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Matter and Its Topological Operations in Schelling's Science of Reason

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Hephaestus stands over them with his mending tools, asking ... "Is this your heart's desire, then—for the two of you to become parts of the same whole, as near as can be, and never to separate, day or night? Because if that's your desire, I'd like to weld you together and join you into something that is naturally whole, so that the two of you are made into one.

—Plato, *Symposium*

"The darkest of all things" (SW II: 359), "the cliff upon which all false systems founder from the outset" (SW II: 223), "the crisis of consciousness" (SW XIV: 210), "maybe the hardest of all metaphysical concepts" (SW X: 310), and even "the *σκανδαλον* [*skandalon*], that is: the pitfall, of philosophy" (SW XI: 424)¹—these are some of the epithets that Schelling reserves for matter in a philosophical itinerary that stretches from 1794 to 1854 and which never ceases to make the former's thematization a central point of its efforts. For Schelling, the motivation to constantly revisit the investigation concerning the essence of matter is not only commanded by

¹ Most citations from Schelling's works stem from K.F.A. Schelling's edition of the *Sämtliche Werke* (Stuttgart & Augsburg: J. G. Cotta'scher Verlag, 1856–1861). Where this is not the case, full bibliographical information is provided. All translations from Schelling's works are my own.

the latter's apparently inherent refractoriness, but even more importantly by the conviction that, "without knowledge of it physics is without a scientific basis, [and] the science of reason deprived of the bond whereby the Idea is connected to actuality" (SW II: 359). The present paper aims to make an initial contribution to the elucidation of the obscurity that engulfs matter, specifically insofar as it relates to the notion of ground and plays a role in the above-quoted "science of reason," i.e., the negative or purely *a priori* component of Schelling's philosophy.

Insofar as it focuses on matter's role within the purely rational philosophy, this paper mostly limits its inquiries to those nascent powers which in *The Deities of Samothrace*, Schelling called the *hephaistoi*: the first worldly or natural forces, akin to an ambivalent fire that stirs in the depths and whose nature it would be to break forth violently and blindly, though if persuaded into control by a purposive principle, it can also contain itself in order to be the seat for the ever higher configurations that succeed it. On the one hand, this means that the considerations which follow must proceed *de profundis*, from the lowest. On the other hand, it means that at stake are a schematic according to species—*κατ' εἶδη* (*kat' eide*)—and insight into the *how* of the craft and toil which forge this world, rather than an answer to the abysmal question of *why* a world is forged in the first place. Moreover, given Schelling's longstanding conviction that the first in time is not the highest but only that which comes before the highest as its groundwork, and that the higher—the spiritual—can only exist as actual in virtue of its triumph and assertion over and against the lower, then any and all thematization of matter—insofar as the latter is characterized as the first expression of being, or the *primum Existens*²—must necessarily lead to a consideration of the law of the ground (*Gesetz des Grundes*).³ And this law itself, whose crucial role in Schelling's enlargement of his philosophical focus to include the purview of freedom is all too well known, must be understood both as having matter as its first actual instantiation, and as having its subsequent operations work *on* matter and in that sense arising out of the possibilities accorded *by* matter. For in the end, it is, as Schelling says, that "in matter qua *primum Existens* all potencies are contained, if not according to their actuality, still according to their possibility" (SW IV: 150). And while it is true that no matter may actually exist if not a formed matter, it is no less true, as will be seen, that no form is possible if not by means of a reconstruction which, because it releases matter from excess, "must work destructively on everything that is constructed" (SW IV: 53). Or to go back to mythic language, that anything that may attain actuality, whether the earth or the subtlest theory about the earth, must pass through the languorous and incandescent strokes of Hephaistos' forge, for only "through the attenuation of fire everything first introduced itself into this world" (SW VIII: 352).

² This is a designation first used in 1801 in Schelling's *Presentation of my System of Philosophy* (SW IV: 144), but one by which he explicitly stands in later works, for example in his 1843 *Presentation of the Process of Nature* (SW X: 308).

³ As will be seen, this intimate relation between matter and ground is further supported through the demonstrable connection each of them has to Schelling's understanding of the law of identity. See SW VII: 346. Cf. also Schelling's defense of the operation of this law in his 1812 open letter to Eschenmayer (SW VIII: 169 ff.).

In Schelling's eyes, indeed, the resolution not to let philosophy founder at the cliff that is matter is at one with that of not acquiescing either in the excision of nature from theory or in the baseless pretension that our philosophical standpoint can be indifferent to the ontological conditions of its own natural groundedness. For him, the problem with the Kantian ambition of offering a critique of reason understood merely as an examination of the subject's cognitive apparatus is that "the cognitive faculty or reason itself remained incomprehensible and opaque, because this so-called apparatus was again not conceived out of reason itself, but was given from outside" (SW XIII: 57). As a corrective to this, Schelling's own rational philosophy, with its insistence on the "often misunderstood" principle of "absolute identity of the real and the ideal" (SW VII: 31, 422), consisted not in a reversion to pre-critical metaphysics but rather in an attempt to correct the denatured one-sidedness of the Kantian (and, albeit in a different sense, Fichtean) subjectivist approach to the question concerning the possibility of knowledge. Thus, in general terms, rather than exclusively asking under what conditions the subject can have knowledge of what exists, his philosophy effectuated a genetic "turn into the objective" (SW XI: 373) and matched that with the complementary questions: Under what conditions can there be something which exists? And how could that which exists raise itself to the complexity of the subject of knowledge which then makes the rest of existence into its object? It is in precisely this sense that Gabriel has talked about the German Idealists—Schelling among them—as offering a 'transcendental ontology' that amounts to an examination of the "constitution of transcendental constitution,"⁴ and that Wirth has characterized Schelling's philosophy as uncovering "the metacritical possibility of any critical project."⁵

Such as Schelling understood it, the ambition of the science of reason is thus to fully and systematically give an account of how it may come to be that "reason stands opposed only to reason itself and is as much the knower as the known" (SW XIII: 57).⁶ The possibility of this project, however, depends on finding a way of unitarily thematizing the subjective and the objective in a manner that satisfies the minimal conditions that the *Stuttgart Seminars* set forth: namely, in an organic, dynamical, and non-reductive way (SW VII: 421). And that is exactly where matter and grounding come in. As that which discharges the role of the system's first existent, matter needs to provide the means whereby those precise systemic demands can in due course be met. This is exactly why matter cannot be straightaway equivalent to the somatic, but must rather be a matrix for both the somatic and for that which is opposed to and elevated above the merely somatic. It is, in other words, exactly why matter must be one of those "middle concepts" that Schelling claims are "the most important, indeed, the only ones that truly explain anything in science" (SW VIII: 282).

⁴ Markus Gabriel, *Transcendental Ontology* (London: Continuum, 2011), xii.

⁵ Jason Wirth, "Translator's Introduction," in F.W.J. Schelling, *The Ages of the World*, (Albany: SUNY Press, 2000), xxi.

⁶ This identity of knower and known was explicitly recognized in the draft of the 1804 *System of Philosophy as a Whole and of the Philosophy of Nature in Particular* (SW VI: 137).

Following Schelling, the thematization of matter can be undertaken from at least three complementary perspectives, though all of them ultimately dynamical: (1) A preponderantly objective—force-based—approach which emphasizes the need to explain all of the properties and operations of things in nature from the process of construction of matter itself, thus doing away with the *ad hoc* postulation of occult qualities;⁷ (2) A preponderantly subjective, transcendental approach which focuses on exhibiting the reasons why the ideal determinations of a knowing subject’s consciousness are identical to—albeit not causally determined by—correlative objective determinations; (3) A properly rational thematization which draws on the previous two but focuses on the construction of matter out of the essence that stems from the absolute identity of reason qua medium of position. Drawing their guidance from a constellation of Schelling’s works, though chief among them the 1843 *Presentation of the Process of Nature*, the considerations which follow privilege the third of these approaches. They pursue their course through three main moments, of which little needs to be said in advance other than that hopefully their relevance to the considerations finally submitted as conclusions will become self-evident. Beyond this, I am fully aware that this paper will speak only to those who, like me, are in agreement with Grant’s characterization of Schelling as “the most consistent metaphysician of the last century”⁸ and with McGrath’s recent elaboration of that characterization by insisting that this consistency is given by “the principles that govern Schelling’s thinking in all of its many phases—the objectivity of reason, the principle of ground, the dialectic of indifference and differentiation . . .”⁹ From such convictions alone can the overall project of Schellingian philosophy to the extent that it presents itself negatively as a systematic science of reason, as well as the role played in that project by matter in its intimate connection to the law of the ground, be understood.¹⁰

⁷ One should not, in other words, conflate the broader (Platonic) notion of a dynamic principle with that of force. The concept of force is indeed a particular instantiation of a dynamic principle, but it is necessarily circumscribed to a certain level of philosophical thematization. For Schelling, the concept of a simple force which is one-sidedly taken as the explanatory ground of a phenomenon is “a purely formal concept, generated by reflection,” given that it “denotes a relation of one-sided causality, which is objectionable for philosophy” (SW II: 198). This is why Schelling’s ontological dynamics would gradually move away from the notion of force in favor of that of principle, though emphatically preserving the lessons drawn from his force-based nature-philosophy. “It is not too harsh to judge,” he asserts, “that, once the dynamic spirit has been awakened, any philosophizing that does not draw its strength from it can only be regarded as an empty abuse of the noble gift of speaking and thinking” (SW VIII: 199).

⁸ Iain Hamilton Grant, *Philosophies of Nature After Schelling* (London: Continuum, 2008), viii.

