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Fundamental perspectives: simulacra, history and the influence of Schelling on contemporary thought

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Abstract

The article brings up an analysis of the notion of the Real and the notion of Reality in contemporary thought in order to show the influence and relevance of the concept of “Grund” and “Remainder” by Schelling in Žižek. The paper proposes from Schelling’s perspective a reading of something “which does not exist, [but] continues to insist” (Welcome to the Desert of the Real) that explains the conformation of Real and reality (Žižek) and reality and simulacrum (Baudrillard)

Keywords

F.W.J. Schelling, S. Žižek, Real, Reality, contemporary thought, Grund, Existence

Bertolt Brecht is walking through the streets of Berlin when suddenly he sees a column of Soviet tanks appear in the distance. Lumbering like steel giants amid a sea of flags waving the hammer and sickle and banners thick with Party slogans, the tanks inch implacably towards the *Stalinalle*- the present day boulevard Karl-Marx-Allee- in order to crush the workers’ rebellion. Later that afternoon, Brecht would write in his diary that at this

moment he was tempted for the first time in his life to join *de facto* the Communist Party¹. As Žižek notes, this did not mean that Brecht accepted “the cruelty of the struggle in the hope that it would lead to a prosperous future” but rather that “the harshness of the violence as such was seen and endorsed as a sign of authenticity”². For Žižek, this gesture constitutes an example of what Alain Badiou regards as the main characteristic of the 20thC – a century which, in contrast to the utopian or “scientific” ideals and projects of the 19thC, was marked by a passion for the Real³, a passion for what we might describe as “the truly real”. As Žižek puts it, “the 20th C aimed at delivering the thing itself, at directly realizing the longed-for New Order. The ultimate and defining moment of the 20th C. was the direct experience of the Real as something opposed to everyday social reality- the Real in its extreme violence as the price to be paid for peeling off the deceptive layers of reality”⁴.

Basically, what Žižek proposes here helps him gain a *lacanian* understanding of what constitutes reality, but it might also be placed within a much broader context that has to do with what constitutes historical processes and with what we might describe, via Hegel, as “the end of history”. Indeed, if the 19th C. is the century of utopia it was because there was the perception that reality was not as it should be- thus the development of an ideal that held that the world had to be changed. To repeat Marx’s well-known words from his 11^o thesis on Feuerbach⁵, contrary to philosophy that had limited itself to interpret the world, it was now time to transform the world in order to carry out its complete realization (*Verwirklichung*), or to put it another way, the ideal had to be made effective (*wirklich*) via action with the aim of constructing a new reality. This construction, in turn, was to have some effect (*Wirkung*) upon the reception and interpretation of history.

It is well known that Marx developed this essential part of his thought as a criticism of idealism, or more specifically, of the Hegelian type of philosophy of history in which the history of Humanity gradually draws nearer to its destination (one which is none other than the realization of Reason). The meaning of progress, a most *modern* term that sprang from the pen of Voltaire in the 18th C⁶, is related precisely to this idea: that each instant of

¹ Cf. Brecht, B.: *Arbeitsjournal*, Dritter Band, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1973. *Journals, 1934-1956*, trans. Hugh Rorrison, ed. John Willett, Routledge, 1996.

² Žižek, S.: *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, London, Verso Books, 2004, p.5.

³ Cf. Badiou, A.: *Le siècle*, Paris, Editions du Seuil, 2005.

⁴ Žižek, S.: *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, op cit, pp. 4-5

⁵ Cf. Marx, K.: “Thesen über Feuerbach”. In: *Karl Marx Frühe Schriften*, vol. 2, Stuttgart, Cotta, 1971, pp. 1-4.

⁶ Significantly, it was Voltaire who first adopted the term “philosophy of History” in his *Essay on the Customs and the Spirit of the Nations* (1769). This was a work that attempted to provide, in a way that was secular and that ran contrary to the political theology of Bossuet, the philosophical history of a world-wide ‘civilizational’ process which was based upon reason and which was ruled by the sciences, technology, morals, laws and trade- the forms of control, that is, that man uses when

our time is considered different, better, and greater than its antecedent, thus encompassing and giving meaning to the same. Humanity as a whole, and not individual men, constitutes the ideal Subject of a history that, in constant progress, improves over time like a fine wine and which ends, after a long period of maturation, in a state of “perfection” or of “fulfillment”. Whatever happens we will come to the end of history, despite wars and misfortune (think of the “the cunning of reason” described by Hegel): along with time, the red carpet of history rolls out to a *finale* which we will toast with the chalice of the Spirit (the same with which Hegel, paraphrasing some verses of Schiller, concludes *The Phenomenology of the Spirit* in 1807). Having come to an end, however, history is not completed but rather has reached its culmination. Reason thus weaves its web, a pure construct that is in and of true history and which is revealed “linearly” (as a path to progress) in a splendor shorn of all excess in which everything remains “assimilated” within the system and in which everything is revealed.

The true direction of this rational progress (which culminates in the highest level of perfection), would be signalled by historical “events” that Kant would describe as “*Begebenheiten*” (or “irruptions of meaning”). At the very beginning- at the moment of actually taking place- some of these events might appear to be incomprehensible, yet they may be analyzed a posteriori to ascertain where they come from and what it is that has produced them. Their importance, however, derives from the fact that, in Kant’s view, they constitute a *signum prognostikon*,⁷ or in other words that they are facts that enable us to know where *we are heading*- and if this were not the case, events would be purely contingent, fortuitous and merely successive without internal meaning. It is important to note that, as is understood by Kant, the event reveals the essence that holds history together: *parusía*, it might be said. Yet as we were saying, nothing is fortuitous and it is not because these events allow us to glimpse the *télos* that drives history: more than “specific moments” or “key points” in the historical process that herald the future yet to come and that insert themselves into a network of meaning, such events are the tip of the iceberg in that they not only provide signs of the future but also because they are, as Hegel might have said, “manifestations” of Reason in History. This would be the case with the French Revolution, for example, in which the correct course of Reason is demonstrated by the appearance of liberty.. Indeed, it was this idea that lead Francis Fukuyama to argue in 1989 that the collapse of the Soviet block and the end of the cold war signalled the end of

confronted with the world. Indeed, this is a world which is permanently shaped by the “rational” intervention of man and not one in which “material” is provided by a “nature” which is “available” to humanity.

