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The *Grundlogik* of German Idealism: The Ambiguity of the Hegel-Schelling Relationship in Žižek

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In a recent essay, Žižek makes a claim that, to many readers, must appear out of place within his work: “Hegel's 'overcoming' of Schelling is a case in itself: Schelling's reaction to Hegel's idealist dialectic was so strong and profound that more and more it is counted as the next (and concluding) step in the inner development of German Idealism” (Žižek 2009a: 122). The effect of this comment is twofold: not only does it strike those immersed within conventional accounts of the history of philosophy as essentially wrong, but it also highlights a fundamental ambiguity at the core of Žižek's reading of German Idealism and, by consequence, his own philosophy, insofar as his parallax ontology is perceived as a reactualization of the movement. If the late Schelling is, for Žižek, in some sense the culmination of German Idealism, the fulfillment of its internal, self-unfolding logic, why does Žižek refer to his project again and again as *Hegelian*, but never as *Schellingian*?

The problem is amplified when one engages the key Žižekian texts concerning German Idealism. In both the *Ticklish Subject* and the *Parallax View*, for example, there are praises of Schelling as the greatest philosopher of the pre-symbolic Real, of the nature of the impossible X, the *je ne sais pas quoi*, which precedes consciousness as the most central theme in post-Kantian philosophy and which reappears in the wake of the Lacanian subject. Žižek even goes as far as to say that Schelling was “the first to formulate this task” (Žižek 2009b: 166) and the philosopher who

“gave the most detailed account of this X in his notion of the Ground of Existence” (Žižek 2000: 55). Why, then, does he characterize the fundamental question that constitutes his project as a “properly Hegelian one: *how does appearance itself emerge from the interlay of the Real?*” (Žižek 2009b: 106)?

Moreover, there is a qualification of this exaltation in Žižek's crucial work on Schelling *The Indivisible Remainder*, an attempt to disavow any absolute dependence of the question on the latter's own answers. Immediately after his provocative reading of the birth of the Schellingian subject out of the Real, Žižek gives a scathing critique of Schelling's logic and argues for its inferiority to Hegelian dialectics. Where Schelling tries to ground *Grund* and existence in absolute indifference, the Hegelian movement of the negation of the negation does away with the need of an exterior principle of mediation. In what then could the Schellingian breakthrough consist, so that it would be the *culmination* of German Idealism, if Hegelian dialectics is superior?

In the following I propose to read Žižek *against* Žižek in order to demonstrate the complex intertwining of Schellingian ontology and Hegelian logic at the heart of his own thinking..ⁱ What we will see is that if the *Grundlogik* of German Idealism is the radical ontological incompleteness of reality announced by the abyss of freedom constitutive of the Kantian subject, then understanding the ambiguity of the relationship of these thinkers within Žižek is crucial for grasping the movement as a whole. Neither Hegel nor Schelling are able to come to terms with the full implications of the deadlock of freedom by themselves and that it is only through a retroactive reconstruction of the inner logic of post-Kantian philosophy, a playing of these two figures against one another, that Žižek is able to present his reading of the radical nature of subjectivity in German Idealism.

I. Metaphysics in the Wake of Kant

In order to tackle the nature of the ambiguous Hegel-Schelling relationship in Žižek, we first need to outline the stakes in post-Kantian philosophy and the specific way they are taken up in the early Schelling and Hegel. What we will see is a new, provocative reading of the immanent development of German Idealism hinted at by Žižek's philosophy. By following certain premonitions within Kant's pedagogical writings which appear to link transcendental spontaneity to the psychoanalytical concept of *Todestrieb*, Žižek reads Hegelian Absolute Idealism against standard interpretations by claiming that Hegel's attempt to think substance as subject implies the ontogenetic emergence of freedom through a self-sundering of being.

Following Lacan's claim that “Kant's practical philosophy [is] the starting point of the lineage culminating in Freud's invention of psychoanalysis,” Žižek's project could be described as having two goals (Žižek 2009b: 48). Firstly, because the Lacanian subject is lacking any theory of its own ontogenesis, Žižek turns to German Idealism to develop a dialectical materialism that would ground it, insofar as there is an obvious structural parallelism that exists in the underlying

problematic plaguing both post-Kantian philosophy and contemporary psychoanalysis. Secondly, if we read Kant, Hegel and Schelling through Lacan, we can see an underlying identity that exists between the psychoanalytical subject, haunted by the *Todestrieb* as the constitutive ground of its very existence, and the operative logic of the German Idealism tradition:

The key point is thus that the passage from “nature” to “culture” is not direct, that one cannot account for it within a continuous evolutionary narrative: something has to intervene between the two, a kind of “vanishing mediator,” which is neither nature nor culture – this In-between is silently presupposed in all evolutionary narratives. We are not idealists: this In-between is not the spark of *logos* magically conferred on *Homo sapiens*, enabling them to form his supplementary virtual symbolic surroundings, but precisely something that, although it is also no longer nature, is not yet *logos*, and has to be “repressed” by *logos* – the Freudian name for this In-between, of course, is the death drive [...] a moment of thoroughly “perverted,” “denaturalized,” “derailed” nature which is not yet culture. (Žižek 2000: 36)

For Žižek, this “in-between” finds its expression for the first time in Kant’s practical philosophy in the necessity to discipline the excessive “unruliness” (*Wildheit*) of human nature, the “wild, unconstrained propensity to insist stubbornly on one’s own will, cost what it may” (Žižek 2000: 36). Yet, this “unruliness” cannot be equated with the brute reality of animal existence (contrary to standard readings). Žižek quotes Kant himself:

