not exhibit "the absolute idea of language", but treat the question of the origin of

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therefore becomes more insistent: what evidence is there that language identifies the two *intrinsically* rather than *extrinsically*?

language from a limited standpoint, the standpoint of reflection: "The whole question concerning the origin of language, at least as it has been treated until now, is merely an empirical one with which the philosopher accordingly has nothing to do."[13] The philosopher must look to the eternal, to "the idea itself" of language, free from the distortions of reflection: "In this sense, language, just as the universe itself, still emerges in an unconditional fashion through the eternal effect of the absolute cognitive act." Hence, all previous philosophy of language has not been speculative enough.

Schelling here announces the need for a speculative transformation of linguistics that would transform pre-existing empirical and psychological theories into a genuinely philosophical account – language according to its idea, rather than according to reflection: "The controversy over a divine or human origin of language is in the *Identitätssystem* sublated into a 'construction of language'." (Hennigfeld 1984 16) Such a speculatively-transformed philosophy of language would provide an adequate account of its "higher necessity" and so of its symbolic essence. Such a philosophy of language would rigorously demonstrate the incorrectness of presupposing arbitrary signs, and, in consequence, the cogency of a language of symbols.

Frustratingly, however, it is at this point Schelling closes the section with the following remark:

> An exposition of the particular model of reason and reflection within the structure and inner conditions of language belongs to a different sphere of science than the one with which we are here concerned and in which language itself functions merely as a medium.

[13] "Contemporary theories of the origin of language remain inadequate because they have no ontological-metaphysical basis." (Hennigfeld 1984 21)

This is tantalising, precisely because at no other place in his *Identitätssystem* (nor indeed in his philosophy as a whole) is such an exposition given. The reader is left wondering what theory of symbolic language (and of the origin of language) was lurking behind these tantalising glimpses.

10.5 The Heautonomy of Language

What then of Schelling's claims for symbolic language? In his remarks on its origin, Schelling gestures towards 'a higher necessity' to language without explicitly describing in what this higher necessity consists; however, what these remarks do tell us is that Schelling *certainly* thinks the relation between image and concept, being and meaning in language is *not* an 'accidental' one, but is instead symbolic. Therefore, it seems fair to conclude that their identity is an intrinsic one – a relation of indifference – rather than an extrinsic or causal one. In consequence, language is based on *symbols not signs*.

There is further, indirect evidence for this view within §73 itself, and this can be inferred from the extent to which language exhibits all three first-order properties of the symbol. We have seen at length that Schelling conceives language as displaying syntheticism and tautegory: it unifies the real and the ideal, image and meaning. Language does not conceal its meaning behind a husk, nor does it retreat into the subject; in language, meaning takes on sensuous form without thereby reducing any of its meaningfulness. Language is meaningful being: it is tautegorical (and therefore synthetic).

Schelling also demonstrates the extent to which language manifests heautonomy or self-contained unity. Indeed, it exhibits heautonomy at various levels: first, on the level of language as a whole ("Language viewed absolutely or in itself is unified or *one*"); second, on the level of individual languages ("Each language is a universe if taken by itself"); third, in individual utterances (different tones and sonorities "are all blended in human language, which accordingly does not particularly resemble any one sonority or tone, since all reside within it")[14]; finally, even individual words possess a form of heautonomous wholeness through the interplay of vowels and consonants that occur within them. The word forms an organic whole of soul and body. Even in the individual word, real and ideal, body and soul, are intermingled to form a self-sufficient whole which generates its own meaning internally: "Each new word is a particularisation of the absolute." (Coseriu 1977 5)[15]

Language is therefore one, on many levels: "Everything resides as one in language, regardless of the perspective from which one views it."[16] As a result, language mimics the identity which constitutes reality or, more technically, it produces absolute identity most intensely. "Absolute identity is expressed in language to an even greater extent… Language itself thereby becomes the symbol for the identity of all things." Language is maximally productive of reality, because it exhibits formal identity. It is completely indifferent – "indifference exhibited objectively" (Coseriu 1977 6) – and this is what makes language a symbol, the most productive *Darstellung* possible.

[14] "Speech is the material of all tones and sonorities reduced to indifference," he later writes (*SW* 5:635; 1989 204)
[15] See also Schelling's discussion of the heautonomy of rhythmic, poetic language (*SW* 5:635-8; 1989 205-6 – *SW* 6:491-2).
[16] Language is therefore an organism (Hennigfeld 1984 20).

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This, therefore, is Schelling's response to the need for symbolic language – a construction of the ways in which language is symbolic. Language is the indifference of meaning and being; it is the indifference of ideal and real; it possesses a 'higher necessity' than the mere sign, and it exhibits heautonomy on many levels. Schelling has demonstrated that there is a language appropriate to reason, not reflection – a language that can faithfully articulate symbolic forms of thinking. Philosophy can therefore be superior to mathematics, because its discursive medium is also superior. Schelling is not trapped in a mute prison, unable to utter the intuitions of the absolute he has attained; instead, he has shown how language articulates the absolute in the most intense possible way.

PART FOUR

THEOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS

CHAPTER ELEVEN

SCIENCE WITHOUT REFERENCE

Having analysed §73 of the PdK in detail, it is time to draw some conclusions. What is the significance of this theory of language? What does it mean for theology? In what follows, I argue that *the elimination of reference* stands at the heart of Schelling's construction of symbolic language. This results from his commitment to absolute tautegory and rationalist heautonomy. Instead of functioning referentially, language is defined by the degree to which it produces reality (or God), and this is furthermore dependent on the indifference of being and meaning language attains. That is, what matters is the structure or form of language, rather than its content. Implicit in this idea of language, I go on to argue, is a critique of Christian theology which typically confuses God with meaning, or the eternal with the infinite. Schelling thus sees the need to reform theology, so that its form (i.e. its language) can become symbolic and so that it can manifest God in its words to the maximum possible extent.

It is here therefore in Part Four of the thesis that the practice of theology takes centre stage in my argument. Having built up a picture of Schelling's thought and its place in his contemporary context over the previous ten chapters, I now draw out its consequences for theology.

11.1 From the Infinite to the Eternal

To begin therefore, I return to Schelling's construction of symbolic language to draw out its most important and contentious aspects.

11.1.1 The Elimination of Reference

There are two overriding elements to the Schellingian interpretation of symbolic language which distinguish it from the standard 'romantic' interpretation: the commitment to absolute tautegory and rationalist heautonomy:

First, Schelling is committed to an absolute interpretation of tautegory: meaning and being are not partially identified in some kind of synecdochical structure (in which being is the part and meaning the whole). Rather, meaning is utterly identical to being – there is nothing to distinguish them. Schelling thus goes far beyond his contemporaries on this point. No distinction can be drawn between meaning and being; they exist equally and indissociably in a state of indifference.

Second, Schelling's rejection of the representational paradigm is thorough. And it follows from this that words cannot represent something in the world; in fact, there is no outside to words. Language, that is, is heautonomous. Here we arrive at the second major element of Schelling's interpretation of symbolic language: his *rationalist* interpretation of heautonomy. For theorists of 'the romantic symbol', meaningful being is to be perceived; this is a passive encountering of a ready-made object whose properties are self-evident. Schelling rejects this view. Meaningful being, according to him, is not to be perceived but *constructed*. It is not seen but made.

On both the above points, Schelling rejects the interpretation of symbolic language offered by his contemporaries. The Schellingian symbol is based on a very different interpretation. Moreover, all the criticisms Schelling implicitly makes of 'the romantic symbol' have the same end in view: the annihilation of any residual elements of signification from symbolic language. For Schelling, there is no more signification. First, absolute tautegory denies the transcendence (or even otherness) of meaning in any form. Meaning does *not* (even partially) exist separate from being – and so no process or activity (including signification) is required to transfer from the latter to the former. Second, rationalist heautonomy asserts the production of meaning *as* being (rather than the pre-existence of meaning). Language remains completely immanent to itself. Reference is no longer a valid category.

This is what I meant when I designated Schelling's conception of language, 'hyper-Cratylism', in Chapter One. In cratylic conceptions of language, a motivated relation between sign and reference (being and meaning) holds, but theories of the symbol take this conventional cratylic interpretation of language one step further by subscribing to tautegory: the cratylic correlation between sign and referent is here radicalised into some form of ontological sameness between them. An identification of meaning and being (however partial) occurs, and this moves theorists of the symbol beyond the category of motivation. Schelling takes up a more extreme position still – not only does he go beyond Cratylism normally understood, he also takes up a position more radical than any other theorist of the symbol. He identifies meaning and being *absolutely*. In consequence, like cratylic theories, there is *no unmotivated* relation between sign and referent, but, unlike cratylic theories, there is *no motivated* relation either. And this is because there is no longer any sign nor any referent, but

just immediately and fully meaningful being. All relations of reference – even cratylic ones – are revoked.

11.1.2 The Two Relations of Language

What is the point of hyper-cratylic language? Language is typically defined by its referential function, so then what is left of language after this has been eliminated? In order to obtain a preliminary answer to such questions, I first need to distinguish between two relations in Schellingian symbolic language: the relation of the finite to the infinite and the relation of the finite/infinite to the eternal.

In Chapter Six, I introduced Schelling's *Potenzlehre*: all phenomena consist in three elements – the finite, the infinite and the eternal. The different amounts of each element distinguish one thing from another. This three-term series needs to be borne in mind when considering language too. Language has a finite element (its image or sound), an infinite element (its meaning) and an eternal element (its idea). Therefore, language does not consist merely in a relation of finite being to infinite meaning, but in a more complex interplay of three elements. That is, Schelling *adds* an extra, third term to the typical view of language: language is not merely defined by the relation of the finite to the infinite, *but also* by a supplementary relation that both the finite and the infinite have to the eternal. So, in order to genuinely comprehend Schelling's conception of symbolic language, *both* relations need to be noted.

First, as we have seen, Schelling interprets the relation of finite to infinite or being to meaning in a radical way – *as pure identity*. The finite is the infinite and the infinite is the finite. In symbolic language, the first two potencies are in a state of complete indifference and, whenever this is not the case (even partially), this marks the deterioration of symbolic language into schema or allegory – the slide of rational

language into reflective language. This idea of the identity of meaning and being may seem somewhat difficult to grasp in the abstract, but there is an obvious illustration of such identity in everyday language: performative statements. The statement, 'I promise', does not refer to anything external to itself, but creates the very state of affairs which is its meaning. Meaning is generated as the words are formed – this is a *constructive* procedure. Performative statements thus exhibit the very rationalist heautonomy Schelling demands of all language: meaning and being are constructed simultaneously and identically. Meaning is performed in and as being; it is thus wholly immanent to, and ultimately identical with, being.[1]

Yet, this is not the only (or even the most important) relation out of which Schellingian symbolic language is established. This honour falls to the second relation of the finite and the infinite *to the eternal* – a relation which is unique (at least in its specifics) to Schellingian language. This is the additional element that sets Schelling's construction apart from many other linguistic theories in Western modernity. Language is not constituted by the relation of being to meaning alone, but also by the way both being and meaning relate to a third element – the eternal.