⁹ Sean J. McGrath, “Is the Late Schelling Still Doing Nature-Philosophy?,” *Angelaki, Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, 21, no. 4 (2016), 121–41: 137. Note that the term ‘phase’ (φάσις) should primordially be understood in its original sense as ‘aspect,’ not as ‘period.’

¹⁰ As in Plato (who from beginning to end remains Schelling’s most privileged interlocutor), the unity that governs Schelling’s natural growth and production of new insight operates not as a mere median point between diverging extremes, but on the contrary as the focal point which generates them following an organic logic. The notions of matter and ground are crucial to that logic. Cf. Barbarić’s assessment that, “It is perhaps no overstatement to say that the problem of matter, in all its manifold inner complexities, constitutes the very center of Schelling’s philosophy.” Damir Barbarić, “Schellings Platon-Interpretation in der Darstellung der reinrationalen philosophie,” *Das Antike Denken in der Philosophie Schellings*, ed. Rainer Adolphi, Jörg Jantzen (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 2004), 77–98: 13.

Though apparently following in the footsteps of Kant's *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, Schelling's construction of matter—from its earliest presentation in the 1797 *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*—should be distinguished from the Kantian one on at least two counts. First, Schelling holds true to the viability of the project of a dynamical construction of matter capable of rationally anticipating the latter's formative potential—a possibility which Kant had rather surrendered in his acquiescence to the Newtonian determination of mechanical efficacy as a function of the mere quantity of homogenous parts integrating a body. Second, and intimately connected to the first, for Schelling matter is to be the first echelon of a nature of which it is asked not that it “coincide by chance with the laws of our mind ... but rather that *it itself* not only *express* but *even realize* the laws of our mind necessarily and originally” (SW II: 55–56). Even guided by these convictions, however, Schelling's first nature-philosophical works still emulated the general procedure of Kant's account, relying exclusively on the two basic forces of attraction and repulsion to explain matter's filling of space to the exclusion of any foreign intrusion. Had it not been for the lucid—and yet still largely under-appreciated—contributions of Franz Baader, Schelling may never have been able to find the way beyond the subjectivist reductions he so much desired to undo.

After having welcomed Schelling's *On the World-Soul* as a felicitous waking up from the “death-slumber of atomism,”¹¹ Baader pointed out the unviability of constructing matter from exclusively two forces. A two-force construction, he argued, ultimately surrenders matter to a haphazard aggregation of a multiplicity of homogenous, mutually external parts and fails to recognize the intensive degree which must objectively belong to matter if it is to be capable of developing formal determinations otherwise than by receiving them as regulative projections. It is this intensively-couched, unitary organizing principle in each existent that Baader conceives as its specific gravity and which—in departing from all previous theorizations of nature—he rigorously distinguishes from the efficacious, motion-inducing force of attraction. Subsisting at an internal remove from the spatial externality of material existence, gravity first makes the latter possible insofar as it provides the unifying medium for the other two forces and, without itself directly manifesting, serves as the “common ground of their definite and persistent presence” (SW III: 258).¹²

It is thanks to Baader, indeed, that Kant's all too hasty identification of the *substantia phaenomenon* with matter is shifted to gravity. And since each individual existent's degree of specific gravity is drawn from a common or systemic well of essence, structurally obeying what Schelling will later call a “*universal reciprocal*

¹¹ Baader, Franz, *On the Pythagorean Square in Nature, or the Four World-Regions*, in *Sämmtliche Werke*, ed. F. Hoffmann, 16 vols. (Leipzig: Herrmann Bethmann Verlag, 1851–1860), III: 249.

¹² Baader, *On the Pythagorean Square*, SW III: 258.

distribution,” (SW IV: 36),¹³ then that degree also determines the existent’s preponderance or capacity for self-determination in the face of alterity. Physically, that preponderance plays itself out as inertial mass, whose manifestation as the resistance to extrinsic impulsion not only provides the material existent with its share of mechanical autonomy, but does so in a manner that is rational and rule-bound, given that it obeys the total conservation of a distributive value. The key insight is thus that without the background or backdrop of gravity no material existent could be placed in a medium beyond its own self-containment, occupying a position alongside other beings in a milieu of common, rule-bound ex-istence. In short, no unitary ground of existence, no existence. Hence no being can be determined in isolation, since ultimately it is the whole which is ontologically prior to the part and every part is determined in its being as a function of its role in the whole.¹⁴ By 1799, in the *First Outline of a System of Naturephilosophy*, Schelling had heeded Baader’s precisions and likewise insisted on the specificity of a third principle as “that which binds the individual to a certain system of things and assigns it its place in the universe” (SW III: 265). Giving an incipient formulation of his celebrated ground/existence distinction, and a clear intimation that all its subsequent or higher deployments must nonetheless remain rooted in a properly understood natural ontology, he insisted that, “matter manifests only through gravity; there may be an imponderable matter, but it does not manifest” (SW III: 267).¹⁵

It is nonetheless crucial to note that Schelling’s true contribution is not so much to have first diagnosed the operation of the ground—as is often claimed—but much rather to have (quite literally) elucidated the means by which the possible configurations that the ground delineates can be drawn out into actuality by the higher operation of light, giving birth to a matter *imaginatively*¹⁶ formed out of its own

¹³ Strictly speaking—and this should be of no small interest to contemporary science—it is not gravity per se which is distributed in Schelling’s account, but rather only attraction (and thereby, indirectly, repulsion). The degree of specific gravity is therefore much rather the distributor than the distributed. Indeed, as condition of multiplicity, gravity cannot itself be multiple. This is to say, while it grounds the zero-sum distribution of essence from which concrete multiple existents can result, gravity itself remains perpetually one and undivided, at a remove from all that appears and which consequently must be susceptible to quantity. Cf. Schelling, SW II: 364 ff.; VI: 257.

¹⁴ That Baader’s overhaul of Kant’s merely Newtonian notion of gravity constitutes the first steps towards a naturalization of the otherwise still all too logical principle of thoroughgoing determination (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A571/B599) can only here be touched in passing.

¹⁵ For an earlier, but even more inchoate hint, consider the following passage from Schelling’s *Timaeus* Commentary of 1794, which at once opens up the distinction to the dimension of its Platonic lineage: “Concerning the assertion that: νοῦν χωρὶς ψυχῆς οὐδέποτε παραγινέσθαι [*noûn chorîs psuchês oudéποτε paragínésthai* / It is impossible for anything to come to possess intelligence apart from soul], it means as much as: Understanding has for itself no causality, should it therefore become visible in any one thing, then this cannot happen otherwise than if it is connected to a principle of actuality.” F.W.J. Schelling, “*Timaeus*” (1794), ed. Hartmut Buchner (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1994), 29.

¹⁶ Beginning in 1802, in the dialogue *Bruno*, Schelling introduces the notion of *Ineinsbildung* (along with cognates *Einbildung*, *Hineinbildung*, etc.). I will leave for another opportunity both a consideration of the difficulties this term presents the translator, as well as a deeper look into the meaning of this all-important ontological operator. For now, I simply register the conviction that the speculative depth of Schellingian imagination—or *coadunation*, or *in-formation*—is not fully sounded if not thought together in its connection

potential basis. Adamantly resisting the conflation of arithmetic variations in weight with qualitative differences,¹⁷ Schelling argued that while gravity may fix an existent's overall physical preponderance, only light's exponential reworking of the essential basis provided by gravity could explain how that preponderance may manifest in the ideal terms of an internal complexity. While gravity thus strives to make the totality of existents one by binding them in the motions their specific weights occasion in one another, light in turn strives to make each existent a concrete totality of the overarching unity, i.e., optimally reflective of that totality because incorporating it into its own determinate being by way of reorganizing its disposed essence for the sake of representative preponderance. And it is this essential imaginative collaboration of gravity and light, Schelling insists, which alone may first deliver an existent in its requisite determination: both in terms of its presence, as well as of its capacity to represent other presences. The articulation of this imaginative exponentiation of the basis of existence in the direction of higher forms of self-determination admittedly followed up on advances made by Baader,¹⁸ but was for the first time clearly and rigorously expounded by Schelling's 1800 *General Deduction of the Dynamical Process*.

Of course, this conception of matter's capacity for autonomous formation by way of the imaginative collaboration between a real basis and an ideal actualizing principle is developed under the guiding conviction that if "the system of nature is at the same time the system of our mind" it cannot be because the latter would be "projected onto nature" (SW II: 39, 55) but rather because the very identity of both is ultimately at one with the self-elevation of the former unto the latter. Accordingly, it should not be surprising that it continues to be operative at the heart of Schelling's thought once its focus shifts toward the very logic—or indeed ligature—of the identity: "that secret bond" (SW II: 55) holding those two domains of nature and mind together. A better understanding of this, and of why Schelling submits that matter expresses the same bond that reason does—namely "that between the infinite and finite" (SW II: 360)—is therefore given by turning to Schelling's consideration of the identity formula $A=A$, which for him constitutes the "highest law of reason" (SW IV: 116).

to insights of a mathematical nature. It is not a coincidence that the philosophical exhibition of complex relations is possible only by means of the ontological imagination of the real and the ideal, while in mathematics the real numbers remain a unidimensional infinity unless they are articulated into the complex numbers, which however is possible only by means of the imaginary unit (i) and the relations this latter bears to e ($= 2.71828\dots$), a number which is famously tied to growth, but also, as the Leibnizian construction of the catenary shows, to gravitation and the pull of the ground.

¹⁷ For example in *On the True Concept of Nature-philosophy and the Correct Manner of Solving its Problems* (SW IV: 100).

