FRIEDRICH SCHLEGEL AND THE ROMANTIC ICONIC TURN

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My dissertation project examines the rediscovery of the medieval devotional image and the Byzantine iconic tradition in German Romanticism. Tracing the contours and political implications of a Romantic iconic turn in the aesthetics of Friedrich Schlegel and the painting of Caspar David Friedrich, my dissertation concentrates on a countermovement within the German Romantic tradition that sought to reconfigure the medium of painting at the moment of its institutionalization. By seeking to restore the medieval religious image as an alternative to the secular conception of autonomous painting, I argue that the Romantic iconic turn was an attempt to reestablish the modern discourse of painting on a different ontological footing while simultaneously reconfiguring its history, resituating the German school of painting in a historical lineage that had its origin in the iconic tradition of medieval Byzantium. As such, I demonstrate that the Romantic iconic turn coincides with the first positive appraisal of Byzantine art in modern European history, which ultimately had no other aim than to unleash the image's religious and political power. This dissertation thus concludes by arguing that the Romantic iconic turn was motivated by a counter-revolutionary politics that sought to undermine the secular underpinnings of European visual culture. Reinscribing the image within an economic-theological framework that derived from the work of the Early Church Fathers, I argue that the Romantic iconic turn was

ultimately informed by a nationalistic agenda that sought to reintegrate the domains of art and life while reconfiguring the medium of painting as a principal instrument of governmental power.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Sander Oosterom received his Bachelor of Arts in the History of Art (cum laude) from Utrecht University in the Netherlands in 2011. Sander studied in the Department of German Studies at Cornell University, receiving his MA in 2019 and his PhD in 2023. He is a recipient of the 2020 Cornell Exchange Fellowship with Heidelberg University, and the 2022 doctoral scholarship of Türkiye Burslari. His previous work has appeared in the *Journal of Art History* (*Sanat Tarihi Yıllığı*), *Reflektif: Journal of Social Sciences*, and the exhibition catalogue *Jill Bullitt: The Living Thing About a Painting*.

For Evrim, who always treated softly on my dreams

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INTRODUCTION

Schlegel's "Descriptions of Paintings" and the Iconic Turn in German Romanticism

i. Introduction

It is a commonplace in Anglo-American scholarship on Friedrich Schlegel that the work he produced after his departure from Jena in 1802 is marked by a steep decline in quality. The roots of this belief can be traced back to Schlegel's own lifetime. Particularly his conversion to Catholicism in 1808 was met by many of his contemporaries with sheer incomprehension. Goethe famously wrote in response that never before "such a remarkable case occurred that in the highest light of reason, intellect, and world overview, an excellent and highly developed talent is tempted to veil himself, to play the bogeyman." (". . . ein so merkwürdiger Fall eintrat, daß im höchsten Lichte der Vernunft, des Verstandes, der Weltübersicht ein vorzügliches und höchstausgebildetes Talent verleitet wird sich zu verhüllen, den Popanz zu spielen."; qtd. in Behler, "Intro to KA VIII" CXXVIII).[1] But also now, more than two centuries later, similar sentiments still predominate, leading many scholars to identify a break between Schlegel's early and late Romantic works with his stay in Paris from 1802 to 1804 as the inevitable turning point. For example, Michael N. Forster argued that Schlegel's Parisian writings on art show a "precipitous decline in the originality and interest of Schlegel's philosophical ideas" (35), and Manfred Frank stressed at several occasions that Schlegel's writings after 1802 do not mark a

[1] All references to the critical edition of Schlegel's collected writings are marked by the abbreviation KA, followed by the respective volume number. Unless otherwise noted, all in-text translations are mine.

continuation, but a departure from the spirit of Jena Romanticism ("Wie Reaktionär" 150).[2] Yet, the most personal and severe criticism was expressed by the French philosopher Maurice Blanchot, who condemned the later Schlegel in the harshest terms:

> [A]s a young man he is an atheist, a radical, and an individualist. [Evident is the] freedom of spirit he displays, the intellectual richness and fantasy that each day lead him to invent new concepts [...] Some years pass: the same Schlegel, converted to Catholicism, a diplomat and journalist in the service of Metternich, surrounded by monks and pious men of society, is no longer anything but a fat philistine of unctuous speech, lazy, empty, his mind on food, and incapable of remembering the young man who had written: 'A single absolute law: the free spirit always triumphs over nature. (353)

As a result of sentiments like these, contemporary scholarship on Schlegel is almost exclusively focused on the early Romantic work that he produced in Jena and Berlin.[3] However, as

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[2] More specifically, Manfred Frank responds to the more general issue whether German Romanticism as such should be regarded as a conservative movement, a claim first popularized by Heinrich Heine in *Die Romantische Schule* and later defended by liberal and Marxist interpreters of the German Romantic tradition, most notably Georg Lukács. Both Heine and Lukács understood the Romantic tradition as essentially a restorative movement. Instead of seeing a break between early and later forms of Romanticism, they both emphasized the continuity between early and later forms of Romanticism and saw the movements later religious manifestations as the inevitable outcome of Romanticism's early emphasis on subjectivity. Lukács even goes so far as to connect the Romantic anti-rationalism, and particularly Schlegel's, with the rise of fascism more than one century later. Frank, on the other hand, goes a long way in countering these arguments, particularly by stressing the progressive and revolutionary political impulse of early German Romanticism ("Wie Reaktionär" 144). However, just as Frederick Beiser would come to do in his criticism on Heine and the Marxist interpretation of the Romantic movement, he does so by drawing a distinction between, on the one hand, early Romanticism, and, on the other, middle, high or even late Romanticism (Beiser 172).