The love of freedom is naturally so strong in man, that when once he has grown accustomed to freedom, he will sacrifice everything for its sake.... Owing to his natural love of freedom, it is necessary that man should have his natural roughness smoothed down; with animals, their instinct renders this unnecessary. (Kant 1900: 4-5; Žižek 2000: 36)

For Žižek, this demonstrates that the enigma of the emergence of subjectivity in German Idealism cannot be reduced to a mere dichotomy between *nature* and *culture* as if in order to conform to the symbolic law of our own making, we must first tame the blind, egotistical pleasure-seeking principles of our animal nature. The self-creative, ontologically autonomous milieu of culture is only possible through a prior, infinitely uncontainable freedom which acts as the “vanishing mediator” between brute animal reality and structured human sociopolitical existence. The passage to culture does not consist in an overcoming or sublimation of animalistic needs, but rather through a disciplining of an excessive “unruliness” that marks human nature.ⁱⁱ

Žižek links this to the Cartesian gap between man and nature because it names an intrinsic *break* or *breach* from the order of positive being that sets the stage for the *cogito*’s autonomy and to the birth place of psychoanalysis. *Todestrieb* becomes a synonym for the transcendental subject by giving expression to the pre-subjective conditions of the possibility of freedom as some kind of violent “disturbance” in nature that serves as its ontogenetic basis. But many questions remain unsolved in Kant: Why does the transcendental spontaneity itself develop? What is its exact relation to the “unruliness” at the core of our being which appears to logically precede it? Insofar as

transcendental spontaneity is related to the synthetic powers of the imagination and to “unruliness,” what is the relationship between them?

Within the trajectory of modern philosophy, the inheritors of the legacy of the critical system all agree that it is with Kant that we see the *first* truly penetrating account of the essence of human freedom.ⁱⁱⁱ Post-Kant, all of the immediate representatives of post-Kantian German Idealism agree that there is *no* going back: this would be to give up on the intuition of irreducible human freedom. In the immediate aftermath of transcendental idealism, however, there is an ambiguity as to how to proceed. Not content with Fichte's own response to the dilemma because it only intensifies the problematic by making nature a mere posit of the absolute subject, Schelling and Hegel attempt to give an account of the *birthplace* of the “I” as *causa sui*. What is necessary for Schelling is a theoretical project which attempts to supplement the autistic Fichtean subject with an account of the immanent genesis of subjectivity out of a creative, unconscious nature, which would implicate an elaboration of the interpenetration and ultimate identity of the two.^{iv} Initially satisfied with Schelling's response to the deadlock of Fichtean idealism,^v Hegel later breaks from what he refers to as an “objective idealism,” a mere reactionary form of idealism. But *what* exactly, then, drives Hegel to part ways from Schelling and develop his own answer to the enigma of the subject? And, more importantly, why is this juncture important for understanding Žižek's dialectical materialism?

Žižek refuses the “conservative” interpretation of Hegel, “the standard cliché according to which German Idealism pleads the 'pan-logistic' reduction of all reality to the product of the self-mediation of the Notion” (Žižek 2000: 55). This textbook reading of German Idealism goes against what Žižek's holds to be really at stake in the tradition. It levels off the radicalness of Hegel's thinking by making it look like another classical metaphysical system. This becomes more obvious when we take into account the relation of post-critical philosophy to Spinoza.

Amongst other things, Spinozistic metaphysics represents an avid attempt to rethink the Cartesian ontological splitting of mind and matter by reconceiving the very notion of substance so that the two categories no longer represent a schismatic split but are subsumable under a single, unified substrate. They are a kind of epistemic parallax shift between two different logical modalities of an all-persuasive weave which encompasses all things within its vital ebb and flow. This means that humans *are* still free, but only insofar as they participate within the self-actualizing movement of substance (God, nature) as *causa sui*: the apparent autonomous essence of subjectivity is merely an epiphenomenon, a false appearance, of the vital flux of a more primordial life-force that runs through and simultaneously is the universe. And although both Schelling and Hegel look up to Spinoza as the epitome of a philosopher, they see something fundamentally insufficient in Spinoza's cancelation of concrete human freedom by its submission to the oneness, unity and harmony of substance.^{vi} The problem is that freedom is *not* compatible with substance *qua* devouring totality. How, then, are we to think substance *and* subject/system *and* freedom if we are to retain the spontaneity attested by Kant alive? For Žižek, “[t]he passage from the Spinozan

One *qua* the neutral medium/container of its modes and [sic] the One's inherent gap is the very passage from Substance to Subject” (Žižek 2009b: 42).

The immediate problematic in the aftermath of the critical system is that the Kantian affirmation of transcendental freedom must be grounded in an ontological edifice that can rival Spinozism. Hegel remains unsatisfied with the results of the early Schelling and must have, at some level, implicitly recognized that Schelling missed the true radicalness of Kantian freedom and its implications. Consequently, Hegel tries to save the breakthrough of the critical system by thinking substance as subject, by thinking *how* the order of being *exists* in the mode of subjectivity, instead of merely tying two seemingly different yet complementary areas of thought together in a precarious unity. The task to be done is to fully actualize the primordial insight of the *cogito* by instituting the transcendental “I” and the *schism* it evokes directly into the Absolute. The goal of Žižek's Hegel is to balance Spinoza and Kant by creating a metaphysical system that *possibilizes* the rupture in being that is freedom.

The problem is to explicate how a truly existing free subject can emerge from within the internal mechanics of substance. If human freedom is *irreducibly* self-reflexive it cannot be understood in terms of the immanent pulsation of the absolute.