¹⁸ Among countless other sources of insight for subsequent thinkers, Baader's seminal 1797 *Contributions to Elemental Physiology* include a distinction between the modes of operation (*Wirkungsweisen*) of the essence which goes into finite natural existents (Cf. Baader, SW III: 211), an acknowledgement of the interiority with which all existence whatsoever is endowed (III: 216), a nonetheless clear warning that not all interiority amounts to an essence's enjoyment of selfhood (III: 219), as well as that those essences whose interiority does indeed get reworked into selfhood stand at an exponential remove from the merely linear relations of external essences (III: 215).

II

In a move that follows, and explicitly credits Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, Schelling's 1801 *Presentation of my System of Philosophy*, as well as the accompanying *Further Presentations from the System of Philosophy*, from a year later, assert that the identity proposition establishes not the being of the *relata* of which it consists, but rather only that of identity itself. For while abstraction can be made from the actual content of the subject and predicate in the formula, the self-sameness of the milieu or medium wherein they are posited—in this case unconditioned reason rather than egoic consciousness—cannot be abstracted from; and to that extent is absolutely asserted.¹⁹ The being that is within reason, in other words, and which alone is a being in-and-for-itself because it is *ex hypothesi* at the indifference point between both the subjective and the objective, is the being of absolute identity itself. No essence or ontological quota whatsoever is thus in reason if not that which streams from absolute identity. Whatever may subsequently be said to be within the purview of the *a priori* system of reason can only be said to be in virtue of being an expression of absolute identity, or of the indifference point between the subjective and the objective. And so, because it stands for the being outside of which there can be no other being, this one common essence is characterized as for itself akin to infinity.

But because absolute identity amounts to the nexus or *copula* of a certain relation—even if a self-relation, viz. that of reason as identical to itself—then it is, and

¹⁹ Cf. SW IV: 116. In passing: the much debated issue of what is truly ideal about that “ideal part of philosophy” which Schelling promises to be addressing for the first time in earnest with his 1809 *Philosophical Investigations*, is to be brought back to this characterization of reason as that wherein $A=A$ holds. What Schelling does in 1801 and subsequent works is to rely on the assumption that one can take this self-sameness of reason qua medium of position for granted, and indeed in such a way as to make it into the principle whose unpacking may yield content and form both for the system that will be constructed on its basis as well as for its discrete components. As will be seen below, it is from the identity proposition, qua highest law of reason as self-same, that Schelling extracts both the ontological capital to be expended through differential distribution, as well as the differential criteria according to which this distribution can occur: to wit, first the distinction between subject and predicate, from which in turn (via the doubling of identity) the difference between subject and object is extracted, and this latter in such a way that in its first instantiation (matter) all of the ones that will follow are already potentially, yet necessarily, contained. All Schelling needs to get his entire systemic construction going, in other words, is for the self-sameness of reason to be granted as the necessary, unquestioned departure point. What he does in 1809, however, and even more explicitly in the drafts of the *Ages of the World*, is to submit even that basic assumption to a critical examination, asking whether it is itself consequent upon something else. Needless to say, for reasons which cannot be explored here, Schelling concludes that if the presentation is to be philosophically informative at all, not only can that self-sameness of reason not be taken for granted; in addition, it must ultimately be recognized that no other justification can be given for it other than the radically free decision whereby the cohesion of identity is secured through the bond of love alone (cf. SW VII: 408). Thus, both the things and the very system which receive their necessary determinations thanks to absolute identity are thereby subjected to an irreducible antecedent contingency: the non-necessary release of the world to be caught up in the nets of reason (cf. SW X: 143). Nature itself can only be awarded a “derived absoluteness” (SW VII: 347). And that “eternal past” which was never present but from all eternity past (SW VIII: 254) is in this sense the absolute ontological counterfactual: the chaos wherein nothing can subsist because the absolute identity of reason to itself breaks apart in the absence of the bond of divine love (cf. SW VII: 378).

can only be, under the form of $A=A$. In other words, absolute identity abides only as the copula between *relata*, and while it is not dependent on any given or specific ones, it still is only in such a way that it constitutes a nexus *of relata*. There is thus a certain form, or what Schelling also calls “a manner of being [*Art [d]es Seyns*],” (SW IV: 120) that belongs ineradicably to absolute identity. Such a form is not to be collapsed or confused with the former’s innermost being or essence, but simply with the way in which it is given. Within the purview of reason, in fact, this form does not condition the being of absolute identity, but is rather always immediately posited alongside the latter’s unconditional being. And thanks to the inseparability of essence and form, whatever may follow from the form is therefore also posited immediately through the being of absolute identity.

Everything is thus according to its essence the one and only being of absolute identity. It is in this sense that Schelling is a monist. But there are multiple ways in which essence can be compliant with its form, and so it is this multiplicity of ways in which the same form can actually be instantiated that ultimately yields the multiplicity of things thought individually. “Absolute identity,” we read, “is under the same form in the individual as in the whole, and *vice versa*” (SW IV: 131). This means that, because it stands for the different modes this one being can take, the form is characterized as akin to finitude and as ultimately giving rise to multiplicity. And this is why, in turn, Schelling’s monism is a differentiated one—and indeed: an *essentially* differentiated one, since not only is that system comprised of different existing things, but in fact the existence of those things is made possible by the different operative modes of essence: namely as ground and as grounded existence.²⁰ Of crucial importance in this context, however, is that the formal differentiation which gives rise to multiplicity happens not in accordance to a haphazard profusion, but rather to a structure deeply seated in Schelling’s conceptions of indifference (*Indifferenz*), and of the “divine imagination of the fore-image and counter-image in which every essence has its true root” (SW IV: 394). So what is this structure?

If one conceives of the absolute as indifference, as Schelling does, then the aforementioned distinction of form and essence cannot really obtain therein, and so it must be the case that, in the absolute, essence and form are really one. As the *Further Presentations* tell us, however, to be truly one, each must incorporate the other in itself; which is to say that their being one can only be given by the mutual imagining (*einbilden*) of the one into the other. Essence, which has the character of infinity, must in itself be the unity whereby finitude is taken up into infinity; form, on the other

²⁰ This operative distinction is of course the one which the 1809 *Philosophical Investigations* would make famous: “essence insofar as it exists and essence insofar as it is mere ground of existence” (SW VII: 357). That very important recognition of essence’s split into two essences via its “modes of operation [*Wirkungsweisen*]” (SW VII: 409) does not, however, contradict the ultimately monist character of Schelling’s ontology. For proof, consider Schelling’s vehement profession of an anti-dualistic view: “I do not in any way admit two different worlds but through and through only the *one and the same*, in which everything is comprehended, also what in common consciousness is opposed as nature and spirit.” (SW IV: 102) Cf., also the “ultimate principle” of metaphysics in the late *Treatise on the Source of Eternal Truths*: “The *Daß* [is] according to its nature, and therefore in all things, only one; in the great community that we call nature and the world, a single *Daß* which excludes all multiplicity from itself rules” (SW XI: 590).

hand, which has the character of finitude, must in itself be the unity whereby infinity is taken up into finitude. Only thus can “these two unities [be] in the absolute not outside each other, but in each other, and thereby the absolute [be] absolute indifference of form and essence” (SW IV: 416). The structure in question—significantly designated an “organism of the whole” (SW IV: 415)—is thus a threefold one: two instances and their unity. Since, however, these two instances cannot but themselves be a unity in the first place—under pain of not *being* at all, since all being is according to what was argued above only the being of absolute identity—then the structure is of necessity one which calls for its own iteration on different tiers or levels. This is exactly what Schelling means by that “doubled unity” whereby being is actually given as “the identity of identity” (SW IV: 414, 121).²¹

As a consequence of this doubling, the imagination of form and essence in fact yields two ways of having a unity of the infinite with the finite—or what is the same, a unity of unity and multiplicity. Namely: on the one hand, as the unity within multiplicity; and on the other, as multiplicity within unity. Each of these two ways is termed a “potency [*Potenz*]” (SW IV: 414). And in their highest sense, each of those two potencies corresponds to a domain or field of the universe of existence, broadly understood. The first potency, which imagines unity into multiplicity, corresponds to nature. The second potency, or that which imagines multiplicity within unity, corresponds to the ideal world of intelligible determinations, which may admittedly manifest in variable degrees in different existents, but which is nonetheless to be understood, on rational grounds, as present everywhere. In turn, given that each of the aforementioned potencies has to be for itself a unity or a totality—insofar as its very being depends on this—so again in each of them the imaginative structure of two potencies and their identity gets reiterated internally. The one important proviso here is that this time the three inner potencies do so under the overall character of the specific overarching potency to which they belong. In the ideal world, the threefold structure takes on the hue of infinity or generality. In nature, on the other hand, it is instantiated under the guise of finitude or particularity.

The 1806 treatise, “On the Relation between the Real and the Ideal in Nature” very poignantly fleshes out this instantiation of Schelling’s identitary ontology in nature-philosophical terms tying in with what the previous section of this paper established. Under the aegis of an elucidation of matter qua “unknown root from whose elicitation all forms and living appearances of nature come forth,” (SW II: 359) it tracks the operation within nature of gravity, light, and their coming together to give rise to formed matter. Gravity is characterized as nature’s finite or natural principle, i.e., as the grounding principle that brings the infinity of essence into the finitude of

²¹ Cf. Schelling’s *Stuttgart Seminars* for proof of the long-lasting validity of this: “This transition from identity to difference has often been seen as a suspension of identity; this is however by no means the case, as I will presently show. It is much rather a doubling of essence, hence an intensification [*Steigerung*] of unity” (SW VII: 424–425). The doubling is, on the one hand, exhibited in the transition from the subject-predicate distinction to the subject-object distinction. It is also evident, on the other, in the necessary reiteration of homologous essence-form structures operating *ad intra* and *ad extra* for any given potency or level of Schelling’s system. More on this later.

form. Light, in turn, is characterized as the infinite or actualizing principle that describes the multiplicity of form within the unity of essence. And the imaginative coalescence or concretion of both, whereby things can first reach existence, is matter, which is thus explicitly understood not as a principle, but as resulting from principles.