⁷ AK. VII, 84 (*Der Streit der Fakultäten*). There is a translation in English: Kant, I.: *The Conflict of the Faculties*, trans. Mary J.Gregor, Universtiy of Nebraska Press, 1992.

history: "The triumph of the West, of the western *idea*, is evident first of all in the total exhaustion of viable systematic alternatives to western liberalism [...] What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War or the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the end of history of such; that is, the end point in mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government"⁸. That this triumph implied that all cataclysmic events (terror, oppression, extermination and genocide) might only be *empirical* "facts", did not mean, according to Fukuyama, that there was any less rational meaning in the course of history nor any less validity in his own interpretation of events⁹.

Curiously, the idea of the "end of history" was picked up and further developed by Marxism (the same that Fukuyama criticizes in his Reading of Hegel). While Marx still subscribed to the idea of "the end of history", he believed that it could only be achieved by picking away at a reality which is fabricated by the abstract process of reason, that is, that we have to wake up from the deception and lethargy produced by inhaling the *opiate of the people* and realize that our reality is constructed, artificial and that, as such, can be knocked down and reconstructed. It is here that the reaction experienced by Brecht- the "passion for the Real" with which we began the text- makes sense: it is the violent gesture that allows a glimpse, among the rubble of artificial reality, of "the truly authentic". To grasp the accuracy of Žižek's reading, one only needs to recall the bleak conclusion to Brecht's own play *Drums in the night* (1918-1920): "All of this is nothing but pure theatre. A simple stage and a cardboard moon. But the slaughterhouses that lie behind them, they're real enough alright"¹⁰.

This distinction between the "passion for the Real", characteristic of the 20th C., and what we might term the "passion for the ideal" of the 19th C., is constructed upon our understanding of reality. Indeed, it is a distinction that Žižek uses to interpret our era- an era of the virtual. Yet the interesting thing- and this is our proposal- is that such a distinction also connects, inexplicitly, two apparently unrelated problems: on one hand, and as already discussed, the construction of historical realities (within the realm of philosophy of history), and on the other hand, the ontological question over "being" in reality and the Real, that is to say, what constitutes our reality and being (at a metaphysical level). These two problems find common ground in the philosophy of Schelling, a point which the philosopher from Leonberg himself described as constituting

⁸ Fukuyama, F.: 'The End of History', *The National Interest*, Summer, 1989.

⁹ Cf. Fukuyama, F.: *The End of History and the Last Man*, The Free Press, MacMillan, 1992, p.70.

¹⁰ Brecht, B.: *Drums in the Night*, Methuen, August, 1988

“the most important for philosophy since Plato”: “that which is not” (*das Nichtseyende*)¹¹. We can thus speak not just of Schellingian developments in philosophy but also of their currency and relevance in addressing problems of contemporary philosophy, above all those problems considered by Žižek and Baudrillard. Indeed, if the Hegelian type “philosophy of history” holds that events signal the rational end of history, then with Schelling we can define a new conception of history in which, as well as “events”, there is *something else*, something that would explain the relationship between the construction of history and all that is virtual and the spectacle, something that means that history itself- and by extension, the supposed “progress” that Humanity tends towards- would be adulterated. History does not thus move in a direction that matches our interpretation of reality.

Schelling’s proposal regarding the system of the Absolute and his way of understanding it was to be radically different from that of Hegel. There is no revelation of the profound but rather something profound and obscure beneath the revelation: although history also constitutes a way of giving shape to things and is a “Subject’s” awareness of the same, there is not a full manifestation, as if everything were liable to become conscious, or that is, “manifest”. Instead, history is made up of subterranean levels, subconscious substrates, and as such, ones which are both irreducible and constitutive of the Subject: they are “effective” although they never come to have an entity of their own in existence.

1. Žižek and the Desert of the Real

This “other history of consciousness” leads Žižek to consider that Schelling carried out a philosophical revolution¹² and is used by Žižek to explain the virtualization of our experience. If we follow Žižek’s considerations in *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (2002), we find reality to be related to the network or context in which we are inserted or integrated, that is to say, to a network of symbolic coordinates that determines our experience of reality (our “daily” world). Lying beneath this- latent- is the Real, understood as that which is “authentic” but at the same time as that which is impenetrable and if viewed may convert the subject into stone (just as if they had gazed upon the

¹¹ WA I 36.37. *The Ages Of the World*, Columbia University Press, 1942, trans. Frederick de Wolfe Bolman, p. 50. Schelling claims that his philosophy of identity reintroduced the concept of ‘that which is not’ into philosophy (after having experienced the ignorance and rejection of idealism). Cf. *Philosophie der Offenbarung*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1977, p. 113-114.

¹² Žižek, S.: “Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Schelling (But Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock)”. In Wirth, J.M.: *Schelling Now. Contemporary Readings*, Indiana University Press, 2005, p. 33.

