

THE INDIFFERENCE OF OBJECTIVITY TO  
DIFFERENCE AND IDENTITY  
THE PARADOX OF SUBJECT-OBJECT  
OBFUSCATION BETWEEN SCHELLING AND  
DELEUZE

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ABSTRACT: Schelling and Deleuze are polarised respectively as philosopher of identity and philosopher of difference *par excellence*. Schelling grounds reason in his early *Naturphilosophie* in the *a priori* identity deduced from the abstraction of the proposition  $A=A$ . Deleuze, however, reworks the Platonic *Idea* and Nietzsche's Eternal Return in the service of an *a priori* 'problematic being', an ontological difference-in-itself, which precedes metaphysical identity. Despite their apparently polarised metaphysical groundwork, they stumble across a similar consequence: the distinction between subject and object, and any problematic derived thereof, is in consequence of the ontological constitution of the object itself. The paradox of objectivity as indifference to an *a priori* difference or identity is presented, and preliminarily suggested to be due to the Deleuze-Schelling opposition not being a difference-identity opposition, but an opposition between difference and a 'blind act' which retroactively precedes the making-identical to itself of the *one* as distinguished from the *many*.

KEYWORDS: Schelling; Deleuze; Paradox; Identity; Difference; Act; Objectivity; Ontology

AGAINST AN ONTOLOGY OF IDENTITY AND SUBJECTIVITY

As with many of his contemporaries, a sense of mistrust of the development of philosophical narratives drove many of Deleuze's philosophical investigations. Deleuze defined himself in a time where Lacan had succeeded in irreparably altering multiple philosophical traditions, through his fusion of linguistics and psychoanalysis, his eccentric reformulations of the Cartesian cogito, and his subsumption of various philosophical categories under the retroactive

constructions of a structurally contingent yet profoundly anti-structural ‘Real’. These disruptions posed challenges whose ripple effects are still evident in continental philosophy today. The aftermath of Lacan was a succession of generations of French intellectuals seeking to rebuild something new, a variation on this destructive Lacanian theme which pointed for a different philosophical discourse through a continued subversion of classical philosophical oppositions and categories.

Deleuze’s decisive moment in this post-Lacanian apocalypse was an interesting one: to work towards a philosophy of difference. From Hegel onwards, there had arguably been a formal tendency to posit a succession on ontological ‘stages’, generally proceeding from identity to subjectivity. The most well-known forms of these stages are expressed firstly by Hegel, in the indeterminate form of being-in-itself and the dialectically mediated and self-conscious being-for-itself. Prior to the Lacan-event in philosophy, Sartre had built upon this Hegelian distinction, but had nevertheless maintained a fidelity to the stage-like progression from pre-conditioned substantial identity towards a reflexive interruption of pure identity in the form of the ontological disjunction of subjectivity. Being-in-itself again denotes the pre-(or un-)conditioned identity of the former that is thrust towards the questioning inconsistency of the latter, where being-for-itself is the form taken by a being which enters into disparity with itself, being is conscious only insofar as an internal nothingness is installed by being placed under question by itself:

‘The being of consciousness,’ we wrote in the introduction, ‘is a being for which there is, in its being, a question of its being’. This signifies that the being of consciousness does not coincide with itself in an absolute equivalence. This equivalence, which is that of the in-itself, expresses itself by the following simple formula: being (*l’être*) is what it is. There is not, in the in-itself, a portion of being which is not to itself without distance. There does not exist in being, thus considered, the smallest suggestion of duality [...]. The characteristic of consciousness, on the contrary, is that it is a decompression of being (decompression d’être). It is effectively impossible to describe it as coinciding with itself. (Sartre 1943, p.110, own translation)

The Sartrean for-itself is its own nothingness – this explosion of subjectivity out of phenomenal identity is marked by the placing between brackets, the putting into question of being as regards its belonging to itself. The for-itself determines itself as existing insofar as it reflects upon its non-coincidence to itself.