How then do the first two potencies relate to the third potency in symbolic language? The answer is: through *production*. We have repeatedly seen the central role production has for Schelling in Part Two of this thesis and it is no less important here. The being and meaning of language *produce* the eternal (or the idea or reality). Just as all individual *Darstellungen* are defined and differentiated by the degree to which they produce the absolute, so too language. Language is defined by the extent to which it produces the absolute – and symbolic language produces the absolute to the maximum extent. Words produce the absolute, just as all other *Darstellungen* do.

[1] Performative statements are not, it must be emphasised, the only way the identity of meaning and being is achieved; however, they are a particularly clear illustration of it.

This is a repetition of the form/essence distinction within language: meaning and being together constitute the form of language and this form is the condition for the production of essence. Language is not only defined by the indifference of meaning and being, but also by its generation of the absolute.[2]

* *

Absolutely crucial here is the relation that holds between these two defining linguistic relations (meaning to being and meaning/being to the eternal). In short, the second relation is *completely dependent* on the first. The extent of the indifference pertaining between meaning and being is the sole criterion for the intensity of the reality that is thereby generated. Indeed, this can be put much more strongly: the extent of the indifference pertaining between meaning and being *is* the intensity of the reality thereby generated – and this is because indifference is another name for reality. Construction of indifference and construction of reality are identical procedures. The two relations therefore collapse back into one – productivity is synonymous with indifference.[3] Symbolic language is the absolute maximally potentiated in language (and Schelling even suggests, as I discussed in the previous chapter, it is the absolute maximally potentiated *tout court*).

This then is the point of Schellingian symbolic language; this is what remains after the elimination of reference. What matters is not the referent (for there is none), but the product. What is more, this product is dependent on there precisely not being a referent – that is, it is dependent on meaning and being entering into a relation of

[2] This is ultimately the same thing – as we shall see in the next paragraph.
[3] Again, the form/essence distinction is helpful: the amount of essential identity produced is dependent on (or is) the formal identity of the *Darstellung*. So, the more the form of language is indifferent (i.e. the more meaning and being are identical), the more essential identity is generated.

indifference and so excluding all forms of signification and reference altogether. Symbolic language does not refer to God; it *produces* God, and does so only on the condition it does not refer.

11.1.3 Schelling and de Man

To further crystallise the Schellingian conception of language, I now attempt to put it in dialogue with Paul de Man's linguistic views. As I have repeatedly shown in this thesis, de Man is extremely critical of any attempt to theorise symbolic language; to compare Schelling and de Man's conceptions of language is thus to pit Schelling against an adversary, but also to test his idea of language against the presuppositions and prejudices of late twentieth-century linguistic thought.

De Man's criticisms of symbolic language centre on the category of aesthetic ideology. Aesthetic ideology designates the ideological falsification of the nature of language that took place under the name of aesthetics during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. "Aesthetics is," de Man writes, "a phenomenalism of a process of meaning and understanding" (1986 7), the making phenomenal or perceptible of linguistic meaning. This is, for de Man, the very definition of ideology: "What we call ideology is precisely the confusion of linguistic with natural reality, of reference with phenomenalism." (7)[4] Words, on this view, become flowers (as Hölderlin put it): they are ready-made objects passively encountered, and *not* produced.[5] The "aesthetic *aura* of the symbol" (de Man 1996 104) is precisely that it too participates in this phenomenalisation of meaning: symbolic language reduces conventional reference to the perceptibility of natural objects. Theories of symbolic language ignore, suppress

[4] Culler describes this ideological process of phenomenalisation as follows, it is the process "when something – words, meanings, affects, effects – would simply be given to perception rather than produced by reading" (1988 132).
[5] See further de Man 1984 3-7.

and neglect those "factors or functions that cannot be reduced to intuition" (1986 13). At stake here – as I have emphasised throughout this thesis – is the distinction between empiricist and rationalist heautonomy. De Man claims that all theories of symbolic language *must* be committed to the empiricist interpretation, and so conceive the symbol as an empirical object. As we have seen, however, *this is not true*. Schelling interprets symbolic language constructively; he thus does *not* fall foul of de Man's criticisms or even of the more general label of 'aesthetic ideology' (at least on this issue). Schelling does *not* phenomenalise meaning; he constructs it.

Therefore, while the Schellingian symbol could *superficially* be seen as quite close to 'the romantic symbol' on this point, it is in fact quite distant. Schelling (like other theorists of the time) does hold onto terms like "organic", but he reinterprets them. In short, the symbol and its properties undergo a speculative transformation in Schelling's thought. Hence, the 'naturalness' of the symbol, far from being a result of phenomenalisation, is reconceived as a form of *poiesis*. The term 'organic', for example, is interpreted by Schelling as a name for the mode in which the absolute produces and constructs itself. It is the name for a process of *creating meaningful being*. This is very different from theorists (like Goethe) who consider language a natural object to be encountered passively in the world.

To this extent therefore there seems no reason why Schelling's conception of language should be thought of as problematic on de Man's terms. Language is the mode in which the absolute exhibits itself in its most intense form; it is the maximal production of the indifference of meaning and being. Yet, this is not to say that there are not massive divergences between Schelling's view of language and that of de Man (and for that matter any theorist of language of the twentieth century); there obviously are. In what follows, I want to consider four such differences and tentatively suggest

that they do not *necessarily* undermine the plausibility of Schelling's conception of language; they merely flag up its untimeliness.

(a) Metaphysics

There is no doubting the strangeness of Schelling's philosophy of language from a post-Saussurean standpoint. Even from the 1830s onwards, linguistics took on an empiricist methodology, taking the concrete speaking subject or the determinate existence of a body of language at a particular time as its starting point. Schelling's linguistics, however, is unashamedly metaphysical. Indeed, he explicit criticises the empiricist and subjective foundations of earlier theories of language: "The whole question concerning the origin of language, at least as it has been treated until now, is merely an empirical one with which the philosopher accordingly has nothing to do." More specifically, Schelling opposes the arbitrary nature of the sign as one pernicious manifestation of this empiricism: previous theories "view language as an arbitrary choice or invention… Yet language is not that accidental. There is a higher necessity." (*SW* 5:485; 1989 102) To discern this higher necessity, Schelling insists, philosophising must begin from the "idea" of language. Schelling's question is always "what connection exists between language and the absolute" (Hennigfeld 1984 19).

It is no understatement, however, that Schelling's argument has had no influence; indeed, the eighteenth-century theories which Schelling here labels *too empiricist* come to be seen by later linguists as still too philosophical and *too metaphysical*. Schelling's speculative account of language goes against the grain of the majority of modern Western thinking about language.

Philosophically, what is at stake is the legitimacy of Schelling's practice of speculative transformation. As we saw in Chapter Four, Schelling make use of the

material of empirical aesthetics so as to transform it into a *metaphysics* of art; in the process, art as a particular, temporal object is cast aside in favour of the eternal idea of art. The same operation is at work here: Schelling surveys previous philosophies of language and transforms them into a metaphysics of language. It is precisely the legitimacy of such an operation which is implicitly questioned by later nineteenth and twentieth-century theorists. Their assumption is that to transform phenomena speculatively is to falsify them, and language is no exception. To attempt to metaphysically construct a theory of language irrespective of its empirical properties is to misunderstand the nature of language itself.

Of course, there is little hope of asking linguists to reconsider the validity of the Schellingian view of language; however, two points might be made in order to stop us immediately discarding Schelling's viewpoint. First, Schelling belongs to a long and well-established philosophical tradition (indeed, his work is in many respects the culmination of this tradition) in which to think adequately is to think *sub specie aeternitatis*. It is the eternal idea – not the mutable phenomenon – which is the proper subject of philosophy, and this is no less true of language. While it is certainly the case that much of this tradition has today fallen out of favour, it is important to acknowledge how compelling such an assumption was for generations of philosophers. Second, what modern linguistics and philosophy of language seem to discourage is any interrogation of the *ontology* of language – the philosophical basis of our everyday employment of language. And to interrogate the ontology of language requires more than just empiricism.[6] While, of course, Schelling's metaphysical explanation is not the only (or even most compelling) account of this ontology, its pursuit of a philosophical justification of language *as such* is certainly valid.

[6] See Surber 2000 335.

(b) Immediacy

Language is a productive process for Schelling; yet this process is free of any form of mediation. This is true for both of the relations which constitute Schellingian language. In terms of language's relation to the eternal, all *Darstellungen* are *immediate* exhibitions of the absolute, so no form of mediation is required to access the absolute through language.[7] In terms of the finite/infinite relation, meaning is also immediately present in language. Neither any hermeneutic activity of uncovering concealed meanings nor any process of signification (in which the meaning of a referent is made present) is necessary for Schellingian symbolic language. Both absolute and meaning are immediately there – no extra work is required.

This, however, raises a new question: does language *essentially* involve mediation or is an immediate language conceivable? That the experience of language is ineluctably mediated is certainly true for de Man and all theorists within the Saussurean tradition. Language operates in two ways: first, by assigning value to each signifier through its difference from all other signifiers; second, by means of the signifier referring to the signified. Both operations involve mediation: value is mediated by the value of all other signifiers and the signified is mediated by the signifier. This is also true within the hermeneutic tradition as well: hermeneutic activity is the mediated procedure of retrieving meaning concealed behind meaningless being. On this basis, Titzmann, for example, has criticised the valorisation of immediacy in theories of the symbol during the *Goethezeit*: "The meaning of the symbol requires no interpretative reconstruction… it is 'immediate'… In the symbol therefore hermeneutics is annulled: the symbol neither allows for an explanation nor requires one." (1979 656)

[7] See *SW* 5:631-2; 1989 202-3, Coseriu 1977 8, Adams 1983 20.

Schelling (as Titzmann implies) rejects all these forms of mediation. He denies that mediation is necessary to language. What then are we to make of this? How can we answer the question whether language necessarily involves mediation or not? If it does, then Schelling's notion of an immediate language is a contradiction in terms; if it does not, Schelling's symbolic language becomes an alternative model for the functioning of language.

Rationalist heautonomy is again crucial to answering this question, since Schelling here positions himself in a *constructive* tradition, in which immediacy is a defining characteristic of all knowledge.[8] Take, for example, Kant's comments concerning mathematical construction: one of the main differences between knowledge constituted from mathematical construction and that constituted from typical *Vorstellung* is the *immediacy* of the relation of concept and intuition present in the former. Mathematical concepts can be fully and directly 'laid out' in intuition in a way other concepts cannot. For Schelling, the same is true, except of course that he extends the range of construction to all ideas.

(c) Identity

A similar story can be told about the contrast between Schelling's commitment to identity as a defining property of language and the twentieth-century obsession with difference. Obviously, there are good linguistic, ontological and ethical reasons for the importance difference has attained in the twentieth century. However, what I have attempted to show in this thesis is that there are also plausible reasons for Schelling's commitment to identity. For de Man, the identification of

[8] This immediacy is a crucial difference between the *dialectical* tradition running through Fichte, the Schelling of the *System des transcendentalen Idealismus* and Hegel and the *constructive* tradition of early modernity of which Schelling's *Identitätssystem* is the culmination. In the dialectical tradition, mediation is key: what is most expressive or true is what is reached by means of a process of mediation. This is not the case in the constructive tradition.

meaning and being is an ideological strategy; it suppresses genuine difference in favour of a fictional utopia which is never to come. This ideology falsifies and conceals the "essence" of language which resides in difference (1984 6). De Man asserts, "That sign and meaning can never coincide is what [should be] precisely taken for granted." (1983 17) However, to assert that language essentially exhibits difference is (at least *prima facie*) just as plausible as asserting it essentially exhibits identity – both claims rely on particular metaphysical presuppositions that need to be understood before they are evaluated.[9] It has been the task of this thesis to uncover Schelling's presuppositions.