[3] German scholarship on Schlegel is more balanced in this respect. Yet, this scholarly attention for the writings Schlegel produced after he had left Jena is also in Germany a fairly recent phenomenon as Grunnet's words from 1994 testify: "Schlegel scholarship has a peculiarly colorful history, since scholars until well into our century mainly read the young Schlegel at the expense of the later one. Moreover, older research was often characterized by moral indignation as well as religious and political prejudices." (Die Schlegelforschung hat eine eigentümlich bunte Geschichte, da man bis weit in unser Jahrhundert hauptsächlich den jungen Schlegel auf

early as 1980, Ernst Behler warned that this one-sided emphasis, partly under the influence of postmodern theory, led to a distorted conception of Schlegel's personality and work, picturing him at once "as the pioneer of the avant-garde in literature and philosophy and conversely as a renegade from free thinking. He is hailed in present-day France as a precursor of our modernity, but has also been regarded, in the wake of Hegel, as the prototype of an extravagant Romantic subjectivity, who having initially broken all traditional bonds, finally surrendered to the authority of the Catholic Church" ("Origins" 48). Although it is hard to deny that his religious and intellectual outlook underwent a significant transformation in Paris and Cologne – Behler himself actually referred to the years in Paris as the actual turning point of his life ("Wendepunkt" 245) – all stress on the perceived rupture in Schlegel's work not only prevented a more substantive engagement with the later stages of his development, but also obscured the underlying continuity of his thought.[4]

In his influential study on Schlegel's philosophy of history, the German scholar Klaus Behrens has argued that the revolutionary and restorative tendencies in his work cannot clearly be separated. What informs Schlegel's thinking on art, religion, and history throughout is the idea of an open future; that is, the understanding of the French Revolution as an absolute rupture of the historical order that

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Kosten des späten Schlegel gelesen hat. Zudem war die ältere Forschung oft durch moralische Entrüstung wie auch religiöse und politische Vorurteile geprägt."; 9).

[4] Indicative for the current state of Schlegel scholarship is the entry on his work in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Dealing almost exclusively with his early Romantic work, Schlegel's writings and lectures from after 1802 are largely ignored, and, if mentioned at all, discussed in the most general terms (Speight). At the same time, Dalia Nassar has pointed to the inconsistency with which some scholars have approached the later Schlegel. Pointing to the writings of Manfred Frank, Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert and Michel Chaouli in particular, Nassar perceptively argues that although these scholars express reservations about the later work, they continue to draw on the Cologne lectures on philosophy from 1804-05 to explicate certain elements of Schlegel's early Romantic thinking (291n26). This ambiguity goes back to Walter Benjamin who self-consciously drew on the same lecture course in his discussion of Schlegel's of early Romantic concept of art criticism (120). Paola Mayer, on the other hand, is one of the few scholars who understood Schlegel's work in terms of continuity. According to her, Schlegel has been throughout concerned to arrive at "a truly organic account of the universe by demonstrating that the relationship between God, humanity, and nature was a symbiotic one" (164).

undermined all expectations of what was to come (256). When Schlegel wrote shortly after his arrival in Paris that "we ourselves are actually living in the true Middle Ages, and mistakenly placed it in the past." ("wir eigentlich selbst in dem wahren Mittelalter leben, und dieses fälschlich in die vergangne Zeit versetzt haben"; KA VII 72), he pointed precisely to the present as a moment of transition between a past that is no longer, and an open future that is not yet.[5] It is this experience of the present as a moment of rupture that marks Schlegel's work throughout. For him, the French Revolution only underscored the contingency of history, turning the present into a post-historical moment that could no longer be regarded in direct relation to the past. As a result, Schlegel's philosophy of history is informed by an inversion of the dominant linear and progressive histories of his time (Behrens 269).[6] For him, it was no longer the past that directly informed the present, but rather the present that governed one's view of the past. This is why history takes the form of cultural criticism for Schlegel, always directed toward an open-ended future (Behrens 264). In other words, disconnected from both present and future, Schlegel turns history into an archive that can now be appropriated for the creation of a new socio-political order (Behrens 266). He thus referred to the historian as a "backward-turned prophet" ("rückwärts gekehrter Prophet"; KA II 176 #80) in *Athenaeum*, but the same idea is most cogently expressed in the programmatic text "Journey to France" which marks the beginning of his Parisian period. Published in the first number of *Europa*, the literary magazine that would become Schlegel's most important mouthpiece in Paris, and which includes the majority of his writings on the

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[5] Behrens is by no means to only scholar to stress the triadic structure of history in Schlegel's thought. Essential for this triadic structure, as Nivala explains, is the assumption that a new golden age (or the Kingdom of God for that matter) might be regained in the future. For a criticism on this model, see Nivala 15fn36,39.

[6] It is precisely for this reason that Wilhelm Dilthey claimed that not Hegel, but Schlegel stands at the basis of the historical sciences (see Behler, "Kulturphilosophie" 74).

visual arts, "Journey to France" follows in the footsteps of Schiller and Novalis who earlier identified the Enlightenment with an endless process of fragmentation. This tendency to separate, Schlegel writes, can now

> be considered complete, having come to the point of self-destruction. There would at least be room for something new, and precisely because everything has been shattered, one finds material and means for everything, and the courage to build a new world out of the destruction.
>
> (als vollendet angesehen werden, da sie bis zur Selbstvernichtung gekommen ist. Es wäre also wenigstens Raum da für etwas Neues, und eben weil alles zertrümmert ist, so findet man Stoff und Mittel zu allem, und an dem Mut eine neue Welt aus der Zerstörung auf zu bauen.) (KA VII 77).