Medusa) but which only becomes a threat to the subject who experiences it. The Real, as opposed to the construct of reality, is thus the abyss¹³ -as illustrated by Michael Gondry's film *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2005), in which the main character repeatedly tries but fails to prevent memories- which are erased by a machine designed to eliminate "painful left overs"- from springing up again, in much the same way that humidity on a wall that refuses to disappear. Artificially created reality cannot likewise dodge the thrashings about of a subconscious as it struggles to adapt to new and imposed reality, though this might even be self-imposed (or precisely because of this). The Real makes an appearance but "it has the status of a(nother) semblance: *precisely because it is real, that is, because of its traumatic/excessive character, we are unable to integrate it into (what we experience as) our reality, and are therefore compelled to experience it as a nightmarish apparition*"¹⁴. A game of mirrors, to camouflage what is truly real, the Real is made up to appear like the sleep of reason- one as Goya might say, that produces monsters. As such, the 21st C. would not only be characterized by the passion for appearance that Žižek himself notes but also (as we will see) by the simulacrum, as Baudrillard would well see. Both these characteristics would occur within what has been known, since Debord, as the society of the spectacle¹⁵; while, in our world of information and globalization, the illusion of transparency leads us to we think we have direct access to everything that takes place in our reality, "immediacy" is in fact confused with "transparency" and "transparency" with "authenticity". In effect, our access to reality is filtered by a media that broadcasts virtual images in real time. Indeed, the first illusion of immediacy hides the fact that with the use of a camera lense a decision on perspective has already been taken- that the lense is, as Susan Sontag pointed out, a filter between two points¹⁶. The broadcast in "real time", which is never completely real given that it displays a temporal imbalance, guarantees neither the authenticity of the image nor even its fictitious character. Instead, the only thing it does guarantee is the image itself, which might refer to something that truly exists but which also may shift away from its reference point *ad infinitum*, as in the famous final scene in *The Lady from Shanghai* by Orson Welles (1948). This leads us to the second illusion of immediacy: transparency. There is not, as such, an authentic Passion for the

¹³ Žižek develops three notions or categories of the Real: the real Real –which will be the subject of this text- ,the imaginary Real, which does not refer to the illusion of the Real but, rather, to something that inspires rejection without us knowing why, and the Symbolic Real associated with that which cannot, from the perspective of science or reason, be integrated within our bounds of sense, such as for example, quantum physics which cannot be explained in itself but only translated on the basis of formulas that work. Cf. Žižek, S.: *Risking the Impossible-* and *Conversations with Žižek*, Slavov Žižek and Glen Daly, Polity Press, 2004, p. 68 and following.

¹⁴ Žižek, S.: *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

¹⁵ Also Žižek himself: "the ultimate truth of the capitalist utilitarian despiritualized universe is the dematerialization of 'real' life itself, its reversal into a spectral show". *Ibid*, p. 14.

¹⁶ Cf. Sontag, S.: *On Photography*, Picador, 2001.

Real, but rather a false passion based on another game of appearances in which what is presented as Real is what is constructed and presented as such. However, the real in itself is, by definition, beyond reach and thus beyond control.

In the field of philosophy of history, it could thus be said that various types of events are woven together into “historical realities”: easily-integrated authentic events, real events which are taken to be fictitious (which would be interruptions of the Real, disguised so as to be integrated into the system, albeit in adulterated form) and fictitious events which are taken to be authentic. While the first of these might be described as events in the strong sense of the word¹⁷, the second would be specters and the third, simulacra. In this paper, I will try and analyze the last of these two concepts, the specter and the simulacrum. If indeed it is only the event that “is” (as such), and which (as such) carries out the function of “what is” according to the ontological tradition- that is, according to book IV of *Metaphysics*, “what is, in as much that something is” (τὸ ὄν)¹⁸, then in the last two cases mentioned we would encounter forms of “what is not”: in not being, they are; or better said, they are “effective”; or better yet, in spite of not being, they exist. We would thus have to speak of an “effectivity” (*Wirklichkeit*) of that which is not, a concept that had two meanings for Schelling, both of them far removed from ‘lack of being’ or ‘deficiency’. Indeed, both meanings employed by Schelling will help us to understand the construction of historical realities and the sense in which both “the specter” and “the simulacrum” might be understood.

So it is that reality, like some stage-managed scenery in which we calmly move about, places a monster guise over what is truly monstrous. However, camouflaged as fictitious, this Real becomes the specter, a “unreal nightmarish specter” to employ Žižek’s words, one which constantly threatens and paralyzes, like a shadow lying in wait, and as such, that appears as the origin of that which is traumatic. In spite of its supposed “unreality”, it does have some effects (*Wirkung*); a specter that although “it was not possible” has become effective (*wirklich*): “In our daily existence, we are immersed in ‘reality’, and this immersion is disturbed by symptoms that bear witness to the fact that another level of our psyche, repressed, resists this immersion”¹⁹. That being the case, what is this ‘Real’ that, not being, is? Or, to put it another way, what is it that not being comprehensible to reason, escapes and remains beyond reach and yet effects reason, or has effect upon it? Žižek

¹⁷ For a more in-depth analysis of “the event”, see also my own article “Blow up. Evento, acontecimiento, crisis”. In Cadahia, L.-Velasco, G.: *Norma y crisis de la filosofía*, Madrid, Katz Editores, 2012.

¹⁸ Aristotle: *Metaphysics*, Book IV, 1003a-1003b. Aristotle in 23 Volumes, Vols.17, 18, translated by Hugh Tredennick. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1933, 1989.