Reading the Hegelian response to Schelling through psychoanalysis, Žižek suggests that what provokes the immanent movement from transcendental philosophy to Hegelian substance as subject is a recognition of an irrevocable (ontological) disturbance of nature at the foundational basis of the *cogito* missed in Schelling's early *Naturphilosophie*. For Žižek, the true breakthrough that we see in Kantian idealism, which gets radicalized and made explicit for the first time in Hegel, is the proclamation of transcendental freedom as *Todestrieb*, as an excess of being that breaks from all externally given laws. We arrive at a conditional: If freedom exists, substance cannot be all. Substance's autodisruption is the condition of the possibility of the subject.

What intrigues Žižek in Hegel's articulation of the subject as negativity is how it links up with the Kantian pedagogical concepts such as “unruliness” and “diabolic evil.” Insofar as these indicate, for Žižek, that the zero-level of human subjectivity is in some sense *non-natural*, it shows that, if we follow the internal *Grundlogik* of German Idealism, various Hegelian descriptions of spirit in concepts such as the “night of the world” and “tarrying with the negative” are an elaboration of the subject's ontologico-foundational basis in a disruption from the closed-circuitry of the homoeostatic laws of nature as already hinted at in Kant. What this means is that prior to the self-legislative laws of practical reason *and* the synthesis of imagination that constitutes the unity of phenomenal reality, we must posit some kind of ontological frenzy that represents a savage *tearing apart* of the immanent flow of vital being. Before the smooth fabric of experience there is “the activity of disrupting the continuity of the inertia of the pre-symbolic 'natural' Real;”^{vii} the primordial unruliness of the human organism is nothing other than a logical modality of transcendental imagination, its most originary expression.

II. The Insufficiency of the Hegelian Philosophy of Nature

Hegel is thus the first to make the crucial step towards elaborating the true ontogenetic ground of the subject. His account of negativity radicalizes the breakthrough of transcendentalism by showing how subject, as the night of the world, “designates the 'imperfection' of Substance, the inherent gap, self-deferral, distance-from-itself, which forever prevents Substance from fully realizing itself, from becoming 'fully itself'” (Žižek 2008: 7). However, within Žižek's texts one thing is clear: even if the notion of negativity in Hegel is an attempt to draw out the ontological implications of Kantian unruliness, it itself rests ultimately insufficient to actualize the full core of the *Grundlogik* of German Idealism. Within Hegel's mature logic, Žižek sees a turning away from the true ontological effects of subjectivity already articulated in the early *Realphilosophie* and even the *Phenomenology*, a move which opens up the space for their culmination in the late Schelling. My aim in this section is to show exactly how Žižek's philosophy is radically dependent upon Schellingian ontology in order to articulate the notion of metaphysical breakdown so crucial to his reading of German Idealism, and thereby establish the often neglected place of Schelling in Žižek's thinking.

The night of the world is merely a kind of description, a haphazard glance into the disarray and pandemonium that precedes the transcendental reconstitution of reality into a (relatively) unified fabric of experience. It does not itself explain the primordial moment of withdrawal from complete immersion in the positive order of being that signals the birth of irreducible subjectivity. In order to comprehend this movement, we must first plunge into the immanent pulsation of the vital ebb and flow of being itself in order to see how it sets the stage for the subject, a movement which Žižek explicitly says is most acutely developed in Schelling:

Kant was the first to detect this crack in the ontological edifice of reality: if (what we experience as) “objective reality” is not simply given “out there,” waiting to be perceived by the subject, but a artificial composite constituted through the subject's active participation – that is, through the act of transcendental synthesis – then the question crops up sooner or later: what is the status of the uncanny X that *precedes* the transcendently constituted reality? F. W. J. Schelling gave the most detailed account of this X in his notion of the Ground of Existence – of that which “in God Himself is not yet God:” the “divine madness,” the obscure pre-ontological domain of “drives,” the pre-logical Real that forever remains the elusive Ground of Reason. (Žižek 2000: 55)

But, if this question of the *emergence* of appearance from the pre-symbolic Real is a *Hegelian* project, why doesn't Žižek rely on, for example, the Hegelian philosophy of nature in order to expound it? Pointing to what he takes as an ambiguity that persists within Hegel's account of the dialectical movement from self-contained Notion to nature and then to spirit in his mature logic,

Žižek suggests that Hegel was unable to bring into conceptual fullness the groundbreaking realization that he was on the verge of articulating.^{viii} What is left aside is, strictly speaking, the night of the world that his earlier *Realphilosophie* had uncovered. In the later works, it is uncertain how this radical self-relating negativity, this moment of irreducible ontological breakdown, truly fits in. Instead of the precarious, never-to-be-complete “reconciliation” between nature and finite spirit as we see in the *Realphilosophie* (due to the abyssal void of the subject), culture itself becomes a closed circuit, a complete return of the Idea to itself out of its self-outsidedness in nature, which completely does away with the “psychotic” contraction into Self. The “here shoots a bloody head, there another ghostly apparition” disappears.

For Žižek, there are thus two forms of Hegelian dialectics: either we have the perfect dialectical *triad* of the mature system (Logic – Nature – Spirit), or a non-closed *quadruple* which signals the self-collapse of dialectical logic itself of the *Realphilosophie* (Logic – Nature – finite Spirit – objective/naturalized Spirit).^{ix} The difference between traditional accounts of Absolute Idealism and the quadruple dialectic of the *Realphilosophie* demonstrate the nature of dialectical logic he wants to defend as the *Grundlogik* at work within German Idealism and develop in his own parallax ontology. Whereas the former can be understood as a series of upward moving spirals where each new turn completely encompasses the previous so that eventually we have a completely enclosed, organic totality, the very self-unfolding operation of the later precludes the possibility of such a self-totalizing activity. The passage from nature to culture does not reveal a struggle of transmutation, but an irrevocable standstill in the heart of being that cannot be sursumed. It is from this negativity that the process of subjectivation (culture) emerges, allowing nature and culture to self-actualize in isolation to one another but at the same time “linked” together through the abyssal void of subjectivity, that which infinitely “protrudes” out of both. Here we have a rich account of the *emergence* of autonomous zones of activity which remain irreducible to although simultaneously dependent on the precedent levels which constitute their genetic ground.

