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## “The Unity that is Indivisibly Present in Each Thing”: Reason, Activity, and Construction in Schelling’s Identity Philosophy

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*But a unity of principles is unsatisfactory if it does not return to itself through an infinite series of individual effects. I hate nothing more than the mindless striving to eliminate the multiplicity of natural causes through fictitious identities. I observe that nature is satisfied only by the greatest dominion of forms, and (according to the claim of a great poet) that it delights in arbitrariness in the deathly management of decomposition (SW II: 347-348).<sup>1</sup>*

On May 15th, 1801, Schelling sent Fichte a copy of his recently published *Presentation of my System of Philosophy* along with a letter. In the letter Schelling claims to “stand on a point whose discussion falls outside this circle on which, for this very reason, the whole meaning of your system depends.” He continues, “I indeed do not know whether the kind of enlargement I provide is of the same sort or is harmonious with that which you have intended for idealism.”<sup>2</sup> The letters between the two men after the *Presentation* are marked by deep mutual misunderstanding and wounded pride, and it is clear that an important philosophical break between them is at stake in Schelling’s new work. Whereas in previous writings, Schelling was concerned with

1 F.W.J. Schelling, “On the World Soul,” trans. Ian Hamilton Grant, *Collapse* 4 (2010), 16.

2 Schelling, “Correspondence 1800-1802,” in *The Philosophical Rupture Between Fichte and Schelling: Selected Texts and Correspondence (1800-1802)*, ed. and trans. Michael G. Vater and David W. Wood (Albany: SUNY Press, 2012), 51. Cf. also Schelling, “Briefwechsel 1800-1802,” *Historisch-kritische Ausgabe*, vol. III.2, ed. Thomas Kisser (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 2010), 347-348.

unifying the systems of idealism and nature philosophy, he now seeks a unity prior to the very distinction between them. Schelling names this unity “absolute reason,” and he further claims that “construction” is the method for doing philosophy from such a standpoint.

In this paper, I focus on the issue of construction in the *Presentation of My System of Philosophy* and the subsequently published *Further Presentation of My System*. Looking at recent literature on the subject, I will first explicate Schelling’s concept of the absolute in this period in terms of both “absolute reason” and “absolute identity.” I then rehearse the idea of geometrical construction which Schelling often presents as analogous (though not identical) to philosophical construction. Finally, I argue that, for Schelling, construction is not only a philosophical method for examining the absolute but must be conceived as itself a moment of the activity of absolute reason, which I propose to call absolute construction. That is, insofar as philosophical construction is an activity ‘of’ the philosopher, it is so only as a (particularly reflexive) instance of the auto-poietic activity of absolute reason itself and cannot be understood on the basis of subjectivity or representation.

## Absolute Reason

Schelling begins the text of the *Presentation* by redefining reason as the absolute: “I call *reason* absolute reason, or reason insofar as it is conceived as the total indifference of the subjective and the objective” (SW IV: 114).<sup>3</sup> The absolute does not admit of the distinction between subject and object because it precedes such a division. It is not, however, a transcendental being that floats above subjects and objects or a first cause that gave rise to them from without; rather, “outside reason is nothing, and in it is everything” (SW IV: 115).<sup>4</sup> That is to say that reason is absolute totality, not as aggregate, but as that which is “simply one and simply self-identical” (SW IV: 116).<sup>5</sup> Reason is no longer a faculty of human cognition or even a principle of speculation but rather absolute infinity (SW IV: 118),<sup>6</sup> absolute indifference (SW IV: 114),<sup>7</sup> and absolute totality (SW IV: 125).<sup>8</sup> In place of Spinoza’s scandalous equation of God and nature (*Deus sive Natura*), Schelling pronounces the identity of reason and the absolute, indeed reason *as* absolute identity.