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As such must the for-itself be its own nothingness. The being of consciousness, as consciousness, is to exist at a distance from itself as presence to itself (presence à soi), and this null distance that being (l'être) carries in its being (son être), is Nothingness. As such, for a self [own italics] to exist, the unity of this being must contain its own nothingness as nihilation of the identical. [...] The for-itself is the being that determines itself to exist insofar as it cannot coincide with itself. (Sartre 1943, p.114, own translation)

The nothingness of Sartre's being-for-itself is the element of self-distanciation installed by a self-reflexively questioning, self-conscious subject. This nothingness is the nothingness separating being from itself by its own consideration. Sartre also supplements his being-for-itself with a being-for-others, which denotes his attempt to construct an ontology from the irreducible immediacy of the experience of the Other. Here, the radical alterity of another conscience forms the unassimilable content of subjective experience. The *Other* is a trace of an absolutely excluded presence, something which installs a break in the solipsistic system of the subject, and decenters it in relation to its own place in the world.

There is an evident suspicious operation in this progression from identity to subjectivity in the form of being-in-itself and being-for-itself. The opposition to the identity of in-itselfness, that is, an opposition in the form of *difference*, is, in the case of Hegel and Sartre, dependent upon an unconditioned, *a priori* identity. In other words, the internal difference of Sartre in many ways appears as only secondary to the ontological primacy of identity. Therefore, despite Sartre's profound reworkings of the phenomenological-ontological tradition which preceded him, one could arguably point out his insistence – indeed the insistence of an entire ontological and metaphysical tradition – to retain a certain primacy of a substantial identity as *that which comes first*. This metaphysical identity becomes the precondition for any difference. It is this thread that Deleuze picked up, and that he sought to subvert through his *Difference and Repetition*.

#### DIFFERENCE, FIRST AND FOREMOST

Many of Deleuze's efforts were spent on attempting to subvert the ascribed values which certain academic traditions had afforded certain philosophical categories and concepts. His two-part work with colleague Guattari, *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, begins with a multifaceted critique of Freud's structural triangulation of the subject, and its deviations in neurosis, around the family-triad

and the theatrical Oedipus. This critique essentially expresses itself as a critique of the phallus as a structuring determinant of social organisations, which it sought to replace with a view of the unconscious as occupying a position of producing unrestricted flows of uncoded desiring. Deleuze rewrites the unconscious as a functional consequence of his Body-without-Organs, which replaces a dominant Platonic insistence on the permanence and dominance of the One over the multiple for an unstructured movement of inconsistent intensities and abstracted ‘partial-function machines’ with discontinuous and unevenly interacting qualities which are coded and inscribed into stratifications and social formations (c.f. Deleuze & Guattari 2013[1972]). Part two, *A Thousand Plateaus*, continues the theme of this critique by welcoming a shift from standard categories of contradiction and negation towards the smooth variations on intensities and in tonality/formality in the form of difference and becoming. Signifying and subjectifying formations, contingent with the instance of despotic faces and coded stratifications in social formations are penetrated, dissected, and released with a subversive reading of a multitude of subjects according to the new principles of lines of flights (intensities and movements, for example in the entirely unnatural and all too human process of becoming-animal, which so commonly occurs alongside schizophrenic breaks from the Platonic forms of the One) and a replacement of form and content with the less staggered distinction of content and expression. This line of flight, the penetrations of strata by the abstract intensity of an eternal becoming, opens onto the place of consistency: Deleuze and Guattari’s large-scale translation of the Body-without-Organs. In essence, this philosophical project rewrites the standard operations of signification and structuralisation into textual-tonal aggregations of the elusive productions of intensities and becoming (c.f. Deleuze & Guattari 2013[1980]).

Indeed, if *Difference and Repetition* “rewrites the *Critique of Pure Reason* from the point of view of genesis” (Hughes 2009, p.5), *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* rewrites Nietzsche’s *Genealogy of Morals* (where a revaluation of values is instigated according to the proposition of a new genealogy derived from a logic of will to power, which produced creditor-debtor style morality and the resentment characterising European nihilism) from the point of view of an anti-structural multiplicity and its inverse in coded, stratified channels of desiring. From this we begin to situate the series of critical reconsiderations which fueled Deleuze’s oppositions to the philosophical, psychoanalytic, linguistic, and sociological traditions of his time.

