TRANSCENDENTAL STUPIDITY: THE GROUND BECOME AUTONOMOUS IN SCHELLING AND DELEUZE

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The activity of thinking has been traditionally set against the risk of error and its concomitants: inconsistency, incoherence, the false. Philosophy pursues and protects the truth; such is its mission statement. But this is, for Deleuze, an inadequate conception that gives us the image of a thought so weak, so thin and impoverished, that everything happens as if from the outside. What, asks Deleuze, of stupidity? How are we to account for it transcendentally? In his attempt at an answer, Deleuze draws directly from Schelling's Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, though without clearly articulating either the form of Schelling's concepts or presenting how exactly they are supposed to account transcendentally for stupidity. Further still, Deleuze seems implicitly to recapitulate—to the serious detriment of his conceptual schematic, as Derrida famously claimed in* The Beast & the Sovereign*—Schelling's belief in a freedom that is solely human, and therefore the refusal of a capacity for stupidity to the animal as well. The present article intervenes here, reconstructing the Schellingian concepts necessary to an understanding of Deleuze's theory, and sketching in conclusion the possibility of a revised account that need not stratify itself so straightforwardly along the human/animal divide.*

there is no bêtise *in itself, but a becoming*-bête*.*
— Jacques Derrida, *The Beast & the Sovereign*, Volume I

In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze articulates a series of strategies by which we might learn to think beyond the strictures of common sense. Most foundational among them is the injunction never to trace from the empirical its transcendental conditions.[1] For the empirical

[1] Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, (tr.) P. Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 143. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as DR.

is already constituted, and to think empirically is to learn to recognize only what already exists.[2] This is thought conceived under the aegis of its orthodoxal image, an image structured by resemblance, recognition, representation. Here Deleuze is emphatic. For him, nothing could be further from the creativity of the thinker. Nothing could pose any greater a threat to thought. "The conditions of a true critique and a true creation are the same: the destruction of an image of thought which presupposes itself and the genesis of the act of thinking in thought itself." (DR, 139) The vestiges of its traditional image continue to haunt thought today. The concern of this article lies with one in particular, though it is legion: thought's negative, that against which the activity of thinking is constantly admonished.

We are as philosophers and as readers of philosophy time and again implored to think correctly, to avoid at all costs falling into error, into contradiction, inconsistency or incoherence; to remain wary of the dangers of improper thinking, of superstition, and most emphatically to reject always and out of hand the first signs of the false. Philosophy pursues and protects the truth; such is its mission statement. But this claim recognizes, in Deleuze's own words, "only *error* as a possible misadventure of thought, and reduces everything to the form of error." (DR, 148) Every other affliction suffered by thought, the myriad humiliations of stupidity, the misfortunes of madness and malevolence, everything irreducible either to the true or false is thereby exported, forced outside the dominion of thought itself and "regarded as facts occasioned by external causes, which bring into play external forces capable of subverting the honest character of thought from without." (DR, 149) If there is something more than simply error at work in madness (or evil), it is not because thought is capable of producing its own failure—or so says common sense—but because something external has been brought into play: a disease, a defect. But this gives us the image of a thought so weak, so thin and impoverished, that everything happens as if from the outside. What, asks Deleuze, of stupidity? How are we to account for it transcendentally, internal to the structure of thought itself? Surely something more is at work in its convulsions than simple misrecognition, as if the tyrant needed only to better understand the facts, as if he went wrong only in method. Surely we are no longer so optimistic a population of rationalists.

In his own answer to the problem, Deleuze draws directly from Schelling's *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human*

[2] See James Williams, *Gilles Deleuze's* Difference and Repetition: *A Critical Introduction and Guide* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), 135–37.

Freedom, though without clearly articulating either the form of Schelling's concepts or presenting how exactly they are supposed to account transcendentally for stupidity. Further still, Deleuze seems implicitly to recapitulate—to the serious detriment of what Derrida famously claimed, in *The Beast & the Sovereign*, to be his conceptual schematic—Schelling's belief in a freedom that is solely human, and therefore the refusal of a capacity for stupidity to the animal as well. Deleuze is clear: whatever stupidity is, it is not and has nothing to do with animality. (DR, 150) This is a plainly Schellingian claim, the implications of which will have to be enumerated.[3] The present article will unfold accordingly: first, I will briefly reconstruct Schelling's concept of the ground; then I will elucidate on its basis Deleuze's claim that stupidity marks a failed relation between individual and ground; and finally, I will consider, with Derrida, the significance of the distinction implicated in this account of stupidity between humans and other animals, sketching in conclusion the possibility of a revised account that need not stratify itself so straightforwardly along so traditional a divide.[4]

I. All Birth is Birth from Darkness into Light

Schelling begins, in the *Philosophical Investigations*, by distinguishing the ground from the concept of existence. (HF, 27) Everything that exists is grounded; all existence presupposes a ground. In their notes on the text, Jeff Love and Johannes Schmidt suggest that we understand the ground as a kind of condition for the existence of what it grounds, though its nature is neither causal nor logical. (HF, 149) The ground does not provide a set of causal explanations for what it grounds, the way it might for Spinoza, nor does it serve only the role of a logical postulate necessary for the intelligibility of what exists. If it is to be thought at all as a condition, it must be in terms of potency, power, force. For every thing that exists, we can locate beneath it (at least provisionally) a power to exist, a kind of force that possibilizes it. Love and Schmidt claim of this force that it is a contraction—of

[3] F. W. J. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom* (tr.) J. Love and J. Schmidt (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 40. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as HF.