The eternal opposition and eternal unity of both principles engenders as a third, and as the full ectype of the entire essence, that sensible and visible offspring of nature: matter. Not a matter *in abstracto*, a general or barren one, but rather matter with the liveliness of forms, particularly so that it too again makes out something threefold, disseminated and yet linked into an indissoluble whole (SW II: 371).

Not to be overlooked here is that Schelling's ontological schematic is run through by an inherent dynamical concatenation and an inherent logic of nascency that dictates the order in which the moments of each potency follow one another.²² For every potency is itself an imaginative composition whose *last* moment is the full identity of essence and form and whose other two constituents are respectively: the identity under the preponderance of form, and on the other hand, the identity under the preponderance of essence. But because being is something which is as such owed to essence, rather than to form, in order for that third or final moment of the overarching structure to obtain—and hence for the structure as a whole to obtain—the moment corresponding to the identity which is seen as posited under the preponderance of form has to be *first* mobilized so as to come to be posited under essence, which alone gives being. Thus, since in constitutive terms the most urgent demand within the structure is the positing of all its moments as *being*, under pain of otherwise having the whole structure fall apart, it is a question of strict ontological necessity that the moment ruled by form comes first, if only to be able to attain its particular subsistence by means of its striving towards essence. This first moment can then be followed by the imaging of form into essence, and finally by the full identification (*Gleichsetzung*) of both form and essence, qua third and final moment of the potency or structure in question.

The natural logic stringing together the potencies of an imaginative schema thus dictates that each preceding moment is relatively more entangled with form—and less with essence—than the subsequent one. This is crucial; for given that form furnishes mere mode of being but not being itself, that means that each moment that precedes another displays the latter's possibility, not yet its actuality. The form, "which only appears as ground," is however only posited *alongside* the unconditional being of essence, which alone is "absolute activity and positive cause of reality" (SW IV: 417). And hence, it is ultimately this necessary commencing by laying the ground of the

²² An order which will indeed be called into question once the spirit of Schelling's positive philosophy suggests to him that "philosophy has a still larger content than the world" (SW X: 228) and leads him to question how the world indeed may have been released into "the nets of reason or the understanding" (SW X: 143).

higher existence which is to follow which *organizes* every imaginative identity and *dynamizes* the whole. For it is always the third which is the actual, and for the sake of which the first two are given. That is why Schelling says of the first two that they are ideal (*ideell*) determinations of the third, which is what properly speaking has existence, and in which the first two are really (*reell*) one. The relation of ground/existence accordingly links together two inverse orders of priority: on the one hand, a natural one which looks to the order of nascency, giving the first place to what conditions subsequent emergence; on the other, one of ontological preeminence, where existence takes the upper hand over its genetic conditions. Notice, therefore, that the first two are not there accidentally or blindly, but always already geared towards the third. They work as its enabling conditions; but as conditions which themselves would not have been given had the actuality they condition not have had ontological preeminence over them. So that, as Steigerwald correctly notes, the grounding basis or backdrop of what properly shines forth in appearance, is one which is “always already in a dynamic interplay with light and existing appearances.”²³

Speaking again with the terms of the identity proposition $A=A$, Schelling claims that “all actualization in nature” rests on the gradual annihilation of the finite and bonded, its “becoming-transparent” for the sake of the *copula* or infinite essence that affirms itself in every bonded particular (SW II: 367). And that, because essence is infinite, then it has to affirm itself infinitely, through all possible configurations of form. Or as Schelling says in clear anticipation of the famous 1809 dictum that “will is primal being” (SW VII: 350), “The absolute is however not merely a willing of itself, but a willing in an infinite way, in all forms, degrees and potencies of reality. The imprint of this eternal and infinite willing of itself is the world” (SW II: 362). These convictions remain unchanged for over forty years, and inform Schelling’s “latest” thematization of matter in his *Principienlehre*.

III

Still pursuant to the fundamental tenets of the “so-called system of absolute identity” (SW XI: 371), even if by then crucially aware of that system’s overall contingency with regard to its facticity, the 1843 *Presentation of the Process of Nature* again insists that only a subject-object can properly be what exists. And it warns just as well that this concept of the subject-object inevitably fragments itself in immediate thought into its constituents. Of these, the pure subject of being must necessarily come first. For as a pure capacity-to-be which has not yet attained actual being, it alone presupposes nothing but itself, and is the initial attractor point of being. This subject must be immediately followed by its onto-logical counterpart, viz. that pure being which is to be attained later: the object. And since each of these two totally lacks that in which the other purely consists—the one as pure capacity with no being, and the other as

²³ Joan Steigerwald, “Schelling’s Romanticism. Traces of Novalis in Schelling’s Philosophy,” *Freedom, Nature, and Systematicity: Essays on F.W.J. Schelling*, ed. G. Anthony Bruno (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 47.

pure being with no capacity—then neither could subsist in isolation. As a third moment, therefore, which however must always remain third insofar as it genetically presupposes the previous two, the subject-object is posited, which alone has the capacities to be and not be, both of which are required by what *exists*. There is accordingly a necessary concatenation of subject, object, and subject-object. These three moments or principles, therefore, belong essentially to the idea or prototype of the existent (*das Seyend*). And this idea of the existent, because it forms a constitutively self-enclosed co-belonging of all its moments under the form and rule of the whole they integrate, and because it follows the necessity of thought in so constituting itself as a circular co-determination of parts and whole, amounts to an “*organism of pure reason*” (SW X: 306).²⁴ Without disregarding possible differences, it will become clear that, like the “organism of the whole” of 1801-1802, this new threefold schema likewise constitutes a generative existential prototype governed by the law of identity in its implication of the law of the ground.

The notion of an organism at the basis of all reality amounts to thinking all species of existents as variable configurations of a prototype of existence. Only, while the absolute idea comprehends *the existent* in general, it does so not abstractly but rather precisely in its *con-cretion*, i.e., in the growing together and mutual determination of all particulars therein contained. The difference between an abstract and an absolute idea like Schelling’s—henceforth: the Idea²⁵—is thus that only the latter is susceptible of being exhibited as a generative process whereby its comprehension of all kinds and species is given by the capacity it has of producing them in their full difference and multiplicity, rather than by its absorption of them through the effacement of their differences. Importantly, that production must be fuelled by the infinite dynamical potential welling up in the necessity of reason itself, and so takes place as the ordered self-affirmation of the essence which streams forth from the identity of reason through all possible configurations under which its intension can be deployed in the extensional mode of its form. In other words, the actualization of the Idea, qua prototype of existence, can only be achieved through the ordered

²⁴ Or as Bruce Matthews aptly characterizes it: a “relational structure [which] is incapable of being reduced to the linear mechanics of logic, since it exhibits the same property of reciprocity indicative of the dynamic feedback that structures life’s capacity for self-organization.” Bruce Matthews, *Schelling’s Organic Form of Philosophy: Life as the Schema of Freedom* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2011), xiii.

²⁵ Although perhaps visually obtrusive and stylistically questionable, I believe that it is worth rendering Schelling’s term ‘*Idee*’ as ‘Idea,’ with a capital ‘I’. The choice aims to mark the fact that this idea does not simply stand for that of a given existent or other—not an *eidōs* in the sense of an *essentia rerum*, or the form of a species—but rather for the epitome and source of all such ideas, a master prototype or prototypes, as it were. In this sense, Schelling emphasizes that “the existent as the universal per se is not an idea, but the Idea per se, *the Idea itself*” (SW XI: 273). That said, it is crucial not to mistake this capitalized designation of the Idea for its would-be hypostatization or individualization. It is precisely the realization that there is an unfathomable—if not therefore unbridgeable—chasm between the Idea and a would-be *Ideal* of pure reason which motivates Schelling’s turn to positive philosophy. For more on this difference, see the *Presentation of Purely Rational Philosophy* and the *Treatise on the Source of Eternal Truths* (SW XI: 283 ff. & XI: 575 ff.).

generation and genetic interconnection of all the possible iterations of itself qua finite and determinate. Or as Schelling says:

If absolute indifference is thus only the direct expression of reason itself, then the leading principle of a science of reason cannot be anything other than precisely to trace and hold firm to this indifference in everything and through everything, i.e., to regard it as that which should be actualized by means of the science, to be presented as actual. Solely from this indifference, which entails that all potencies included in it likewise be satisfied, we have tried to also comprehend the universe (SW X: 343).

Any one existing thing—or indeed domain of things—must accordingly be thought as drawing its determinate existence in virtue of being an ectype of the original prototype of the existent: i.e., by being other than the *whole* Idea, even if nonetheless a part or moment of the Idea's total possible yield, and only on condition of minimally complying with its overall structure: to be, at least in a liminal sense, a subject-object.