It is here that Schelling introduces a distinction between form and essence. In its *essence* absolute identity is simple, infinite, and absolute, but it expresses itself

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3 Schelling, “Presentation of My System of Philosophy,” in *The Philosophical Rupture Between Fichte and Schelling: Selected Texts and Correspondance (1800-1802)*, ed. and trans. Michael G. Vater and David W. Wood (Albany: SUNY Press, 2012), 145.

4 Schelling, “Presentation of My System of Philosophy,” 146.

5 Schelling, “Presentation of My System of Philosophy,” 147.

6 Schelling, “Presentation of My System of Philosophy,” 148.

7 Schelling, “Presentation of My System of Philosophy,” 145.

8 Schelling, “Presentation of My System of Philosophy,” 152.



in the form  $A=A$ : “Absolute identity IS only under the form of the proposition  $A = A$ , or this form is immediately posited through its being” (SW IV: 118).<sup>9</sup> The *essence* of identity is expressed in the *form* of the proposition  $A=A$ ; the equation of A with itself thus expresses absolute identity in a formal proposition, and is indeed the *only* possible formal expression of absolute identity as essence. This is both the sole possible expression of identity and also its *necessary* expression; Schelling continues that “Absolute identity simply IS and is as certain as the proposition  $A=A$  is. Proof. Because it is immediately posited along with this proposition.” Irreducible to one another, essence and form are nonetheless inseparable from one another. In the corollary to this proposition, Schelling further elaborates: “Absolute identity cannot be conceived except through the proposition  $A=A$ , yet it is posited through this proposition as an existing being [Seiend].” Absolute identity cannot be thought otherwise than as  $A=A$ , and in being so expressed, it is immediately posited as an existent being. It is absolute identity that makes any being what it is, and yet none of these beings can be posited as equal to being itself. In Schelling’s schema, then, any existent being is *essentially* absolute identity (i.e., it is absolute identity that makes it what it is) but is not therefore the same as or homogenous with absolute identity. It is a particular form, variation, or expression of this essence; it *is* absolute identity, even though absolute identity remains “beyond” any particular existent being.

Essence and form, then, necessarily appear together, but it is only *form* that establishes the ground for differentiation and individuation. In the *Further Presentation*, Schelling, foreshadowing the *Ages of the World* and the Freedom Essay, provides a religio-mythological analogy for the form/essence distinction:

The essence of the absolute in and for itself reveals nothing to us, it fills us with images of an infinite enclosure, of an impenetrable stillness and concealment, the way the oldest forms of philosophy pictures the state of the universe before he who is life stepped forth *in his own shape* [eigener Gestalt] in the act of self-intuitive cognition (SW IV: 404-5).<sup>10</sup>

Here the difference is narrativized and thus schematized into successive time, but the point is clear—only with the self-in-forming of its own essence, does essence come into being as *existing beings*. In an 1803 book review of Benjamin Höyer’s *Treatise on Philosophical Construction as an Introduction to Lectures in Philosophy*, Schelling remarks that this unity of essence and form is a necessary condition for being called philosophy at all: “No philosophy can be counted as true and absolute ... if it has not had insight into the *indivisibility of essence and form* and made this into its lodestar

<sup>9</sup> Schelling, “Presentation of My System of Philosophy,” 148, emphasis in original.

<sup>10</sup> Schelling, “Further Presentation from the System of Philosophy [Extract],” in *The Philosophical Rupture*, 221.

and principle” (SW V: 126).<sup>11</sup> To reiterate, this unity of essence and form is not homogeneity or indistinguishability but mutual irreducibility.

From here, Schelling proceeds to show how individual forms can be developed out of the formal difference between subject-A and object-A. In this way, the *Presentation* proceeds from the disclosure of the absolute and to the construction of individual forms from out of this absolute. The potencies (matter, magnetism, and electricity) are simply increasingly complex variations on the *form* of absolute identity (via a numerical preponderance of either subjectivity or objectivity). These potencies are not “deduced” from the absolute as a first principle but are rather constructed *within it*; they are potential variations of form that belong *to* absolute reason. And, indeed, if we recall that the totality and unity at stake is not one of aggregation or homogeneity, then we see more clearly that the potencies are not “caused” by absolute identity in the sense of separable and distinct effects. They are its ownmost possibilities and are not drawn out of it by an external force. Absolute identity, then, is neither transcendent first cause nor a homogenous substrate, but rather the immanent formation of all possible forms, the very activity of *forming*.