[4] This is an article primarily on the concept of stupidity and its genesis out of Schelling's *Freedom* essay, so it is worth noting at the beginning that I will be reading Schelling selectively—which is to say that I will not be able to do justice here to the extent to which he is concerned with evil in that essay, nor will I be able to draw extensively on his other writings.

intensities to be explicated in the unfolding of the existent. (HF, 150) And if ground is contraction, then existence is expansion. The two are always in dynamic tension. So each principle is perhaps better rendered in verb-form: the ground is always contracting, the existent grounded is always expanding; "each movement is defined with and against the other, they function together harmoniously, and the whole that emerges out of this movement is not comprehensible as a whole without it." (HF, 150)

It is a mistake to see in the distinction between ground and existence the recapitulation of a stubbornly persistent line of traditional ontological dyads: the founded and its foundation understood as actualized possibility or realized ideality. The distinction between ground and existence is posited foremost as a split in God, between God and nature, his existence and its ground. "Since nothing is prior to, or outside of, God, he must have the ground of his existence in himself." (HF, 27) But this means that God's ground is real and actual, that it is inseparably *in* him while remaining nevertheless distinct *from* him. God's ground is nature, a nature that cannot exist without God, and so depends in a certain sense upon him, and yet necessarily precedes him in existence—circularly. (HF, 28) So God is, to borrow a line from Žižek, never fully himself.[5] The ground for his selfhood is, in Heidegger's terms, "that in God which God himself 'is' not truly himself."[6] Considered solely in himself, God is fully actual, completely illuminated, perfectly consistent. But God can never be so considered—or, better, in order to be fully himself God requires a contracted, withdrawn ground out of which to become but, in Žižek's words, "on account of which God is never fully Himself, can never attain full self-identity."[7]

This fraught relation between ground and existence marks the transition to a new style of pantheistic thinking, one anchored in God's becoming instead of his being.[8] Identity, on this account, is to be conceived as the product of a higher unity of what were originally (at least conceptually) separate movements. God does not emerge from the darkness of his ground without also bringing the ground into a higher relation with the light of his understanding. (HF, 27) God's ground is in him but other than him, and his divinity consists

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[5] Slavoj Žižek, *The Indivisible Remainder: On Schelling and Related Matters* (London: Verso, 2007), 61.
[6] Martin Heidegger, *Schelling's Treatise: On the Essence of Human Freedom* (tr.) J. Stambaugh (Athens: Ohio UP, 1985), 110.
[7] Žižek, *Indivisible Remainder*, 62.
[8] Heidegger, *Schelling's Treatise*, 110.

in what Schelling calls the "unfathomable unity" of the two, a unity that does not, however, succeed in bringing the ground completely into harmony with God. (HF, 29) There always remains something indivisible in the ground, a kind of irresolvable excess. This point is crucial, for the ground cannot be exhausted by what it grounds. Its darkness can never be brought fully and finally into the light. Nature does—to take a well-known line from Heraclitus—love to hide, yes, but saying so sounds like an exercise only in epistemic humility, a claim made on the behalf not of nature but of human finitude, as if nature were hiding but only *from us*. It is perhaps more appropriate to say of nature that it exceeds, that it is itself excess as such. All talk of hiddenness, concealment, and withdrawal is anthropomorphic—conceptual elucidation at the expense of metaphysical precision. In his *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*, Schelling sets forth what he calls the chief task of the philosophy of nature: not to thematize the excess of activity, potency, or force over product, permanence, and stability, but rather to explain the very the possibility of the latter determinations.[9] That active nature exceeds its products is to be taken as axiomatic. "The product is originally nothing," in his own words, "but a mere point, a mere limit."[10] In explanation, he offers the image of a whirlpool, and it is, I think, worth reproducing here at length:

> a stream flows in a straight line forward as long as it encounters no resistance. Where there is resistance—a whirlpool forms. Every original product of nature is such a whirlpool, every organism. The whirlpool is not something immobilized, it is rather something constantly transforming—but reproduced anew at each moment. Thus no product in nature is fixed, but is introduced at each instant through the force of nature entire.[11]

Schelling does not merely locate beneath the phenomenal fixity carved into nature by the frames of a human perceptual apparatus the currents of a smoothly processual cosmic flow. No such thing. Nature itself is both production and product, both field of individuation and individual; the excess of the former over the latter indexes a noumenal fact, not an experiential limitation. To think becoming is therefore to divide movement into that which becomes and that out

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[9] F. W. J. Schelling, *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*, (tr.) K. R. Peterson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 17–18.
[10] *Ibid*., 205–206.
[11] *Ibid*., 18.

of which it does; to think becoming is necessarily to think the inexhaustibility of the latter. This second qualification preserves what Iain Grant calls a fundamentally *productive* conception of nature, a nature the completion of which remains forever foreclosed—again, not only to the relatively paltry twitches of the mammalian imagination, but in itself, onto-cosmologically.[12] Not even God is capable of sounding its depths.