(d) Production

Finally, there remains the question of reference. I have insisted that it is Schelling's rejection of this aspect of language which is potentially so fruitful. Rejection of reference frees Schelling from worrying about correctly or incorrectly representing an already existing entity; what is rather at stake is how intensely entities are generated through language. *Description is replaced with production*.

It is often thought that reference is essential to language. De Man's critique of the phenomenalisation of meaning, for example, is partially an attack on denials of the referential function. The symbol suppresses "the referential function of language – that is *always* there, irreducibly, whenever we talk about anything called 'language'" (Warminski 1996 14). In de Man's words, "The referential function is a trap, but inevitable"[10] – and so theories of symbolic language which attempt to avoid this trap, he contends, always end in failure.

[9] And indeed de Man's position has not escaped censure. See Eagleton 1990 358, 1991 200.
[10] De Man, quoted in Warminski 1996 1.

Flying in the face of linguistic good sense, Schelling jettisons reference entirely, and I have already described at length the two relations with which he replaces it – indifference and production. Indifference is merely a way of flagging up the lack of a replacement for reference: since meaning is already fully present in being, there is no need for any kind of mechanism to make present an absent meaning. Production, however, *is* a mechanism which defines the workings of language (as well as of all *Darstellungen* in general). Production does not, however, define the relation between being and meaning, rather it defines the relation between language and the absolute. Language does not refer to the absolute; it *produces* the absolute.

The question then becomes: is production a legitimate category by which to envisage the operation of language? It is important here to note what distinguishes production from reference as a model for language. Referential language talks *about* God more or less *accurately*; productive language *is* God more or less *intensely*. Reference presupposes that word and reference are external to one another (at least partially) and only extrinsically related. This, as we have seen with signification, relies on a qualitative opposition between word and referent, as well as some form of causal or mediating relation between them. On Schelling's metaphysical presuppositions, these are merely reflective ways of theorising language – they do not attain to the idea of language. Production, on the other hand, posits the essential identity between word and absolute. It is, in fact, one of the only consistent positions for a monist when it comes to language: words cannot refer to referents as separate, distinct entities, because words and referents are fundamentally *the same thing*. There is no room for reference, if one is a monist. Again, this is not to prove that production *is* a legitimate category for conceiving language; it is merely to contend that, on Schelling's philosophical presuppositions, production seems a plausible candidate.

11.2 The Critique of Theology

Such then are the immediate linguistic consequences of Schelling's construction of symbolic language. The question I now turn to answer, however, is its consequences for theological thinking. It is here that theological issues become explicit in this thesis (although they have been implicit all along) – that is, I am now concerned with cashing out my analysis of Schelling's thought in terms of its theological significance. As we shall see as the section progresses, Schelling uses his conception of the symbol as a tool to criticise the current practice of theology. He tests theology against the symbol and finds it lacking. This creates a new task for the thinker – the reformation of theology along symbolic lines.

11.2.1 A Theology without Reference

The Schellingian construction of symbolic language has three immediate consequences for theology.

First, God is *not* the object of discourse. He is not the referent of theological language. God is not infinite meaning. The absolute cannot, and so should not, be made into the object or meaning of propositions, for – and this is key – this would be to reduce the eternal to the infinite, to mistake the third for the second potency. God maximally manifests himself in the third potency, but only does so to a much lesser extent in the second potency. To think God through the second potency, rather than the third, is thus a form of *reflective* thinking – limiting the potential productivity of thought. Theology should not therefore treat God as an object of discourse; theology need not be *about* God.

In consequence, *theology can be about anything at all*. What matters is not the object of discourse (the second potency), but the extent to which the eternal is produced (the third potency). There is therefore no limitation on the meaning or content of theology: it can talk about whatever it wants. Theology need not be worried about adequately, fully or accurately representing an external entity, for such a procedure is, according to Schelling, reflective. Rather, the criterion for the success of theology is the degree to which it produces God, and this is directly dependent upon (or equivalent to) the extent of the indifference pertaining between being and meaning. This indifference is, moreover, a purely formal criterion and can be achieved no matter what the content of the theological discourse might be. Theology, in conclusion, has no specific subject matter it need talk about; it has no proper content or predetermined field. All that characterises good theology is a purely structural requirement – the indifference of meaning and being.[11]

Indifference of meaning and being is the formal criterion for successful theological practice. Therefore, theology is more divine the less it talks of God! In order for theology to produce God as the third potency to the maximum possible extent, it needs to suppress all its referentiality, including, most notably, its tendency to talk *about* God. Only when reference is completely eliminated does the requisite indifference of meaning and being obtain, so that theology's language – and consequently theology itself – becomes symbolic. In short, theology must be poietic, not referential – produce God, not refer to him.[12]

[11] This is true of all other sciences as well.
[12] It is worth remembering that essence (even when that essence is called God) does not pre-exist form, but is generated by form.

11.2.2 The God of the Third Potency

On the basis of the above, Schelling is able to criticise theology as it is currently practised. He sets the above ideal of a poietic theology over against past and present theologies, so as to reveal the latter's inadequacies. At the centre of his critique lies Christian theology's mistaken identification of God with the infinite object of thought. Much theology past and present has failed to realise that God is not infinite, but eternal. As such, this theology has practised a reflective (i.e. less intense) form of thinking in which God is not produced to the maximum possible extent. Theology has not been poietic enough.

Thus, Schelling rails against those who try to make God the object or meaning of discourse, those who "are not able to fashion any other notion of the absolute but that of a *thing*" (*SW* 7:158; 1984b 256). It is in epistemology, rather than linguistics, that Schelling is most articulate on this point (although the correspondence holds firm). God is not the object of knowledge:

> Reason does not *have* the idea of God, it *is* this idea and nothing else… In no kind of knowledge can God occur as the *known* (the object). As known he ceases to be *God*. We are never outside of God so that we could set him in front of us as an object." (149-50; 250-1)[13]

Just as there is no referent, there is no object of knowledge. Hence, Schelling insists definitively at the beginning of the 1804 *System*,

> In our first reflection on knowledge, we believe to have distinguished in it a subject of knowledge and the object of knowledge… I purposely say: we *believe* to have discriminated, for precisely the reality of this distinction is at issue here, and it will become readily apparent that this very distinction between a subject and an object in knowledge constitutes the fundamental

[13] See further *SW* 6:172; 1994b 164 – *SW* 5:215-7; 1966 10.

> error in all knowledge… We now abandon forever that sphere of reflection that discriminates between the subject and the object. (*SW* 6:137-40; 1994b 141-3)

In the same way therefore as previous philosophy's attempt to separate out an object of knowledge has been a serious error retarding the progress of the discipline, so too Christianity's confusion of God with infinity is for Schelling the very essence of 'dogmatism' (152; 152). Dogmatism relegates God to the second potency; it makes of him an infinite object. Put another way, dogmatic theology concentrates on the first relation of Schellingian language at the expense of the second – that is, Christian thought is obsessed by the question of how the first two potencies relate (how being can signify and refer to meaning); it therefore remains ignorant of the resources offered by the third potency, i.e. how the elimination of any discrepancy between finite and infinite generates the eternal. Dogmatic theology is oblivious to the poietic potential of indifference, and remains bound to a reflective and representational thinking, concerned with how the finite can adequately capture the infinite.

Schelling is insistent again and again: dogmatic theology is wrong. God is not an object to be thought, but the third potency itself. God, as we saw at the start of Chapter Five, is another name for reality, and not an infinite element in reality. God is reality itself. As the 1804 *System* puts it, "God is not the supreme but the unconditionally One, not the endpoint of the last link in a sequence but the centre. There is no world outside him to which he relates in the manner of cause and effect." (152; 152) God is everything, and it is, according to Schelling, atheism to claim otherwise. Atheism is the failure to identify God and the third potency; it reduces God to either a finite, sensible object (the first potency) or to an infinite, ideal object (the

second potency).[14] Both are forms of idolisation. Christian theology – insofar as it is and has been *dogmatic* – is *atheist*. On the contrary, only eternity is divine and worthy of theological contemplation.[15] Schelling's task with respect to theology is therefore *to reform it* – to rectify its fundamental mistake by elevating God back to his proper place as eternal.

* *

At stake once more is a *speculative transformation*, this time of theology. Just as with aesthetics, theories of the symbol or philosophies of language, Schelling is here intent on taking pre-existing theologies and appropriating them for his own end. In short, it is a matter of *redirecting* theology towards the absolute: theology must be turned away from representation and reference towards indifference. Christian theology is not and has not been sufficiently speculative – *not absolute enough*.[16] Its obsession with the infinite has obscured what is properly scientific – the eternal. It is a case of renovating what is unproductive in the theological tradition to make it more speculative, intensifying its absoluteness.

11.2.3 A Genealogy of Christianity

This task to reform theology needs to be set in a wider context, however, because Christian theology's divinisation of the infinite considered in the previous section is a symptom of a much more fundamental problem. In short, Christianity as

[14] "For him whom the soul is actual, God is not external but is a God within. All others relate to God as to their ground… he lies in the infinite distance, as mere object… For him whose soul is itself grasped by the divine, God is no externality… God is in him and he is in God. The true atheists are those who invoke atheism when one claims that God is not external to us and we are not external to him." (*SW* 6:562)
[15] See *SB* 2:351; Fichte and Schelling 1997 87.
[16] See Schelling's critique of contemporary theology (*SW* 5:296-303; 1966 92-100).

such is a religion of the second potency – of the ideal, the infinite and the subjective. In all Christian thought, it is the second potency which predominates. Christianity obsesses over the infinite and ignores the eternal – this for Schelling constitutes its very definition. Again, it is a question of Christianity ignoring the second relation of Schellingian language in favour of the first. For Christianity, the ideal (or the infinite) is what is ultimate, and it is obsessed with how this ideal can be adequately signified or represented by the real. The relation of both to the eternal is consequently forgotten. The ideal is privileged at the expense of the eternal. There is no aspiration to indifference. On this account it is obvious why Schelling would want to criticise Christianity, and criticise it he does. Between 1801 and 1805, this criticism takes many forms, but is most evident in the detailed genealogy of the Christian religion Schelling charts in both the *PdK* and *Über die Methode*.

"With Christianity begins a new world", writes Robinson in his lecture notes to the *PdK* (1976 173). The turning point of world-history is the life of Christ; through it the ancient world is turned upside down. Modernity is the "reversal" of antiquity and in a series of propositions in the *PdK*, Schelling schematically lists the oppositions that divide the two eras: in antiquity art is the product of nature, in modernity of freedom (§44); the finite predominates in the former, the infinite in the latter (§45); in the former, the universe is intuited as nature, in the latter as providence or history (§47); sublimity is the "basic character" of the former, beauty of the latter (§47); the collective is fundamental to the former, the individual to the latter (§48); the former exhibits unchanging eternity and being, the latter transience and becoming (§49); space dominates in the former, time in the latter (§50); nature is revealed and the ideal world concealed during antiquity, whereas the ideal is revealed and "nature retreats into mystery" during modernity (§51); the former gives rise to a "nature

religion" founded on mythology, the latter to a revealed religion based on tradition (§52); finally, in the former ideas are concretised in being, in the latter in action (§53). From this list, it should already be evident that modernity (and so Christianity – the two are synonyms for Schelling) is defined by the second potency, in opposition to antiquity which is defined by the first. History, action, subjectivity – the hallmarks of Christianity – are all phenomena in which the second potency, the ideal, predominates. Thus for Christianity to be characterised by such phenomena already suggests it privileges the second potency, and Schelling goes on to stress this fact repeatedly in his history of the development of the religion.