What one will notice here is the intrinsically *Schellingian* character of this distinction.^x Whereas mature Hegel falls into the trap of a complete triadic logic, it is the late Schelling who, attempting to present a logical system that would be able to combat what he perceived as the horrifying “pan-logicism” of Hegelian dialectics, is actually a radicalization, a *completion*, of the inherent *Grundlogik* of German Idealism. This suggests not only that Žižek is retroactively unpacking a latent, but covered up potential, in Hegel's text through Schelling, but also that the germ of the latter's late philosophy is already located within Hegel's early *Realphilosophie*, drawing a consistent historical trajectory from the beginning to the end of German Idealism.

In order to situate ourselves more firmly within the dialectical radicalness of Schelling's *Freiheitsschrift* and *Weltalter*, we can use the problem of evil as an entry point. Schelling's basic thesis is that, although Hegelian Logic can express notional necessity (what something ideally is),

it ultimately fails to grasp the *fact* of being, the primordial basis of its raw reality in freedom, something which forever eludes the self-mediation of conceptuality. Whereas for Hegel evil becomes merely a sursumed moment in the self-development of the Good, a necessary phase for its establishment, for Schelling evil remains at its very core *arational, non-logical*. There is something irreducible about the choice for evil which necessarily eludes our concepts, something insurmountable about the unruliness of a soul that insists on that which it wants and will sacrifice whatever it can in order to achieve it. Evil is the capacity to say “No” with the full knowledge of the implications of one's action.

As soon as evil is understood and conceptualized, it fails to be *evil* – it becomes, rather, misguided good in the Platonic sense that no one does wrong willingly. Hence Schelling's articulation of freedom as the possibility for good *and* evil. It of itself knows no order, no rationality: there is something mad about a free act. That is to say, insofar as the act itself is concerned, both the modalities of good and evil as expressions of freedom are *formally identical* insofar as they involve the choice of a set of values *without any guarantee and without any external determination*. What this suggests is that evil is itself at the core of every good act: in order for an act to be truly good and authentically free at the same time, it must “pass” through evil, discipline it, and use it as the tamed *Grund* for its own expansive power.^{xi} In this sense, the Schellingian freedom is an explicit rethinking of the Kantian notion of diabolic evil and its coequal concept of the original “unnatural” unruliness: it tries to develop a philosophical, onto-logic concept whereby radical spontaneity of human practical activity is irreducible to notional necessity and escapes our complete conceptualization. It is an indivisible remainder, the “incomprehensible basis of reality,” missing in mature Hegelian dialectics.^{xii}

It is this conviction of the irreducibility of free decision that leads Schelling into the abyssal labyrinths of self-exploration that constitute the conceptual fabric of the *Weltalter*, following Kant's intuitions in his pedagogical writings. For Žižek, therefore, it is not an accident that Schelling's own descriptions of the vortex of *Triebe* which precede the spoken Word are remarkably similar in spirit to Hegel's descriptions of the night of the world: both are driven by an attempt to give a philosophically adequate bedrock to freedom, the latent *Grundlogik* of German Idealism. What interests Žižek, therefore, is how Schelling drastically advances the descriptions in the tradition of the elusive X, the *je ne sais quoi*, which haunts transcendently constituted reality by completing plunging into the autodisruptive logic of the pre-symbolic Real in a way unprecedented by any philosopher before him.

Schelling demonstrates a remarkable insight into the immanent, thriving forces of the extra-/pre-symbolic, material Real, the elusive, obscure phase of darkness that precedes and constitutes the birth of the light of consciousness. But what intrigues Žižek is the radicalness, the depth, of his *materialist* response to Hegel, which still remains immersed in the fabric of transcendental idealism. If we superimpose onto the Schelling's ground/existence distinction the

real(ity)/ideal(ity) distinction that is operative within modern philosophy from Descartes onward, we perceive a nuance in the ontologization/grounding of the subjectivity: the *split* announced between mind and matter, which makes them non-reconcilable to one another, *occurs “within” or “on the side of” the material Real through a schismatic rupture*. The standard debate between idealism and materialism is thus split on its head:

idealism posits an ideal Event which cannot be accounted for in terms of its material (pre)conditions, while the materialist wager is that we *can* get “behind” the event and explore how Event explodes out of the gap in/of the order of Being. The first to formulate this task was Schelling, who, in his *Weltalter* fragments, outlined the dark territory of the 'prehistory of Logos,' of what had to occur in preontological protoreality so that openness of Logos and temporality could take place. (Žižek 2009b: 166)

So how, then, do the pulsations of pure, raw materiality open up unto the irreducible event of the ideal? Although Žižek's own descriptions in *The Indivisible Remainder* and “The Abyss of Freedom” of the passage from the rotary movement of *Triebe* to a subject that is non-coincident with its material *Grund* focus on the founding gesture of subjectivity as a fiat, this is not enough. The question is *how* the id-like pulsation of the drives *grounds* the self-positing act of the decision. As Adrian Johnston makes astonishingly clear, even if the self-positing act of the subject *is* a groundless act “analogous to the cutting of the Gordian knot” (Žižek 2007: 13), Schelling searches for a way to inscribe the very condition of the possibility of the act itself within the material palpitations of nature in works for the most part not discussed by Žižek.^{xiii} In this sense, Žižek's own account is dissatisfying because it fails to show in detail how the drives, of themselves, short circuit.