The ground, even on the condition of this inexhaustibility, is still not itself ontologically primary. Neither is it ontologically sufficient for the characterization of a Schellingian nature. This is because there is always to be found what Grant calls "an *ungroundedness* at the core of any object" that testifies to the fact that "there is no 'primal layer of the world', no 'ultimate substrate' or substance on which everything rests."[13] The ground bottoms out into what Schelling calls the non-ground, "a being *before* all ground and before all that exists." (HF, 68) This is Schelling's Absolute, a postulation marked by fundamental indifference, an indeterminable field out of which arise the distinctions in the ground and their myriad unifications in different forms of existence. Schelling's is therefore emphatically not a substance ontology, but a metaphysics of powers that denies at every step the predication of those powers of any substantial fundament. "All is ungrounded," in Grant's terms, "because there is no ultimate ground of things, no substance in which all these causes inhere, or of which all these powers are accidents or properties."[14] But Schelling goes still further, conceiving—in a feat of conceptual calisthenics—what seems at first like a lack or absence under the monstrous aegis of an originary being in which differences are present without opposition or unification, "a being against which all opposites ruin themselves." (HF, 68) This is indifference itself as Absolute, the fabled night in which Hegel could make out nothing but black cows.[15]

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[12] Iain Hamilton Grant, *Philosophies of Nature After Schelling* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 43. Cf. Ben Woodard, *On an Ungrounded Earth: Towards a New Geophilosophy* (Brooklyn: Punctum Books, 2013), 9–10.

[13] Iain Hamilton Grant, "Mining Conditions: A Response to Harman," in *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism*, (ed.) L. Bryant, N. Srnicek, and G. Harman (Melbourne: re.press, 2011), 44, emphasis mine.

[14] Iain Hamilton Grant, "Does Nature Stay What-it-is?: Dynamics and the Antecedence Criterion," in *The Speculative Turn*, 82–83.

[15] Of course, that differences are not opposed in the non-ground does not mean that their presence cannot be affirmed in it. Hegel seems either to have missed this point, or else he must insist that difference is thinkable as opposition and nothing else. Consider Deleuze's parenthetical remark on the topic: "Hegel

To posit the ground as a kind of individuated power or determinate foundation is—to speak momentarily with a Deleuzian accent—to trace the transcendental from the empirical, to think in terms of fully formed individuals, of being instead of becoming, and therefore to think finally in accordance with the strictures of a common sense.[16] In the endeavour to think the ground transcendentally without tracing its contours from the existents grounded in it one necessarily finds, in Schelling's terms, that "the being of the ground, as of that which exists, can only be that which comes *before* all ground, thus, the absolute considered merely in itself, the non-ground." (HF, 69–70) Otherwise, we fail to recognize the extent to which every existent is conditioned by a ground that exceeds it.[17] And since, to speak again with Grant, every object is so exceeded by its conditions, "they are equally the conditions involved in other existing objects, and that cannot therefore be specified as belonging to that object alone, nor as terminating in it."[18] The causes that drive the constitution and dissipation of mountains are also, at some level of generality, causes of muscle spasms, of animal behaviour, of volcanic eruptions and of conversational acuity. Indeed, "were this not the case, then each set of objects would envelope its own, wholly separate universe."[19] If there is to be difference as such, there must therefore exist beneath it a field of indifference that conditions its emergence and individuation without being itself so conditioned.[20] Otherwise, there could be neither ground nor existence at all; "*without* indifference, *without* a non-ground, there would be," in Schelling's own words, "no two-ness of principles." (HF, 69)

If the different is ontologically *anteceded*—to borrow a term from Grant—by the indifferent, if "the understanding is born in the genuine sense," in Schelling's words, "from that which is without understanding," then the human being is on Schelling's account that being

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criticized Schelling for having surrounded himself with an indifferent night in which all cows are black. What a presentiment of the differences swarming behind us, however, when in the weariness and despair of our thought without image we murmur 'the cows', 'they exaggerate', etc.; how differenciated and differenciating is this blackness, even though these differences remain unidentified and barely or non-individuated." (DR, 277)

[16] On this count (as on others), Jason M. Wirth's careful study on the topic is instructive. See his *Schelling and the Practice of the Wild: Time, Art, Imagination* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2015), 55–121.

[17] Grant, *Philosophies of Nature After Schelling*, 67.

[18] Grant, "Mining Conditions," 43.

[19] *Ibid*.

[20] See Groves, "Ecstasy of Reason, Crisis of Reason," 30.

in which the two are capable of achieving unity. (HF, 29) Schelling sees in the human being not only a product of grounded existence, but more significantly a being in which the two movements are brought into a higher relation—a unity which is at one and the same time their furthest separation. This is, for Žižek, Schelling at his most dialectical: "man is the *unity* of Ground and Existence precisely," in the words of the former, "in so far as it is only in him that their *difference* is finally explicated, posited as such."[21] And this is also precisely why these differences are in the non-ground neither differentiated nor unified. To unify them is to differentiate them, and to differentiate them is to bring them out of the ground and into existence as opposites. (HF, 30) Posited as such, ground and existence become in the human being—itself a grounded existent—principles capable of unity and discord. To speak anthropomorphically, the ground is marked by a blind craving or desire for the illumination of understanding—an *insistence* into *existence*, to take a distinction from Deleuze's *Logic of Sense*—that throws the human being out of joint, driving it further beyond itself in the direction of what is for Schelling a fundamental selfishness. (HF, 32) "As longing, the ground is," in Heidegger's terms, "a striving-for-itself which becomes the craving for separation in the creature."[22] Human selfishness, or the triumph of will over understanding, of ground over existence, does not mark merely a tension between the principles, but rather a false unity. It is not only because the human being is capable of detaching its will or yearning from its understanding, but more precisely because it is capable of bringing the principles into a discordant relation, that the human represents, for Schelling, a disruption to the natural order.[23] Its distinctiveness is simultaneously the human being's highest dignity as well as the possibility of its lowest degeneracy. It is what sets him apart from the animal, both negatively, in rendering him capable of evil (or stupidity), as well as positively, in bestowing upon him the opulence of an ontological freedom. (HF, 40) The human stands below the animal in the case of the former, above it in the latter, but never on the same footing.