This is reminiscent not only of Spinoza’s third kind of knowledge, but it also harkens back to an earlier period of Schelling’s own writing in which he took geometry’s construction of the pure line out of the intuition of pure space to be a model for philosophical speculation. In such a construction, to use Daniel Breazeale’s formulation, “mathematics treats space and time as the absolute itself and then proceeds to ‘demonstrate’ the universality of the properties of the particular figures or relationships with which it is concerned by actually ‘constructing’ them in pure space and time.”<sup>12</sup> Or, as Schelling puts it, one can then construct a point out of this unlimited line, and then a limited line, and then a line which changes direction at every instance and thereby construct a circle, in which the unlimited and the limited are united (SW I: 444).<sup>13</sup>

The constructed intuition of the original unlimited line, of course, never appears in empirical experience: “a line [drawn on a blackboard] is not the *straight line itself* but only its *image*” (SW I: 445).<sup>14</sup> It is, nevertheless, the very form of all straight lines. No particular line will ever contradict this construction, and, importantly, abstraction from every straight line ever given would not give you the self-identical form of the straight line: “You cannot develop an understanding of the straight line

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11 Schelling, “On Construction in Philosophy,” trans. Andrew A. Davis and Alexi I. Kukuljevic, *Epoché* 12, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 272.

12 Daniel Breazeale, “‘Exhibiting the Particular in the Universal.’ Philosophical Construction and Intuition in Schelling’s Philosophy of Identity (1801-1804),” in *Interpreting Schelling: Critical Essays*, ed. Lara Ostaric (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 102.

13 Schelling, “Treatise Explicatory of the Idealism of the *Wissenschaftslehre*,” in *Idealism and the Endgame of Theory: Three Essays by F.W.J. Schelling*, ed. and trans. Thomas Pfau (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994), 133-134.

14 Schelling, “Treatise Explicatory,” 133-134.



by means of the mark on the blackboard, but, on the contrary, *you understand the mark on the blackboard by means of the straight line*" (SW I: 450).<sup>15</sup> The particularity of any straight line is already potentially contained in the universality of the original (unlimited) line; what is thus exhibited is the "universal in the particular, the infinite in the finite, the two united in a living unity ... [It is] to see the plant in the plant, the organism in the organism, in a word to see the concept or indifference within difference" (SW IV: 362).<sup>16</sup> It is not that the particular is deduced from the universal or that, in reflecting on an aggregate of particulars, we abstract to the universal; the particular is grasped *immediately* in its universality, or rather, it is seen in terms of its being a variation on the form of which it is an instantiation.

In the philosophical construction of the identity philosophy, however, it is not pure shapes or empirical concepts that are constructed, but forms or ideas. Schelling says explicitly that his philosophy and philosophical construction are not concerned with the empirical world of appearances:

Construction is thus, from start to finish, an absolute kind of cognition and (for exactly this reason) it has nothing to do with the actual world as such but is in its very nature idealism (if idealism means the doctrine of *ideas*). For it is precisely this world that is commonly called actual that is abolished by construction (SW IV: 408-9).<sup>17</sup>

At this point, it is worth noting that Schelling is not only paying homage to Spinoza but is also crossing the Rubicon, so to speak, with regard to Kantian critical philosophy. Schelling's understanding of construction establishes itself in opposition to the Kantian idea of construction as it appears in the final division of *The Critique of Pure Reason*, "The Transcendental Doctrine of Method":

Philosophical cognition is rational cognition from concepts, mathematical cognition that from the construction of concepts. But to construct a concept means to exhibit *a priori* the intuition corresponding to it. For the construction of a concept, therefore, a non-empirical intuition is required, which consequently, as intuition, is an individual object, but that must nevertheless, as the construction of a concept (of a general representation), express in the representation universal validity for all possible intuitions that belong under the same concept.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Schelling, "Treatise Explicatory," 137, emphasis added.