Difference and Repetition would be Deleuze's critique of the a priori metaphysical and substantial identity which he located within ontology and metaphysics; the same primacy of identity as identified in the above section. Difference and Repetition are in fact the names of a series of functions betraying the difficulty of maintaining the initial identity of things in themselves. From the subversive standpoint of pure difference (*différence en elle-même*) we reach the elusive function of a complex repetition (*répétition pour elle-même*). A complex series of problematics centering around the metaphysical quality of repetition, and its synthetic-deconstructive effects, accompanies the question of identity and difference. Complex repetition doubles a constitutive disjunction within that which repeats or is repeated. Far from positing a substantial pre-repeated identity, which repeats as a consequence of certain predicates of the identical thing (e.g. repetition is the return of a pleasurable sensation, or the repetition of a predicate/object), Deleuze posits repetition as itself synthesizing that which repeats. The unreconciled substance of that which begins by its difference, which is constituted by its primary incompleteness, is constituted by the doubling of this disjunction in a repetition which, in a sense retroactively, constructs that principle which functions through its being repeated.

Repetition, as founded in an ontological difference-in-itself, precedes that which is repeated. Hence Deleuze's interesting emphasis on the relationship between repetition and pleasure in habit, and the primacy of the former:

The problem of habit is therefore badly posed as long as it is subordinated to pleasure. At times repetition in habit is considered to be explained by the desire to reproduce an acquired pleasure; at other times that it may concern disagreeable tensions within itself, but in order to master them with the goal of obtaining pleasure. It is clear that these two hypotheses presuppose the pleasure principle: the *idea* of a pleasure already obtained, the *idea* of a pleasure to be obtained act but in accordance with the principle, and form its two applications, past and future. But habit, as passive synthesis of binding, instead precedes the pleasure principle and makes it possible. And the *idea* of pleasure follows, just as past and future, as we saw, follow from the synthesis of a living present. The effect of binding is the instauration of the pleasure principle. [...] It is possible that, empirically, we experience repetition as subordinated to an obtained or to-be-obtained pleasure. But in the order of conditions, it is the inverse. The synthesis of binding cannot be explained by the intention or the effort of *mastering* an excitation, even if it has this effect. Once again, we must guard ourselves from confounding the activity of reproduction with the passion of repetition that it covers up. The repetition of excitation has as its

veritable object to elevate the passive synthesis to a strength from which follows the pleasure principle and its applications, future and past. Repetition in habit or the passive synthesis of binding is therefore 'beyond' the principle. (Deleuze 2011[1968], p.129-130, own translation)

Pleasure, in other words, is subordinated to repetition. Repetition is a passive synthesis, only possible by the primacy of difference over identity (the primacy of difference over that which differs) which it recreates, which posits the foundation of what it is that is pleasurable bound in the act of repeating.

Like difference-in-itself, which adopts the problematic being of *difference before differing*, of a difference which founds the identities which in turn are differed, repetition installs the experience of pleasure in habit as a retrograde and anterograde 'continuation' of principles which repeat. It is, as with present in relation to past and future, that which disseminates both retroactively and proactively by the virtuality of an always-present which accomplishes itself as a passive synthesis of *a* past and *a* future. Repetition is a passive precondition for the recurrence of actions and of pleasures. It is 'beyond' the principle insofar as it installs a binding which allows a given principle to function according to an internal logic (e.g. in accordance to pleasure: Freud's pleasure principle); beyond the principle insofar as it founds the origin and destination of a principle of repetition, through the pre-condition of repetition itself (repetition-for-itself).

The question of repetition, not as the repetition of something preconceived, but as the external reproduction of a state which differs initially, leads to Deleuze's assimilation of his complex repetition to Nietzsche's *Eternal Return*. The constitutive, *a priori* difference-in-itself which grounds substances by only secondarily ascribing identity, this difference-in-itself which underlies its doubling in the complex repetition which retroactively installs the principles of repetition, meets its most precise articulation in the paradox of the Eternal Return. The original point of identity is, for Deleuze, a retrospectively posited illusion. An illusion which provokes the platonic distinction between *Idea* and copy, between image and reproduction. Deleuze's reading of the Eternal Return emphasises, as with his formulas of repetition, that *the return is in fact all there is*. First return, then that which returns. That which returns must be retroactively posited. The returning instance is constituted only by the logic of an initial return, of a return which predates that which returns, or as Deleuze formulates it:

It is as such that an identity finds itself necessarily projected, or rather retrojected,

onto the originary difference, and that a resemblance finds itself interiorized in the diverging series. Of this identity, of this resemblance, we must say that they are ‘simulated’: they are produced in the system which returns the different to the different through difference (this being why such a system is itself a simulacra). The same, the semblant, are fictions engendered by the Eternal Return. There is there, this time, no longer an error, but an *illusion*: an inevitable illusion, which is at the source of error, but can be separated from it. Alternatively, the same and the semblant do not distinguish themselves from the Eternal Return itself. They do not preexist the Eternal Return: it is neither the same nor the semblant which return, but the Eternal Return is the only same, and the only semblant of that which returns. (Deleuze 2011[1968], p.165, own translation)

The Eternal Return is in this sense a semblance only of itself – this logic is of a return conditioned only by its own returning. As with the paradoxes of difference-in-itself, where repetition retrospectively posits an identical object which is repeated, the return posits what it is that returns. Therefore, returning to the Platonic problem of original and copy, we find, according to Deleuze, a false distinction, one which is solved by the logic of the Eternal Return. The distinction is in fact between two images, two images determined according to a retrospective, illusionary chronology, all by the simple ontology of a primacy of recurrence.

But more profoundly, the true Platonic distinction displaces itself and changes nature: it is not between the original and the image, but between two types of images. It is not between the model and the copy, but between two types of images (*idols*), of which the copies (*icons*) are but the first type, the other being constituted by simulacras (*phantasms*). The model-copy distinction is there only to found and apply the copy-simulacra distinction; because the copies are justified, saved, selected in the name of the identity of the model, and thanks to their internal resemblance with this ideal model. (Deleuze 2011[1968], p.166, own translation)

We therefore find, in this exposition, the logic which underlies the statement that “the Eternal Return only concerns and only makes return simulacra and phantasms” (Deleuze 2011[1968], p.165, own translation). Taking this rewriting of ideas according to the simulacral logic of the Eternal Return, could we not argue that if Capitalism and Schizophrenia rewrites the Genealogy of Morals, then not only *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, but *Difference and Repetition* is a rewriting of Nietzsche’s *Beyond Good and Evil* (with its excessive critique of Kant and Hegel from their inversion of the relationship between sense-knowledge and *Ideas*)?

There is therefore, according to Deleuze, a fundamental shift incurred by a

metaphysics derived from the primacy of difference over identity. A shift away from the immediacy of *Ideas* and their recurrence in copies and images, towards a repetition-for-itself of simulacras, which posit identity only as a retrospective fantasy, an ideal supplement, of an *a priori* difference. Deleuze points towards a philosophical system which emerges from the in-itselfness of a disjunction, a disruption or difference internal to and constitutive of any object itself. Another layer of complexity is therefore created for an epistemological subject which attempts to *know* an object – a difficulty which formed the basis of one of the principal theses of Žižek's *Less Than Nothing*: epistemological limitation is in fact ontological incompleteness (Žižek, 2013). The problem, or impossibility, of an absolute knowledge of an object, the disruption central to this epistemological relation, is not a limitation of the observing subject (or its tools of observation), but is a disruption, an incompleteness (put simply: a *difference*) inscribed within the object *itself* which is sought to be known. The ontological incompleteness of an *a priori* difference is in itself constitutive of the object in the first place, and the limitation of the subject's knowledge merely doubles the ontological incompleteness of the object. Because of Žižek's appropriation of this argument into a Lacanian-Hegelian variation, Deleuze's expression of the same conclusion remains most faithful to a genuine philosophy of difference:

The problem or the question are not subjective or private determinations marking a moment of insufficiency in knowledge (*connaissance*). The problematic structure belongs to objects, and allows them to be grasped as signs, just as the questioning or problematising instance belongs to knowledge (*connaissance*), and enables the grasping of the positivity, the specificity, in the act of *learning*. Even more profoundly, it is Being (Plato called it the *Idea*) which 'corresponds' to the essence of the problem or the question as such. There is something like an ontological 'opening', a 'gap', or a 'fold', which reunites *being* and *question* [own italics] with each other. In this relation being is difference itself. Being is just as well non-being, *but non-being is not the being of the negative*, it is the being of the problematic, the being of problem and of question. Difference is not the negative, it is on the contrary non-being which is Difference. (Deleuze 2011[1968], p.89, own translation)