Now, it must be said that Schelling's concern here, and indeed throughout the whole of the *Philosophical Investigations*, lies primarily with the possibility of a positive formulation of evil, one that

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[21] Žižek, *Indivisible Remainder*, 64.

[22] Heidegger, *Schelling's Treatise*, 149.

[23] See Andrew Bowie, "Schelling, Adorno, and All That Jazz," interviewed by Richard Marshall, *3AM Magazine*, 13 June 2014, accessed 22 March 2015 [http://www.3ammagazine.com/3am/schelling-adorno-and-all-that-jazz].

thinks it intrinsic to the nature of the human being. Evil, for Schelling, must be thought not as internal lack or external defect. In the severability of ground and existence in the human being is to be found the possibility of a properly transcendental conception of evil. Animals are, on this account, incapable of evil because they are relative expressions of the unity between ground and existence, helpless to sever the relation and invert it. Incidentally, Deleuze has little to say about evil. He finds instead in Schelling's project the tools requisite for a positive conception of stupidity, though it is in the last analysis unclear whether Deleuze distinguishes what he calls stupidity from what Schelling calls evil. Stupidity is, in any case, to be conceived transcendentally, internal to the nature of the human being, and against the spectre of a merely empirical absence—whether of knowledge, truth, common sense, method, or otherwise. And if evil is for Schelling the hallmark of a specifically human exceptionalism, then the same must—at least it would seem—also be said for Deleuze's concept of stupidity.

II. The Misadventures of Thought

"Stupidity is *never* foreign to knowledge," so proclaims Bernard Stiegler.[24] It is internal to it, coextensive with the very architecture that conditions our every epistemic achievement. And "it is always," for Deleuze, "our belief in the postulates of the *Cogitatio* [or common sense] which prevents us from making stupidity a transcendental problem." (DR, 151) It is here that we find the ambition motivating Deleuze's concern with stupidity: to free thought from the strictures of a common, all too common sense. For the latter badly mangles what it means to think, deprives thought of its possibilities, and yokes it to a series of conservative assumptions, operating it on the basis of a binary logic—of truth and falsity, error and accuracy—that conceives thought's opposites in the puerile image of an inattentive grade-schooler. (DR, 150) This image of thought makes error, falsity, and misrecognition into the sole negative possibilities occasioned by thought, the only misadventures risked by the thinker in principle. (DR, 148) Error is, on this account, an empirical artifact of the misuse of one's faculties, an absence of harmony, identity, or representative fidelity, "when, for example, I slip the present object of my *sensation*

[24] Bernard Stiegler, "Doing and Saying Stupid Things in the Twentieth Century: Bêtise and Animality in Deleuze and Derrida," (tr.) D. Ross, *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, vol. 18, no. 1 (2013): 159–74, here 161.

into the engram of another object of my *memory*." (DR, 148–49) Error, lacking a positive form of its own, borrows one from truth and so constitutes itself in the inverted image of a truth the reality of which it fails to grasp. The false is simply a withered, inaccurate approximation of the truth—a botched attempt, "the reverse of a rational orthodoxy, still testifying on behalf of that from which it is distanced." (DR, 148) Common sense asks not after the nature of stupidity but only after that of truth, implicitly taking the former to index nothing beyond the latter's failure.

When Deleuze asks after the possibility of stupidity, he is therefore careful to distinguish the object of the question from mere error. (DR, 151) Error is empirical, stupidity transcendental. In *The Beast & the Sovereign*, Derrida intensifies the distinction: stupidity does, he suggests, often imply laterally the production of an error or illusion to which it is irreducible, but to think along with Deleuze is to think the extent to which it need not and in fact often does not do so.[25] And this is precisely the point—to see beneath the surface of recognizable error a deeper, initially indiscernible darkness; to see in this darkness the transcendental ground for the genesis of the representational structures of thought; and to locate stupidity in a specific relation between the two. To ask after stupidity is therefore to ask—in properly Kantian fashion—not after its appearance but rather the conditions for its possibility. (BS, 147) Deleuze's answer? "It is possible by virtue of the link between thought and individuation." (DR, 151) This formulation is, of course, characteristically pithy, terse. Nested within the link between thought and individuation is a more primary relation between individual and ground, which is to say: between ground and surface. Stupidity, then, emerges out of the way in which the relation between ground and individual is related at a second order of magnitude to the operation of thought.

The individual is a product, an effect of movements of individuation, and "individuation as such, as it operates beneath all forms, is inseparable from a pure ground that it brings to the surface and trails with it." (DR, 152) This pure ground ought, I claim, to be understood in terms of Schelling's Absolute, the non-ground: it "rises to the surface," in Deleuze words, "yet assumes neither form nor figure." (DR, 152) Individuals are grounded, but their grounds are always "undermined by the fields of individuation which work beneath them…which [hold] up to them a distorted or distorting mirror in

[25] Jacques Derrida, *The Beast & the Sovereign*, Volume 1, (tr.) G. Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 147. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as BS.

which all presently thought forms dissolve." (DR, 152) Suffice it to recall Schelling's own formula: "a being *before* all ground and before all that exists, thus generally before any duality." (HF, 68) Not a being at all, but a field, formless and vast. If we recall that the pure or non-ground involves in itself all the differences of the ground without either opposing or unifying them, indiscernibly, indifferently, then we have, I think, some basis on which to understand individuation. The non-ground is, of course, pre-individual; it must be posited underneath or *before*—to echo Schelling—the explication or individuation of difference. "It involves fields of fluid intensive factors which no more take the form of an I than of a Self." (DR, 152) Individuation, then, is to be thought as the movement through which the indeterminable non-ground assumes determination in the ground and so in the individual; it is the process by which differences are differentiated.