<sup>16</sup> Schelling, "Further Presentation," 206.

<sup>17</sup> Schelling, "Further Presentation," 223.

<sup>18</sup> Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), A714/B742.

The gap that separates Kant and Schelling can be already be seen here. First, there is the limitation of philosophical cognition to discursive cognition, that is, the subsumption of particulars (objects given in intuition) under universals (concepts of the understanding). For Kant, philosophical cognition cannot abolish the divide between the particularity of intuitions and the universality of concepts. Thus, the geometer and the philosopher are called to different vocations; the Kantian critical philosopher not only institutes a new method of philosophy, but also a new regime of discipline, which is intended to truncate precisely such philosophical excesses. Concepts, in their universality, remain guarantors of truth only insofar as they do not lose their fixed orientation towards the data of empirical intuition. Whereas mathematical cognition “considers the universal in the particular,” philosophers, if they are to steer clear of falling into the old metaphysical traps, must resign themselves to “consider the particular only in the universal.”<sup>19</sup>

Here, then, the Kantian system rejects philosophical construction insofar as construction eliminates the very differences on which its entire edifice is built, the oppositions of particular and universal, of intuitions and concepts. These distinctions are indispensable to the “negative education” of the *Critique*, i.e., the deflation of the pretensions of pre-critical metaphysics: “The *more geometrico* is to be shown up in the illegality of its pretense. Mathematics and philosophy are once again to be assigned their rightful places and all contamination prevented. The demarcation is commanded by the articulation of the fourfold: universal/particular, intuition/concept.”<sup>20</sup> Insofar as Schelling’s philosophical construction precedes the intuition of space and time that would be necessary for geometrical construction, then, it also precedes the distinction between concepts and intuitions more generally, between universality and particularity at all. Schelling’s wager is that Kant’s critique of construction is a result of him having started “too far down the line,” so to speak. In the next section, I will clarify this specificity of philosophical construction, differentiating it from geometrical construction in order to argue that these various *forms* of construction must themselves be thought as forms of an *absolute* construction, understood as the in-forming, expressive activity of absolute identity.

### Absolute Activity

Philosophical construction thus operates at a level which precedes even the distinction between space and time that geometrical construction requires (insofar as it requires pure space); indeed, the analogical relationship of mathematical and philosophical construction is helpful only to a degree, and if taken too literally can prevent one from grasping what is really at stake in Schelling’s talk of the absolute *essence* which is

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19 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A714/B742.

20 Alberto Toscano, “Philosophy and the Experience of Construction,” in *The New Schelling*, ed. Judith Norman and Alistar Welchman (London: Continuum, 2004), 112.



exhibited in everything. Geometrical constructions are not separated completely from the empirical, because the geometer begins from the forms of empirical intuition (space and time). Philosophical construction, on the other hand, operates fully removed from the empirical, prior to any realm of sensible appearance, even in its most abstracted and geometrical form.

What Schelling is attempting to name with the *unitary essence* of the absolute is precisely the *pure activity* that alone makes any particular thing possible as a variation of this in-forming activity. Whereas scientific construction saw within a plant the concept of plant, Schelling claims that absolute construction must construct “the plant, *as form of the universe*” (SW IV: 409).<sup>21</sup> What is at stake is the exhibition of *absolute identity* in the *form* of plant (as opposed to exhibiting the form of plant in an empirical plant). The identity philosophy is thus the unification of the transcendental and nature philosophies, insofar as it recognizes that the exact same *essential activity* was at stake in both, only under the aspects of objectivity and subjectivity respectively. The identity philosophy “abstract[s] from what does the thinking” (SW IV: 114)<sup>22</sup> and thereby aims to think from the “indifferent” standpoint prior to even the differentiation of subject and object, in order to become, to borrow Schelling’s terminology, *absolute idealism* (SW IV: 404).<sup>23</sup> Understood properly, then, this absolute standpoint is not the dialectical overcoming of already-existing or already-positing differences, but an attempt to think the differentiating activity that produces difference, the “unified” activity of differentiation.