¹⁹ Žižek, S.: *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

asserts that: “In order to account for this paradox, we should bear in mind that the opposite of *existence* is not nonexistence but rather *insistence*: that which does not exist, continues to insist, striving towards existence (the first to articulate this opposition was, of course, Schelling, when, in his *Treatise on human liberty*, he introduced the distinction between Existence and the Ground of Existence). When I miss a crucial ethical opportunity, and I fail to make a move that would ‘change everything’, the very non-existence of *what should have been done* will haunt me forever: although what I did not do does not exist, its specter continues to insist”²⁰. This specter does not only have to do with regret (‘what should have been done’) but also with a threat that has not materialized, with what may come and befall us at any moment, like the sudden apparition that, having to remain hidden, all of a sudden reveals itself, making itself known in order to disappear again and to leave reality in tatters (trauma, in other words). This is why Žižek understands the attack on the World Trade Center as a blow to our reality delivered by the irruption of the Real and why he is able to assert that “the United States got what it fantasized about”²¹. As such, the Real would thus have to do with what is found in our psyche and what appears as a symptom of an unconscious fear that, upon becoming conscious, appears as a ghost. The ‘ghost’ thus embodies this fear towards what escapes the rational material with which we construct our reality. We know, however- Žižek tells us- that something is not working in this theater of ours.

The allusion made by Žižek to *On human freedom* of 1809 refers to the concept of “the indivisible remainder” (*nie aufgehende Rest*) that Schelling develops upon analyzing the relationship between existence and its ground and what was to be the main pillar of his research²². Žižek, in fact, dedicated an essay on the subject of “the remainder” in 1996, *The indivisible remainder*²³, above all focusing on *The Ages of the World*, Schelling’s great unfinished work, which took up three versions (1811, 1813 and 1815) and long periods of development until his late philosophy²⁴. The distinction *Grund/Existenz* attempts to provide an account of how the Absolute unfolds, an account that Schelling always understands to be linked to the concept of historicity and which means that the Absolute is not something already done or given, something “immediate”, but rather something that goes about creating itself through a process of self-construction and formation. Not only does this account imply the “phases” that constitute identity and subjectivity and the

²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 22.

²¹ *Ibid*, p. 16.

²² Cf. SW I/7, 357. Cf. Carrasco Conde, A.: *La limpidez del mal. El mal y la historia en la filosofía de Schelling*, Madrid, Plaza y Valdés, 2013.

²³ Žižek, S.: *The indivisible remainder. On Schelling and related matters*, London, Verso, 1996.

²⁴ Cf. Carrasco-Conde, A.: “El Sistema de los tiempos y el Epos de la historia: Schelling y la historicidad del absoluto”. In: *Revista Bajo Palabra* (2009), Época II, N. 4, pp. 99-106.

gradual awareness of the Absolute- which is to say, of the path from unconsciousness (*Unbewußtheit*) to consciousness (*Bewußtsein*)²⁵(from which, incidentally, comes the title of Jankélévitch, *The odyssey of consciousness*²⁶)- it also implies the construction of reality itself, of things “coming into existence”. All that exists appears within the process of the development of the Absolute, that in its full sense, is understood not as a point of departure but rather as point of arrival²⁷ in which this Absolute-Subject reaches its consummation (*Vollendung*) and its effective realization (*Verwirklichung*) via the highest self-revelation (*Selbstoffenbarung*). This is concept- that Schelling presents as an Absolute (or God) in becoming²⁸- of the “derived Absolute”²⁹. If, as such, this is an arrival, then what do we find at the start? How does the process take place? What does it mean that things are and only exist within this becoming? And, finally, what sense is there in speaking of an “indivisible remainder” when it is asserted that the process leads to the manifestation and effective realization of the Absolute?

Schelling was to begin *On human freedom* by responding to the accusations of atheism and pantheism made by Schlegel in his *Indierbuch* in 1808 in which, following the witch hunt initiated and sustained by Jacobi, ‘spinoZism’ was identified with atheism³⁰. The main point of the argument developed in the text is structured around Schlegel’s statement: “pantheism is the system of pure reason”³¹ and, as such, is fatalistic. Using the words of Schlegel, Schelling was to argue with some irony: “the only possible system of reason is pantheism, but this inevitably leads to fatalism. It is undeniable how marvelous the invention of these general names is, via which one can describe an entire conception at once”³². This idea emerges from the study carried out by Lessing according to which the only philosophy that may be regarded as such is that of SpinoZa³³ and given that his system, it is thus argued, can only be labeled as atheist, all philosophy is pantheist (we will recall that for SpinoZa, according to Part I of *Ethics*, Propositions XIV and XV, the only

²⁵ SW I/7, 361.

²⁶ Cf. Jankélévitch, V.: *L’Odyssée de la conscience dans la dernière philosophie de Schelling*, Paris, Félix Alcan, 1933.

²⁷ Cf. Marquet, F.: *Liberté et existence. Étude sur la formation de la pensée de Schelling*, Paris, Gallimard, 1973, p. 396.

²⁸ Cf. SW I/7, 358-359.

²⁹ Cf. SW I/7, 347.

³⁰ There is an extensive bibliography on this issue: *Die Hauptschrift zum Pantheismusstreit Zwischen Jacobi und Mendelssohn*, edited by Heinrich Scholz, Verlag von Reuther & Reichard. Berlin, 1916 which contains an almost exhaustive collection of documents dealing with this subject. In addition, there is Kurt Christ’s study: *Jacobi und Mendelssohn. Eine Analyse des SpinoZastreits*. Königshausen & Neumann. Würzburg, 1988; as well as the classic study by Hans Hölters: *Der spinozistische Gottesbegriff bei M. Mendelssohn und J.H. Jacobi und der Gottesbegriff Spinozas*. Universitas-Archiv. Verlag-Anstalt Heinr. & J. Lechte / Emsdetten. 1938.

³¹ KA, VIII, 249.

³² SW I/7, 338.