Deleuze deploys the term individuation across a number of scales of operation, and it takes on a variety of forms in accordance with a variety of rhythms at each.[26] Two scales concern us here. At an ontological level, individuation works impersonally, as a natural force. In this sense, it is to be understood on the model of Schelling's whirlpool: a natural product fixed in form by the work of nature entire. Mountain topology is determined and so individuated by processes of geological stratification. Representational thought is conditioned by a series of neurodevelopmental stages, neurology by the microbiological mechanisms that possibilize the emergence of complex nervous systems, biology by chemistry, chemistry by physics. But what is distinctive, on Deleuze's account, of the human being is that it marks the emergence of another scale of individuation, indicative of a new reservoir of potentiality for thought: representationalism, as well as the possibility to break with it anew and onto new cognitive territories. At this scale, individuation is effected by the structures of thinking and made to operate on the basis of a product of the mechanisms of the first scale, an individual thinker. If thought does not merely approximate and so represent to itself the empirical world, it is because thought is itself involved in the individuation and determination of its apprehension of that world. It should go without saying that a satisfying exploration of this account

[26] See Thomas Lamarre, "Humans and Machines," *INFLeXions: A Journal for Research Creation*, Issue 5: "Simondon: Milieus, Techniques, Aesthetics" (2012): 29–67.

lies far beyond the purview of the present article.[27] Suffice it to say here, though, that in thinking, the thinker effects an operation of individuation parallel to the processes that subtend the becoming of nature itself, a movement in which the pure ground is raised to the surface of thought—which is to say, from what conditions thought to what thought is capable of recognizing. In a more properly Deleuzian vernacular, we can say of thought that it actualizes, giving form and determination to an otherwise formless and imperceptible field of intensities (Schelling's non-ground), that it raises the indeterminate material of sensibility—that which shocks thought into thinking—to the level of representation.[28] Stupidity indexes a failure of this procedure.

"Stupidity," says Deleuze, "is neither the ground nor the individual, but rather this relation in which individuation brings the ground to the surface without being able to give it form." (DR, 152) If we take the ground here to indicate the formless field out of which what Deleuze calls psychic individuation—the individuation proper to the activity of thought—operates, then we can conceive the surface in terms of representational thought, as a kind of empirical screen stretched over its transcendental framework. To think is therefore to think through a certain mode of individuation in which thought determines its ground. "If everything works correctly," to borrow a line from Joe Hughes, "Ideas [the objects of thought] will be plugged into intensities [the ground] and will be able to give rise to determinate representations, or 'individuals' [the surface]."[29] Hughes suggests that we understand stupidity as "the lack of communication between two fundamentally different elements of subjectivity."[30] Between, that is, thought and its ground. But this is imprecise. Recalling Schelling, what is at issue is not a lack of relation but rather a

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[27] See, for a more developed account of Deleuze's syntheses of thought, Joe Hughes, *Deleuze's* Difference and Repetition: *A Reader's Guide* (London: Continuum, 2009), 102–41. Though it is indeed the case that thought is, for Deleuze, an activity distributed across all of organic life—for every synthesis of habit incarnates a larval subject—at stake here is the emergence of *representational* thinking (on the basis of the faculties of the human being), for as we shall see, stupidity indexes *both* the potential for thought to shirk the fetters of the dogmatic image of thought and its enchainment to representation, *as well as* the operation of that enchainment itself.

[28] Again, justice to this account cannot be done in the present article. For such an attempt, see Daniela Voss, *Conditions of Thought: Deleuze and Transcendental Ideas* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 142–202.

[29] Hughes, *Deleuze's* Difference and Repetition, 80.

[30] *Ibid*.

false or inverted relation, a perverted unity. We call stupid not a groundless thought, but a thought whose ground is left indeterminate, raised to the surface of representation without receiving form from thought.

In a footnote and in passing, Deleuze refers with approval to the fact that Schelling wrote "some splendid pages on evil (stupidity and malevolence), its source which is like the Ground become autonomous." (DR, 321 n.15)[31] The appearance of this last term, autonomy, is, I think, instructive. "All existence demands," for Schelling, "a condition so that it may become real, namely personal, existence." (HF, 62) What is distinctive about the human being (in Schelling's vernacular) is that he "never gains control over the condition, *although in evil he strives to do so*; it is only lent to him, and is independent from him." (HF, 62; emphasis mine) Thought, for Deleuze, must be shocked into activity by virtue of an encounter with that which it cannot fully think, in contact with an object whose full and final formalization eludes it. The encounter *grounds* and *conditions* thought, forcing its faculties to their limit in response. And it is out of this encounter, in response to what it cannot think, that thought unfolds a world of representation—by bringing that inexhaustible ground under some determination to the surface. When the ground is granted autonomy, when thought renounces its position of determination, "the Sabbath of stupidity and malevolence takes place." (DR, 152) For Schelling, the ground can never rise in the human being to full actuality. To allow it to is to grant it an autonomy it cannot properly assume and out of which stupidity manifests itself. To think while avoiding the calamities of stupidity and without collapsing back into the conservatism of common sense is therefore to negotiate the vicissitudes of a precipice between tracing, on the one hand, the transcendental ground from its empirical artifacts, and raising, on the other, that ground to the level of the empirical without fully determining it in the process. The point, then, is to think the ground without letting the ground take precedence over thought, affording it an illegitimate privilege. And to this extent—over and against a common sense that defangs the ground, domesticating it in terms of an already formed empirical world—stupidity is not *only* the name for what Deleuze calls a "pathetic faculty," a faculty whose products are malevolence and stupidity, but at the same time the designation of a "royal faculty" as well. Stupidity's royalty consists in its orientation toward the ground, the effect of which is its capacity