'*Non-being is not the being of the negative, it is the being of the problematic*' – here is Deleuze's opposition to Hegelian dialectic concentrated into one phrase. For Deleuze, Being, or the Platonic *Idea*, corresponds ontologically to the act of questioning it as such. The disjunction in the form of a placing into question of an object is a disjunction which pre-exists the object itself; this disjunction is the



difference-in-itself constitutive of the object. Being is not that which assumes a negation as a substantial and inversely positive form – this is Hegel’s formula for the progression from Being to Essence in the *Encyclopaedia*, where we have “a pure *nothing*, but a *nothing* that contains *being* (Hegel 2015[1817], p.145)”. Instead, Deleuze emphasises the ‘non-being’ of difference, its subsistence through its in-itselfness. This non-being is the *problematic being*, the *being* formulated in terms of a problematic, which is internal to the object contemplated by a subject. Such non-being is the only *being* possible for a philosophy of difference.

We have here one of the interesting consequences of Deleuze’s philosophy of difference: the subject-object relationship is obscured by their sudden non-separability. The problems of an observing subject, the problematic of observing an object, becomes suddenly constitutive of the object itself. The subject-object distinction dissolves in an interesting way: by doubling the limitation facing the observing subject into an internal constitutive fact of the object, ontologically founded on the philosophy of difference. The position of subject is lost, as this positional difference is already inscribed in the object. Deleuze’s philosophy of difference leads, therefore, to a partial dissolution of a subject-object distinction (by relocating this distinction internally to the object). Interestingly, however, and as will be explored now, this is not a consequence solely of a radical philosophy of difference. The unusual dissolution of a subject-object boundary, caused by the ontology of the object itself, is found in the absolute antithesis of Deleuze’s project: Schelling’s philosophy of identity.

#### THE IDENTITY OF DIFFERENCE: A PARADOX

The obscurity of subject-object relations has recurred many times in the history of philosophy. Kant’s transcendental idealism shook the foundations of the empirical reality of an autonomous, self-constituted object which lends itself for phenomenological and epistemological experience. The subject in fact grounds the possibility of an object’s phenomenal constitution by the construction made possible by the mediated intuitions of space and time and the categories of the understanding (Kant 2008[1781]). The metaphysics of substance in Hegel’s phenomenology are determined by its appearance, and internal antagonism, in the form of a questioning subject. A part of the whole subverts its substantial foundation by reflexively questioning this whole (substance) and reformulates it

according to the ‘return of Spirit towards itself’, and in thus doing installs an internal negation by its appearance both as substance and questioning subject (Hegel 1979[1807]). This is the fundamental logic of the absolute necessarily appearing both as substance and as subject. The phenomenological tradition from Husserl onwards, including Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, in some way (though with significant theoretical differences) explores the profound difficulty of maintaining the possibility of an autonomous object-identity upon the introduction of a subject. And in so doing they obscure, at the same time, the ontology of any form of self-determining subject, and obscure even more the epistemological relation between subject and object. However, a reasoned system which, at one point or another, leads to the dissolution of a logical/ontological separation of subject from object, or which locates subjective limitation within the metaphysical composition of objects, is more rarely come across (although not, of course, unheard of). What this paper is highlighting however, is the absolute separation in the foundations of two philosophical systems (Deleuze’s and Schelling’s) which nevertheless both lead to a subject-object dissolution caused by the ontology of the object itself.

Schelling and Deleuze, respectively philosophers of identity and difference par excellence, find as a consequence of their philosophical systems two separate problematics which culminate in a subject-object obscurity. Identity and Difference is a significant theme of Schelling’s work. It is perhaps fair to suggest that Schelling’s work is one of the hardest philosophical opuses to attempt to summarise – his shifting alliance with Kant and his occasionally uncanny resemblance with Hegel, as well as the eternally changing nature of his philosophy, leads to a series of works which are as original as they are elusive to fix as a determinate moment within the German Idealist tradition. The focus here will not, therefore, be to summarise the development of Schelling’s philosophical thought. It will instead be suggested that the systems he adopts, reflecting the preoccupations he had at certain points of his career, paradoxically lead this philosopher who so strongly contradicts the difference-in-itself of Deleuze, to somehow find an allegiance with the latter on the topic of subjectivity and objectivity. Underlying Schelling’s philosophy of identity was a recurring speculation upon what can be taken as essentially given, the unconditioned first instance, of any metaphysical system.