³³ Sp.-Br, 18.

substance that can conceive itself is God and that, as such, all that is, is in God). It is along such lines, just as Jabobi was to reveal in a reaction against Lessing which initiated the polemic, the philosophy of Spinoza (and that of Lessing, Fichte, Kant and even Schelling) is fatalistic and atheist. Everything is God. But if everything is God, there is no place for freedom within the system: we would be part of a machine, of an everything that would turn us into passive beings dependent upon the absolute causality of a unique Being. Schelling would solve this problem by explaining what should be understood by 'spinozism' and why his system should not be identified with it³⁴. It does not mean that "Everything is God" but rather that "Everything is in God"³⁵. Not pantheism but rather, according to the term established by Krause, 'panentheism'. Beings are, in this way, a consequence of the self-revelation of God, but not God himself. They appear in the process of His manifestation, but cannot be identified with Him, with the Absolute Subject or to put it another way, beings are in the system but are not identifiable with it, they are something else, or even, if you will, we are in the universe but we are not the universe.

If all that exists, exists in and because of the process of manifestation or the becoming of the Absolute in its self-revelation, and we do not identify with it (we are not God), there is something more, as well as the very Existence of this subject, something more that enables the process but that is not identified with the process itself. Thus Schelling's statement: "Let us acknowledge [...] that the concept of becoming is the only one appropriate to the nature of things. Yet, considered in an absolute sense, these cannot become in God, given that they are different from Him *toto genere* or, to say this more correctly, they are infinitely different from Him. To be excised from God, they have to 'become' on a different ground from Him. Yet as there can be nothing that exists outside of God, this contradiction can only be resolved by saying that things have their ground in that which, in God himself, is not *Himself*, that is, in that which is the ground for the existence of God"³⁶.

Schelling had previously already distinguished between "being, in as much as it exists" and "being with respect to a mere ground of existence"³⁷, two terms that Žižek alludes to and which are not just at the beginning of the process of manifestation but also at the end (and from this comes, as we will see, the relationship with that "indivisible remainder"). The "being, in as much as it exists" is God, the subject, considered in absolute form in its gradual path to be itself, to become conscious of itself, while "the ground of its

³⁴ In any case, according to Schelling, Spinoza's system cannot be labelled as fatalistic. Its problem does not lie with the fact that it locates things within God but rather that they are things, that is, because of the lack of life and mechanical character that it bestows upon nature Cf. SW I/7, 349.

³⁵ Cf. SW I/7, 339-340.

³⁶ SW I/7, 359.

³⁷ SW I/7, 357.

existence” is what it leaves behind, but does not manage to eliminate, nor overcome, but rather remains inseparably united to it as a base or supply fund and that, though not God himself, it is the darkness prior to what is the beginning of being itself. Schelling would call this *nature-* in God. As *Grund*, it is the basis of the process in the “real” sense of the term and as such, it can never take leave of itself, neither logically nor in reality. In order to explain this relationship, Schelling makes use of the analogy with gravity and with light: the first always implies a movement of contraction, even more than retraction, and the second, of expansion or of *Given-ness*³⁸. The ground is that which always retracts, and which acting as a base or fund, enables the manifestation of what exists and which must be fought against in order to emerge from the darkness of the unconscious. It is the urge to be (*Sehnsucht*), desire (*Begierde*)³⁹, that initiates the revelation, yet at the same time that it generates the expansive movement of existence (expansive will), it produces a movement of contraction towards itself upon wanting to be itself, upon aiming at being its most genuine self (contractive will)⁴⁰. It was not in vain that Schelling was to assert that in this particular odyssey, phases or previous figures (*Aufhebung*) are not overcome, cancelled or raised up but instead there is a constant effort made towards subjugation (*Überwindung*) that may never be integrated in the “rational” part of the system. At the same time that

³⁸ “ This relationship may be illustrated by means of the analogy between the relationship existing in nature between the force of gravity (*Schwerkraft*) and light. The force of gravity precedes light as its eternally obscure ground, that is not act itself and that flees in the night with the approach of light (the existent). Not even light itself completely breaks the seal under which it remains enclosed”. SW I/7, 358. It is interesting to note that what Schelling opposes to light is gravity and his allusion to this last as obscurity should not be understood in terms of privation, such as a lack of light, but rather as that force which, owing to its absolute contraction, is positively opposed to it (according to the celebrated- and reviled- concept of “darkness” or *Finsternis* in Goethe). In view of the object of our text, we will not stop to further explore this important distinction. We thus refer the reader, among the ample bibliography on this subject, to the works of O. Höffe- A. Pieper (Eds.): *Über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit*, Berlin, Akademie Verlag 1995 and, within this collective project, the work of O. Marquard: “Grund und Existenz in Gott”; also M. Baumgartner - W.G. Jacobs (Eds.): *Schellings Weg zur Freiheitsschrift. Legende und Wirklichkeit*, Stuttgart, Fromman-holzBoog 1996; J. Hennigfeld: *Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schellings >Philosophische Untersuchungen über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit und die damit Zusammenhängenden Gegenstände<*, Darmstad, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 2001. The celebration of the bicentenary has also seen the recent publication of two works of great interest: G. WenZ: *Das Böse und sein Grund. Zur Rezeptionsgeschichte von Schellings Freiheitsschrift 1809*: Vorgelegt in der Sitzung vom 9. Juli 2010, München, Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften 2010; S. Peetz - R. Elm: *Freiheit und Bildung: Schellings Freiheitsschrift 1809-2009*, Paderborn, Fink 2011; Ferrer, P.-Pedro, T. (Eds): *Schellings Philosophie der Freiheit. Studien Zu den Philosophischen Untersuchung über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit*, Würzburg, Ergon, 2012. We also cite, as indispensable, M.Heidegger’s study: *Schellings Abhandlung über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit (1809)*, Tubinga, Max Niemeyer 1971.