[31] On the relation between stupidity, evil, and malevolence, see Wirth, *Schelling and the Practice of the Wild*, esp. 107.

to force "all the other faculties to that transcendent exercise which renders possible a violent reconciliation between the individual, the ground and thought." (DR, 152)[32]

Stupidity, then, is to be understood in terms of the possibility of this reconciliatory violence—and not merely of its failure. "Stupidity (not error) constitutes," in Deleuze's own words, "the greatest weakness of thought, but also the source of its highest power in that which forces it think." (DR, 275) Further still, "thought remains stupid so long as nothing forces it to think." (DR, 275) Even if that by which it is forced is precisely what Deleuze calls stupidity. For we risk badly underestimating the possibilities of force by endeavouring to think it on a model of blindness and brutality, of base desires to destroy and dominate. To the contrary—and to take an insight from Schelling's theory of the non-ground—forces are better understood as impersonal intensities, of indeterminate differences the effects of which depend on the way they are synthesized or unified within a particular field or individual. (HF, 59) And as such, "they can," in Voss's words, "either inhibit and prevent critical thought or, on the contrary, increase the critical power."[33] If thought is determination, then stupidity is the indeterminate. Thought needs the indeterminate; in fact, it can only think in and through an encounter with it.[34] But if indetermination as such is afforded a privilege at the expense of thought, then we are unmoored from the individuation proper to thinking and sent adrift into a "perpetual confusion with regard to the important and the unimportant, the ordinary and the singular," incapable of distinguishing between banalities, simple acts of recognition, opinions, truths, speculative constructions, and errors. (DR, 190) But on the other hand, stupidity serves as the transcendental condition for the possibility of critical thought itself—a refusal of the

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[32] We might choose to hear in Deleuze's pronouncement that stupidity is the faculty of transcendental thought reverberations of Schelling's equally provocative claim that it is only in and through evil that we can come to know the good. Evil is therefore similarly doubled: both the failure of a proper relation of principles, as well as that in which the right relation is made possible. See HF, 55.

[33] Voss, *Conditions of Thought*, 45.

[34] There may be a line of resonance to be drawn here between Deleuze and Schelling, in terms particular to Schelling's fascination with Plato's *Timaeus*. "The emergence of the generated world challenges," for Plato and so for Schelling, "the senses to exceed their own genesis and entails instead a 'gaze fixed on what always is' (29a4f), on the *Idea* in nature, despite the idea itself being necessarily non-sensible (*anhoraton*, *anhapton*)" (Grant, *Philosophies of Nature After Schelling*, 44; cf. n.75). The embedded quotation refers to Plato, *Timaeus*, (tr.) R. G. Bury (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975).

determinations of common sense, the pronouncements of what "everybody knows," and even finally a rejection of the rational form of discourse entirely for the sake of what it has always already obscured. (DR, 130)[35] The royal faculty of stupidity turns against its first manifestation, undercutting what Voss calls "the reign of base truths and petty values."[36] But the relation seems to cut in both directions: "perhaps one could say," she continues, "that stupidity in the first sense also has a transcendental significance, inasmuch as it incites critical thought."[37] "Is it not also," asks Deleuze, "the existence of stupidity which forces it to think, precisely the fact that it does not think so long as nothing forces it to do so? Recall Heidegger's statement: 'What gives us most cause for thought is the fact that we do not yet think.'" (DR, 275)

III. The Animal is Forewarned

If the presence of thought is so often heralded as that which distinguishes the human from the animal, as the trait the manifestation of which in us and the highest exercise of which in philosophy is supposed to set us apart categorically from the rest of the natural order, then we might expect to find its opposite predicated primarily of what we are not: namely, of the animal. But here Deleuze is emphatic: stupidity, insofar as it marks the failure of thinking, is not animality. (DR, 150) "The animal," he continues, "is protected by specific forms which prevent it from being 'stupid'." (DR, 150) Deleuze, unfortunately, has little else to say of the animal here. It is Derrida to whom we must turn for a more comprehensive set of reflections on the topic. (BS, 161–63)[38] And, indeed, he confirms for us that Deleuze takes the refusal of stupidity to the animal from Schelling. (BS, 152–

[35] The difference between the two forms of stupidity is paralleled in the difference between Descartes's idiot and Dostoevsky's. Deleuze develops the conceptual persona of the Russian idiot alongside Félix Guattari in *What is Philosophy?*, (tr.) H. Tomlinson and G. Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 62–63.

[36] Voss, *Conditions of Thought*, 47.

[37] *Ibid*.

[38] It is, however, worth noting at the outset that Derrida insists on the insurmountable difficulties in translating *bêtise* straightforwardly into *stupidity*. For our purposes here, I propose to leave to one side these difficulties, as a proper exploration of them will undoubtedly take us too far afield.

53)[39] But Derrida is pessimistic, not just of the coherence or cogency of what Deleuze has to say of the animal, but more importantly of the consequences yielded by his account.