Christianity begins with Jesus Christ and, according to Schelling, Christ can be considered in two ways. He is a liminal figure: he is not quite modern, but also not quite Classical. "He stands as the boundary between the two worlds." (*SW* 5:292; 1966 89)[17] On the one hand, Christ marks the end of the series of Classical deities as *both* their termination and also their culmination: he perpetuates and even perfects many of the principles by which the Greek gods were understood.[18] Yet, on the other hand, Christ is *not* merely Greek, but the god who breaks down Hellenistic paradigms to establish the modern world. Schelling thus insists on the inadequacy of understanding Christ through Hellenic terms alone; the influx of "Oriental ideas", he counters, is more important for understanding him. While Greek religious thought is dominated by the finite, Oriental religious thought is completely in thrall to the infinite. "In the Orient, the finite is completely overbalanced by the infinite." (Robinson 1976 173)[19] The influx of the Orient had a crucial influence on Christ's

[17] See Marquet 1973 266-7.
[18] "Christianity's leading idea is… Christ as culmination, the closing out of the ancient world of the gods. In Him, as in the ancient gods, the divine principle becomes finite." (*SW* 5:292; 1966 89) He is "the peak… of the polytheistic universe." (Tilliette 1994 9)
[19] See further *SW* 5:422-4; 1989 56-7.

fate. Rather than remaining content with the Greek ideals of finitude and nature, Christ succumbed to the infinite, to the ideal, to the second potency:

> How utterly differently does this incarnation of God within Christianity manifest itself when compared with the concept within paganism of the divine that has become finite. In Christianity the finite is not the most important element. (*SW* 5:431-2; 1989 63)[20]

Christ abandoned the real for the ideal, and henceforth "lead[s] all of the finite into and to the infinite" (432; 64). This shift is represented by the events that lead from the Crucifixion to the Ascension: they represent Christ's abandonment of his finite, real body and his escape into the infinite – "the nullification of the finite" (432; 64). They inaugurate a new era of a religion of the transcendent, of the infinite existing beyond (*not* within) the finite. Tilliette writes,

> The fundamental contrast between paganism and Christianity prevents one from making Jesus into the finite icon of the infinite, the infinite enclosed in the finite, like a Greek deity; on the contrary, he is in fact a fugitive image, expanding the finite into the infinite, destroying the finite in the infinite and ideality. This indicates how much his life is seen in terms of its death. (1994 7-8)

In his death, Christ fails to be symbolic. His finitude cannot remain indifferent to the new power of the infinite that arrives from the Orient. The infinite surges forth in excess and surplus. The death of Christ "closes the world of the finite and opens the world of the infinite." (*SW* 5:294; 1966 91) Moreover, this ultimate failure of the symbolic through an upsurge of the ideal will be a recurrent motif throughout the whole history of Christianity. Christ sets the pattern that modernity is doomed to

[20] See Marquet 1965 65-6.

repeat: whenever moments in Christian theology approach the symbol, an excess of the infinite always drives them back into transcendence and ideality.[21]

It must be admitted that Schelling's narrative relies on some extremely problematic categories, for instance an oversimplistic ideal of Hellenism ('the Classical') and a racist caricature of every culture east of Athens ('the Orient'). They certainly put into question the validity of his account. Yet, Schelling's basic point seems sound: if one is a monist or even just committed to a philosophy of immanence, the affirmation of the transcendent and consequent negation of this world (tendencies which one could interpret as the significance of Christ's death and subsequent ascension) seem problematic. They seem to valorise a 'two-world' metaphysics which Schelling rejects, and so it is on this basis he designates these aspects of Christian religion less productive of reality – events in which the second, rather than the third, potency dominates.

Moreover, from this account, one can already begin to see the task Schelling will set for thought: to come to terms with this new, excessive infinity present in Christianity; to cultivate the real and the finite so it can enter back into a relationship of indifference with the infinite, so that God will be produced more intensely.[22]

11.2.4 Christianity and Modern Thought

Christianity fails to be symbolic. Yet, Schelling is equally insistent that contemporary thought cannot just discard it and start again with a more symbolic religion. And this is because, he claims, *Christianity has thoroughly determined modern thought* to the point that all philosophy, natural science and art since Descartes has been irremediably infected with the ideality of Christianity. It is for this

[21] Christ's death is thus "the original sin" of Christianity which it is doomed to repeat over and over (5:290; 1966 86). See Brito 2000 69, Tilliette 1970 1:448.
[22] See further Marquet 1965.

reason Schelling devotes so much space to charting the deficiencies of Christianity in both the *PdK* and *Über die Methode*. While other disciplines (like politics or natural science) are just as catastrophically reflective as theology, just as marked by the excess of the second potency, Schelling provides no parallel genealogy. For such genealogies would be redundant; they would not get to the root of the problem. Only a genealogy of theology tackles how and why reflection has come to dominate modern thought, because Christian theology is the *cause* of all reflective thinking in modernity. It is not just that theology exhibits the dualisms, the lifelessness and the causal categories inherent in all modern thinking *better* than any other form of thought, it is that Christ's Ascension and the theology that arose from it gave rise *in the first place* to all the dualisms on which modern science is based. *Theology is the root of unproductive thinking*.

Reflection has its roots in Christianity; nowhere does Schelling make this clearer than in the opening to *Über das Verhältnis der Naturphilosophie zur Philosophie überhaupt*. He begins by calling attention to "the fundamental error that has lurked unchallenged at the base of almost all recent philosophical efforts" and goes on to make two further claims: first, that "the error is in a certain way the focal point of our whole modern culture" and, second, that Christianity is its origin (*SW* 5:108-9; 1985 368). When Descartes opposed mind and body, he was merely bringing "to conscious and scientific expression… the dichotomy that had long been present" – he was making explicit a Christian problem. Indeed, Schelling continues, "It can be shown that all the more recent innovations in philosophy … are just different forms of a single opposition, thus far unsurmounted and indeed insurmountable by our culture." (116-7; 373-4) Christian oppositional thinking defines how we philosophise

and theologise. Schelling makes the same point with Hegel in the *Einleitung* to the *Kritische Journal*:

> The Cartesian philosophy expounded in philosophical form the universally comprehensive dualism in the culture of the recent history of our north-westerly world – a *dualism* of which both the quiet transformation of the public life of men after the decline of all ancient life, and the noisy political and religious revolutions are equally just different-coloured outward manifestations… All the sciences have been founded upon this death. (*SW* 5:15-6; Hegel and Schelling 1985 284)

Only once the source of all modern failures in thinking has been identified can the healing process begin; moreover, it follows naturally that this healing process must first and foremost be a matter of renovating this source – reforming theological thinking. Hence, the possibility of a future symbolic science which employs symbolic language requires the reformation of theology.

11.3 An Absolute Theology

Thought's most pressing task is therefore the reformation of theology. And the rest of this chapter – indeed the rest of this thesis – is devoted to outlining Schelling's response to it. What, I ask, must thought do to establish indifference between the finite and the infinite, and so become maximally poietic? How does science overcome its Christian inheritance to become symbolic? Only once this task has been achieved will science in general and theology in particular manifest God properly.

11.3.1 Symbolic Practices

It is a question therefore of (what I dub) *symbolic practices* – practices of thought which potentiate science. My focus in the rest of the chapter is on these symbolic practices which Schelling believes will intensify the productivity of thought in modernity. Through them, Schelling hopes to transform all discourse, including theology, into a symbol.

This is another way of talking about the process of *Bildung* I outlined at the end of Chapter Six: "the gradual intensification of all forms" (*SW* 5:147; 2008 285) is the aim of all being – a cultivation of the third potency until it predominates. This "striving of the individual after absolute being" (Troxler 1988 36) is the Schellingian version of the *imitatio Dei* where, rather than imitating or in any way approximating to a pre-existing deity, *Bildung* is concerned with the production of the divine.[23] Symbolic practices repeat this process of *Bildung* within the domain of science; they designate the means by which science cultivates its own idea until it becomes symbolic. Provisionally, in the present section, I provide some initial examples of the symbolic practices Schelling recommends. In the next chapter, I turn far more specifically to how Schelling intends to make *theological language* symbolic.

(a) Art

Artistic creation is a crucial example for Schelling of how to intensify *Darstellungen*. Art is not a contemplative or passive mode of knowing reality, it is an action which produces reality. It is thus for Schelling the highest indifference of knowing and action or necessity and freedom – the phenomenon in the ideal world in

[23] See *SW* 6:561-2, Bär 1999 168.

which the third potency predominates.[24] Art is an ideal symbol, and in consequence is a helpful aid in becoming symbolic: it is one strategy that increases productivity. Schelling writes,

> In art the mystery of creation becomes objective, and art is for this reason absolutely creative or productive. For the absolute in-formation, which becomes objective in the production of art, is the source of all, and the production of art is thus a symbol of divine production. (Robinson 1976 158)[25]

This is also why Schelling defines artistic genius as "the immediately productive element or force of the work of art" (*SW* 5:459-60; 1989 83) – in other words, the genius is he in whom indifference is total, and so, Schelling puts it bluntly, "The poet himself… becomes a god and the most perfect image of divine nature." (652; 216) A genius produces the absolute to the maximum extent; he is poietic.[26]

(b) Church

Another strategy Schelling recommends as a symbolic practice is joining a church. That is, through participating in a community ("truly public action" (5:736; 1989 280)) the symbolic intensity of thought is also strengthened. The church is privileged by Schelling in this way because he sees it as the only 'live' social body in modernity that exhibits the requisite organic wholeness or heautonomy for 'group symbolism': "The body of the church is constructed as an open, infinite unity which gathers all men into a spiritual unity." (Maesschalck 1989 109) In Schelling's own words, it is "a kind of spiritual drama in which each member ha[s] a part." (5:434;

[24] See *SW* 6:569-74.
[25] See also *SW* 5:631-2; 1989 202.
[26] Genius is "the indwelling element of divinity in human beings. It is, so to speak, a piece of the absoluteness of God. Each artist can thus produce only as much as is united or allied with the eternal concept of his own essence in God." (460; 84)

1989 65) Just as in an organism, here too there is a reciprocity of causation between the parts which does away with the need for a transcendent *archē*. The church forms a heautonomous symbol and, as such, increases the poiesis of its members. Schelling sees this ecclesiastical potential particularly within the Catholic Church. He claims, "The true church is necessarily Catholic" (Robinson 1976 164), and it alone exhibits the heautonomy and syntheticism of a symbolic phenomenon (*SW* 5:435; 1989 67). He concludes, "Only the church itself is symbolic in Christianity" (436; 68).[27] In other words, the third potency predominates in the church, so that participating in it is another aid in the pursuit of symbolic thought.