This twofold idea of revolution remains foundational for Schlegel's thinking throughout. The experience of the French Revolution as historical rupture not only allowed, but necessitated the projection of a broader socio-cultural revolution onto an open future.[7] Even when his work begins to include more restorative elements, and future change is increasingly understood in terms of a counter-revolution against French political and cultural oppression (Oesterle, "Friedrich Schlegel in Paris oder die romantische Gegenrevolution" 164–65), the modern experience of historical discontinuity remains constitutive for Schlegel's political and philosophical outlook (Behrens 270). Freed from the requirement to offer a rational explanation for present and future, the scope of history expands and becomes more inclusive, allowing Schlegel to study historical episodes that enjoyed only a marginal

[7] For a more general account of how the Romantics responded to the French Revolution, see Behler's *Unendliche Perfektibilität*.

status at the time.[8] This becomes first obvious in "Journey to France" where Schlegel makes an emphatic claim for the importance of the Orient in the rejuvenation of European culture. Already in *Athenaeum*, Schlegel pointed to ancient Eastern culture as the place where "we have to search for the highest Romanticism" ("müssen wir das höchste Romantische suchen"; KA II 319). Yet, in Paris, his interest in the Orient not only moves to the center of his scholarly work, culminating in the publication of *On the Language and Wisdom of the Indians* in 1808, but is also imbued with a new political relevance as "Journey to France" unmistakably shows. In direct response to the failures of the French Revolution, Schlegel writes here that if revolution is to be "more than a failed idea" ("mehr als ein missglückter Einfall"; KA VII 76), and people really want to take it seriously, it "would have to come to us from Asia, much more than that we are able, as we assume all too easily, to spread human spirit all over the world from here" ("müsste sie uns wohl vielmehr aus Asien kommen, als dass wir fähig wären, wie wir zu voreilig wähnen, den Geist der Menschen über den ganzen Erdkreis von hier aus lenken zu wollen"; KA VII 76).

Yet, it is not only the Orient that holds the promise of a rejuvenation of Europe. In the same text, Schlegel promotes a return to the Christian origins of European culture (compare Wiese 97). In this respect, "Journey to France" can also be seen as the pretext for his emerging interest in medieval art. In fact, it turns out that art, and medieval art in particular, was exactly what he had in mind when he would later call for the courage to rebuild Europe from its shattered history: "Art itself is nothing but a fragment, a ruin of past times. . . . The totality of art no longer exists, it is destroyed; what remained are only lost individual traces of it, which those who have grasped the spirit of the past can

[8] It is Herder who initially provided Schlegel with the model for such a comparative history that included marginalized historical episodes. For the many influences on Schlegel's historical work, see Anstett, "Intro to KA XIV" XXIII–XXXVII.

at best animate again as idea for the future." ("[D]ie Kunst [ist] selber nichts anders, als ein Fragment, eine Ruine vergangner Zeiten. . . . Das Ganze der Kunst ist nicht mehr vorhanden, es ist zerstört; nur verlorne einzelne Spuren derselben sind uns geblieben, die derjenige, der den Geist der Vergangenheit gefaßt hat, allenfalls zur Idee für die Zukunft wieder beseelen kann."; KA IV 80). Inscribed within a passage in which he praises the qualities of late medieval German and Italian painting, Schlegel is advocating the return to a form of art that by this time had hardly been touched upon.[9] When he thus turns to the work of Jan van Eyck and Hans Memling in his first contribution on painting written in 1802, the effects of his historical outlook become immediately visible.[10] As Christopher Wood reminds us, Schlegel was "the first writer not only to assign van Eyck's work to the towering, indeed nonpareil, status it enjoys to the present day but also to try to explain why it deserves that status" (186).[11] By arguing that van Eyck's paintings mark "the oldest and first stage of the development of art" ("die

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[9] Despite the fact that Wackenroder and Tieck are often seen as "undisputed medievalists," W.D. Robson-Scott rightly argued that their advocacy of Raphael and Dürer fits an aesthetic taste that can hardly be called medieval (Robson-Scott 159–61; for Dürer, see also Sanford 442)

[10] As the titles of Schlegel's five contributions give a misleading sense of their ordering, I chronologically refer to them by numbering them from the first to the fifth contribution throughout this dissertation. The titles of the first three contributions are respectively "Nachricht von dem Gemälden in Paris," "Vom Raffael," and "Nachtrag italiänischer Gemälden." The fourth and fifth contribution on painting that I will come to associate with the iconic turn are titled "Zweiter Nachtrag alter Gemälde" and "Dritter Nachtrag alter Gemälde."

[11] In his recently published *The History of Art History* (2019), Wood is one of the first art historians to attribute a key role to Schlegel within the history of the discipline. In the wake of Péter Szondi, who in 1966 already suggested that contemporary reflections on art history and theory should not take Hegel's, but Schlegel's work as their point of departure (126), the latter's writings on medieval art mark for Wood an inversion of the traditional canon in which previously conceived "bad" and "ugly" artworks were for the first time historically legitimated (179). And although by no means downplaying Hegel's importance, Wood argues that it was Schlegel (and to a lesser extent Schiller) who inspired Hegel to think historically about art (219–20).