Derrida is, I think, right to foreground immediately the imprecision in Deleuze's claim that it is their "explicit forms" that "protect" or "forewarn" animals against a failed relation to the ground—against, that is, the possibility of stupidity. (BS, 154; DR, 152) But what Derrida makes of this postulation seems to me misguided. What sense are we to grant to the concept of form here? Are human forms as explicit, and how do they operate in order *not* to forewarn us against the stupidity at stake in the ground? Derrida's answers take the shape of a polemic. But before attending to Derrida's criticisms, it is, I think, worth attempting the construction of an argument on Deleuze's behalf. Now, it seems to me that there is available the possibility of reading "explicit forms" in terms of what Schelling calls the "type and constitution" of one's "corporeal formation," the effectuation of which occurs, for Schelling, in the human being's free decision to relate to the ground in a particular way. (HF, 52) And the possibility of which is the birthright of a properly human freedom and is, therefore, foreclosed to the animal from the outset. It should by now go without saying that everything that exists relates to its ground. But anthropoids, on Schelling's account, relate freely. And that means transcendentally, by dint of an atemporal decision in accordance with which we play out our phenomenal lives. (HF, 52)[40] Which is to say that humans do not decide how to relate to their grounds in time, but are rather always-already so decided. In acting, they apprehend themselves in the form of that relation. The decision itself is therefore transcendental, its conscious apprehension mere phenomenal appearance. If we think ourselves free in time, then it is only by means of a residue left in consciousness by the decision that has taken place prior to its advent. "Everything happens at once," says Schelling: "accordingly, man, who appears decided and determinate here, apprehends himself in a particular form…and is born as that which he had been from eternity." (HF, 52) The nuances of this account need not concern us here. Suffice it to say that it is for Schel-

[39] See David Farrell Krell, *Derrida and Our Animal Others: Derrida's Final Seminar, the Beast and the Sovereign* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 19–20.

[40] For an exploration of the issues with this concept of decision, with respect especially to the way it plays out in Heidegger's treatment of Schelling, see Benjamin S. Pryor, "Giving Way to… Freedom: A Note After Nancy and Schelling," *Schelling Now: Contemporary Readings*, (ed.) J. M. Wirth (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 229–31.

ling by means of a free decision that the human being relates to the ground in the way that it does. And in so relating, it assumes a kind of form, which we might read as a bodily disposition or manner of living one's body—as that body is marked by a particular relation to the ground. To say, then, that the explicit forms of animals protect them from stupidity is to say that their types or styles of embodiment are the hallmarks of a certain orientation to the ground.

"Man takes form on this ground by retaining a relation to it (a free relation, this is his freedom)," so says Derrida of the Schellingian position he ascribes to Deleuze. (BS, 155) If freedom is to be understood in terms of this ability to decide transcendentally one's orientation to the ground, a decision manifested phenomenally in one's "explicit form" or "corporeal formation," and if stupidity is the mark of a botched relation between ground and individual, a failure of the latter to properly determine the former, then we see rather quickly how the refusal of stupidity to the animal is, in fact, and for Derrida, better understood as a *denial of freedom to it*.[41] If the animal is embodied in a form that renders it incapable of stupidity, then this is because it is so embodied by necessity, because its embodiment is not the effect of a free decision, and because its relation to the ground is therefore decidedly unfree. And we should not, on Derrida's account, shy from the implications of this claim, even if nothing could sound more foreign to our ears: Deleuze, no matter the pretensions of his project, seems to have failed to extricate himself from the Cartesianism he so detested, and therefore also failed to conceive the human being in terms that do not immediately reproduce a series of metaphysical assumptions under the weight of which the tradition of Western thought has for so long slouched and stumbled. (BS, 181–82)

Now, it should be said that Derrida does not terminate his reflections in these accusations. He diagnoses in Deleuze the failure that opens his project to them, and provides for Deleuze an opportunity for amelioration. But before considering the positivity of that step, I want first to take issue with what Derrida understands to be the failure in Deleuze's account of stupidity—which is, of course, the invocation of an essentially human freedom. While it is the case that for Deleuze (as for Schelling) the distinction between humanity and the rest of the animal kingdom is one that emerges out of the relation maintained by each to the ground, it is emphatically not the case that

[41] See Richard Iveson, "Deeply Ecological Deleuze and Guattari: Humanism's Becoming-Animal," *Humanimalia: A Journal of Human/Animal Interface Studies*, vol. 4, no. 2 (2013): 34–53, here 44.

this difference finds, for Deleuze, its basis in anything like freedom, self-reflection, understanding, or transcendental decisions.[42] Neither is it the case that the animal *lacks* a relation to the ground. Nothing of the kind. Both humans and other animals are related to the ground. Neither decides the form of this relation transcendentally. And neither form of relation has anything to do with freedom—at least not in terms of the questions at hand—which is, for Deleuze, a different problem entirely.

Bernard Stiegler proclaims that "Derrida does not understand the meaning of the words *fond* [ground], *rapport* [relation] and individuation as they are used in *Difference and Repetition*."[43] Perhaps this goes too far, but it is clear that Derrida badly misrepresents what it means for Deleuze to claim that its form protects the animal from a certain relation to the ground. Form is not for Deleuze, as it is for Schelling, the phenomenal byproduct of an originary decision. It is rather the determination of a phase of individuation, often only one among a series of many. In the process of individuation, the individual passes through a series of individuated forms. This is to say that there is not, on the one hand, a pre-individual field or ground, and a fully formed individual on the other. Relation is not a capacity of the latter to orient itself toward the former. To the extent that Derrida implies as much, he does fail to understand the concepts. Individuation is processual. Embryonic development, for instance, passes through phases of determination, but at no point in the maturation of a fetus are we struck with an amorphous lack of form. *This* is Deleuze's model for individuation. What it means to relate to the individuating conditions of one's development—to the ground, that is—must therefore be reconceived accordingly. And if every scale of individuation relates to a common ground, then what distinguishes one from another is not a difference in ground, but a new relation to it, which consists, in Stiegler's terms, "in the distinction and the inscription of a difference."[44] Not a different ground, but a difference *in the ground*—this is how to understand relations. Everything relates to the ground, yes, but different relations bring into determination new differences in it—and recall that for Schelling the Absolute ground is to be understood as the indifferent implication of all differences. To speak of a difference between humans and other

[42] For the way Schelling's account *does* find its basis in concepts like human self-reflection and understanding, see Jason M. Wirth, "Animalization: Schelling and the Problem of Expressivity," in *Schelling Now*, 86–87.
[43] Stiegler, "Doing and Saying Stupid Things," 164.
[44] *Ibid*., 165.

animals is therefore not to speak of the presence or absence of a freedom of relation.