(c) *Naturphilosophie*

Schelling also recommends *Naturphilosophie* as a symbolic practice. This is because *Naturphilosophie*'s concern with nature (and the real in general) is the perfect antidote to the surplus of the ideal inherited from Christianity. Its tendency to the real is "quite the opposite of the tendency within Christianity." (*SW* 5:447-8; 1989 75-6) Schelling continues,

> One must not seek to force the realistic mythology of the Greeks onto Christian culture; one must rather, in quite the reverse fashion, seek to plant its idealistic deities into nature itself, just as the Greeks place their realistic gods into history. This seems to me to be the final destiny of all modern poesy… Neither do I hide my conviction that in *Naturphilosophie*, as it has developed from the idealistic principle, the first, distant foundation has been laid for that future symbolism and mythology that will be created not by an individual but rather by the entire age. It is not *we* who want to give the idealist culture its gods through *physics*. We rather await its gods, gods for

[27] See also 434; 65 – 455; 81.

> which we are already holding the symbols, ready perhaps even before they have developed in the culture itself independently from physics. (448-9; 76)

Naturphilosophie brings thought back down to earth, grounding history in nature, cultivating the real so that it is once more able to enter into a relation of indifference with the ideal. *Naturphilosophie* leads to the rebalancing of the first two potencies.[28] Again, therefore, *Naturphilosophie* is a key way to cultivate the third potency in thought – it is another symbolic practice.[29]

Naturphilosophie, the church and artistic creation are three key elements in the thinker's armoury for the reformation of Christian theology and the recreation of indifference. Only through such symbolic practices can discourse become symbolic. These are not the only three possible symbolic practices of course, nor is the above a full account of their potential; however, the preceding is meant as an introduction to Schelling's response to the problem of the surplus of the ideal in Christian modernity.

11.3.2 "The Gospel of the Absolute"

Through symbolic practices, Christian theology can be renovated: the ideal can enter into indifference with the real; discourse can thus become maximally productive of God. In short, theology can become symbolic. Philosophy, Schelling writes (although what he writes should be extended to all science),

> with its truly speculative standpoint, has restored the true meaning of religion, has done away with empiricism and the latter's natural ally, naturalism, and thereby paved the way for a rebirth of esoteric Christianity and the Gospel of the absolute. (*SW* 5:305; 1966 102)

[28] This is the motive behind Schelling's notorious call for the development of a new mythology through *Naturphilosophie* – a call often repeated within the *Identitätssystem* (as well as outside of this period).
[29] See Marquet 1965, Dietzsch 1975 398.

'The Gospel of the absolute' designates the era in which thought has become symbolic.

However, Schelling's texts remain extremely ambiguous (in a manner reminiscent of Hegel's philosophy) on the question of whether this 'Gospel of the absolute' still deserves the name Christianity – that is, he remains seemingly undecided whether Christianity is irremediably tethered to the second potency or whether there are forms of Christianity which can indeed be symbolic. Thus, on the one hand, Schelling speaks of an 'esoteric' core of Christian thought that needs to be renewed (as above), but, on the other hand, he does also call Christianity "a transition" (*SW* 5:448; 1989 76).[30] This ambivalence is summed up in the following quotation which speaks of a 'new religion' which is simultaneously the 'fulfilment' of Christianity:

> Whether the present moment in time, which has become such a remarkable turning point for everything shaped by time, and for the sciences and the works of man, will not also be a turning point for religion; and whether the time of the true gospel of the reconciliation of the world with God is drawing near to the stage where the temporal and merely outward forms of Christianity disintegrate and disappear – this is a question that must be left for each and everyone who understands the signs of the future, to answer for himself. The new religion, which already announces itself in revelations to single individuals, is a return to the first mystery of Christianity and a fulfilment of it. It will be discerned in the rebirth of nature as the symbol of eternal unity. The first reconciliation and resolution of the age old discord must be celebrated in the philosophy whose sense and significance is only

[30] See also *SW* 5:120; 1985 376 – *SW* 5:456; 1989 82 – Robinson 1976 165.

> grasped by those who recognise in it the life of the divinity newly arisen from the dead. (5:120; 1985 376-7)

Whether what is to come is Christian or not, however, the import of Schelling's comments is clear: we are on the cusp of a new type of thinking and so a new religious experience. The *Identitätssystem* is a programme for a revolution in thinking which will overcome the reflexive, unpoietic nature of our theological inheritance, so as to attain a new symbolic form of discourse through which God will be manifest to the maximum possible extent.

* *

Through symbolic practices, science can become symbolic; yet – as I have insisted again and again in this thesis – a necessary condition of this becoming symbolic of science is the *becoming symbolic of language*. Only if language too becomes symbolic can science obtain symbolic status. Therefore, the whole programme of the *Identitätssystem* and the fate of Schelling's 'Gospel of the absolute' ultimately rests on the elimination of any residual referentiality in language.

What is more, as Schelling indicates in §73 of the *PdK*, language is the paradigmatic symbol. Nothing can be as symbolic as language; therefore nothing is better placed to combat the surplus of the ideal in Christianity and return thought to a state of equilibrium. Language is the sensualisation of ideal meaning: by embodying the ideal in sounds and graphic marks, the ideal is brought into the real without thereby losing any of its ideality (I discussed this at length in the previous chapter). Indifference is the result. Language is therefore well-placed to combat Christian theology's excess of the ideal – and, as the only symbolic phenomenon to fully

indifferentiate real and ideal, it is the only form which is quite so well-placed for this task.

What is more, this is ultimately an implicit polemic against the apophatic currents of Christian thought. Apophaticism, crudely put, is an admission that God as an infinite object exceeds language. Theology's preference for the apophatic has, on Schelling's terms, consigned it to the second potency, and in consequence this has been extremely detrimental to its capacity to generate God. Apophaticism obstructs theological poiesis by failing to use language as a means of bringing the ideal into the real. Such tendencies have made Christianity more reflective. Schelling insists, on the contrary, that theology cannot give up on language, for only by *articulating* its truths and insights can it combat its own propensity to the ideal, and so approach indifference. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, entities only become genuinely real for Schelling by being named – and this is also true of theological entities. All science, especially theology, must cultivate language, not renounce it.

How though, the question remains, do theologians so cultivate language; how do they intensify their speech until it finally obtains symbolic status? This is a question I have yet to answer, and it is to this question in particular I turn in the final chapter. So far I have sketched three general strategies for the potentiation of theological thought; what I describe in the final chapter is a more specific symbolic practice for the potentiation of theological language.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE BECOMING ABSOLUTE OF THEOLOGY

The previous chapter's invocation of an absolute theology may have felt like the climax to my argument. With this concept, theology and the Schellingian symbol merge. Absolute theology is theology that has become symbolic – it exhibits God in the most productive possible way. In other words, theology's form here approximates to formal identity, so that essential identity is thereby generated intensely. Moreover, this is partly because absolute theology employs symbolic language: this ensures the symbolic nature of its form. Absolute theology becomes symbolic through its use of symbolic language.

However, my thesis does not end with this invocation of absolute theology, because on its own this concept remains rather removed from concrete theological practice. In this chapter therefore, I delve further into the nuts and bolts of how absolute theology can actually be attained. That is, I answer the question: how does theology become absolute? Moreover, I answer it by returning once more to §73 of the *PdK*, for I contend that enacted in the very text of this section is one way in which theological concepts and vocabularies are made absolute.

In the previous chapter, I considered three preliminary symbolic practices Schelling recommends to aid the becoming absolute of theology: art, church and *Naturphilosophie*. Taken in isolation, however, these practices too appear disengaged from actual theological practice. Thus, they are in need of supplementation, and so in this chapter I concentrate on one more symbolic practice advocated by Schelling that returns us to the concrete production of theological texts. My focus, unsurprisingly, is on theological language and one specific means by which it can become symbolic,

according to Schelling. In short, he recommends the eclectic appropriation of forms as materials for the expression of God. Absolute theology can only be established, he contends, once theological terms and concepts are no longer conceived as normative constraints on thinking, but as one more set of tools for constructing a system that is productive of God to the maximum possible extent.

This chapter is therefore a case study of §73 of the *PdK*, focusing in particular on what we here discover about Schelling's own scientific practice and his deployment of theological tropes. It is sometimes claimed that in §73 Schelling uses theology in a sustained manner for the first time. Even if this is only partially true, it still means that §73 is a privileged site on which to see the becoming absolute of theology played out. On the basis of this case study, I draw some further conclusions concerning the role of theology in Schelling's *Identitätssystem* with particular reference to Schelling's idea of the interrelation of the faculties in *Über die Methode*. Finally, I return once more to the Schellingian practice of speculative transformation which has permeated so much of my discussion.

12.1 The Introduction of Theology in §73

In Chapter Ten, I discussed Schelling's insistence in §73 of the *PdK* that language and reason are identical. This identity of reason and language is a central tenet for the *Logosmystiker*, especially Hamann – as I explored in Chapter Three. What is more, following this initial identification, Schelling goes on to present views that are even more obviously drawn from acquaintance with this theological tradition. He writes,

> In most philosophical and religious systems, particularly those of the Orient, the eternal and absolute act of self-affirmation in God – his eternal act of creating – is designated as the *speaking* word of God, the *logos*, which is simultaneously God himself. One views the word or speaking of God as the outflow of the divine science, as the creating, multifarious, and yet congruous harmony of the divine act of creation. (*SW* 5:483; 1989 100)

He then goes on to interrogate the formative arts (music, sculpture and painting) on the basis of this claim, concluding (in a manner that the actual discussions of these art forms would not have prepared one for),

> Just as knowledge still grasps itself symbolically in language, so also does the divine knowledge apprehend itself symbolically in the world such that also the *whole* of that real world is itself a primal act of speaking. Yet, the *real* world is no longer the living word, the speech of God himself, but rather only the spoken – or expended – word. In this way, the formative arts are only the dead word, and yet nonetheless *word*, the act of speaking. (483-4; 100-1)

The *Identitätssystem* is here reinterpreted into traditional theological terms. The self-affirmation of the absolute is God's speech-act; the construction of matter is the hearing of God's spoken word; reason's pre-eminence is due to its status as Logos. Schelling openly deploys concepts from theological traditions as a means to understand the workings of symbolic language. Therefore, in order to grasp the full significance of §73 one must not only consider Schelling's actual construction of symbolic language, but also his *use of theology* to do so.

Central to these passages is the idea of the Logos in its triple signification as divine revelation, human reason and language. God's creation and revelation are 'primal acts of speaking'; in consequence, the entirety of the real world (especially music, painting, sculpture and the matter out of which they are constructed) needs to

be interpreted linguistically. Matter – as the product of the divine speech-act of revelation – is the spoken word of God; it is a form of divine language. Further, it is precisely on the basis of this move that Schelling is able to bestow priority on the verbal arts over the formative arts. This is because, while nature has become reified so that it is extremely difficult to recover its linguistic origins, products of human language remain patently characterised by such origins. Nature has concealed the Logos behind a dead surface of meaningless being, whereas human language and the verbal arts still persist *as* language and so perpetuate the divine speech-act more effectively. In Schelling's terms, matter is the 'spoken' word of God, while language is the 'speaking' word.