älteste und erste Stufe der Kunstentwicklung"; KA IV 45),[12] Schlegel's writings on the visual arts immediately reflect his awareness that painting's conventional boundaries can be construed differently to include an altogether different aesthetic. Refusing to submit the evaluation of artworks to a universal standard, Schlegel firmly situates art history in the present as he argues that it is impossible "to present artworks as from a fixed position, according to a certain particular view on art." ("Nun aber ist es nicht möglich, Kunstwerke darzustellen, als aus einem festen Standpunkt, nach einer bestimmten eigentümlichen Ansicht der Kunst"; KA IV 70). As Hubert Locher rightly observed, Schlegel was the first to introduce relativism into the history of art, treating the total body of artworks not as a given, but as a construction from the historian's own point of view ("Construction des Ganzen" 112–13).

Yet, as I will argue, this relativism only marks the earliest stage of Schlegel's engagement with the visual arts. Although at first dramatically expanding the scope of his writings to include accounts of 14th century German and Italian painting, I will argue that this relativism is eventually superseded by another normative framework that takes as its point of departure precisely the hitherto neglected art of the late Middle Ages. As a result, one should take great caution in understanding Schlegel's writings on art as a unified whole. As Hans Eichner already recognized more than half a century ago, it is

[12] At this point, it may be good to remark that Schlegel regarded van Eyck as a German painter. Although Schlegel was well aware that van Eyck was of Flemish descend and mostly worked in Flanders throughout his life, he gives the following reason for including van Eyck in the German tradition: "Now that Holbein copied Eyck, and the figures of the latter are by no means like the later manifestations of the Dutch school, it would probably be most understandable to include van Eyck in the German tradition, by which the history and development of the German school becomes very clear and comprehensible through a definite and extremely simple sequence of stages from van Eyck to Dürer and Holbein." ("Da nun Holbein dem Eyck sich nachgebildet hat, die Gestalten des letztern auch durchaus nicht niederländisch sind in der spätern Bedeutung, so wäre es wohl am verständlichsten den Eyck zur deutschen Malerei zu rechnen, deren Geschichte und Entwicklung in der bestimmten und äußerst einfachen Stufenfolge des Eyck, Dürer und Holbein dadurch sehr deutlich und begreiflich wird."; KA IV 43).

incumbent to make a distinction between Schlegel's earlier and later writings on the topic (XXII).[13] The five contributions on painting that were published in *Europa* between 1803 and 1805, and which later became known as the *Descriptions of Paintings* [*Gemäldebeschreibungen*], rather show that his understanding of painting developed over time (Locher, "Construction des Ganzen" 113). Here, a crucial distinction is to be made between the first three essays that Schlegel produced in Paris, and the fourth and fifth account he wrote in Cologne. Separated by almost a year, the transition from the third to the fourth essay is marked by his acquaintance with the brothers Sulpiz and Melchior Boisserée. These brothers not only first introduced Schlegel to the Catholic way of life (Anstett, *La pensée religieuse* 202), but also to the late medieval art of van Eyck's contemporaries and predecessors, taking him on a journey to northern France, the Low Countries, and the German Rhineland as they exchanged Paris for Cologne in 1804. During these travels, which are recounted in the fifth and final contribution on painting, and which include Schlegel's boldest statements on art to date, the group visited a number of medieval churches and monasteries where Schlegel first had the opportunity to see many works of medieval art in their original context. The impact of this journey becomes first palpable in the fourth account on painting. Whereas the first three accounts basically extend the early Romantic discourse of universal poetry to the domain of the visual arts, it is in his fourth contribution that Schlegel begins to move from an aesthetic to an iconic conception of painting.

[13] What has often hindered a recognition of the importance and innovative character of Schlegel's philosophy of art is that his several contributions on painting are seen as the expression of a single authorial voice. Even Locher, otherwise attentive to the internal development of Schlegel's views on art, nonetheless maintains that his position "did not fundamentally change" ("sich nicht grundsätzlich verändert . . . hat"; "Bildende Kunst" 267) in the period between 1802 and 1805.

ii. A Failed Mythology

The cause for this shift is not merely to be found in Schlegel's extensive encounter with medieval painting while traveling from Paris to Cologne. Constitutive for his later views on art and poetry is rather the perceived impossibility to develop a new mythology for the present (Petersdorff 155). This new mythology was originally conceived as the principal means to overcome modern fragmentation. Whereas Greek mythology integrated society by providing its citizens with a shared symbolic worldview, Schlegel believed that the fragmented state of modern society had its root precisely in the absence of such a symbolic center (KA II 314): "Our poetry lacks a focal point, as mythology did for the ancients, and everything essential in which modern poetry is inferior to ancient poetry can be summed up in the words: We have no mythology." (Es fehlt . . . unsrer Poesie an einem Mittelpunkt, wie es die Mythologie für die der Alten war, und alles Wesentliche, worin die moderne Dichtkunst der antiken nachsteht, läßt sich in die Worte zusammenfassen: Wir haben keine Mythologie."; KA II 312). In order to fill this lacuna, Schlegel argued that poetry had to be elevated to a mythological level. By integrating the dispersed fragments of modern life into a new symbolic unity, he believed that a new mythology carried the potential to rejuvenate society (KA II 312-313, 319-320), and spread the recently acquired political freedom to other socio-political domains (KA II 314).[14]

Part of the problem was, however, that ancient mythology only provided a partial model for the present. Whereas ancient myth formed a closed system – a "finished poem" ("vollendetes Gedicht"; KA II 313) as Schlegel calls it – that was predicated on the integration of the human in the

[14] For Schlegel, the emancipatory power of mythology already comes to the fore in his earliest work where he argues that the mythological figure of Prometheus was essential for the ancient Greeks to overcome their subordinance to nature, and move from a stage of savagery to cultivation (Nivala 46).