The Idea is thus generative precisely insofar as its identity is not a logical but a natural—or, even better—a *naturing* one. The philosophical history of such a generative universal containment stretches as far back as the Pythagorean musings of the older Plato, readily available in his notion of a cosmic animal (*κόσμον ζῶον* / *κόσμον ζῴον*) as the organization which comprehends all other organizations, as well as in his account of what he calls the divine method or way (*ὁδός* / *hodós*) which one must follow in order to trace the concretions which the ontogenetic dialectic between unity and unlimitedness is capable of yielding.²⁶ And like Plato, all those centuries before at the dawn of the tradition of ontological dynamics, Schelling is also *mutatis mutandis* concerned with thinking how it is that the concrete ectypes of an ideal prototype can subsist beyond the latter in a real community with others like them. At stake here is thus a stepping outside of what most generally and prototypically can be said to *be*, towards that *locus* where multiple, specified things can exist as actual. Were we to speak for a moment in a Platonic tone, we could say that here the centrality of the ὄντως ὄν (*óntōs ón*) is left behind for the periphery of the *χώρα* (*chōra*).²⁷ Or equivalently, that

²⁶ Cf. Plato's *Timaeus* 30c and *Philebus* 16c–e, respectively. Though this notion of a prototype of existence likewise connects to claims by other thinkers whose influence on Schelling is undeniable—e.g. Leibniz's analogy of a garden whose every plant is a new garden, Herder's postulation of a main organizational plasma at the base of all existing things, Kierkegaard's doctrine of the ratio of forces, and even Kant's principle of thoroughgoing determination (minus the organic character of this determination)—it is easy to see that Schelling ultimately draws the insight from Plato. In his 1794 notes on the *Timaeus* and *Philebus*, Schelling registers the following: "The world is, however, the ectype of a pure, ideal prototype, thus ectype of an idea of animal, which lies at the basis of every particular species and kind, which embraces all species and kinds of animals, just like the visible world likewise contains all kinds of animals." Schelling, "*Timaeus*," 29.

²⁷ A more careful engagement with this resonance between Schelling and Plato, which would among other things have to thematize the different degrees to which they make distinctions between matter proper and space, must be foregone here. I merely recall that Plato famously chose the term *χώρα* (*chōra*),

emphasis is put on the fact that the actual existence of which we ourselves are a part can only be purchased once the plenitude, infinity, and permanence of the eidetic is recognized as only the paradigm, however necessary, of a reality which in order to be multiple and concrete cannot but be fully localized, thoroughly changing, and irreducibly submitted to parameters of finitude. This would therefore be the place to engage in a consideration of the role which space and time play as “form[s] of finitude,” (SW II: 364) and of how it is exclusively thanks to their ordered accommodation of a finite thing’s constitutive essence as it exercises—and exhausts—itsself in its interaction with alterity that each naturing particular is not only placed in its exclusive position in the midst of totality, but also thereby determined in its being. Such a consideration should likewise take note of the role played by the dynamical articulation of dimensions in the construction of complexity and orientation, as well as of how the asymmetric conjugation of space and time correlates to and is governed by the imaginative bond of gravity and light. Only, because it would lead our overall investigation too far afield, that consideration must be marked for a later opportunity, and attention must now turn to the way in which the moments of the Idea emerge from their organic totality, only to come together again under the guise of matter.

In the original, pre-actual unity of the Idea, the three moments are not for the sake of their own being, but rather just for the sake of the organic prototype they integrate. Each moment itself is thus something which has not gone over into actuality; and only in virtue of this respective abnegation of their own self-transition into actual being can the organism of reason be the consummate Idea of that which exists. If, however, there is on the one hand to be any-*thing* other than the prototype of existence in general as it is constituted by the necessity of reason, and if, further, the unity those merely logical moments compose is itself to ever be actual, then the moments of this Idea must attain to being for themselves. In other words, and just as had been advanced back in Schelling’s 1800 *General Deduction of the Dynamical Process*, absolute indifference may be the source of all actuality, but only to the extent that it loses itself and ceases to be what it was, in order to reveal itself as what it has dynamically become. Perfect, self-contained unity sacrifices itself as such and gives way to a multiplicity whose gradual dynamical unfoldment will make possible the actuality of existential forms which were only indeterminately contained in the original unity at rest. Needless to say, if and why such a leaving behind of the absolute ontological “abyss of rest and inactivity” (SW IV: 34) takes place is not susceptible to *a priori* thematization, and can only be *a posteriori* corroborated. But having once presupposed it does happen, the presentation of how it happens becomes the task of a science of pure reason.

Calling the subject of existence, insofar as it is first-come, the ground or basis for the unity of the whole reason-organism, Schelling maintains that since the original unity is anchored in that subject, it can only be suspended by it. To that end, it is

which designated the surrounding fields that environed the *polis*, for the medium that allows for extra-
eidetic existence insofar as it “provides a fixed state for all things that come to be.” (*Timaeus* 52b).

however necessary that the possibility of being that the subject consists in be put at the service not of the Idea but of itself. In so putting its potency in service of itself, the subject of the Idea essentially suspends the self-retention it exercised so as to remain mere capacity-to-be for a whole larger than itself. In place of such retention, it rather releases itself as something which arrogates being for its own self, in direct contravention of the role it should have otherwise played in regard to the Idea. It is this breaking with and out of the Idea that amounts to the upsurge of nature, i.e., the moment of nascency: the passing over into being—but a being *external* to the Idea insofar as not primordially geared towards the Idea. In what is thus a clear example of how even in a science of reason the Idea is impotent if not for nature, and also of that other conviction that there can be no life without contradiction (SW VIII: 319), Schelling reasserts the ambivalence or tension—a “*dissonance*” he elsewhere calls it (SW X: 101)—that must be present already in the very first moment of the actualization of being if there is to be anything more than just the absolute and absolutely self-contained Idea.

And here is the point of one of Schelling’s most decisive insights: that the Idea of the existent cannot transpose itself or any of its constitutive moments to a *locus* other than its own—that of pure logical necessity—and so cannot actualize itself, except by effectuating an inversion of its own constitutive disposition, such that what was once mere *potentia* in the Idea, because its chronological priority still obtains outside the Idea but is no longer immediately controlled by any kind of higher organization, therefore becomes a sort of incontinent *actus* once it emerges from the eidetic, a sort of unfettered overflow of being which loses control of itself and gives itself completely out, with no reserve or self-limitation. At the same time, what was proper *actus* in the eidetic is thereby forced to regain itself in extra-eidetic actuality first as a *potentia* that must be gradually granted by that newly incontinent and alterity-excluding *actus*. It is, in short, as if in its inevitable urge to nature into actuality, the Idea were quite literally turned inside out. With incisive wordplay, Schelling designates this nascent whole which is transposed outside the purely eidetic realm “the inverted One—*Unum versum*, thus *Universum*” (SW X: 311).

Only, in the context of this world-founding uni-version, the principle which natures out of the indifference designated by the Idea’s organic composition ceases to be what it itself was according to the logic of that composition. What was once true subject or anchoring basis of the prototype of the existent becomes, once outside of the pre-actual milieu of that prototype, only a spurious subject, a subject which is no longer in truth such. Following Schelling’s assertion that “potency is synonymous with subject” (SW X: 381), then in terms of ontological capacity, the first principle’s exclusionary takeover of being corresponds to an inversely proportional function whereby it ceases to be mere capacity *within* the Idea and rather saturates the space *outside* the Idea with a being that knows virtually no capacity, i.e., no subjectivity or self-retention, no interiority, but mere unfettered and hence one-sided exteriority. Having lost its essential place in the innermost center of the pure Idea, the being that first stands out into actuality—the *πρῶτον ἐξιστάμενον* (*prōton existámenon*) or *primum Existens*—is thus one which can only do so at the price of becoming estranged from

its own original potency.²⁸ Were it to last, this estrangement of being would in fact constitute a fruitless and barren existence, a one-sided and undifferentiated externality which would amount to nothing less than a miscarriage of the Idea, because none of the latter's higher potencies would come of it. But the estrangement is only a moment in the process of nature, and is ultimately prevented from enduring by the dynamism of identity inherent in the law of pure reason. Still, the only possibility that is left for this estranged being's conversion back into true subjectivity, true interiority, dictates that the principle whose takeover of being inverted the Idea should now gradually pass through the process of recognizing itself as the relative object of those higher potencies which were subsequent to it in the prototype and which in passing over to actuality it has tried to exclude. And these excluded principles in turn are thenceforth compelled to ceaselessly vie for a return to their originally allotted roles by the only means left to them: sublimating their opposition to the exclusionary usurper of actual being by gradually obtaining from it a mediated access to the extra-eidetic *locus* which it has unilaterally taken over.