The foregoing should sound remarkably similar to my presentation of themes from the *Logosmystik* tradition in Chapter Three. Reason is language, creation is language, nature is congealed language – an isomorphism is set up here in Schelling's work (just as it is in the writings of Hamann and Böhme) between human language, nature and the divine. They must all be viewed through the same linguistic lens. Logos is the ultimate paradigm for reality.

* *

In 1928, Heinrich Knittermeyer proposed that §73 of the *PdK* (and the above passages in particular) marked a decisive and irrevocable shift in Schelling's philosophical development. No longer is nature the basis of Schellingian philosophy, it is now language:

> In [his] reference to the 'speaking Word of God' – the divine Logos – a blow is struck to the disinterestedness of Schelling's philosophy. Here the

> absoluteness of the word is openly victorious over the absoluteness of matter. *Philosophie und Religion*, the piece which soon followed, adopts this idea to develop a new viewpoint. (1928 346-7)

According to Knittermeyer, §73 announces Schelling's (as yet unconscious) intentions of moving from *Naturphilosophie* to a philosophy of mythology and revelation. The trajectory of Schelling's philosophy is here played out in miniature. Moreover, Knittermeyer goes on to conjecture, theological ideas drawn from the *Logosmystik* tradition are what bring about this epochal shift. The influence of Böhme, Hamann and even Eckhardt first becomes perceptible at this moment in Schelling's writings, and these ideas precipitate a transition away from a paradigm of natural science towards images drawn from mystic strands in Christian theology. In short, Logos rather than organism now becomes the privileged descriptive tool in Schelling's philosophy.[1]

There is much that is problematic in Knittermeyer's understanding of Schelling's development. The idea that while writing the *PdK* between 1802 and 1804 Schelling's interest in *Naturphilosophie* waned is patently false – some of Schelling's most significant writings on *Naturphilosophie* date from 1806. However, in general, Knittermeyer's contention that §73 reveals many of Schelling's theological interests openly for the first time is still plausible.[2] Some of the images used in §73 (especially nature as the spoken word of God and reason as Logos) do indeed, as I have just suggested, seem to be drawn from the *Logosmystik* tradition far more directly than anything present in Schelling's earlier writings. §73 does mark a moment at which Schelling seems much happier to openly deploy theological language. It is for this reason Bär insists,

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[1] See Henningfeld 1984 21 for further discussion.
[2] For example, more generally, the *PdK* is the first of Schelling's works to consistently use the term 'God' as a name for reality.

> Schelling can be seen as the most prominent proponent of *Logosmystik* discourse in early romantic reflection on language. At the centre of his philosophical consideration of language stands the creative Word of God, known in exactly the same way as all Baroque theorists of language and in particular Böhme. (1999 144-5)[3]

He concludes, "Schelling places himself in a line passing through Böhme and Hamann… a long and influential German tradition… of *Logosmystik*." (158)[4]

* *

We must be wary of taking this line of thought too far. I argued in Chapter Nine that Schelling's construction of symbolic language in §73 is not an unexpected development, but *necessitated* by the claims of the *Identitätssystem* as a whole. Schelling *needs* to construct a theory of symbolic language for his philosophy to have any claim to be *rational* and *symbolic* whatsoever. To this extent, §73 of the *PdK* does not point to the future, but is an integral part of the project Schelling had been outlining since 1801. One of the purposes of the first half of this thesis, in which I contextualised Schellingian symbolic language first in terms of the debates of his time and then in terms of his *Identitätssystem*, was to argue that §73 of the *PdK* does not come out of nowhere: its conclusions and details are both responses to debates around the symbol in the 1790s and also products of the specific and unique metaphysical and epistemological claims he makes from the 1801 *Darstellung* onwards. What Schelling says in §73 is no departure from the norm, but exactly the conclusions we would expect from a philosopher intent on rigorously thinking through his philosophical

[3] See also Coseriu 1977 1.
[4] This is not to say, it must be emphasised, that there is anything in the text which conclusively proves Schelling had read Böhme (or any other *Logosmystiker*) first-hand before 1805.

presuppositions in the realm of linguistics. It is merely *how he says it* which is new and unexpected.

Therefore, while the imagery may have altered, the fundamental thought-structures are the same. §73 of the *PdK* does *not in any way* mark the end, disintegration or deconstruction of the *Identitätssystem*; rather, it marks the *culmination* of the *Identitätssystem*. The theology employed in the section does not undermine the fundamental tenets of the *Identitätssystem*; it articulates them in a slightly different vocabulary. Schelling uses theological imagery as an aid to clarify and strengthen his stable, systematic position. It is for these very reasons that I am interested in these passages here: their theological form, embedded as they are in the context of the *Identitätssystem*, is a particularly significant way-in to Schelling's views on the practice of theology.

The question therefore arises: why does Schelling resort to this surprising vocabulary? To repeat, the decision seems to have nothing to do with the content (or essence) of his conclusions, but merely the style (or form) in which they are articulated. This implies that the interplay between the essence of the *Identitätssystem* and the theological form it temporarily assumes aids Schelling's thought. In short, theological forms are employed to intensify the claims of the *Identitätssystem* – the rest of this chapter is devoted to unpacking and making plausible such a contention.

12.2 The Question of Form

Initially, it is important to indicate the extent to which this interplay between the form and essence *of* the *Identitätssystem* is commensurate with Schelling's elucidation of the form/essence distinction *in* the *Identitätssystem*.

Schelling is a monist with regard to essence. There is one essence to all of reality, and this essence is identity. In consequence, all sciences have *essentially* the same subject matter – identity. All language (theological, philosophical, mathematical or poetic) talks about the same thing – essential identity. Schelling exclaims, "What do I boast of? – [Of having] proclaimed… the potential sameness of all knowledge no matter of what topic." (*SW* 7:143-4; 1984b 246) All future scientific endeavour must be intent on one thing alone – repeating the same essence over and over. Scientific progress does not therefore consist in what is said, but *how* it is said. In other words, it is a question of form, not essence.[5] The *form of science* becomes the crucial issue: if all science has the same essence, what matters is the intensity with which this essence is produced, and this, as I have emphasised repeatedly in this thesis, is a question of form. The production of essence is directly and solely dependent on the nature of the form in which it is produced. Essence is a product of form.

The Schellingian ideal is a maximally poietic science, a science which produces essential identity with the maximum possible intensity. And poiesis is conditioned by form. For Schelling, form decides the fate of science.[6] Therefore, what is needed is "the gradual intensification of all forms" (*SW* 5:147; 2008 285) – a

[5] "Philosophy can only ever be one and the same, as there is only one truth which is not produced by the individual but only developed by him. Of course, it can appear in different arrangements and forms. The business of philosophy is therefore not to generate truth." (Troxler 1988 28) See further Brito 2000 61. Schelling's first ever publication was entitled, *Über die Möglichkeit einer Form der Philosophie überhaupt*.

[6] See *SW* 7:142-3; 1984b 245-6 – *SW* 5:241; 1966 34.

process of *Bildung* by which form becomes increasingly productive of essential identity. Moreover, the criterion for such maximally poietic form is indifference (or formal identity). The more scientific discourse manifests indifference – both in terms of the number of indifferences it manifests and the intensity with which it manifests them – the more it is poietic. The task facing science is therefore to intensify its form, to manifest indifference more patently.

* *

The above general model applies self-reflexively to the *Identitätssystem*. The force of Schelling's argument means that the *Identitätssystem* says nothing new and does not even try to. It merely repeats the same essence as all other philosophies. This notion of the fundamental sameness of all philosophy is one of the reasons that Schelling is led to speak of the one true system of philosophy (*SW* 4:352), as well as to appeal to a perennial philosophy recurring through all of Western history from Pythagoras through to Fichte (400-1). In essence, all philosophy is the same. It is when it comes to *form* that the *Identitätssystem* is to be distinguished from all previous attempts at producing essential identity. And this is not only because Schelling realises the importance of the intensity of all forms while formulating the *Identitätssystem*, but also more importantly because Schelling believes he has discovered the methodological practice needed to intensify all forms to the maximum possible extent.

I will take each of these points in turn. First, the *Identitätssystem* is self-consciously constructed around this insight into the centrality of form to the philosophical endeavour. Style, vocabulary, structure and even grammar stand at the

heart of the *Identitätssystem*'s precedence over all previous attempts at philosophy. Form, Schelling tells us again and again, is what matters.[7] This point has been seriously neglected in the scholarship, yet it is ultimately the reason why Schelling experiments with the dialogue form and with the *more geometricus*; it is the reason why he adopts Spinozist vocabulary, then Platonic vocabulary, then theological vocabulary; it is the reason why he draws the magnetic line or talks in mathematical formulae. All these experiments in form – and I will return to them in more detail in what follows – are attempts to articulate essential identity as intensely as possible. They are all trials in philosophical *Bildung*. In short, the *Identitätssystem* speaks so clearly and persistently of identity precisely because Schelling tries in a creative and sustained manner to form identity most intensely.

Second, all these various experiments in form which stand at the heart of the *Identitätssystem* are variations on one fundamental practice which Schelling thinks will make his system *the most* poietic possible. This one practice is another symbolic practice, one more way to cultivate indifference and so produce the absolute to the maximum possible extent. For this particular symbolic practice, all previous scientific discourse is reduced to the status of *materials* that can be appropriated to aid the production of identity. This is, I contend, something like what Schelling means when he writes to Fichte, "I have been able to make use of idealism as a tool." (*SB* 2:351; Fichte and Schelling 1997 87) Idealism (and in particular the ways in which idealism is articulated in the *Wissenschaftslehre*) is a 'tool' Schelling picks up to help him in his project of intensifying the form of his system as much as possible, so that it can ultimately become maximally poietic. I designate this practice, 'absolute eclecticism' – that is, the magpie-like appropriation of individual concepts and styles from various

[7] See, for example, *SB* 2:326; Fichte and Schelling 1997 80.

scientific discourses for the sake of producing the absolute. Schelling takes 'the best bits' from the rest of science to make his system the best.

12.3 *Über die Methode*: The Equality of the Sciences

At the moment, some of the above (especially my appeal to absolute eclecticism) may appear somewhat conjectural. It is the task of the next two sections to flesh out this symbolic practice concretely through Schelling's texts. In the next section, I will give a number of examples of 'absolute eclecticism' in practice, but in the present section I examine in detail the text in which Schelling lays out the theoretical basis of absolute eclecticism – *Über die Methode*.

At the heart of *Über die Methode* stands the claim,

> As for philosophy, I maintain that there is no such faculty, nor can there be, for that which is all things cannot for that very reason be anything in particular. It is philosophy itself which becomes objective in the three positive sciences [theology, *Naturphilosophie* and history], but it does not become objective in its totality in any single one of them. (*SW* 5:284; 1966 79)

Courtine glosses this passage thus,

> There is no faculty of philosophy; philosophy is not a part of the general organism of knowledge or an element in the institution of the university, it is the soul of all, the life or spirit which gives to the body of sciences precisely its organic status. (1990 144)

Philosophy, Schelling claims, is not a typical discipline; it is not a discourse which articulates objectively the one essence of all reality. Instead, it plays the role of 'the

life or spirit' of such discourse – essential identity itself in its purity prior to becoming objective. "Only philosophy accedes to the essential self-sameness of absolute identity." (Courtine 1990 134) For this reason, philosophy acts as the glue which unifies all other disciplines ("the sciences are one in and through philosophy" (*SW* 5:261; 1966 56)) – that is, philosophy here designates essential identity, the subject matter of all thought. Every discipline is ultimately concerned with essential identity or philosophy, so philosophy names that which unifies all elements of the university.