natural world, modern man found itself severed from nature with no immediate way to restore the rift that had been breached.[15] This insight into the objective character of ancient mythology as opposed to the subjective character of modern poetry dates back to Schlegel's earliest historical studies of classical antiquity, and has important repercussions for his ambition to develop a mythology for the present.[16] In contrast to ancient myth, a new mythology cannot "immediately secure and attach itself to what is the nearest and most alive in the sensual world" ("sich unmittelbar anschließend und anbildend an das Nächste, Lebendigste der sinnlichen Welt"; KA II 312), but necessarily has to spring instead from the realm of subjectivity itself:

> The new mythology must be formed out of the deepest depths of the spirit; it must be the most artificial of all works of art, for it must embrace all the others, a new bed and vessel for the ancient eternal wellspring of poetry, and will be itself the infinite poem which veils the seeds of all other poetry.
>
> (Die neue Mythologie muß im Gegenteil aus der tiefsten Tiefe des Geistes herausgebildet werden; es muß das künstlichste aller Kunstwerke sein, denn es soll alle andern umfassen, ein neues Bette und Gefäß für den alten ewigen Urquell der Poesie und selbst das unendliche Gedicht, welches die Keime aller andern Gedichte verhüllt.) (KA II 312)

In this passage, Schlegel identifies the subject's creative powers as the source from which the new mythology should take root (compare Frank, *Der kommende Gott* 206). At another point, he argues

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[15] We will come to discuss the relationship between antiquity and modernity in more detail in the first and second chapter.

[16] The terminology is derived from Schlegel's early work *On the Study of Greek Poetry.* The terms objective and subjective poetry correspond with the notions of naive and sentimental poetry in Friedrich Schiller's more famous essay "On Naive and Sentimental Poetry." Yet, Schlegel arrived at a similar distinction independently from Schiller. Although only published in 1797, Schlegel completed his book in 1795 before the publication of Schiller's more famous essay in the same year (Matuschek 88). For the relation between Schlegel and Schiller, see Oesterle, "Friedrich Schiller Und Die Brüder Schlegel," Körner, and Schmidt.

that man reaches its highest destination in the creation of something new and unprecedented: "[T]he real value, yes, the virtue of man is his originality." ([D]er eigentliche Wert ja die Tugend des Menschen sei seine Originalität."; KA II 320). However, as Schlegel elevates the status of the poet-artist to mythic dimensions, he also burdens him with a task that may very well reach beyond his powers.[17] For all intents and purposes, it never becomes clear how poetry, or any art for that matter, could be elevated to the level of mythology, and establish a new symbolic center that unites mankind not merely in the abstract, but on the level of lived experience.[18]

It is at this stage that Schlegel's call for a new mythology reaches its limit. Particularly in a society that is fragmented through and through, it seems hardly imaginable that an artwork can claim the authority required to overcome its subjective grounding, and reach the universality needed to bind the community together.[19] As von Petersdorff aptly puts it:

> Where the idea of communal totality recedes, where the public sphere is seen to be determined by a heterogeneous abundance of interpretative concepts and their visualizations, and where these are all understood as constructs without any ultimate commitment – there art cannot create a new mythology.
>
> (Wo die Idee gesellschaftlicher Totalität zurücktritt, wo man die Öffentlichkeit bestimmt sieht durch eine heterogene Fülle von Deutungskonzepten und deren

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[17] Here, it is not difficult to recognize in Schlegel's new mythology the underlying structure of the invisible masterpiece that Belting regarded as the prototype of the modernist artwork. In formulating his theory of the invisible masterpiece, Belting leans strongly on Walter Benjamin's dissertation on Romantic art criticism that largely deals with the early Romantic art theory of Schlegel. This topic will be discussed in more detail in chapter 2.

[18] As Otto Pöggeler has argued, it is not clear how any artwork that "an individual poet creates can obtain the same binding power that myth possessed when it established itself in the spirit of a great nation" ("was der einzelne Dichter bildet, jene Verbindlichkeit erhalten, die der Mythos besaß, als er sich im Geiste einer großen Nation bildete"; 194).

[19] For similar criticisms, see not only Pöggeler, but also Bohrer 66, Behrens 190, Petersdorff 155.

> Verbildlichungen und wo man diese allesamt als Konstrukte ohne letztgültige Verbindlichkeit versteht - da kann auch Kunst keine neue Mythologie . . . schaffen.) (159)

As Schlegel would soon come to realize himself, any conception of art that is grounded in human subjectivity can necessarily claim only relative jurisdiction, and will have no normative relevance outside its limited sphere of influence. Looking back on his earlier work by the time he settled in Cologne, Schlegel now writes that "[t]he diffusion of the idealist school was good to recognize the futility of a religion based on human forces." ("Die Zersplitterung der Schule der Idealisten war gut, um das Nichtige einer Religion aus Menschenkräften einzusehen."; KA XIX 210 #72). By this time, however, Schlegel had already discovered medieval painting, grasped its implications, and understood that a different conception of art was better equipped to overcome fragmentation and reunite modern society under a shared ideal.

iii. The Turn to Tradition

Already in Paris, Schlegel became increasingly aware that the ambition to establish a new mythology rested on an overestimation of the subject's creative powers (Behrens 190). This becomes perhaps clearest in his lecture series on the history of European literature, privately delivered to the brothers Boisserée and Bertram in the winter of 1803-04. It is in these lectures that Schlegel first offers a tacit critique on his earlier call for a new mythology, and starts experimenting with a conception of poetry established on entirely different principles. Yet, these transformations are premised on a fundamental shift in Schlegel's religious and philosophical outlook. Particularly as a result of his studies on Oriental mythology, Schlegel arrives at the conclusion that the divine is not to be sought for in man's creative powers, but rather in the more intimate depths of the human mind (Behler,

"Kulturphilosophie" 83). More precisely, a mythology for the future is not to be created, but to be found and recovered within oneself. If not explicitly, then Schlegel refers at least implicitly to the notion of a primordial revelation ("Uroffenbarung"; KA XI 117), the vague memory of which still lingers in the most distant corners of modern man's scattered mind (KA XI 117n242).