Initially, in his *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*, the

unconditioned is conceived as that which is indissociable from Nature itself (nature being the material which philosophy is given to utilise – presentation, in other words). This unconditioned is Being, which is ascribed to all presentation, and cannot be conditioned from something prior, yet is inseparable from that which is presented, or in other words, from that which is (Schelling 2021[1799]). Far later in his career, a certain natural necessity, located at the level of essence over actuality, becomes that which is unconditioned in a system of nature. This unconditioned is a *natura necessaria* (necessary nature), an existence independent from actuality, which “exists necessarily, namely, according to its nature or its essence” (Schelling 2021[1845], p.41). The *natura necessaria* would be “that which has the capacity to be something other” (ibid). In other words, what Schelling begins to attempt to discern is an unconditioned necessity which grounds identity, and upon grounding identity the capacity to differ ensues. There must be a self-identical something from which the others, that which differs, logically follow. A type of metaphysical necessity must provide the unconditioned ground for this primacy of a self-identical one over the others from which it differs. In this sense, there is a certain connection between the metaphysical act of grounding in the form of an unconditioned and an ontological (self-)identity which precedes difference. Identity is grounded, it seems, in an object, prior to its differentiation into otherness as a consequence of this grounding. Here we therefore have one of Schelling’s more sophisticated articulations of his philosophical tendency to posit the primacy of ontological identity over difference through his search for the unconditioned.

The consequence for this primacy of identity for the subject-object relation is revealed in his, relatively early, *Presentation of My System of Philosophy*. In proto-Hegelian fashion, Schelling grounds reason as all there is, and a system of philosophy which takes what there is as the expression of reason. Philosophy is therefore the reasoned study of all there is – this philosophy of all there is foreshadows his later *Naturphilosophie*. Schelling grounds a proposition of identity ( $A=A$ ) as the ultimate law of being and reason, and therefore the identity of  $A=A$  becomes the foundation of what is (the effort to ground reason in philosophy from the proposition  $A=A$  had occurred a year earlier, in *System of Transcendental Idealism* [1993[1800]]). The strength of a grounding proposition of identity for a system of reason lies in its exclusion from time, and thus its eternal validity: “The

proposition  $A=A$  is the sole truth posited in itself, without any reference to time. I designate such a truth an eternal truth, not in an empirical but in an absolute sense” (Schelling 2002[1801], p.351). Because of its eternality through timelessness, and because “it alone expresses the essence of reason, the proposition  $A=A$  [the proposition of identity] is also the unique unconditionally certain proposition” (ibid). Once again, we find the intimate connection between the grounding, unconditioned essence of philosophy, and a primacy of identity.

Interestingly, the primacy of identity based on (or even constitutive of) the unconditioned is not a matter of an identity in a subject or a predicate (or a subject and its object). Schelling’s argument is that the foundation of reason and nature, in the proposition  $A=A$ , emerges because this proposition annuls the possibility of  $A$  as subject or  $A$  as predicate – it obscures the distinction between these two, and instead simply posits identity in itself. Identity precedes that which is identical.

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

Based on the primacy of an *identity-in-itself* (as opposed to Deleuze’s *difference-in-itself*) we find a series of direct inversions of the ‘non-being’ (the *problematic* being of *being*) which follows Deleuze’s system. The following propositions serve as the most direct contradictions of Deleuze’s philosophy of difference: “*Absolute identity can never be abolished as identity*” (Schelling 2002[1801], p.352), “since identity is infinite and can never be abolished as absolute identity [...] everything that *is* must be absolute identity itself” (ibid), or “absolute identity is the unique thing that absolutely *is* or is *in itself*, so everything is in itself only to the extent it is absolute identity itself, and to the extent that it is not absolute identity itself, it is simply not *in itself*” (ibid). From this we can understand that Schelling’s system, by grounding reason in the primacy of an *identity in itself*, where identity precedes that which is identical as terms of subject and predicate in the formula  $A=A$ , abolishes a concrete distinction between an observing subject and its object.