As Johnston points out, within the Schellingian ontogenetic narrative, the self-positing of the subject is first possibilized by the emergence of *desire* within being. Desire marks the first juncture of some kind of immanent blockage in the heart of blind necessity which obfuscates the automatic oscillation of drives by shattering their pure immanence. In place of a smooth, determined relation to the environment wholly programmed by instincts (the coincidence of *Innenwelt* and *Aussenwelt* through an predetermined set of biological schemata that hardwire the organism into its surroundings), we get a degree of liberation from the various sense datum of perception. Desire in its Schellingian mode is thus an intermediary stage between instinct and drive within the ontogenesis of the transcendental “I.”

The Žižekian/Hegelian night of the world emerges as the nonconscious drives of nature for the first time liberate themselves from the blind necessity of being through an immanently generated pandemonium within the corpo-Real of the body. Properly speaking, desire is an impasse within the ontological life of substance – “[s]ince there is consequently an unremitting urge

to be and since it cannot be, it comes to a standstill in desire, as an unremitting striving, an eternally insatiable obsession with Being” (Schelling 2000a: 21) – which prevents it from devouring, *encompassing*, all, because the organism now obeys its own nonnatural logic. Here, the analogue with the body is useful. Although the biological unity of the corpo-Real can astound us with its organic dynamism, the very awing force of this self-organizing totality can cast a shadow over its dark underbelly. This a fact often betrayed by the mindless proliferation of cancerous tumours, muscular dystrophy and mental illnesses caused by pure organic dysfunction. The laws that normally regulate and sustain the body can, of themselves, immanently short circuit. Like an illness or disease within Schellingian logic, desire does not stand for a positive ontological unity in any way for Žižek, but, rather an internal scrambling of the circuitry of a system that does not follow its supposed path within the whole and instead stubbornly asserts its own Self at all costs – even its own downfall by cutting away the life-stream that keeps it in being.^{xiv}

As the force of desire is raised to a higher degree of ideality, matter enters into a self-lacerating rage (*sich selbst zereißende Wut*) like a cancer-ridden, disease-stricken body, howling under its own out-of-control energy. Desire a violent self-destructive mania that *tears apart* the smooth fabric of the world. This is why Žižek finds Schelling's “Wagnerian” vision of God is so terrifying. It represents a nature which, through the full amplification of desire into *Todestrieb*, becomes *denaturalized*.^{xv} The primordial unruliness of human nature and its coequal term diabolical evil are therefore synonymous with this grotesque excess of life that we witness in the breakdown of the corpo-Real in times of illness; or, as Johnston says, “[t]he surplus of autonomy is made possible by the deficit of heteronomy. Freedom emerges from the dysfunctioning of determinism” (Johnston 2000: 114). The freedom of the subject is not a positive characteristic or attribute: it is the failure of autoactualization of essence, its inability to contain itself within its own preset logistics, “a malfunction of evolution,” “a snag in the biological weave” (Žižek & Daly 2004: 59).^{xvi} Desire, thus, indicates a beginning of being's ontological passage through madness.

Žižek's argument is that this psychotic autodisruption of the Real is a *necessary* theoretical posit if free experience is to be possible instead of a blind experiential void: “[w]e cannot pass directly from nature to culture. Something goes terribly wrong in nature: nature produces an unnatural monstrosity and I claim that it is in order to cope with, to domesticate, this monstrosity that we symbolize” (Žižek & Daly 2004: 64-65).^{xvii} It is only through a radical engagement with Schellingian ontology, however, that Žižek is able to fully articulate the idea of a quadruple dialectic of non-reconcilability and claim that it stands as the culmination of the *Grundlogik* inherent to the entire German Idealist tradition. But, matters become more complicate as we shall see in the next section, insofar as Žižek is only able to appropriate this category of “metaphysical collapse” through exposing and excavating a Hegelian logic of negativity that he sees hidden within the 2nd draft of the *Weltalter*.

III. The Restlessness of the Negative

This section will demonstrate that, although Žižek depends upon Schelling's ontology to explicate the emergence of the subject, Hegel is omnipresent in Žižek's reading. We will see that, since Schelling's own account of the logic of the *Grund* has theosophic tendencies that are in contradiction with what Žižek takes to be the founding intuitions guiding German Idealism, he is only able to extract a consistent metapsychology from Schelling insofar as he can "formalize" or "purify" its content. Perceiving a strictly *Hegelian* structure of self-relating negativity in the exposition of freedom in the 2nd draft of the *Weltalter* that opens up unto an identification of *Grund* and existence that is missing in the others, Žižek internally reconstructs the entire conceptual structure of Schelling's ontology through Hegelian dialectics and psychoanalysis.

The issue at hand is further complicated by Žižek's division of Schelling's philosophy into three distinct and irreconcilable stages, which he finds reflected in three existent drafts of the *Weltalter*.^{xviii} Schelling₁ is largely co-incidental with his quasi-Spinozistic philosophy of Absolute Indifference, where freedom is completely subsumed under the positive order of being. In the 1st draft this is seen with the explication of freedom as a logical mode of necessity within the inner articulation of substance. In Schelling₂ of the 2nd draft of the *Weltalter* and the *Freiheitsschrift*, we see an interesting twist in terms of how the contraction of material being itself is made possible. By conceiving the act of contraction itself as ultimately free and self-positing, here Schelling is able to think the will-to-contraction (the No) and the will-to-expansion (the Yes) as identical and therefore *internal* to the dynamic of freedom, which makes his thinking approach that of Hegel's (and, consequently, the *Grundlogik* of German Idealism). For Žižek, this brief period of breakthrough was quickly left behind by Schelling₃ of the philosophy of mythology and revelation. Here we see a return to pre-modern "essentialism," which he claims we already see hinted at in the 3rd draft of the *Weltalter*, in which Schelling posits another principle of synthesis *external* to the movement of contraction and expansion within which freedom and determinism are grounded as opposites.