This reconfiguration of man's relationship to the divine has important repercussions for Schlegel's philosophy, the implications of which become first manifest in his lectures from 1803-1804. In the first place, it deepens Schlegel's engagement with tradition and cultural history. As he maintains that the memory of this revelation is better preserved by ancient and more primitive cultures than by modern ones (KA XI 117), Schlegel becomes increasingly concerned and occupied with the historical origins of the western cultural tradition (Behrens 161), recognizing the revolutionary promise that the study of history holds. Different artistic and cultural traditions are now evaluated and compared to the extent that they remain faithful to this primordial revelation, and carry the potential to rekindle a sense of the divine in modern man (Behrens 179, cf. KA XIII 33-35). Much of this is implied in a long passage from the first lecture in which Schlegel points to the importance of the study of history for future spiritual (and by implication social) transformation:

> The true religion . . . has no other purpose than the *reunification of fallen man with the divine*. The belief in a divine origin, which lies at the basis of this, has not entirely vanquished, but has been suppressed and sunk. . . . If one wants to attain something that has partly been lost, there naturally emerges the desire to acquire a better understanding of it. Because . . . all understanding of the infinite, like its object, is always infinite and unfathomable, and can, as a result, only be indirect, symbolic presentation is necessary in order to arrive at a partial understanding of that which cannot be understood as a whole.

> (Die wahre Religion . . . hat keinen anderen Zweck als *Wiedervereinigung des gesunkenen Menschen mit der Gottheit*. Der Glaube an einen göttlichen Ursprung, der hier zugrundeliegt, ist nicht ganz erloschen, aber unterdrückt und gesunken. . . . Will man ein Gut, was man zum Teil verloren, erreichen, so entsteht natürlich das Bedürfnis, sich eine nähere Kenntnis davon zu verschaffen. Weil . . . alle Erkenntnis des Unendlichen wie ihr Gegenstand immer unendlich und unergründlich, also nur indirekt sein kann, wird sinnbildliche Darstellung nötig, um das, was nicht im ganzen erkannt werden kann, doch teilweise erkennen zu können.) (KA XI 9; emphasis in original)

This passage not merely indicates the historical reorientation that characterizes Schlegel's thinking after 1803-1804, but also points to the entirely different demands that his reconfiguration of the relationship between man and the divine places on poetry and the arts. As Behler rightly observed, man's creative powers are no longer derived from an infinite longing for a somewhat abstract and future God, but are now informed by a desire to restore the knowledge of a concrete historical revelation that lies hidden in memory, and which can be actualized again by remaining faithful to the underlying principles that informed the art and religion of ancient cultural traditions ("Kulturphilosophie" 83–84). This consequently means that Schlegel releases the artist from the burden to be authentic and create something original. However, as the last sentences in the passage above illustrate, this does not happen without offering a severe challenge to art's autonomy. By demanding from poetry no longer a productive, but rather a mediating role with respect to the divine, Schlegel effectively cancels the identity of art and religion that informed his earlier writings, and

submits the artwork to the demands of a divine revelation that historically and ontologically precedes it.[20]

In the months and years that followed Schlegel extrapolated these insights to other domains as well. That is to say, not only the underlying principles of art and poetry should remain faithful to the memory of divine revelation, but this also goes for morality, economics, and politics.[21] As a result, the conceptions of cultural transformation and political revolution increasingly begin to merge. Especially after Napoleon's visit to Aachen, where the new emperor presented himself as the legitimate heir of Charlemagne in 1804, and the official coronation in Paris later that same year, Schlegel's anti-French sentiments become more pronounced (Behrens 173).[22] The seeds of his were already to be found in "Journey to France" where Schlegel related Europe's fallen state with the predominance of France as a political and cultural force, criticizing the liberal ideals that informed the French Revolution for generating a philistine and materialistic culture that reduced man's individuality to a dispirited uniformity (KA VII 66-68).[23] In order to counter these tendencies, Schlegel proposed a cultural

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[20] This also informs the depreciation of Greek mythology in these lectures. Especially when compared with Oriental mythology, from which it is now believed to derive (see e.g., KA XI 14-15, 117), the Greek equivalent begins to fall hopelessly short. Whereas Schlegel argues that Oriental mythology always stayed true to the primordial revelation of God, he criticizes particularly Greek classical and Hellenistic culture for no longer cultivating this memory, instead founding their mythology on a "superficial" ("oberflächlich"; KA XI 117) aesthetic of "raw sensuous enjoyment" ("rohen Sinnengenuß"; KA XI 13).

[21] Compare Anstett's "Intro to KA XIV" where he argues that Schlegel's work is consistent and philosophically coherent when one accepts his basic premise that all spheres of life are to be measured against the religious truth of revelation.

[22] For Napoleon's relationship to Charlemagne, and the crucial role that Aachen played as the former capital of the Holy Roman Empire in mediating this relationship, see Rowe 154–55.