I call *reason* absolute reason, or reason insofar as it is conceived as the total indifference of the subjective and objective. It is not the place here to justify this turn of speech, since its only function is to generally awaken the idea that I shall connect with this word. – Just a brief indication must be given, then, of how one comes to understand reason this way. One gets there by reflecting on what presents itself in philosophy {as occupying a position} between the subjective and the objective, which evidently must be an item standing indifferently over against both extremes. Reason's thought is foreign to everyone; to conceive it as absolute, and thus to come to the standpoint I require, one must abstract from what does the thinking. For the one who performs this abstraction {4:115} reason immediately ceases to be something subjective, as most people imagine it. It can of course no longer be conceived as something objective either, since an objective something or a thought item becomes possible only in contrast to a thinking something, from which there is complete abstraction here. Reason, therefore, becomes the true *in-itself* through this abstraction, which is located precisely in the indifference-point of the subjective and the objective. (Schelling 2002[1801] p.349)

The difference between subject and object can be retraced as a consequence of the inability to consider their origin within the absolute identity of reason – an abstraction towards the foundation of reason inscribes the problem of subjectivity and objectivity as a consequence of a failed appreciation of the ontology of identity. In other words, the ontological constitution of the object, by being preceded by an identity of which it comes into accord, is doubled in the indistinguishability of subject and object. It places both subject and object as consequential to the identity in the proposition  $A=A$ . The identity constitutive of  $A$  takes primacy over  $A$  as subject over the predicated  $A$ .

Subject and object become a point of indifference: subject is as much subject as object, and object as much object as subject, from the perspective of a system which grounds reason in the primacy of identity-in-itself, and from which the identity of  $A$  (subject) with  $A$  (predicate or object) is a secondary complication from the fact of an *a priori* abstract identity. Here we come across our paradox: the *in-itselfness* of identity, leading to an indifference between subject and object, where the relation between the two doubles the constitution-through-identity of object and subject themselves, is simultaneously a consequence of the *in-itselfness* of difference for Deleuze. Where Deleuze starts from the premise of the in-itselfness of difference, and Schelling with the in-itselfness of identity, both admit the consequence that a subject-object distinction becomes a form of indifference. For

both, the concrete distinction in this relationship is annulled by exposing the non-autonomous existence of both the object and the subject – the distinction is a consequence of the primacy of what is posited as in-itself. The subject-object dissolution doubles the initial constitution of both object and subject as consequential to either identity-in-itself or difference-in-itself. There is either identity-in-itself, or difference-in-itself, and both subject and object are penetrated with this primacy, to the point where the concrete distinction, and individual autonomy of either, is made impossible. Any difficulty in comprehending the subject-object distinction lies in the primacy of the internal identity or difference with which they are constituted<sup>1</sup>.

#### A SOLUTION CAUGHT IN THE ‘ACT’

This is evidently a strange paradox. The primacy either of identity-in-itself or of difference-in-itself (i.e. the opposed systems of Schelling and Deleuze) lead to a formally identical indifference to the distinction between subject and object. Both locate the problematic of a subject and its object in the constitutive roles of identity or difference which ground subject and object and the possibility of limitations in their relation. Evidently, any solution to this paradox will, in this paper, be limited. Presently, a potential avenue for understanding this is presented in Schelling’s refinement of his philosophy of identity, in his *The Ages of the World*.

Schelling reaches a level of sophistication in *The Ages of the World*, with the

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<sup>1</sup> Another interesting common point is met here between Deleuze’s philosophy of difference and Schelling’s philosophy of identity. A specific complicity lies in the ‘secondariness’, or the dependence, of time upon the grounding *in-itselfness* (whether it is an *in-itselfness* of difference or of identity). Schelling describes the eternity of identity, and the possibility of time *after* this *a priori* identity. “*With respect to being in itself, nothing has come into being. For everything that is in itself is absolute identity itself [...]. This, however, has not entered into being, but simply is; therefore it is posited without any connection to time and outside all time, for its being is an eternal truth [...]. Consequently, everything viewed as being in itself is absolutely eternal*” (Schelling 2002[1801], p.352). Similarly, *time* is for Deleuze an implication which is disseminated from a repetition. As briefly described above, past and future emanate from a virtual point-of-presence constituted by a repetition which constitutes a repetitive principle from the perspective of already-always having repeated.