³⁹ Cf. SW I/7, 359.

⁴⁰ In this movement, the concepts of sameness (*Selbstheit*), desire (*Sehnsucht*) and selfishness (*Selbstsucht*) are fundamental. For further study on the relationship between them, I refer the reader to: Carrasco-Conde, A.: “1809: Die Figur Napoleons und der Begriff des Bösen in der *Freiheitsschrift*”, en Ferrer, P.-Pedro, T. (Eds): *Schellings Philosophie der Freiheit. Studien Zu den Philosophischen Untersuchung über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit*, op. cit., pp. 71-81.

consciousness and reason take place, there must be a struggle against what Freud would call “the death drives” and which remain with their own active force as “latency”. What remains deep down and as such, always escaping from the light of consciousness and thus, of pure reason, is precisely the lack of rule⁴¹, which is to say, is that which cannot be measured and that cannot be analyzed or catalogued.

Being self-aware, the subject is already transparent and thus confronts the darkness of the deep, which is its own and is unfathomable to itself and which cannot be eliminated: if it were, the subject would no longer be- it would eliminate a part of what it is. Yet neither would it have ground beneath its feet nor a base on which to raise itself up onto this curvature that allows it to effectively realize itself in history, nor would it have the possibility to do so. This stubborn indivisible remainder (*nie aufgehende Rest*) that “not even with the greatest effort allows itself to be dissolved by understanding” - as Schelling asserts⁴²- is what always remains both in the process and in the complete realization of the subject and what has not been able to be, neither assimilated nor even slightly touched by the foundational activity of reason and understanding. It is not that it is irrational⁴³ but rather that reason, literally, “cannot deal with it” and it thus remains pure in its pure withdrawn state, yet always a threat. As it seems, “the Remainder” is not a residue, as such, that has been controlled and discarded by reason- that is, waste- but rather an opening that points towards this inseparably necessary relationship between *Grund* and Existence. Thus while it is always there - though it never exists - it is neither ‘a void’ nor a ‘being that is’. It is, as Schelling was to say in *The Ages of the World*, “non-being”: “This relationship with the other [contractive] will has confused observers in various ways. For some, making them believe that this force that behaves as non-being is also in itself [...] a non-existent being. That is why idealists usually treat it simply as a force that in no way exists”⁴⁴. For Schelling, ‘that which is not’ does not mean lack or deficiency but rather a different way of being that actively opposes being and that which is: “that which is not is not an absolute lack of essence, it is only essence placed against authentic essence, which does not suppose that it is any less positive in its own way; if that is unity, it is the opposition and, concretely, the highest form of opposition or in itself”⁴⁵.

⁴¹ Cf. SW I/7, 359.

⁴² SW I/7, 360.

⁴³ Lukács was to begin his history of irrationality with Schelling, precisely because he understood this ground of the system to be irrational.. In Lukács, G.: *Die Zerstörung der Vernunft*; en: *Werke*. vol. 9. Luchterhand. 1962. In English, *The destruction of reason. The way of irrationalism from Schelling to Hitler*, translated by Peter. R.Palmer, 1980, Merlin Press, 1980

⁴⁴ WA I. 36.37.

⁴⁵ WA I 36.37.

Žižek thus identifies the Real (the real Real, to use his own terminology) as that which, as we saw at the beginning, is actively opposed to existence: “the opposite of *existence* is not non-existence, but *insistence*: that which does not exist, continues to insist, striving towards existence”⁴⁶. Which is to say, that this “insistence” corresponds exactly with that which does not exist: it does not exist, yet is and given that it is, is not a void. A series of qualifications, however, need to be made. In spite of the fact that Žižek refers explicitly to Schelling to provide an account of the Real as “insistence”, what he asserts in the quote that we have just recalled has two levels: on one hand, all insistence implies the active exercise of an active force, a perseverance- that is, to make a constant effort to achieve something, not a latency. According to Schelling, “the Remainder” is always present as an active force but is not activated. If it were “the same principal that carries and sustains us, we would be consumed and annihilated in its operability”⁴⁷. The way of being of that which does not exist is thus “active” but not “operative” latency, a force that exists in the form of a retraction in which the effective (*wirklich*) is not possible (*möglich*), yet where that which is possible appears as a ground of the effective. Secondly, given that it remains as latency, it does not have so much to do with “what should have been done and I haven’t done”, but rather with what “could happen and should not”. From this, all existence has to submit to or contain its ground, like someone who maintains pressure in a barrel by covering up the opening with their hand. In psychological terms, it could be said that the conscious actively contains the unconscious, although the unconscious is functioning at a level which is not visible to the psyche. If the unconscious is “activated” the impulses (the Freudian ‘it’) start working. It is however when the reality of the conscious subject (the self) wavers. The real is active, real opposition, but it is not operative: a presence, a shadow that comes from afar, that precisely because of its inaccessible character, generates “specters”: “the notion of the Real presupposed here- Žižek maintains- is the Real-as-impossible in the sense of the big absence: you always miss it, it’s a basic void and the illusion is that you can get it [...] the Real is actually too traumatic to encounter: directly confronting the Real would be an impossible, incestuous and self-destructive experience” and, yet, Žižek maintains “the problem with the Real is that it occurs, and *that’s* the trauma”⁴⁸. In other words, the materialization of that which is not, of that which “should not happen and happens” or, according to a well-known formulation: that which “should remain hidden, however, has shown itself”- the Uncanny.

Surely the most frequently cited text by Schelling is that which Freud repeats in his brief article *The Uncanny* published in 1919, in which the Schellingian formulation is

⁴⁶ Žižek, S.: *The desert of the Real*, op. cit., p. 22.

⁴⁷ WA I 24.25.