The new differences brought into determination in the processes of psychic individuation are differences in thought. But psychic individuation does not belong in principle to the human being, just as the capacity to individuate in packs does not belong in principle to the wolf. A lone wolf is, to put the point differently, still a wolf. Psychic individuation is a possibility of humans, one they can participate in thoughtlessly, one they can push to its limits, one they can fall in and out of and even slow down, sabotage, pervert. Thoughtless participation is the hallmark of common sense. Psychic individuation at its limit marks the encounter that forces thought to think. And its sabotage alerts us to the presence of a stupidity internal to the activity of thinking. Psychic individuation is not a predicate, not a trait distinguishing humans from other animals in essence, but the capacity to explicate out of the ground otherwise undetermined differences. The same is to be said of other phases of individuation as well, for while it is true that only humans seem to be capable of global regimes of individuation (digital communities, for example), it is ridiculous to suggest that excluded parties are for that reason any less human. Which is to say that it is therefore not the case that Deleuze remains a Cartesian, for he does not distinguish humans from other animals by ascribing to the former any kind of essential trait, predicate, or purpose.

There is, in humans, the capacity to make new differences or to fail to make them in a ground otherwise related to in other ways by other animals.[45] Even if Derrida does misrepresent Deleuze on this point, he is also alert to the presence in Deleuze's thought of the resources necessary to a more adequate account. "One can," Derrida writes, "avoid reducing the whole of psychic or phenomenological experience to its egological form, and one can avoid reducing all life of the Ego, all egological structure, to the conscious self." (BS, 181) Indeed, Deleuze is elsewhere explicit that the egological human self is nothing but a "becoming trapped in one's molar form and subject."[46] There is far more to human experience than what is captured,

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[45] Or, as Wirth puts the point: "Error is not a matter of holding a false position—these are trivial examples of error—but rather of allowing a position 'to stand still,' 'to clot,' and 'to inhibit' the forces of its progression" (*Schelling and the Practice of the Wild*, 72).

[46] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, (tr.) B. Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 275. Cf. Gabriele Schwab, "Derrida, Deleuze, and the Psychoanalysis to Come,"

recognized, and represented by the Ego to itself; there is far more to thought than what is allowed to filter its way into common sense. "It suffices to admit," Derrida continues, "that the living being is divisible and constituted by a multiplicity of agencies, forces, and intensities that are sometimes in tension or even in contradiction." (BS, 181)[47] When they enter into phases of psychic individuation, human beings engage in the activity of raising the ground into new determinations. This is an activity foreclosed to other beings, beings of less sophisticated cognitive architecture, but not for that reason an activity that captures fully either what it is to be human or even what it means to think. For most thought passes under the auspices of the already-determined, the already-constituted, what everybody already knows. My claim, then, to make it explicitly, is that Deleuze's insistence on the relation between stupidity and the human (over and against the animal) is better understood as a risk internal to certain forms of psychic individuation, a field into which the animal cannot enter, it is true, but a field left often unexplored by humans as well. And this is precisely why stupidity is the name *both* for the lowest misadventures of thought *as well as* for its royal faculty: if it is internal to the field of psychic individuation, then it is part of what it means to think free from the strictures of thought's dogmatic presuppositions at precisely the same time as it is the faculty of what is most wrong, dangerous, and malevolent in thinking.

It is perhaps worth saying, in conclusion, that this article has taken shape primarily alongside and against Derrida's reading of Deleuze on the topic of animality. It is in that reading that Derrida indicates the impossibility of understanding Deleuze's concept of transcendental stupidity independently of the Schellingian concepts he deploys in unfolding it. The first section of this article endeavoured to reconstruct those concepts, as independently as possible from the aim and context of Schelling's own project—as Deleuze detaches the concepts almost entirely. The second section sought to make sense of what Deleuze calls the problem of stupidity in terms of Schelling's concept of the ground thus reconstructed. Finally, the final section was motivated by the way Derrida famously characterized Deleuze's position on animality. It has been my aim to demonstrate both the failure of Derrida's reading as well as the richness of

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Derrida, Deleuze, Psychoanalysis, (ed.) G. Schwab (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 20.

[47] For a revised version of this claim, see Jacques Derrida, "The Transcendental 'Stupidity' ('Bêtise') of Man and the Becoming-Animal According to Deleuze," in *Derrida, Deleuze, Psychoanalysis*, 59.

Deleuze's account of stupidity. If Derrida's lectures constitute the context within which the present article was written, then the problem in response to which it was is the same problem that motivated Deleuze's excoriation of the concept of error as the sole inverse of thought. That problem is the reign of common sense, the claim it holds over thinking. Indeed, "common sense shows every day—unfortunately—that it is capable of producing philosophy in its own way." (DR, 135) And this is to my mind nothing short of a danger for philosophy: "who can believe that the destiny of thought is at stake in these acts, and that when we recognize, we are thinking?" (DR, 135) Too many of us, unfortunately. It is my hope to have contributed in this article to a thought beyond those bounds.

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