[23] In the wake of Ernst Robert Curtius' influential study "Friedrich Schlegel und Frankreich" from 1932, some commentators have understood Schlegel's emphasis on uniformity and universality during his Parisian period as a cosmopolitan attempt to reconciliate German and French culture (see e.g., Behler, "Intro to KA XI" XXXII). With the ongoing publication of the critical edition of Schlegel's

counter-revolution that would take its cue not only from the Orient, but also from the German Middle Ages. It is particularly this latter strand that becomes all the more pronounced after Schlegel exchanged Paris for Cologne. In his lecture series on philosophy from 1805-06, again privately delivered to the brothers Boisserée, he distances himself for the first time from his earlier ideal of a German *Sonderweg*.[24] Maintaining that widespread cultural transformation remains an idle hope as long it is not backed up by a strong, authoritative form of government, Schlegel turns to the German Middle Ages to find the model for a political order that not only holds the potential to impose culture and morality from above, but at the same time respects man's religious origin and destination. Such a form of government he finds in the Holy Roman Empire, particularly between the (German) reigns of Charlemagne and Frederic II,[25] providing him with the model of a "universal monarchy" ("Universalmonarchie") under German rule that he now begins to promote as an alternative to French imperialism. This universal monarchy is conceived as a loosely organized union of relatively

work during the last half century or so, which includes many unpublished sources unavailable to Curtius, it has become increasingly clear that Schlegel's writings from Paris offer nothing of the sort. Quite the opposite, his stay in France only fueled Schlegel's patriotism in opposition to anything French. As Günter Oesterle writes, Paris is for Schlegel "not the place of mediation between German and French culture . . . but the starting point of a cultural counter-revolution." ("Paris ist für ihn nicht der Ort einer Vermittlung der Kulturen Frankreichs und Deutschlands . . . sondern der Ausgangspunkt einer kulturellen Gegenoffensive."; 164–65). For another rebuttal of Paris as place of mediation, see Anstett, "Intro to KA XIV" XLI–XLII.

[24] In her article on Schlegel's contributions on painting from the Louvre, Ethel Matala de Mazza locates this break much earlier, starting with Schlegel's transition from Germany to France. For reasons that will become clear later on, I think she is mistaken in interpreting the earliest contributions on painting already in this light, but her diagnosis is correct when she argues that Schlegel's early Romantic work advocated the idea of "an eternal literary Bible, which was to be for the Germans what the revolution was for the French." (". . . einer ewig werdenden literarischen Bibel, die für die Deutschen das sein sollte, was die Revoluzion für die Franzosen [war]."; 103).

[25] As Schlegel writes in his notebooks in 1805: "The most beautiful national and temporal flower of the Catholic religion is surely the German from 900-1200 - or even from Bonifacius onwards." ("Die schönste National- und Zeit-Blüthe der katholischen Religion ist doch wohl die Deutsche von 900-1200 — oder schon von Bonifacius an."; KA XX 79 #188).

autonomous states under a single monarch (see e.g., KA XIII 168).[26] What binds the people of these states together is not only their loyalty to a single ruler, but above all a common ethos that is expressed by the same nationalistic, moral, and religious values:

> [T]he old German constitution, i.e., the realm of honor, freedom, and loyal custom . . ., in which one builds the ethos on which the true free monarchy is founded, and which must necessarily lead the improved man back to this originary, and only moral and sacred form of national life.
>
> ([D]ie altdeutsche Verfassung, d.h. das Reich der Ehre, der Freiheit, und der treuen Sitte . . . , indem man die Gesinnung bilde, worauf die wahre freie Monarchie beruht, und die notwendig den gebesserten Menschen zurückführen muß zu dieser ursprünglichen und allein sittlichen und geheiligten Form des nationalen Lebens.) (KA III 101)

In order to achieve this ideal, Schlegel takes his inspiration from medieval feudalism. In his lectures on philosophy, he proposes the return to a society of ranks that limits individual freedom and property rights, but in which the state provides the conditions that allow each individual to realize his moral and religious potential within preestablished boundaries (KA XIII 144).[27] As such, Schlegel's

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[26] In the notebooks from this period, we find Schlegel wondering: "Should the Europeans become one people (all blended), or each nation just be itself? – Maybe both as it was in the Middle Ages." ("[S]ollen die Europäer ein Volk werden (alles verschmolzen), oder jede Nation nur sie selbst sein? - Vielleicht beides wie es im Mittelalter war."; KA XVIII 571 #103).

[27] Although many commentators emphasized the restorative tendencies in Schlegel's politics, it is important to remark that it was by no means Schlegel's intention to resurrect medieval institutions and forms of government. Schlegel was obviously aware that the present conditions were not comparable with the Middle Ages, putting different demands on all forms of social and political organization. When Schlegel thus proclaims a return to the Middle Ages, it is on the level of principles and foundations rather than institutions as such (conform Anstett, "Intro to KA XIV" XLVI–XLVII). As we will see, this is also how his advocacy of medieval art should be understood. The ideal is not to copy the medieval icon, but to recreate an icon according to the conditions and demands of the present. For a more extensive discussion of Schlegel's attitude toward the German Middle Ages, see chapter 4.

political theory forms a radical alternative to the liberal values that he associated with France. The years in Paris had convinced him that undue stress on individual freedom and human rights not merely led to social atomism, but also alienated mankind from its religious origin and destiny. These dangers he saw particularly realized in Rousseau's *The Social Contract*, which he pejoratively called the book that best defines France as a country (KA III 354-355). For Schlegel, the main problem with Rousseau's social contract theory was its philosophical starting point in an abstract and idealized notion of personhood. By detaching man from the realm of lived experience, Rousseau not only uprooted man from his ties to community and tradition, but also did not allow for the recognition of evil as a social and political force. It is this latter insight into man's fallen state that would become one of the cornerstones of Schlegel's political thinking in Cologne. In fact, for Schlegel, it was the political actuality of evil that necessitated the formation of social hierarchies and political institutions (Anstett, "Intro to KA XIV" XLVIII). Not merely as a means of control, although this is no doubt part of it, but also to provide the individual with the moral and religious cultivation ("Bildung") required to establish the ideal of an absolute community (KA XIII 99). Because he submitted the individual to the higher demands of the state, one could argue that Schlegel's later political theory stands in sharp contrast with his early republicanism. From his time in Cologne onwards, it is no longer the full realization of one's own individual freedom, but rather the ideal of an absolute community guaranteed and protected by the church and a quasi-totalitarian state that allows mankind to reach its highest moral and religious destination (see e.g., KA XIII 111).