The various archetypes (*Urbilder*) of the absolute (absolute plant, absolute animal, etc.) are the transcendental ideas that then become expressed in the world of appearances (*Abbilder*). Schelling’s identity philosophy, then, presents a tripartite ontology of the absolute, which expresses itself in its variations (archetypes) of its own absolute form, which then are actualized in the world of appearances. The philosopher, according to Schelling’s schema, becomes like the blind seer who sees beyond the world of appearances. It is, for example, the ability to see the very form of plant as merely a formal modification of the living unity of the absolute. Whereas discursive cognition subsumes the particular under the universal and thereby abolishes its particularity, construction traffics in the genesis of ideas, which are at once both universal and particular, are particular forms of the universal. Philosophical construction gives us, to use Schelling’s terminology from the Höyer review, “*possible objects*” (SW V: 135), which is to say the forms or ideas of empirical objects.<sup>24</sup> Dalia Nassar names this non-discursive, constructive cognition “archetypal cognition”:

21 Schelling, “Further Presentation,” 224.

22 Schelling, *Presentation*, 146.

23 Schelling, “Further Presentation,” 221.

24 Schelling, “On Construction,” 278.

Because archetypal cognition grasps the particular within the universal, it does not grasp it as a part of a successive series, but as a member of self-causing, self-determining unity, wherein each part is both cause and effect in a living process. What it sees is not isolated parts effecting change in other isolated parts, but *a unity that manifests itself in the different activities of its inherently connected parts*.<sup>25</sup>

As we already saw, then, Schelling's construction is similar to the "third kind of knowledge" in Spinoza with the twist that one intuits directly the *natura naturans* rather than simply one of God's attributes.<sup>26</sup> And from here we could begin to mark out how Schelling understands his construction to be both deeply indebted to and yet moving beyond the geometrical method of Spinoza. In the Höyer review, Schelling remarks, "if Spinoza erred, it is because he did not go far enough back in his construction" (SW V: 127).<sup>27</sup> Schelling thus sees himself taking up the mantle of Spinoza's project and carrying it to the conclusion Spinoza failed to reach. More specifically, the claim seems to be precisely that Spinoza never reached absolute construction and remained too tied to an arithmetic or geometrical notion of construction.

In thus pushing beyond Spinoza, however, it seems Schelling has encountered a problem of his own. Daniel Breazeale notes that there is a certain contradiction or paradox in Schelling's presentation, a tension that an attentive reader may have already picked up on. On the one hand, Schelling is "unambiguously committed" to the *reality* of the process of in-forming (*Ineinbildung*), that is, to the status of construction as an ontological and indeed ontogenic truth.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, Schelling has also explicitly presented construction as a philosophical method, as the *only* properly philosophical method. For Breazeale, this leads to the conclusion that "the philosopher's construction, his exhibition of the particular ... in the universal ... is perhaps best understood as a purely ideal construction (or reconstruction), one that follows a path that is just the reverse of the one followed by the absolute in its real self-construction."<sup>29</sup> Philosophical construction is recapitulation of the process of construction, a retrospective survey of a separate ontogenetic process. Breazeale is right to point out, however, that this seemingly "reasonable" solution to the problem opens up an unbridgeable distinction between reality and ideality, objective and

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25 Dalia Nassar, *The Romantic Absolute: Being and Knowing in Early German Romantic 1795-1804*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 244-5, emphasis added.