Every discourse therefore tries to repeat philosophy, so as to articulate the absolute (or identity or indifference or God) maximally. Yet, Schelling is equally clear no one academic discipline on its own can achieve this.[8] What is thus required is that all disciplines cooperate with one another, entering into a larger organic whole, called 'the university'. The university is Schelling's name for the assembling of the sciences for the sake of the production of identity. No one science achieves this; only together as the whole or universe of knowledge does scientific discourse come close. It is only as an assemblage of all possible forms of scientific discourse (where each science is an equal part in one organism) that identity – or what Schelling here calls philosophy – is maximally produced.

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However, Schelling's identification of philosophy and essential identity in *Über die Methode* is extremely problematic for a number of reasons. First, as we have seen repeatedly in this thesis, there is no such thing as 'pure' essential identity 'uncontaminated' by form. It does not exist. Essence is only produced *in form*; it does

[8] Philosophy "does not become objective in its totality in any single one [science]." (283; 79) See also Courtine 1990 144.

not pre-exist form. Thus, Schelling's characterisation of philosophy as 'pure' essential identity that does not become objective falsifies many of the principles of the *Identitätssystem*. Second, this identification of philosophy and essential identity gainsays much of what Schelling writes elsewhere concerning the nature of philosophy. Elsewhere Schelling is not shy of asserting the discursiveness of philosophy: philosophy uses language and so articulates essence *in a determinate form*. Everything is formed and philosophy is no exception. There are forms of philosophy, just as there are theological forms and mathematical forms – and the thinker can make use of any or all of these forms to produce the absolute maximally.

Schelling insists most forcefully on the ineluctability of formation even in philosophy at the close of *Bruno*. The character Bruno ends his exposition of the Schellingian philosophy with the following comment,

> I have always sketched for you the figure of the one sole object of philosophy. How to proceed to build from these foundations, how to bring the sacred seed of philosophy to its fullest flower, how to cast such a doctrine into a form appropriate to it – you may pursue these questions on your own. (*SW* 4:307; 1984a 203)

However, this is immediately deemed insufficient by the other participants: the philosopher is not somehow able to elucidate the 'one sole' essence of reality prior to and independent of form. 'How to cast such a doctrine into a form appropriate to it' is not a superfluous question that can be dealt with once the real, serious business of philosophy has been completed. On the contrary, this 'serious business' (the articulation of essence) is immediately and entirely *dependent on* the form in which it is couched. The intensity with which the essence is produced depends on form. Form is prior. For such reasons, Anselm (as convenor of the dialogue) immediately rebukes Bruno for his oversight:

> But, my good man, it seems to me that we very much have to trouble ourselves about the detail of the forms of philosophy. For philosophy is not simply the endeavour to understand the supreme reality by means of universals alone; it attempts to portray this reality in strong, enduring lines, and with unwavering steadiness and lucidity, the way nature does. This is what elevates art to the status of art, and science to that of science… As long as it lacks enduring form and shape, it will not escape corruption. And though perhaps the least perfect forms have perished and the noble matter once bound to them has been set free, that matter must still be alloyed… for philosophy is forever challenged to assume more enduring and less changeable shapes. (307-8; 203)

Anselm continues,

> The grand and true forms of philosophy have disappeared, more or less. Philosophy's subject matter is by nature perfectly simple and indivisible, and only to the extent that a given form of philosophy embodies this simplicity will its contents be true and correct. (309; 205)

Much could (and should!) be written about this remarkable passage, but ultimately Anselm's correction is simple: formation is the first and most important task for philosophy, since the better the form, the more intense the essence. Truth, Anselm goes so far as to claim, is dependent on *the form of* philosophy.

Each of the four participants in the dialogue then draws on the history of philosophy to elucidate such a philosophical form and I will make some comments about these further discussions in the next section. For now, what is important is Schelling's insistence on the ineluctable formation of philosophy in *Bruno*. Schelling here contradicts his problematic characterisation of philosophy in *Über die Methode*: philosophy is one more scientific discourse among others, attempting to articulate identity. In this respect at least, philosophy is not special.

* *

Philosophy does *not* therefore hold some privileged position which allows it to avoid objectivity and express identity perfectly and purely. Despite Schelling's claims in *Über die Methode*, this is not at all the position of the *Identitätssystem* as a whole. On the contrary, philosophy is completely equal to theology, mathematics and the natural sciences as one more way essential identity can be potentiated through form. In short, Schelling's position in *Über die Methode should be*: there is no faculty of identity, and all the faculties there are (theology, history, the natural sciences *and* philosophy) produce identity as intensely as possible through the mediation of their own specific forms.

This indicates the distance separating Schelling from Hegel: for Hegel, the philosophical *Begriff* is capable of pure articulation of the absolute without ultimately needing to draw on the various languages of *Vorstellung* employed by the other sciences. Philosophy exists on a higher plane and enjoys a superior medium – the *spekulative Satz*. It *breaks* with the *Vorstellungen* in which other sciences remain entrapped. From a Schellingian point of view, however, there is a fundamental equality between all the sciences, including philosophy. Each takes place in determinate *Darstellungen* and each tries to produce identity through the resources provided by these *Darstellungen* to the best of their abilities. Of course, some disciplines may have more and better resources than others, but, Schelling insists, no single science working in isolation can be maximally poietic. Therefore, one *could* distinguish the two in the following manner: for the Hegelian, philosophical language expresses reality *purely*; for the Schellingian, all scientific languages (including philosophy) do so *impurely*. However, if one did so distinguish, one would have to be

very careful about the resonance of the term 'impure'. Schelling certainly does not conceive of this as a deficiency. The spectre of apophaticism hovers close at this point. Even to speak (as I have been speaking) of the different sciences all trying to articulate identity is dangerous. And the danger of all this is *representation* – envisioning essential identity as something which pre-exists science and towards which science strives. The danger is suggesting that somehow each science *inadequately* captures identity or that all science is doomed to vainly hint at something that exists above and beyond it. All this would falsify the *Identitätssystem* – there is no failure in the Schellingian cosmos, because there is no representation.

To repeat, essence does *not* pre-exist form; form *produces* essence. So, the impurity of scientific discourse does not subtract from a benchmark of identity; it produces that identity in the first place. All forms potentiate identity – and some do it better than others. The task of the thinker is to locate the most productive aspects of each science and assemble them into a system; the result is a system of identity, an *Identitätssystem*.[9] All sciences are equal, and thus in principle there is no reason to prefer one science to another. Instead therefore of an unfounded total commitment to one science practised in isolation, the impartial thinker should cultivate an even-handed indifference to all science, so as to bring potentially productive elements together into a systematic whole that is maximally poietic. This is the symbolic practice of absolute eclecticism invoked in the previous section: a magpie-like picking and choosing of the best bits from all science. The thinker must choose anything and everything that will intensify his form of discourse and so potentiate identity. *Bildung* occurs through plundering forms.

[9] Rather than (it should be added) an '*Identitätsphilosophie*', a name which incorrectly privileges philosophy as the paradigmatic discipline for the production of identity.

In consequence, 'impurity' becomes the very ideal of science, and the *Identitätssystem* in particular is built on the virtue of impurity. The impure science is one unconcerned with borders and barriers between fields, but which plunders every science *equally* in order to intensify its poiesis. This is genuine interdisciplinarity, treating all disciplines *equally* as the *material* out of which one constructs a symbol.

12.4 The True Significance of Speculative Transformation

This is, moreover, precisely the meaning and role of the notion of 'speculative transformation' which I have invoked throughout the thesis. We have seen how Schelling appropriates material from aesthetics for the sake of a metaphysics of art. Concepts, vocabularies and styles of thinking are plundered in aid of the production of identity in the domain of philosophy of art. The symbol itself is of course the paradigmatic example here: Schelling takes this concept from Kant, Goethe and A.W. Schlegel, but in so borrowing it, he alters it (as we have seen, Schelling's second order interpretation of the symbol is unique). He redeploys it so as to articulate the basic principles of the *Identitätssystem* more effectively. The symbol is imported into the armoury of the *Identitätssystem* as a term whose potential productivity in the right context is immense.

This kind of speculative transformation in the name of an absolute eclecticism is to be found throughout the *Identitätssystem*. A similar story can be told about mythology, about the magnetic line which appears in the 1801 *Darstellung*, the mathematical terminology of the potencies, even the tropes of reflection and refraction. Speculative transformation is the ultimate symbolic practice for Schelling:

it permeates, as we have seen, his whole philosophy. Mythology, physics, theology, mathematics and the history of philosophy are all languages which together *make* the absolute to the utmost extent. Systematic form takes shape through the speculative transformation of the forms of all sciences.

Schelling's distance from Hegel is again illuminating, since Hegel too subscribes to a philosophical practice which could be dubbed 'speculative transformation'. For the Hegelian, there is a qualitative *break* between philosophical form and the forms of the other sciences – the break between *Vorstellung* and *spekulative Satz*. The forms of the other sciences are *sublated* and *translated* into philosophy. From the Schellingian viewpoint, however, philosophy does not break with the other sciences: all sciences are equal because they are all forms of *Darstellung*. As one would expect, there are no qualitative distinctions here, just quantitative differences in intensity. Every science produces the absolute to a certain intensity through *Darstellungen*. Thus, the system does *not* sublate or translate the forms of other sciences, it *redeploys* them, *intensifies* them and *potentiates* them.

* *

At this point I want to hone in on the philosophy/theology relation in particular, for these are the two sciences most deployed in the *Identitätssystem*. Both are *equally* legitimate material for the production of identity, and it is this equality which characterises the relation between philosophy and theology more than anything else. The builder of a system of identity must select his materials from all and any of the sciences, independently of any unjustified prejudice for either philosophy or theology. It has of course to be admitted that Schelling chooses philosophy more often

than theology; however, there is no a priori reason why this is the case (it is just that Schelling found the theology of his day in a far worse state than philosophy, which had at least undergone a Copernican revolution). What matters is the poietic potential of the form, whether that form is philosophical or theological. Anything from philosophy and anything from theology that can be assembled into a system which produces essential identity to the maximum possible extent should be.

I will draw this point out further using two illustrations: a speculative transformation of philosophy and then a speculative transformation of theology. As we shall see, in terms of structure and in terms of purpose the two procedures are identical.