⁴⁸ Žižek, S.: *Risking the impossible. Conversations with Glyn Daly*, op. cit..

recovered to define the term “uncanny”: “*Unheimlich* is what one calls everything that was meant to remain secret and hidden and has come out into the open”⁴⁹. According to this definition, the uncanny takes place in the heart of the familiar: it is not something strange that makes a sudden appearance from without, but rather something that being hidden in what is most representative of us, our reality for example, appears from within and converts what is most typical and familiar into something strange- just like a specter, a *revenant*, or “that which returns”. The uncanny is thus the apparition of what should remain subjugated and contained. It is along these lines that Žižek asserts that, without doubt, *The Ages of the World* can be read- as he himself does- as “meta-psychological writings of a Freudian nature in the most strictest sense”⁵⁰. Thus, at the level of history, the Real has to do with this event that overcomes us, with the appearance of the ghost that, upon not being assimilated by reason, covers itself with fictitious clothing, though this clothing does nothing but cover the site of the wound, like a cloth that hides the emptiness left when the Real is pulled back : “the hard kernel of the Real that we are only able to sustain if we fictionalize it”⁵¹. Think, for example, that the overall reaction to the attack of the Twin Towers was that it was a film. It is not insignificant that Žižek presents this interpretation of the real, after 9-11, in a text titled *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* in an explicit reference to a dialogue from the film *The Matrix* (Wachowski, 1999) in which the main character awakens from a virtual sleep induced by a machine world, one in which what seems to be reality is a virtual reconstruction. In the film, “real” reality has been reduced to rubble, a grey and inhospitable desert that some would prefer to never have seen. Yet the problem is that what is shown to the main character is not real in itself but rather a representation, a computer simulation- a representation of a representation; a game of mirrors.

2. Baudrillard and The simulacrum

It is this game of mirrors, the almost total virtualization of our environment (everything is filtered by the media, by technology in its different modes) which has meant that, according to Žižek, “the experience we are living is more and more in an artificially

⁴⁹ Freud, S.: ‘The Uncanny’, trans. David McLintock, Penguin Classics, 2003, p.132.

⁵⁰ Žižek, S.: *The indivisible remainder. On Schelling and related matters*, op. cit., p. 9. For further reading on this and the relationship between Schelling and the Freudian notion of the uncanny Cf. Goddard, J.-F.: “Freud et Schelling. *Unheimlichkeit* et refoulement”. In Ferrer, P.-Pedro, T. (Eds): *Schellings Philosophie der Freiheit. Studien zu den Philosophischen Untersuchung über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit*, op. cit, pp. 277-285.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 19.

constructed universe”⁵². And while Žižek talks of the desire for “authenticity”, which leads, for example, to the practice of *cutting* (inflicting cuts on the body so that, through pain, one can assert the authenticity of one’s own experience. Think, on another level, of Marina Abramovic’s performances that try to show how other levels of “reality” can be gained through pain), Baudrillard asserts that, in reality, the image that *transparently* covers another image refers to a “refuge in the virtual”: “To the catastrophe of the real- says Baudrillard –we prefer the exile of the virtual, whose universal mirror is television”⁵³. It is worth saying that with the world of images, television, internet, Youtube and Facebook, we live in the era of the simulacrum, that is, in the era of what is presented as real and is not; of what does not exist but is, or better still, is in the way of a “non-being” with “effects” (*Wirkung*) upon reality(*Wirklichkeit*).

Baudrillard begins “the precession of simulacra” with Borges’ well-known fable in which the empire’s cartographers have drawn up a map that attempts to create a perfect copy of the territory to be covered; yet today, as Baudrillard would say, “simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation of models of a real without origin or reality [...] It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory [...] that engenders the territory”⁵⁴. The image without reference: “is no longer is anything but operational. In fact, it is no longer really the real [...]”⁵⁵.

At the level of history, this inoculation of simulacra and appearances in reality, gains its impact from the way in which we interpret what has taken place. In fact, it is this aspect of simulation that led Baudrillard to maintain that, immersed in the culture of spectacle that characterizes our times (to paraphrase Debord), the Gulf War “did not take place”. This was not because the war was not authentic but rather because its character of reality was determined by its character of the spec(tac)ular, “ to falsify ends and all calculation with respect to these ends, to falsify time and the occurrence of things and thereby precipitate our tendency towards impatience with respect to fulfillment. Or, to secretly intuit that the promise of fulfillment itself, too, is false and diabolic”⁵⁶. Events, thus, that are not, yet have effects.

Schelling was to assert that his concept of ‘that which is not’ is indebted to Plato⁵⁷,

⁵² Žižek, S.: *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, op. cit., p. 20.

⁵³ Baudrillard, J.: *The Gulf War did not take place*, Indiana University Press, 1995, p. 16.

⁵⁴ Baudrillard, J.: ‘The precession of simulacra’ *Simulacra and Simulations*, Baudrillard, J, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser, University of Michigan Press, 1981). See <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/jean-baudrillard/articles/simulacra-and-simulations/>

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p. 11.