26 Benedictus de Spinoza, *Ethics*, In *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, ed. and trans. Edwin Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 1:408-620: "This [third] kind of cognition proceeds from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to an adequate cognition of the essences of things" (IIP40S2).

27 Schelling, "On Construction," 272.

28 Breazeale, "Exhibiting the Particular in the Universal," 116.

29 Breazeale, "Exhibiting the Particular in the Universal," 116..



subjective activity, the very chasm that the identity philosophy and the method of construction were supposed to obviate.<sup>30</sup> If the “real” side of the activity (absolute construction) is thus only absolute insofar as it knows itself as absolute (i.e., insofar as it is taken up in philosophical construction), then it seems this absolute activity is not so absolute after all. The only other option, Breazeale argues, would require us to think of construction as “purely logical,” which directly contradicts Schelling’s texts, not only in letter but also in spirit.

Breazeale poses this as an open question and moves on to further concerns. Given what we have laid out above, however, my wager is that the problem is one of perspective. Schelling’s entire system does indeed rest on in-difference, this cleaving of being and knowing, of essence and form. If, as we saw above, absolute identity is only *known* under the proposition  $A=A$ , which *necessarily and immediately* expresses this essence in a propositional form, then this strange parallax of real and ideal construction is a feature and not a bug. Construction, as the absolute activity of the universe, is thus *expressed* and *given form* in philosophical construction. Philosophical construction is a form of absolute construction, in the same way that  $A=A$  (which is, of course, a form of knowing) *expresses* absolute identity. Philosophical construction is thus a *privileged form of absolute construction itself* as it is able to exhibit its own identity with the absolute activity of construction, its special status as a formal expression of this activity. Alberto Toscano puts it nicely: “Philosophical construction is not to be conceived as simply a repetition ... of productivity as such, but as an instance of production *sui generis*.”<sup>31</sup> To occupy the standpoint of the absolute in philosophical construction is not merely to rehash the processes of construction, but to expose oneself to a moment of the activity of construction that exceeds one’s own particularity. This is what is at stake in Schelling’s claim that the “thought of reason is an imposing demand on everyone [*Das Denken der Vernunft ist jedem anzumuthen*]”—the standpoint from which reason can be thought absolutely is especially onerous because it requires that one “abstract from what does the thinking [*daß vom Denkenden abstrahieren muß*]” (SW IV: 114).<sup>32</sup>

To occupy the standpoint of reason, then, is precisely *not* the intellectual intuition of the self, and the suspension of “all success and externality” that occurs

30 Brezeale, “Exhibiting the Particular in the Universal,” 17.

31 Toscano, “Philosophy and the Experience of Construction,” 124.

32 Schelling, *Presentation*, 146. Wood and Vater translate “*Das Denken der Vernunft ist jedem anzumuthen*” as “The thought of reason is foreign to everyone.” While *anmuten* is indeed most often used in contemporary German in connection with the word *seltsam* in order to indicate something that seems strange or out of the ordinary (“*Es mutet ihn seltsam an*,” “it seems strange to him”), *seltsam* (strange) does not appear here in Schelling’s text. It seems rather that Schelling is using *anmuten* in the now-antiquated (then current) sense of *zumuten*, that is, to make an imposing or even inordinate demand upon someone. Indeed, Grimm *only* lists the (now-antiquated) sense of making an extraordinary demand upon someone and its nominalization as *Anmuten* (imposition or demand). Thus, the rendering of “*jedem anzumuthen*” as “is strange to everyone” is anachronistic.

in reason does not denote the absolutization of the interiority of the subject, but rather the abolition of the subject as a discrete or self-enclosed entity. This is precisely what is at play in Toscano's chiasmatic formulation of the identity philosophy: "The construction of experience is replaced by the experience of construction."<sup>33</sup> The subject itself (and its conditions of experience) no longer occupy the privileged locus of productivity, but rather become products that must be constructed from this absolute standpoint, a construction towards which Schelling gestures at the end of the *Presentation* with the cryptic analogy, "just as the plant bursts forth in the bloom, so the entire earth blossoms in the human brain, which is the most sublime flower of the entire process of organic metamorphosis" (SW IV: 211).<sup>34</sup>