Because of these tendencies, which explain Žižek qualifies Schelling as the father of "New Age obscurantism" just as much as he is the father of contemporary philosophy of finitude, immediately after his provocative reading of Schelling in the first chapter of the *Indivisible Remainder*, Žižek quickly changes tone and argues for the supremacy of Hegelian dialectics over Schellingian logic. Although consistent with his interpretation of Schelling, it is simultaneously ambiguous insofar as Žižek does not distinguish *which* Schelling he is arguing against or justify *how* he is able to read the 2nd draft of the *Weltalter* as a radical and ephemeral rupture that "goes farthest in the direction of Freedom" (Žižek 2007: 38). Since the only possible way for freedom to exist for Žižek is through the notion of the irrevocable caustic collapse of the ontological, how is Žižek able to retrieve this from the 2nd draft without falling into the pitfalls of Schelling's thinking?

The answer is that in the 2nd draft Žižek sees a distinctively *Hegelian* structure that

enables him to develop a metapsychological reading of the text that prevents its underlying ontology from succumbing to philosophical commitments that turn away from the *Grundlogik* of German Idealism. The claim is that, after the radical ontology of freedom that he had developed in the 2nd draft, Schelling immediately recoils from the implications of his philosophy through positing a fourth principle of meditation which enables the neutral coexistence of *Grund* and existence through grounding them within the *Ungrund*. Here, instead of announcing the radical rupture of being, the not-all of substance, freedom is a mere return to the abyssal origin of all reality. By displaying the structure of a theosophic quaternity, the 3rd draft and later texts of Schelling are a return to a form of dogmatic metaphysics, an inability to hold unto the truth of irreducible freedom. But insofar as the 2nd draft displays freedom as a kind of self-positing activity which identifies *Grund* (the will-to-contraction, the No) and existence (the will-to-expansion, the Yes), Žižek sees the possibility to “formalize” its content by “purifying” it of all extraneous theosophic commitment through the reactualization of this Hegelian dialectical tendency. Žižek is able to justify this move insofar as he reads the still-born drafts of the *Weltalter* as a myth in the form of the Lacanian lamella, explaining that “the need for the form of mythical narrative arises when one endeavours to break the circle of the symbolic order and to give an account of its genesis ('origins') from the Real” (Žižek 2007: 9).

Within the still-born drafts the *Weltalter*, Schelling divides the passage from the eternal Past (Real) to the Present (Symbolic) into three distinct stages.^{xix} In the absolute beginning prior to God's contraction of material being and the blind, annular rotation of drives, there is a joyous nothingness, a pure potentiality that exists in timeless, inexhaustible rapture. What is of utmost importance here is the irreconcilable contrast between this stage and the next: the joyous void of divine nonbeing is “breached” by the contraction of finitude and the infinite self-diremption of perfection that it entails. This sundering of heavenly symmetry is thus structurally identical to the disruption of the oceanic unity of child and mother that supposedly precedes the Oedipus complex, the smooth, placid functioning of nature, which is skewered by the advent of human subjectivity.

After the contraction of material being, we have what Žižek calls “Schelling's grandiose 'Wagnerian' vision of God” (Žižek 2007: 24). Within Schellingian cosmogony, this is so “terrifying” because, instead of the endless joy of divine eternity, we have a God as subject who finds Himself unfree and caught within the self-lacerating rage of matter. In terms of a metapsychology, it can be read as a mythopoetic description of the ontological short circuit within the blind rotation of *Triebe* which occurs before the eruption of full-fledged subjectivity.

Finally, we have God who is able to speak the Word and thus overcome the deadlock that he found himself lodged within by becoming a full-fledged subject. Ejecting the materiality he had contracted, he bestows upon it an independent existence and becomes God the Creator. Metapsychologically, in the Word we see the unconscious *Entscheidung* which separates *Grund* and existence for the first time. The Symbolic erupts as an attempt to discipline the unruliness of

the material of the previous stage that lacks any self-organizing schemata.

For Žižek, however, the psychoanalytical problem is that the structure of the investigation has the fundamental structure of fantasy.^{xx} In the articulation of the absolute beginning, we insert ourselves as a pure gaze into the pre-symbolic Real, just as if we were to imagine ourselves as a spectator in our funerals watching our friends react to our death. If the introspective analysis which leads to the discussion of the joyous nothingness is merely a imaginary falsification, how can Žižek rely on it to propound his own account of *Grundlogik* of German Idealism as so crucial for his parallax ontology? The problem which Žižek faces is one of the pitfalls of the Real into which Schelling fell: because we can only retroactively posit the material origin of subjectivity from within the Symbolic and the Imaginary, the descriptions of the this natal, abyssal darkness can serve as a mere screen upon which we project fantasmatic supplements. The risk is that if our investigation operates *only* on the level of phenomenological self-analysis it jeopardizes having all of its significance abolished through a reduction to the narcissistic orbit of the Imaginary. Žižek needs to pierce through the psychoanalytical superficiality of Schelling's descriptions of the passage from the Past to the Present by removing this element of the Imaginary in order to arrive at its latent logical kernel.

Insofar as Žižek sees traces of Hegelian logic in the 2nd draft's description of freedom, he claims the primordial zero-level fact in the passage from the Past to the Present has to be the second stage, the self-lacerating rage of matter. The joyous nothingness, which corresponds to the eternal calm of the pure immanence of substance that precedes the ontological unruliness in the deadlock of drives and the struggle to speak the word, can be reduced to fundamental fantasy of the ego. The claim is that one cannot draw a metaphysical distinction between substance as a nothingness that rejoices in the oceanic bliss of non-experience and the unruly basis of human subjectivity which "disrupts" this unity. If we superimpose Schelling's three stages unto the Hegelian dialectic, which is justified through the equation of the will-to-contraction (the No, the will of the *Grund*) with the will-to-expansion (the Yes, free existence), we get the a logical movement from immediacy (Real) → negation (unruliness) → negation of negation (Symbolic) wherein the second movement is inscribed within the first, which only becomes explicit in the third, in the same way that corresponds with Žižek insertion of ideality *within* reality as its extimate germ as the truth of Schelling's logic of the *Grund*.