Thus is the Idea transposed to a universe outside and incepted into actuality: on the one hand at the price of having lost—at least initially—the possibility of being anything other than mere externality, mere blind being. But on the other, with a clear inherent directionality of production, for the very circumstance of its innate inversion means that it is also incepted with the simultaneous demand that it strive to regain its original disposition and harmonious unity as the organic betrothal of the three principles that make up the original subjective-objective Idea of the existent. And so just as the *inversion* of the One belongs to the process of nature, so too and as ineliminably does the urge to undergo its *reversion* by means of a gradual *καταβολή* (*katabolē*), that is: by a debasement or a laying down of the principle which stepped out first in order that it serve as the foundation of the higher ones in the production of the various ectypes of the prototype that await yet to be actualized. This laying down of a ground on the basis of which higher existences may be actualized is of course none other than the moment of materialization. Indeed, as first accomplished

²⁸ One key point to be registered is that, despite appearances, Schelling's designation of '*primum Existens*' concerns not simply the principle itself, but rather, and albeit proleptically, the first concretion of all principles at the moment of their *natural* inception qua minimally subjective and maximally objective (cf. SW X: 130). This means that, even if that designation explicitly receives a new sense of loss and estrangement to go along with that of chronological priority, it nonetheless remains perfectly consistent in 1843 with the 1801 designation of matter itself—and not only one of its constitutive principles—as '*primum Existens*' (cf. SW IV: 144). Pursuing the substantiation of this nonetheless fundamental and often misread point is beyond this paper's scope. It will suffice to recall that in the *Presentation of Purely Rational Philosophy*, Schelling affirms that: "immediately as [the first principle] has raised itself into being (is =B), it falls under the power of the other [principle]" (SW XI: 395). In other words, at play here, as elsewhere, is a conceptual-ontological distinction which must be dynamically drawn, but which cannot effectively hold in time as distinct, or which has no chronological dilation of its own. That it must nonetheless be held apart in thought (just as all principles are indeed held apart only in thought, but in reality we only see the result of their interaction), obeys the eminently *speculative* conviction that "true science is not allowed to leap over any moment" (SW X: 325). Incidentally, this point is directly connected to the issues which are likewise merely hinted at in footnote 42, regarding the distinction between the *ἄπειρον* (*ápeiron*) and the *χώρα* (*chōra*).

subjective-objective ectype, matter ensues as soon as the outpoured first principle accepts the action of the higher principle it previously excluded and “become[s] in regard to it much rather object (objectual for it), subordinate[s] itself to it,” (SW X: 310) thereby “mak[ing] itself into the higher potency’s *ground*, to the matter in which the former actualizes itself” (SW X: 324). Thanks to this subordination, the two higher principles, each in the operational manner which corresponds to it, jointly bring about that the first existent, which at the moment of its inception is maximally objective and minimally subjective, may gradually come to restore its true subjectivity. Hence carried over into extra-eidetic actuality, the principles come together again as operative causes “out of whose interaction,” as Schelling will say in the *Presentation of the Purely Rational Philosophy*, “concreta arise, and, according to the different possible positions of the principles to one another, *different* concreta” (SW XI: 411).

The entire process of nature, in other words, will be dictated by the gradual, systemically interconnected, and variable *katabolization* of that initially uniform and one-sided externality at different points of space and time. Ascending through the variable configurations afforded by the changing ratio between the Idea’s constitutive principles turned causes, the account therefore offers an ontological version of Herder’s and Kiehmeyer’s organic models of generation by force combinatorics.²⁹ A gradation or spectrum of possible existents is thereby laid out which corresponds to the forms of nature and which is ordered in accordance to the degree to which a particular existent showcases the subsumption of the merely external kind of being to the interior and self-controlled one that is granted to it only by the operation of the higher potencies on the materialized basis that the first outpoured principle provides. Between the point of most resistance to the *materializing reversion* and that of the total overturning of the spurious subject back into its true subjectivity lie an infinitude of moments. Each of them corresponds to an actual natural kind and, because it is still dynamically under the “pressure, which every following (coming) one exercises on the preceding one,” (SW XI: 399) it does not yet arrest the ongoing process of nature, but simply lays the basis for its continuation. This goes from the emergence of corporeality, which first upholds a quantitatively determinate impenetrability stretched out along three spatial dimensions, to the ever growing complexity and qualitative differentiation which is rather determined through the temporal relativization and withdrawal of that impenetrability; from so-called inorganic nature, with its promising crystallizations, to the emergence of living, self-moving beings, and finally to that no less wondrous emergence of consummated consciousness.

If Schelling says that the metaphysical concept of matter is the most difficult of all, it is accordingly because of the inherent contradiction that stirs within it, whereby one must think of something that is actual, yet also immediately the potency of something higher which must become of it. It is this contradiction which is at the

²⁹ The key texts in this regard are Herder’s *Ideas Towards a Philosophy of the History of Humanity*, and *God: Some Dialogues*, as well as Kiehmeyer’s *On the Relations Between Organic Forces in the Series of Different Organisations, and on the Laws and Consequences of these Relations*. Schelling is an admirer of Kiehmeyer, to be sure; but the ultimate Herderian source of Kiehmeyer’s central ideas is not lost on him. Cf. SW III: 195.

root and corresponds to the law of the ground;³⁰ this tension that explains why one never experiences matter *as such* but only ever formed matter, and why the process of nature pushes onward in the direction of the full enactment of the myriad forms which are potentially contained in the *primum Existens*, again and again relinquishing its accomplished products to the function of grounding ever higher ones. That, from the perspective of a genetic reconstruction of our own transcendental givenness this must be so, is dictated by the very logic of identity which Schelling had expounded four decades before and—despite important complementing insights—never since abandoned. It is indeed in compliance with the structure of an identity understood under the guise of the potentiating imagination of the real and the ideal that life and consciousness are not belatedly appended to existence but rather have their eventual emergence prepared for from the former's very inception.³¹ The emergence of life, indeed, constitutes nothing other than the moment when the shifting preponderance of reality and ideality reaches an inflection point and materiality begins to be overpowered by the form which a given matter instantiates. Because of that dawning preponderance of the ideal over the real, the organism proper appears as that product whose subsisting unity is given not by the matter it comprises, but by the form which cycles through and disposes of that matter, subsisting even as the concrete matter which supports it at one given moment passes away from it only to be replaced by other matter. And this is exactly why in the *Presentation of My System of Philosophy*, just as he had called matter the *primum Existens*, Schelling in turn called the organism the *secundum Existens*. The organism itself, however, will in turn be nothing other than the matter disposed of by that highest and most ideal point which nature reaches: the I, or self-consciousness. And though he never explicitly gets around to it, one can only assume that Schelling likewise intended to designate the I the *tertium Existens*. For what is the I if not a synthesis of material existence and life disposed of by consciousness, the final natural form wherein essence “completely returns to its own infinity,” (SW IV: 47) and “all potencies of the universe, all these separate moments are determined to be gathered as in the last unity” such that “a new beginning ... the world of spirit, or the ideal side of the universe” (SW X: 389–390) may be opened alongside that of nature?

Of crucial importance is also noting the manner in which the *katabolē* or materializing reversion occurs. In this regard, Schelling once again appeals to Plato.

³⁰ Thus in the *Presentation of Purely Rational Philosophy*, Schelling will state that the general property of matter is “to be ground of existence without itself existing; or to be that which has its existence merely insofar as it serves another for its existence” (SW XI: 398).

³¹ Cf. Schelling's early pronouncement in the dialogue *Bruno, or On the Natural and Divine Principle of Things* that “the attempt to mechanically try to call back to life [a] nature rendered dead in its innermost aspect” is a task stemming from insanity and betraying an incomparable “crudity in the understanding of nature and its beings” (SW VI: 315). Here one again sees the crucial role that a correct conception of matter plays in the possibility of articulating a philosophy which succumbs to neither dualism nor one-sided eliminativism, and which, far from being “a feeble philosophy, a mere artefact ... can measure itself up to life, which far from feeling itself powerless in the face of life and its tremendous reality, or of being limited to the sad business of negation and destruction, rather takes its own force from actuality itself” (SW XIII: 11).

Drawing inspiration from the latter's notion of cosmogonic intellectual persuasion (*πειθεῖν* / *peithēin*),³² he argues that all actuality which becomes on the basis of matter, be that immediately or mediately, “cannot be actualized save insofar as it brings this principle which first came forth to being—or *persuades* it, following the beautiful Platonic expression—to go back again into pure capacity-for-being, into potency” (SW X: 347). This interiorization of blind being back to the point where, in lesser or greater degree, it controls and contains itself from simply exhausting itself in its own ontological outpouring, is nothing other than an attempt at a reversion of that unfettered passing over into being whereby the first principle forewent its role as mooring point for subsequent potencies and tried to be exclusively for itself. In Schelling's words: “Form itself consists only in the *negation* of merely blind being, i.e. in its *interiorization*. A thing is posited thereby, when a potency arises in matter by which it becomes more or less in power of itself” (SW X: 397). Rather than an imposition, therefore—whether transcendent or transcendental—form constitutes the liberation *in* matter of those things it is inherently and constitutively empowered to become as a result of the action of its higher principle upon it lower one. Form is thus not to be explained by an aggregation of any kind, but by an action whose result is to refurbish that first principle or basis with a measure of its lost potency. Hence instead of a merely one-sidedly external and barren being, what persuasion seeks is to transfigure blindly outpoured being into one which has a reserve of its own power and keeps it inside under increasingly complex forms of *actual* subjectivity.³³

It is also in this decisive juncture, of course, that the *Principienlehre* connects with Schelling's earlier nature-philosophy, as in dynamical terms this persuasion expresses none other than the potentiating operation of light on the basis provided by gravity. That imaginative operation had been characterized as destructively reconstructive precisely insofar as light seeks to partially undo the determinations gained in the basic terms of pure preponderance in order to erect more complex, more informative, qualitative determinations on their basis. To that end, while under the organization of gravity an essence quantitatively fills a three-dimensional region of the medium of extra-eidetic being, under that of light it in turn partially renounces that

³² The notion of persuasion is of course most famous from *Timaeus* 48a, but as a *leitmotif* courses through many other Platonic works. In its ontological register, it also very importantly rears its head in the *Statesman* (272c ff; 304d ff.), specifically as connected to the notion of a weaving together of constitutive powers for the sake of an overall coalescence which is oriented towards the good. And one should in any case not forget that the form of the good—to which are credited both a thing's being known as well as its being—is tellingly symbolized in Book VI of the *Republic* by the sun, and its operation by that truth-disclosing one of light (507a–509c).