⁵⁶ Baudrillard, J.: ‘The Illusion of the End’ trans. Chris Turner, Stanford University Press, 1994, pp. 21-28. <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/jean-baudrillard/articles/illusion-of-the-end-or-strike-of-events/>

⁵⁷ WA I, 36.37.

who in *The Sophist*⁵⁸, and turning a deaf ear to the advice given by Parmenides in his poem, questioned himself over the possibility of a third way between being and non-being or, to put it another way, over how it is that what is positively not real, yet 'is'. If what 'is', is the true- Plato reflects- and the true has what is false as its opposite, what do we do with what is false? Can it be that it is not? It has to be said, that in the first place, what is false is, given that it can be discussed and taught. That being the case, its way of being is different from what is true: it exists, given that it is part of being, but 'is' in a different way. It is not its opposite, in which case it simply would only be a form of "being" that has its own nature and its own character. "However, as you say, it is in no way inferior to other realities, and one must have the courage to say that non-being firmly exists and that it has its own nature [...] non-being in itself [is] and it is non-being"(258 b-c). In second place, while what is- the true- adapts itself to reality, to what there is- that is to say, it has a reference and this is not the false- that although it designates the existence of something, this something does not have to adapt itself to the reality of what there is. Thus, in curious parallel with Baudrillard's statements regarding simulacra, Plato asserts that "[...] when the false exists, deception exists [...] And when deception exists, everything is necessarily filled with images, figures and appearances"(260c) .

In his work *On human freedom*, Schelling continues this approach of Plato's in order to explain a different level of 'what is not', one that has to do with the effectivity of what does not belong to itself and that associates the problem of evil not understood as privation, lack or defect but rather as "a positive disorder or inversion of principles"⁵⁹.

In order to understand this relationship between evil, inversion or disorder of principles and 'what is not', it firstly needs to be remembered that in 1809, given over to the problem of evil, Schelling continues with the central idea of *Naturphilosophie* in which the process of self-revelation of the Absolute, nature, unfolds in a series of degrees⁶⁰ as a result of the dynamic opposition of forces which are contractive (*Grund*) and expansive (*Existenz*). Yet if he does not stop to explain the complex development of the process- that he assumes is known because it presupposes previous knowledge of his work- he does explain both the origin of the conflict and its end. This explanation is necessary, as the philosopher himself acknowledges, given that it is evil that has a direct relationship with the natural order⁶¹. In the unfolding process there is a balance of forces that is upset when evil takes effect This is why good has to do with remaining within order, and evil with

⁵⁸ Plato: *Sophist*, 240e-259b.

⁵⁹ SW I/7, 366.

⁶⁰ Cf. SW I/7, 362-364.

⁶¹ "[...] it is only on the basis of the principles of a true philosophy of nature that this concept may be developed so that it completely satisfies the task here before us". SW I/7, 357.

internal disruption in the balance of forces. The way that it acts is the same as that of a parasite, which explains the analogy that Schelling makes between evil and sickness- not because evil is a sickness of the absolute but because of its character of ‘that which is not’: “In the same way that sickness is, in essence, certainly not ‘nothing’ but in reality only a simulacrum [or “appearance”, *Scheinbild*] of life and merely a fleeting appearance [...] and despite this constantly presents itself to the feelings in some small way as something very real, this is what occurs with evil”⁶². The term simulacrum or appearance (*Scheinbild*) is important here because evil would be that image (*Bild*) which is false and which appears as something true and active with its own existence. Yet sickness, like evil, needs a host and a network of forces in order to achieve a form of effectiveness. This is thus not about a problem with health but rather an imbalance in the internal forces, one that is materially the same in a healthy body; they are thus the same forces but formally different (their function is different)⁶³. Evil as such may be understood as ‘that which is not’: because it ‘is not’ yet still has effectiveness and thus manifests itself in nature via its effects⁶⁴: “evil is not in effect anything other than ‘what is relatively not’ [*Nichseyende*], that appears as ‘what is’ [*Seyende*], and thus replaces ‘what truly is’ ”⁶⁵. The simulacrum would be a form of non-being, given that it is dealing with a replacement of what is without previous reference, that achieves a form of effectiveness and that, as such, has some effect upon reality.

Thus, returning again to Baudrillard, we could apply this concept of “that which is not” to the simulacrum: that which cannot even be qualified as “that which is” (because it does not have its own reality) nor as ‘nothing’ (because it provokes some effects) but rather what, similar to a virus or a parasitic element, needs the reality of “that which is” in order to be effective. The key word here is “replacement” of the real: the simulacrum appears as it is, but does not refer to anything, which is to say, a fictitious account that is taken to be true and that, in order to do so, employs the means of the true and materially adopts its forms. Baudrillard again: “It is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real, that is to say of an operation of deterring every real process via its operational double, *a programmatic, metastable, perfectly descriptive machine that offers all the signs of the real and short-circuits all its vicissitudes.*”⁶⁶. The unreal, thus, written with signs of the real-innoculations. Harkening back to Baudrillard himself, it could be declared “it is a little like what happens with *in vitro* fertilization: the embryo of the non-event is transformed

⁶² SW I/7, 366.

⁶³ For more in-depth study of this relationship, I refer the reader to Moiso, F.: *Vita natura libertà. Schelling (1795-1809)*, Milán, Mursia 1990.

⁶⁴ SW I/7, 377.

⁶⁵ SW I/7, 459.

⁶⁶ Baudrillard, J.: *Simulacra and simulations*, op.cit, p.11. Our italics

inside history's uterus of the real". The fictitious event thus takes shape and is made effective when it inserts itself into the historical fabric that provides it with the material conditions of possibility of its "reality".

From what we have seen, the concept of "that which is not" can be applied as a vital part of developing "the logic of the ghost", as Derrida says⁶⁷, one which tries to go beyond binary or dialect logic and which provides us with another way of understanding history, in which a difference is made between different modes of effectiveness (present, current, empirical and living). A concept, thus, that helps us analyze different events and non-events of our reality, during an era (ours) in which it is the "synthetic", the "prosthetic" and the "virtual" that are most important in the scientific world, and "techno-media" and "the spectacle" in the social and political world, to make up the artificially constructed fabric of our historical reality.

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⁶⁷ The term is employed by Derrida in *Specters of Marx- The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, Derrida, Jacques. Peggy Kamuf, Routledge Classics, 1994, p.78.

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