For Žižek, this dialectical materialist logic that we see premonitions of in the 2nd draft allows us to add precision to the German Idealist attempt to think substance as subject. The model of the ontogenetic basis of subjectivity as a contraction of a disease within the vital fold of being needs to be clarified, insofar as there was never a perfect balance that the haywire of human unruliness destroys. This is exactly why Žižek proclaims the superiority of Hegelian logic and dismisses Schelling's notion of absolute indifference: the former does not need to posit a fantasy of original health because it can explain everything through the restlessness of negativity which has the

potential to produce something irreducibly different and operatively new. The idea of nature or substance as a harmonious *Grund*, a tranquil oscillation of forces caught within a blind necessity, is a fantasy: the beginning is not a solid, inert density, but a seething mass of heterogeneous matter lacking symmetry.

If the human subject is in some manner an irrevocable blockage in the vital fold of being, it must represent an amplification of an already existing potentiality in nature. We can see this in various forms – deformed animals, degenerative diseases, viruses, natural disasters, all of which point to ways in which the originary “harmony” of the world is predicated upon disorder, eruptive disarray, the inability to sustain itself in perfect symmetry. However, this lack is not a defect: it is the motor of dialectical change, nuance; it is productive. Here, one must think of the fundamental presupposition of Schellingian philosophy: “Were the first nature in harmony with itself, it would remain so. It would be constantly One and would never become Two. It would be an eternal rigidity without progress” (Schelling 2000a: 219).

Žižek thus reconceptualizes and modifies Schelling's descriptions of the Past as that elusive X that forever haunts and precedes consciousness by modifying its logical core. This has interesting implications. First, we must remember that at the level of logic Schelling's mythopoetic narrative of the Past does not primordially present a *chronology* of the Absolute. The “stages” Schelling refers to are logical and organized according to priority. Consequently, there is no sense in which the joyous nothingness temporally *precedes* the subject caught in the self-lacerating rage of matter. Yet, insofar as freedom *exists*, the abyss of freedom as pure potentiality – a freedom which is not yet posited – *must* be said to logically precede the rotation of drives that constitutes material being. Žižek follows the argument thus far, but then makes a crucial modification. Insofar as the third element – the *Entscheidung* – demonstrates notional self-reflexivity, it retroactively *institutes itself* at the beginning of the entire process through the paradoxical causality of Freudian *Nachträglichkeit*/Lacanian *après-coup*. Freedom is not in direct contact with the *Unground* as that which neutrally grounds the conflict of the polar principles, nor is it a resurgence of the primordial Abyss of Freedom now in a higher exponent: it presents the structure of a negation of a negation, it is the second usurping the position of the first and thus instituting a mere formal reconfiguration of the structure of the whole. Žižek's reading tries to foreclose the possibility of a theosophic quaternity from within Schelling's text and thereby retrieve a textual possibility that we have largely lost view of due to the “regressive” tendencies within the late Schelling's thinking, a possibility that establishes Schelling as the summit of the *Grundlogik* of German Idealism by showing how it is his ontology, and not Hegel's, which must adequately come to terms with the radical incompleteness of reality hinted at in Kantian unruliness, through the expression of the logic of the not-all.

There is, therefore, according to Žižek, a truth hidden in Schelling's description of the passage from joyous nothingness to the all-consuming rage of the unfree subject. Insofar as there is no separation between substance and subject, the description of the joyous nothingness of non-

experience and the infinite negativity of *Todestrieb* are, in essence, two sides of the same coin. The passage from one to the other is only a logical conversion.^{xxi} The ultimate paradox of the shift from the joyous nothingness of eternity (which Schelling refers to in the *Freiheitsschrift* as the *Ungrund*, the Ungrounded^{xxii}) to the *Triebe* of the *Grund*, which serves as the stepping stone to full-fledged freedom, freedom as the predicate of a subject, is that *there is no movement at all* – *Grund is always-already the Ungrund, the “closed” circle of nature is always already the scene of (possible full emergence of) freedom.*^{xxiii} The *Ungrund* is not a fourth principle which exists prior to *Grund* and existence as that which unifies them together as mutual pairs, but the radical self-relating negativity at the heart of the human subject, which now, instead of being a single part in the totality of material being, posits itself as an independent centre that hegemonically dominates the whole to which it belonged.

The libidinal frenzy of the unruliness of human nature does not merely represent a single case of the diseased breakdown of the ontological, but, rather, the inability of substance to posit itself as all. The “ground fails to ground” (Johnston 2000: 92). Nature was always-already a sickly creature, whose collapse coincides with her conditions of (im)possibility. It is not only that nature never knew a moment of eternal happiness and joy, but that the dull, inarticulate pressure of her own gasping for breath (spirit, we remember, comes from the Latin *spiritus*, “breath,” and is related to *spirare*, “to breathe”) precedes the very positivity of her being. Substance can only *be* substance – nature can only *be* nature – insofar as it is *already* internally torn apart by a constitutive moment of autolaceration that is the site of spirit/subject. This is why the passage is merely a “logical conversion” – it merely requires a certain gesture, an opening, to be brought to a new power, while nothing changes at the level of positive being. Here we clearly see the Hegelian logic that Žižek superimposes over/extracts from Schelling in the 2nd draft: it is the failure of the first moment (the self-positing of substance) which leads to the second (the unruliness of human nature, the unbearable instinctual short circuit of *Triebe*), and the failure of the second leads to the third (the self-positing of this rupture in the fold of being, its inserting itself into the first position). The essence of the third moment is, therefore, the negation of the previous two, which gives it a notional self-relationality.