³³ “Passive limitation,” Schelling claimed in the *Stuttgart Seminars*, “is indeed imperfection; a relative lack of force. But to limit oneself, to confine oneself into one point and yet hold fast to it with all forces, not to let go, until it has expanded into a world, this is the greatest force and perfection ... In the force to confine oneself lies genuine originality, the radical force [*Wurzelkraft*]” (SW VII: 428–429). Faithful to this intuition, when talking about the substantial form of anything existent, i.e., to that which makes anything the thing it actually is as raised above mere matter, Schelling holds—explicitly against Aristotle but no less applicable to Kant—that he “could say all the less of it, as he thought of it as something positive” (SW X: 381).

claim so as to invest itself rather in a return to qualitative interiority. Only this interiority is now conditioned by the prior occurrence of the gravitational process, and so occurs on its basis: focused, as it were, in the three-dimensional locality which the process has already determined, geared towards giving that gravitationally grounded existent an ideal, representative life to go along with its real presence. So that, instead of being internality pure and simple, it is rather an internality *of* externality. It is an internality which is environed, conditioned, and indeed made actual by the externality through the opposition of which it has been incepted and in which it takes its place.

And therein, at last, lies the crux of the matter. Provided such interiorizing persuasion does indeed take place; what is gained thereby? Is the transposition of the world from the innermost Idea to the peripheral medium where actuality obtains undone? By no means. Nothing that gets out of the original Idea, so to speak, can make it back to *that* Idea. Nature does not retrace its steps; it does not let itself be eliminated, neutered, or arrested; it simply natures on. Every natured issuance stands, despite its best efforts at emulation of the Idea, at a remove from that Idea. As its ectype, it does indeed restore the latter's structure, but only relatively, and thus without constituting an effacement of the original transgression of absolute identity. Still, the operation of the higher potencies on the exclusionary outpoured subject yields as a result an eidetically homologous inner side of this great outside that is the actual universe. While the absolute inwardness that is lost as soon as the pure capacity-to-be passes over into actual being is never again regained, the persuasion of which the estranged subject is made object in becoming the material of the higher and initially excluded potencies results in a directive interiority constitutively distributed *within* the actual peripheral universe rather than merely in the inherently innermost and central Idea. Far from a simply tragic loss of origin, the impossibility of a genuine return thereby reveals itself as a felicitous circumstance on this side of finitude. For it is exactly this indelibility of the transposition inherent to the ontological nascency operative even within the milieu of *a priori* thought that explains the rational possibility of a subjective-objective universe that is irreducible to the waywardness of mere mechanism and blind efficient causality—and is so *by nature*, that is: not merely regulatively or by transcendental imposition.

It is, in other words, because no reabsorption by the Idea is possible, that the ideal as such acquires its actual operativity in the midst of our reality. Succinctly put, that ideal operativity or incidence of the eidetic within actualized reality plays itself out in a threefold manner. Insofar as it invites essence not to give itself out in spite of all form, thus to rather give itself out in a pondered manner, or in accordance not merely with what *can* but also *should* be, it is first and foremost equivalent to matter's autonomous determination according to a given specific idea, i.e. to an *εἶδος* (*eidos*) or form. Thanks to an existent's obedience of that specific determination, moreover, it will also be susceptible of being ideally ascertained, that is: in-formatively taken into the subjectivity of the rest of real existents as something specific and meaningful. And this in turn means that, in accordance with the internal complexity with which their specific idea endows them, different matters will, to different degrees, become

themselves the subjects who represent other matters. Schelling thereby insists that form and existential order are no mere subjective epistemic or regulative projections, but a consequence of the very principles which make up the rationally necessary constitution of the prototype of existence, and so indissociable from the conditions whereby an essence may first possibly express itself unto objectivity in the first place.

And this ultimately cashes itself out in systemic terms. For given that the emergence of life proper and conscious intellection depend on structures of self-sustainment—or, again with Matthews, of non-linear dynamic feedback³⁴—it is only by thus grounding the objective obtaining of final causality that it becomes possible to give a developmentally unitary explanation of existence, bridging the otherwise unconnected existential poles of the preponderantly physical and material with that of the preponderantly ideal and immaterial. The material co-implication of the laws of identity and the ground thus governs Schelling's engagement not only with natural phenomena, but also his account of the relation of the whole of nature to that which is beyond the merely natural, and thereby also of consciousness to its genesis, and of mind to its conditions of embodiment. Schelling does not thereby abandon the field of transcendental idealism, but he finds a way to articulate it with that upon which it depends and which it otherwise could not but eliminate from its theoretical gaze, inevitably at the cost of the validity of its insights. In this sense, he is thereby at long last delivering on promises made long before: that of explaining with one and the same principles, first the construction of matter, then the entirety of the operative breadth of nature, and finally that of the all and our place in its midst as beings who comprehend it.

Conclusions

What fruits can be said to have come out of Schelling's lifelong pursuit to dispel the darkness that attaches to matter and which had proven—and still proves—to be the pitfall of so many philosophical and physical inquiries? In light of what has been seen thus far, some tentative considerations may be submitted. From a perspective broader than the one taken in this paper, one would need to say that, qua first existent, matter is first and foremost the immediate trace of the eternal, and eternally ongoing, contingent event whose result is existence.³⁵ But from the purely rational *a priori* perspective which has been favored in this paper, and to which these conclusions will adhere, one could just as generally say that matter is above all³⁶ the medium in and

³⁴ Cf. footnote 24.

³⁵ Indeed, against taking nature-philosophy and its elucidation of matter as something done once and for all, rather than as the abiding *Grundlage* of philosophy, it bears recalling that it is precisely the ambition to thematize a positive, *per posterius* determinable event that leads to Schelling's "organism of times" (SW VIII: 310) and makes the moment of materialization an eternally ongoing one. Cf. SW XII: 212: "This materializing of the God was not something that occurred once and for all, but an always ongoing event."

³⁶ A science of reason mostly interrogates matter insofar as it is a living expression of absolute identity, but there are other ways to interrogate matter, which should by no means be unfamiliar to any of us. "We call matter, thought in abstraction of soul or the moving principle, mass ... If matter were

through which the inception into existence occurs of all the possible manners in which the universal essence can be compliant with the form under which alone it can attain to actuality. That is to say: in view of considerations of formal compliance—where ‘form’ is understood according to its Schellingian stipulation qua *modus essendi*—matter provides the stage for the actual and ordered deployment of the fruitfulness or the existential yield of an otherwise merely intensionally given ontological capital. It thus acts as existential matrix, in all the senses in which the richness of this term suggest: as a receiving/releasing medium (a *Gebärmutter*), as an array of possibilities, and as the structured embedding of particularity in commonality. And because it is requisite for that deployment that, once commenced, all of the formal possibilities be strung together in their enactment, and because, on account of their being finite, those possibilities must be in a relation of—immediate or mediate—inter-determination, then matter simultaneously provides the backdrop for the operation of those laws—mechanic, yes, but also purposive—that tie the variegated manifestations together as the systematic, spatio-temporalized yield of the one original essence. In short, matter designates the upsurge of a region of actuality, or a field of existence, where all the formal possibilities of the universal essence occur as inter-determining particulars of a system of reason.³⁷ In that sense Buchheim keenly characterizes matter in terms of the function of “world-entrance [*Weltertritt*],” i.e. “that which releases something into a world”.³⁸

Only, the preponderantly physico-material field does not saturate the universe of existence. Matter “is the *primum Existens*, not in the sense ... that it be the highest existent, but that it is the first to step out of the Idea” (SW X: 308) Buchheim puts it thus: “If matter only conditions worldliness for what is actual, then obviously not the whole actual thing is material, but rather what is material of it is always to be distinguished against that which, in simple contrast thereto, Schelling calls immaterial.”³⁹ Indeed, the fundamental assumption of a system of reason is to think of reason as identical to itself, and hence to think of all essence as proceeding from absolute identity. On account of the inherent structure that follows from the nexal meaning of identity, however, the formal constitution of the essence in question ideally splits it alongside an axis of whose two regions one inherently has being, while the other comports itself as the mere condition for this being. Consequently, as first expression of that one and unique essence, not only can matter only be given by internally showcasing or being an instantiation of that same regional split, but it must

accordingly nothing more or nothing else as what it is due to mass or what is passive in it (but it is never merely this), then nothing could be derived from it other than mechanism” (SW VI: 242).

³⁷ In his *Introduction to the Philosophy of Revelation, or Grounding of Positive Philosophy* (SW XIII: 88), Schelling makes clear that the purely rational philosophy developed out of the essential yield of absolute identity does not need to be systematized, but rather, given its fundamental assumptions, is born a system. This should also provide the departure point for a correction of many recent misreadings of Schelling’s rational philosophy, which seem to conflate the system’s overall ungroundedness with a lack of unity or systematicity.

³⁸ Thomas Buchheim. *Eins von Allem. Die Selbstbescheidung des Idealismus in Schellings Spätphilosophie*, (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1992), 48.

³⁹ Buchheim, *Eins von Allem*, 48.

at the same time gradually elevate itself to the point whereby it fully subjects itself to serving externally—or in its own totality—as the ground of another coextensive field through which the original or producing essence can first *fully* be made actual. More succinctly: the fact that the ground/existence distinction is not only internally operative in matter, but also in respect to the material as a whole, means precisely that matter carries within itself, and necessarily, the conditions for that which is opposed to matter and superior to matter, even if genetically related to matter and subject to a non-reductive accommodation alongside matter in the overall universe of existence. While matter thus emerges as the *first* domain of the actualized prototype of existence, since the dynamical logic holding together the very constitution of the prototype follows a non-symmetrical concatenation, the *highest* actualization of that prototype cannot be instantiated by matter but by the optimal configuration of a developmental unity integrated by matter and what comes after matter and subjugates it.