And if we return briefly to the above comparison with Kant, we can also see how this marks a decisive break with the Kantian schema. Kant's critical edifice depends on an absolute privilege of the faculties of the subject, and accordingly it only ever can speak legitimately about *representations* (*Vorstellungen*). This dissolution of the subject's priority back into the ur-activity of ontogenic construction, however, undercuts this privilege, and it no longer makes sense to speak in terms of representation (*Vorstellung*), for there is no longer a perspectival-subjective before (*vor*) or for whom such representations might appear. Instead, what is at stake in Schelling's absolute construction is the very possibility of an unfolding process whose course would *include* the constitution of the representing subject but would not be limited to it.

Perhaps it is this overcoming of the priority of subjectivity as a starting point that not only takes Schelling's construction beyond the confines of the Kantian project, but indeed also of the Fichtean "circle" Schelling alludes to in his letter. What is at stake is a movement beyond subjectivity and its representations into the movement of *Darstellung*, of presentation, constitution, or even figuration. Insofar as the title of *Presentation* announces a system, we can now see that the unity of this system is no longer grounded in the unity of consciousness but rather in the univocity of a constructive activity of which that system would be an expression rather than a representation.

With this understanding of construction as an instance of the essential activity of the absolute, Schelling's own philosophy becomes a moment of actualization, in which the activity of absolute reason encounters itself, exhibits itself in its in-different unity with itself. Schelling's absolute construction, then, is not merely a *more geometrico* bent to the will of idealism; it is rather an activity that expresses the original and absolute activity in which forms are constructed. Schelling states this characteristic nicely in the Höyer review: "Philosophy is not only a knowing, but always and necessarily at the same time a knowing of this knowing, not in endless procession, but

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33 Toscano, "Philosophy and the Experience of Construction," 115.

34 Schelling, *Presentation*, 204.



an always present infinity” (SW V: 127).<sup>35</sup> In this always present infinity, Schelling sees the universal in the particular by grasping the absolute activity of which all activities and all products brought about by this activity are merely particular variations. The forms that in-form the world of appearance here are encountered in their unity-in-difference, as instances of a singular activity of their *formation*, and the philosopher’s own activity is thoroughly sunk back into the generative activity of which it is a particularly potentiated expression.

To return to where we started, then, we can see just how far Schelling has gone beyond not only the bounds set by Kantian critical philosophy but also the “circle” within which Fichte’s transcendental idealism moved. In the preface to the *Presentation*, Schelling calls Fichte by name and marks the difference quite clearly: “Fichte, e.g., might have conceived idealism in a completely subjective sense, whereas I situated myself and the principle of idealism at the *standpoint of production*” (SW IV: 109, emphasis added).<sup>36</sup> This standpoint of production, as I have tried to show, is not a “unity” prior to subject and object in the sense of a being (or a unity of being and knowing) that is then divided into a subject and an object; it is rather a “unity” in the sense of a unified activity that produces *both* subjectivity and objectivity as it potentiates and develops itself. In this way, the “indifference” of this unity is not the erasure of differences by way of abstraction back to a prior unity, but an attempt to think the activity of differentiation, the force that *produces* difference. It is an experience of this production itself that is at stake in Schelling’s “construction.” Such an experience would not be reducible to the subjectivity that might “undergo” that experience but would be instead an exposure of that subjectivity to an origin prior to itself. The break with Fichte, then, is quite clear—Schelling’s identity philosophy liquidates the privilege of the subject, seeking not to bridge the gap between subjectivity and objectivity, but to trace the immemorial genealogy of their *differentiation*.

35 Schelling, “On Construction,” 273.

36 Schelling, *Presentation*, 142, emphasis added.