Conclusion

What should be clear at this juncture is the ambiguous nature of the Schelling-Hegel relationship within Žižek's reading of German Idealism. Starting from his claim that the fundamental breakthrough announced by Kantian philosophy is its *acomism*, the radical *incompletion* of reality heralded by the deadlock of freedom, Žižek time and time again asserts that it was *Hegel* who most radically brought this truth into conceptual fullness. In the wake of the critical system, Hegel was able to supersede dogmatic metaphysics by making an epistemological obstacle, “we cannot

know the cosmos,” into a positive ontological condition, “there is no cosmos” by inscribing the transcendental subject *within* the fabric of being.^{xxiv} Yet, what is often missing in his own descriptions of this material contingency implied in what Žižek perceives the *Grundlogik* of German Idealism is the irremovable role that Schelling plays in his own interpretation of the conceptual constellation of post-Kantian philosophy. It is only through his “reactualization” of Schelling through the unpacking of a latent Hegelian logic that enables Žižek to articulate this metaphysics of a “not-all,” a dialectics of non-reconciliation, from the German Idealist tradition.

Taking Kant's descriptions of freedom as absolute, both Hegel and the late Schelling, in their own way, try to develop a theory of substance as subject, to explain how the gap that separates us from the closed causal system of nature could emerge, but neither on their own are sufficient. While the mature Hegelian logic backs away from the dialectical implications of the radical ontology of freedom announced by the transcendental subject already partially developed in its earlier concept of the night of the world, the late Schelling, having fully articulated the lacerating autodisruption of substance, in the end shies away from the horror of self-relating negativity by having recourse to *Ungrund*. The true culmination of the *Grundlogik* of German Idealism, as Žižek articulates and attempts to develop it further in his own parallax ontology, can only be a hybridism of Schellingian ontology and Hegelian logic.

- i To anyone familiar with post-Kantian German Idealism, the separation between ontology and logic that I am here making will without doubt appear dubious insofar as both are intricately intertwined within the tradition: Isn't Hegelian logic in some sense an ontology, and isn't Schelling's concept of the metaphysical ground of reality also a logic? Doesn't Hegel have such stark criticisms of formalism? I must point out that this is a merely functional distinction used in order draw out certain continuing difficulties and unearthed textual possibilities in both Schelling's and Hegel's thought that Žižek draws upon and attempts to bring forth. Of course, for Žižek, Hegel's logic is revelatory of the heart of reality and Schelling's ontology as he derives it has a very specific (Hegelian) logic. What will become clear throughout is why I propose such a distinction: according to Žižek, Hegel's mature ontology is inconsistent with its own dialectical presuppositions, whereas Schelling's logic is a turning away from the dialectical radicalness his ontological account of the genesis of the subject, and it is only through the hybridism of the achievements of the two that Žižek implicitly claims we can arrive at the hidden *Grund(onto-)logik* of the German Idealist tradition.
- ii This could be further explicated by supplementing it with a number of possible citations from *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*. For example, Kant 1960: 30.
- iii Schelling says in his *Freiheitschrift* that it is in idealism that "we have to thank for the first perfect concept of freedom" (Schelling 2003: 231) and situates the true Kantian breakthrough in the *Critique of Practical Reason* (ibid. 232). The same applies to Žižek: "No wonder Kant is *the* philosopher of freedom: with him, the deadlock of freedom emerges" (Žižek 2009b: 94).
- iv Schelling 2001: 232.
- v Hegel 1977: 143 & 168.
- vi Schelling 2003: 230.
- vii Žižek 2000: 33.
- viii Žižek 2000: Chapter 2, "The Hegelian Ticklish Subject," section "3, 4, 5," in 79-86.
- ix Žižek 2000: 82.
- x The entirety of the parallax logic that Žižek is attempting to develop as the basis for the rehabilitation of dialectical materialism is, in effect, an attempt to bring into conceptual fullness Schelling's logic of the *Grund*. For a description of the nature of this logic as enabling freedom through ontological dependence see Schelling 2003: 227.
- xi Schelling 2000a: 217.
- xii Schelling 2003: 239.
- xiii Johnston 2000: Chapter 7, "Substance Against Itself: The Disturbing Vortex of *Trieb*," p. 80-92.
- xiv Žižek talks of Jacques-Alain Miller's remarks on unsettling rat experiments mentioned in one of Lacan's unpublished seminars, where it is only through a kind of neurological mutilation that a rat can be made to behave like a human. See Žižek 2007: 219-220.
- xv Žižek 2007: 24
- xvi Žižek even goes so far as to compare this caustic collapse of the ontological to the atrocity of sexual abuse and the horrific pictures of children dying from radiation exposure in Chernobyl. See Žižek 2009b: 73.
- xvii Žižek also develops this idea of the birth of the Symbolic as a need to gentrification of the Real through his reading of Schelling: Žižek 2000: 46-47 & Žižek 2008: 37-46.
- xviii Žižek 2007: 35-39.
- xix Instead of outlining the internal differences that occur within the three existent drafts of the *Weltalter* in terms of the movement from Past to Present, I will deal with Žižek's own exegesis which centres on the 2nd draft. A complete explication of the three drafts is outside the scope of this article.
- xx Žižek 2007: 22.
- xxi Žižek 2000: 23.
- xxii Schelling 2003: 276-277.
- xxiii Johnston 2000: 92.

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