It is important to emphasize, therefore, that just as the material cannot be that which fully actualizes the prototype of which its existence is an ectype, neither can it be that which overtakes matter by itself, but only the hierarchized conjunction of both. Identity's implication of the law of the ground dictates as much that the lower should not exhaust the all, as it does that the higher cannot be given without the lower, and must not only naturally arise out of, but also always be borne by the lower. It is thus as true that matter cannot be fully resolved into the spiritual—an important manifestation of “the irresolvable remainder” (SW VII: 360)—as it is that matter must give rise to spirituality, for the sake of which matter is first deployed in the system of reason. What ultimately gives the direction or method to the multiplicity of material occurrences in the incepted medium of actuality, and what therefore also determines their limit—not in any numerical sense, but rather qua limit of their tendency—is always a progression that brings the “issuances” of the issuing essence from the point where they least perfectly instantiate it (though of course they must always minimally instantiate it, otherwise they would not *be*) to the one point where a final one of those configurations perfectly instantiates or recreates it, thus in a sense coming full circle and capping a certain mode of the production afforded by the original essence. Material progression, as was therefore said, begins at the point of minimal compliance for existence, goes through the inflection or internal midpoint at which matter loses its substantiality to the organizing form, and ends at the limit point *in which* the material altogether ceases to be present, and has nothing if not a negative or extrinsic subsistence.⁴⁰ That said, neither is this coming full circle and arriving at the end of the progression of the formal issuances of essence a cessation of the latter's productivity nor is the return back to itself a seamless one, such that the entire progression would then be effaced without trace as though it had never happened. I will not dwell on the reasons why it is not a cessation. Suffice it to say, just as the original prototype is generative, its actualized highest ectype is, as such, also generative within its own milieu: that of history, of which according to Schelling it is as true that it has a *terminus*

⁴⁰ Cf. SW X: 369 ff. and X: 388 ff. for Schelling's discussion of these two points which, as was said previously, correspond to the emergence of life and consciousness.

ad quem or end, as it is that this *terminus* is not genetically teleological, like nature's, but eschatological.⁴¹ More immediately relevant for this paper, however, is that the coming full circle is not a seamless but a displaced return of essence to itself. And this necessary displacement operative even in the best accomplished return, is what ultimately marks the meaning of nature's naturing and of how this naturing irreversibly envelops any possible actualization of the Idea in the milieu of its own irreducible past.

It was argued, indeed, that the gradual actualization in matter of all the potencies that are therewith injected into existence is tantamount to an ever increasing refurbishment of matter with a measure of self-control. Thanks to that self-control, instead of unfettered outpouring, matter may reserve its capacity under the guise of a dimension of interiority, or an in-formative other side to that aspect of its being which extensionally occupies space. Indeed, as innermost center of being, the Idea is pure intension. Schelling is nonetheless as aware that the philosophical construction of particularity demands the transposition of essence into a shared natural milieu beyond its self-containment, as he is that unless the power unleashed by this transposition be ruled by a higher cause, being runs the great peril of losing itself without producing any lasting generations. But it is the fundamental—and fundamentally Platonic—marker of his conception of matter that the existential localization of essence at stake in its materialization is ultimately and constitutively governed by the submission and collaboration of lower causes to and with higher ones.⁴² This evinces itself in the

⁴¹ Cf. for example SW XIV: 118. For the difference between the (reconstructively) teleological and the eschatological, as well as why that would be significant to thinking how the human being is the “frontier of nature” (SW X: 390), see Sean J. McGrath, “Populism and the Late Schelling on Mythology, Ideology, and Revelation”, *Analecta Hermeneutica* 9 (2017).

⁴² It is crucial to distinguish between the notion of matter qua existent, and that of the material in its merely ideal sense of the factor of existence which is by itself unlimited but may lend itself as the “substrate of limitation” (SW XI: 287). The term ‘matter’ is often used in scholarly literature, though in fact equivocally, to refer to the principle of the unlimited in its speculatively postulated independence of all higher check or in its rebellion to such a check. This principle is indeed a constituent of the Idea, but it can only be called matter in an analogical sense, as the “ideal presupposition of all these ideas” (SW XI: 367). This whole issue touches on complex questions, of Platonic heritage, which can only here be marked for a later investigation: what is the precise relation between the *ἄπειρον* (*ápeiron*)—a principle—and the *χώρα* = *ὑποδοχή* = *μήτηρ* (*chóra* = *hypodoché* = *mētēr*, i.e., the receptacle and mother)—which in contrast to the former is *not* a principle but a *concretum*, and is as such related to the *Philebus*’ *το μίκτον* (*to mikton*, i.e., the mixture), which stands in need of the cause of *νοῦς* (*noûs*) in order that “certain generations result...”? How do these in turn relate to *χάος* (*cháos*), or the still chaotic *πάν ὄσον ἦν ὄρατὸν* (*pán óson ên boratón*, i.e., the disorderly jumble of all that was visible, see *Timaeus* 30a)—which is *neither* a principle, *nor* a kind per se, but more like a radical ontological counterfactual: the speculative conjecture of what would have been the case had no axiarchic persuasion of the lower by the higher taken place? How does this latter relate to identity and rational systematicity? It seems the conflation of these philosophemes, both in their Platonic reception, as well as in the reception of Schelling’s reinscription of them, has been widespread. Admittedly, Schelling’s assertion in the 1809 *Philosophical Investigations* concerning what he calls “Plato’s matter” (SW VII: 361) is at least partly to blame for the common conflation, even if Schelling does admit the equivocal nature of that designation later on (cf. SW XI: 386 ff. & XII: 596–597). Once properly clarified and put in Schellingian terms, the issue marks the difference between matter within the system of reason—such as it is developed out of the essence of identity—and that radically

notion that the first, wayward, transposition of essence into existence nonetheless immediately becomes the departure point for a variegated dynamical progression in which again a new topological transposition occurs, only this time from the exteriority of the purely extensional into the new—materialized—interiority of the ideal. As a whole, matter thus stands as much for the creation of externality to absoluteness, or an outside of the indifference which gives rise to it, as well as—and just as importantly—for the enablement of an *other side of itself*, which therefore turns out to be precisely an inside within the outside that matter itself is. Two topologizations of being, achieved through the original *unfolding* and the subsequent *infolding* of essence, are therefore at play.

Matter as a whole accordingly constitutes a transitional ontological spectrum whose values make up an inverse function relating layers of subjective interiority and an objective exteriority: the complex plotting of the outward assertion of essence's real presence, and of its internalization as ideal representation. And jointly, all of these functional values display the history of the development of the Idea: from the point of its inversion as it becomes actual, up until its full reconstitution and transposition into a new relatively autonomous interiority. To no small degree, if previous systems had foundered upon the cliff that is the elucidation of matter, it is precisely because they failed to understand that the material as a whole is only the transitional spectrum between two endpoints in which matter itself is not present: ⁴³ the prototypical Idea and the actualized Idea—the former absolutely generative yet non-actual, buried in its own infinite intension; the latter, i.e., human consciousness, for the first time capable of meaningfully relating not only to the Idea but—though this would again push us beyond the purely rational—to that personal *ACTUS* who, with full haecceity, *IS* the Idea.

Indeed, just as for the first Idea actual matter is external, so too it is external for the actualized Idea—but, crucially, in an entirely different sense. For whereas the Idea has not itself been constituted by means of an actually existing matter which has been internalized, the actualized Idea has been precisely so constituted. That means that it is enveloped in its own genetic material history—and in fact inescapably so—since it cannot *be* in the absence of that history, given that all its representative determinations are identical to matter—in the Schellingian understanding of identity—qua unfolding of that history. The entire catalogue of our mindful representation is made up, indeed, of the innumerable steps through which nature

past disordered swell that is chaos in the absence of the lasting God-given bond of love, i.e., before its release into the cohesion of reason as self-identical.

⁴³ In the *Presentation of Purely Rational Philosophy* (SW XI: 386 ff.), Schelling celebrates Ch. A. Brandi's substantiation of the fact—attested by Plotinus already—that there is matter in Plato's eidetic world. But Schelling's Idea (the prototype of existence) does not correspond to Platonic *ἰδέαι* (*idéai*) but rather is the source of the eidetic configurations (*Gestaltungen*) which are of a kind with Platonic *ἰδέαι* (*idéai*). Of the prototypical Idea, which qua *Vernunft-Organismus* constitutes rather a certain way to envision the law of identity in its implication of the law of the ground, it may therefore be more exact to say not that it has matter as such (*pace* SW XI: 283), but that, *because its principles sustain material relations among them*, it is the prototypical source of matter—the watershed between the revolutions of chaos and the progression of actual existence.

first arose to the summit of mind. This is where the identity of the transcendental and nature-philosophical constructions of matter are welded together: in the fact that the outside dimension of the actualized Idea cannot be suppressed or ignored, since the inside of that actualized Idea is, though undeniably of a higher order than the outside, still absolutely impossible in the functional absence of that outside with which it is identical and through which it receives the ground of its existence. Unlike that first Idea which may or may not have given rise to its own periphery, this is not, in other words, an inside that could survive without the outside that bears it. The Idea could have remained never externalized, always mere intension, mere essence that never came to ex-ist. But human consciousness, as the homologous inside within the outside of the generative Idea, must have that outside, and must have it as something which is at once intimate and irreducibly different than itself: as its dark unknown root, as its radical and irrecoverable past. All actualization loses itself in darkness before it can see the light: “The seed must be sunk into the earth and die in darkness so that the more beautiful form of light may arise and unfold in the sunbeam” (SW VII: 360). And all of this is indeed a far cry from thinking matter as mere ‘stuff.’