At the end of *Bruno* (as I noted in the previous section), Anselm upbraids Bruno for neglecting the question of form, since philosophy's ability to express the absolute is entirely dependent on it. In order to remedy this fault, Anselm goes on to propose that each of the participants in the dialogue consider one set of concepts from the history of philosophy to test out their productivity. Alexander begins by experimenting with a materialist vocabulary, then Anselm does the same with a kind of Platonised Leibnizianism. Both of them are concerned with locating and selecting those aspects of materialism or intellectualism which are most conducive to poiesis. Schelling here acts out the process of absolute eclecticism, dramatising the task of the philosopher before our eyes. The philosopher must undergo an apprenticeship in the history of philosophy, rigorously probing the potential productivity of past systems for the sake of constructing a symbolic *Darstellung*. The philosopher must return to the history of his discipline to creatively appropriate what is of use to him.[10] Thus, Schelling begins the *Identitätssystem* in the 1801 *Darstellung* by assembling what he

[10] This apprenticeship also takes place in terms of contemporary thought: Schelling and Hegel's *Kritische Journal* sets itself the task of testing recent attempts at philosophy. See *SW* 5:3-7; Hegel and Schelling 1985 275-9.

has borrowed from Spinozist and Fichtean forms of thought, then during the subsequent years he adds concepts and styles borrowed from the Platonic corpus as well as many others. Some of these forms are very quickly dropped (such as the dialogue structure of *Bruno*), whilst others become embedded into the *Identitätssystem* (like the *Ideenlehre*) – they pass the test of productivity and are adopted as a part of the systematic form that produces identity.

A very similar speculative transformation can be discerned with respect to theology. I examined such a transformation at length at the beginning of the chapter: Schelling adopts the language of the *Logosmystiker* so as to articulate his construction of symbolic language more intensely. This is an experiment: Schelling toys with a theological terminology as a means to potentiate the form of the *Identitätssystem*. Not all of the concepts deployed in §73 of the *PdK* survive this test (the idea of reason as logos, for example, plays little role in Schelling's philosophy of the next few years); however, some do, and to this extent at least Schelling's experiment with *Logosmystik* is successful. These new forms aid Schelling in the production of essential identity. In §73 of the *PdK*, Schelling succeeds in articulating the identity at the heart of language more intensely due to his speculative transformation of *Logosmystik*.

Moreover, such a process of speculative transformation with respect to theology is visible more generally too. I have already noted the deployment of 'God' in a late phase of the *Identitätssystem* as a new name for the absolute, and once again it is fair to assume that 'God' is integrated into the system precisely because it intensifies the form of Schelling's philosophy.[11] Another significant example is the Trinity. In a post-Hegelian age, we are very accustomed to philosophical reinterpretations of the Trinity; however, Hegel was following in Schelling's

[11] The same is true of all the names considered at the beginning of Chapter Five.

footsteps, and (except for Lessing) Schelling was the first philosopher of the *Goethezeit* to exploit its speculative significance. In other words, Schelling sets a precedent in his *speculative transformation* of the Trinity; he puts it to work for the sake of identity. Thus in 1802, first in *Bruno* and then in the *Fernere Darstellungen*, trinitarian rhetoric becomes noticeable in Schelling's writings. Basically – and this should be no surprise – the *Potenzlehre* begins to be articulated as a Trinity.[12] Again, this is not some kind of 'theologisation' or 'theological turn' in Schelling's thought, but the deployment of theological forms *for the sake of identity*. Just like philosophy, theology is material to be deployed by the thinker in the construction of identity.

The following sentiment sums up the practice of speculative transformation clearly,

> Some forms are transient and perishable, and the forms in which the spirit of science is clothed are but the eternally different modes of the manifestation of genius forever renewing itself. In particular forms, however, there dwells a universal and absolute form of which the particular forms are but symbols, and [science] is the greater the more it succeeds in revealing this single universal form. (*SW* 5:241; 1966 34)

12.5 Absolute Eclecticism in the *Identitätssystem*

The practice of absolute eclecticism is therefore central to Schelling's thought between 1801 and 1804. Indeed, it provides some kind of answer to three outstanding, hermeneutical questions that I have posed concerning Schelling's *Identitätssystem* in this thesis, but am yet to satisfactorily answer. First, there is the problem set out at the

[12] See *SW* 4:390 – 423 – *SW* 4:252; 1984a 152 – 293; 190 – 328; 221.

end of the previous chapter concerning the becoming symbolic of language – what symbolic practice does Schelling recommend in order to cultivate the indifference of being and meaning necessary for maximally poietic language? Second, my contention that Schelling's interpretation of heautonomy is rationalistic remains underdeveloped – what do I (and Schelling) mean, for example, when I talk of the Schellingian organism as something constructed and not perceived? Finally, there is the problem raised at the end of Chapter Seven concerning how the philosopher can guarantee the absoluteness of his constructions – that is, what can a philosopher do or think to ensure his constructions are genuinely poietic of the absolute?

(a) The Becoming Symbolic of Language

In the previous chapter, I considered a number of symbolic practices which Schelling recommends as means of making science more productive, and so rescuing it from the tendency to reflection bequeathed by Christianity. Yet, none of these practices seemed particularly geared towards the *language* of science and how this could become symbolic – even though, as we have repeatedly seen, symbolic language is an absolutely necessary precondition of a maximally poietic science. Absolute eclecticism remedies this lack; it is a strategy specifically geared towards increasing the productivity of scientific language. The thinker who employs it is not concerned with maintaining the integrity of the vocabulary he appropriates and certainly not with retaining its specific reference; rather, he selects language from the sciences which has most potential for productivity – that is, which exhibits (or might exhibit in the right context) the indifference of being and meaning requisite for maximally poietic science. Absolute eclecticism is therefore a symbolic practice

aimed at the becoming symbolic of scientific language; it is a concrete means of potentiating one's language.

(b) Rationalist Heautonomy

The self-sufficient wholeness of the Schellingian symbol is not something to be perceived straight-off, but the result of a constructive process – such is the claim I have repeatedly made throughout this thesis, and we are now in a position to see why. The answer, in short, is symbolic practices. And this is because in recommending such practices, it is clear that Schelling does not think heautonomy is something that pre-exists ready-made in nature to be passively encountered by the subject; rather, heautonomy is *made*. Absolute eclecticism is a key example: only through a methodological strategy of the type outlined in this chapter can language be potentiated to the extent that it becomes symbolic (and thus heautonomous). Heautonomy is dependent on labour, on the practices of the thinker; it is rationally constructed, not empirically perceived.

(c) Guaranteeing the Absoluteness of Construction

At the end of Chapter Seven I asked how Schelling can be so sure that his (or any philosopher's) constructions can be absolute. That is, I wondered how he can be so certain that the 1801 *Darstellung*, for example, is not a schematic or allegorical *Darstellung*, but symbolic. What guarantees that philosophy is philosophy? This, as I then noted, is to pose the question of 'how to begin' so often asked of Schelling: how can the philosopher be so sure that he is beginning in the absolute? Once again, the short answer is symbolic practices. The philosopher is someone who has carried out and is in the process of carrying out symbolic practices. The philosopher practises

absolute eclecticism, and only through so doing is the absoluteness of his *Darstellungen* assured, for only through such practices does science become symbolic and so maximally poietic. Philosophy is *made* and it is made by symbolic practices. To speculatively appropriate the forms of other sciences is therefore one way to guarantee one's *Darstellungen* will be absolute.

Symbolic practices are to be found right at the heart of the *Identitätssystem*. Absolute eclecticism, in particular, not only illuminates the way in which Schelling practises philosophy, but also sheds light on the way he interprets the symbol and even the manner in which symbolic language should be constructed.

12.6 Absolute Theology as the Dissolution of Theology

What does this mean for theology? In conclusion, it is necessary to return to the overriding question of this chapter and of the thesis as a whole: what is the significance of symbolic practices, especially absolute eclecticism, for theology? How do they aid the becoming absolute of theology? The answer to these questions ultimately depends on how 'theology' is to be understood. For if theology is conceived as a stand-alone discipline with its own vocabularies, concepts and ways of thinking, then Schellingian absolute eclecticism in fact puts an end to theology (rather than making it absolute). If, however, theology is understood as discourse of whatever form that manifests God to the utmost, then absolute eclecticism is a key strategy in the becoming absolute of theology.

Thus, on the one hand, the symbolic practices I have considered at length in this chapter are aimed at destroying the integrity of all fields of thought, including

theology. Schelling advocates the dissolution of any boundaries isolating theology from other sciences. No science, theology included, can be maximally poietic *in isolation* – only as an assemblage of sciences, a democracy of thought or a university is the maximum production of essence possible.

This process could even be dubbed the *de*-absolutisation of theology. Theology must be taken down from its pedestal and transformed into one more tool for poietic practice. Indeed, Schelling insists on the urgency of this debasement, because (as I outlined in the previous chapter) theology's privileged position, determining all other disciplines, has actually been the defining problem of modern thought – Christian reflection has thoroughly infected all the other sciences owing to its superiority. Only therefore by cutting theology down to size can all science, including theology itself, increase its productivity: theology's reformation is dependent on its simultaneous debasement. This is one answer to the question of the theological significance of symbolic practices.

However, on the other hand, if theology is defined formally as any discourse productive of the divine[13], then it is only through symbolic practices (such as absolute eclecticism) that this theology can become absolute. It is engendered on the condition that it appropriate those forms which maximally produce what is – that is, it cultivates symbolic language by appropriating tropes, concepts and vocabularies from all fields of thought indifferently. The result of absolute eclecticism is therefore an absolute theology, a theology whose form produces God most, and which is thereby defined by its lack of integrity, by its eclectic forms.

In the previous chapter, I used the results of Schelling's construction of symbolic language to describe his conception of theology in very similar terms.

[13] And note: *not* 'about the divine'.

Theology does not have a referent; it should not be *about* God. Indeed, it has no pre-determined field of study. All that defines it is the purely structural criterion of the indifference of meaning and being or formal identity. Absolute eclecticism gives rise to exactly the same theological enterprise: the theologian who practises it shows no respect for pre-determined fields of enquiry or for traditional subject matter; what is at stake, rather, is the assimilation of those languages which exhibit formal identity most, for only they will guarantee an absolute theology.

This then is the second answer to the question of the theological significance of symbolic practices. They are aids in the becoming absolute of theology, but only if theology is understood as a science which has renounced reference, which is open to speculative transformations and mutations of its traditional content – only, that is, if it is understood as a science that embraces the eclecticism of forms. Theology must become promiscuous to become absolute.

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Ultimately, in conclusion, Schelling's *Identitätssystem* is itself the most obvious candidate for absolute theology. It renounces reference, it frequently practises speculative transformations and it experiments with all sorts of forms. Moreover, *§73 of the PdK in particular* serves as a particularly clear model for absolute theology: not only does it elucidate much of the theory out of which Schellingian absolute theology is constructed, it also consists in an exemplary performance of absolute theology itself.

Thus, on the one hand, §73 of the *PdK* touches on so much of what is at stake in the *Identitätssystem*. It is here that Schelling responds to the theories of symbolic

language proposed by his contemporaries; it is here that many of the concepts, theories and principles of the *Identitätssystem* are repeated in the realm of linguistics; it is here, moreover, that the last sliver of representation, reference and signification is eliminated from Schelling's thought; it is here that Schelling proposes a theory of language as radical as anything seen before or since in modern Western linguistics. However, on the other hand and perhaps more importantly, in §73 of the *PdK* Schelling experiments with forms: he draws on the *Logosmystik* tradition as a means to express the above doctrinal insights more intensely. This section is one locus in Schelling's oeuvre where the practices of speculative transformation and absolute eclecticism are particularly clear: he creatively assimilates the forms of another tradition to cultivate his system's production of God. §73 both describes *and* performs the becoming absolute of theology.

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