unconditioned being located in the blind act which makes something out of the contradictory essence of God as that which eternally affirms and negates itself, which is disseminated from Himself and retracts into Himself in a pre-material totality. This blind act leads to the something of pure identity, the ground of reason, and to its later dissemination into otherness and difference. This moment of Schelling's philosophy is founded in his complication of a Parmenidean distinction between one and many, or one and others. Something must be posited in an essential primacy, out of the impasse of an alternate positing between one and others, where if the former one is, the others cannot be, yet if one of the others is, then the remaining others are not. Something must, nevertheless, be first.

Schelling finds a solution to the whole problem by proposing an unconditioned *act* which grounds identity and difference in the one and the others. A violent, blind distinction, in the form of an event-like act, comes to (somewhat arbitrarily yet in the compulsion of a necessity) install *a* one which is not the one of the others.

But just in order *that* one begin, that one be the first, a decision must ensue, which, to be sure, cannot happen consciously, by deliberation, but only in the pressure between the necessity and the impossibility of being, by a violence blindly breaking the unity. That alone in which a determinative ground for the priority of the one and the consequence of the other can be sought, however, is the particular nature of each one of the principles, a nature which is distinguished from their common nature, which consists in this, that each is equally original, equally independent, and each has the same claim to be that which is. Not that one of the principles would have to be absolutely the one which precedes or which follows, but only that, permitted by its special nature, the possibility is given to it to be the first, the second, or the third.

Now it is evident that what is posited for a beginning is precisely that which is subordinated in the sequel. The beginning is only beginning inasmuch as it is not what really should be, not that which is veritably and unto itself. If there is a decision, then only that can be posited for a beginning which distinctively inclines most to the nature of what is not. (Schelling 1942[1815], p.106-107)

This blind act, by the simultaneous contingency and necessity of its logic, leads to a sudden placing into question of any form of primacy of identity over difference or difference over identity. The act appears to ground 'what is posited in the sequel', where the primary identity *is* so only insofar as it is sequential to

the enigma of an immaterial act. The difference-identity question becomes, with the violent act Schelling describes, a secondary consequence of a certain tension between necessity and impossibility. Identity is indeed the *a priori* determination of reason – but the primacy of identity is instantly posited alongside the tension which is retroactively posited as its reason, or its *raison d'être*. The tension between necessity and impossibility explains the act of identity, but identity is nevertheless posited as primary. The tension and its impossible act are retroactively installed as the determinations of an identity-in-itself.

In a sense, an impossible disruption, but one which is determined *après-coup*, grounds Schelling's identity – identity-in-itself is grounded in a logic of an indeterminable tension between impossibility and necessity, and this logical grounding expresses itself only from the instance of identity's existence. This 'act between necessity and impossibility' is of course not identical to Deleuze's difference in itself. What is implied by this insight in *Ages of the World*, however, is the fact that the paradox may be resolved through seeing the identity-difference opposition between Schelling and Deleuze to not in fact be such a precise, inescapable opposition. Whilst Deleuze emphasises the primacy of a constitutive difference as preceding any ontological identity, Schelling relies on a third category, on an enigmatic act which is only expressed as the retroactively posited precondition for any identity. The opposition is no longer an opposition, but an asymmetry between difference and act, with an opposition between difference and identity being secondary. The subject-object dissolution may therefore be argued to be grounded, not in any identity-in-itself, but in the retroactive logic of an act which forms the possibility of opposing identity to difference, and yet which allows for the obfuscation of the subject-object distinction which initially appeared dependent either on identity-in-itself or on difference-in-itself. In other words, the Deleuze-Schelling opposition is perhaps not an opposition between the *a priori* existence of difference or identity, but instead a more asymmetrical opposition between difference on the one hand and a 'blind act' on the other hand, which retroactively precedes the making-identical to itself of the one as distinguished from the many, and becomes the 'impossible necessity', from which the abstract identity which grounds Schelling's reason follows.



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