Yet this is only part of the story. Although it is true that the periods in Paris and especially Cologne mark a shift in Schlegel's political leanings, Behrens rightly notes that this later totalitarian notion of the state as transpersonal community is essentially a political concretization of an early

Romantic ideal (272).[28] Indeed, the ambition to establish an absolute community under a symbolic unity is central to Schlegel's thinking throughout (Petersdorff 158). Yet with the realization that human subjectivity offers insufficient ground for a new mythology, and the subsequent turn to history and tradition in Paris, Schlegel's politicization in Cologne coincides with a new emphasis on the role of the Roman Church as the historical guardian of God's primordial revelation. What speaks for the importance of the Church is not merely its religious function, but also that it has proven itself historically capable to provide the state with the symbolic unity needed to govern and organize the people under a shared way of life (Anstett, "Intro to KA XIV" XLIX). For Schlegel, the appeal of the Middle Ages thus not merely consisted in the fact that religious forms of life had unmediated political effect, as Behrens argues (199), but that a distinction between the religious and political was hardly in place. Schlegel thus understands the medieval Roman Church as the moral and political foundation of state sovereignty (Daub, "State as Family" 147); a historical situation that his own political philosophy seeks to restore. In his Cologne lectures on philosophy, he not only speaks of the church and state as two "mutually supportive and complementary" institutions ("sich einander unterstützend und ergänzend"; KA XIII 143), but even argues that the morality of the state "can only be grounded in the church" (". . . kann . . . sich einzig auf die Kirche gründen"; KA XIII 142). In his political philosophy, the two institutions thus form an intricate machinery aimed at a broad cultural and political transformation, and in which the church provides the symbolic groundwork for the state to function as a moral and political unity.

[28] Endres likewise emphasizes the continuity between Schlegel's early and later works, arguing that the Cologne and Viennese writings realize the early Romantic ambition to establish a theory in which the arts are constitutive for the establishment of a new community (226).

As the Christian, and specifically Catholic tendencies of Schlegel's thinking became more pronounced, his earlier enthusiasm for Oriental thought and mythology receded further into the background. He begins to realize that the universality that renders eastern mythology spirituality meaningful is also what renders it politically mute. This is perhaps what, apart from dogmatic differences between the two, sets Catholicism most apart from Indian mythology. With the intensification of his nationalism in Paris grows the realization that the Christian religion can be instrumentalized as political force in a way Oriental religion cannot (Behrens 162). Although his engagement with the Orient was thus decisive for showing him the religious potential of a philosophy grounded in revelation, he soon began to understand the meaning and significance of revelation in more explicit Catholic terms.[29] As Paola Mayer writes, it is during the years in Cologne that Schlegel, "formerly the would-be prophet of a new religion, becomes the adherent of an established, historical one" (130). In this respect, it would be mistaken to place too much emphasis on Schlegel's actual conversion in 1808. By the time of his lecture series on philosophy and universal history from 1804-05 and 1805-06 respectively, his Catholicism was already firmly in place, directly informing his views on the arts, history, and philosophy (Behrens 248; Mayer 142). What these lectures demonstrate is that Schlegel's Catholicism was never espoused for religious reasons alone, but that he was quick to grasp its political implications as well (Anstett, "Mystisches und Okkultistisches" 133). In other words, the exchange of the esoteric ideal of an invisible church for an institutional church established by tradition

[29] More precisely, Schlegel comes to understand Oriental mythology as a precursor of Catholicism, which is now seen as the only true religion. By the time he published his *On the Language and Wisdom of the Indians* in 1808, many of Schlegel's contemporaries understood the book as an apology of his Catholicism. Goethe remarked that the book expressed a "very crude Christian-Catholic confession of faith (". . . ganz crudes christ-katholisches Glaubensbekenntniß"; qtd. in Korngiebel 315), whereas Heine remarked that "[i]t was as if the incense of high mass was smelling from this book." ("Mir war, als dufte der Weihrauch des Hochamts aus diesem Buche"; qtd. in Behler, "Intro to KA VIII" CCXXIII).

was at least partly informed by the realization that the conjoining of religion and state allowed for a level of social organization and government that a secular constitution based on individual freedom could impossibly achieve.[30]

The same principles directly informed the last two contributions on painting that Schlegel wrote shortly after his arrival in Cologne. Despite Carl Schmitt's rebuttal of Schlegel as one of the high priests of political Romanticism (*Political Romanticism* 32), Schlegel's later views on art and politics are much closer to his own than Schmitt himself is ready to acknowledge. It is not merely the case that both concur that the prevalent conception of art within a given society cannot be disentangled from the political order in which it participates, but they also agree – and this is the blind spot in Schmitt's reading of Schlegel – on the political inadequacy of an art that is grounded in liberal values as freedom, expression, and creativity. Behrens is quite right to emphasize that Schlegel's turn to medieval painting is therefore not merely an aesthetic, but also a political gesture: "For just as the early Romantic concept of poetry corresponded with a republican constitution, so Schlegel's turn to medieval painting and poetry corresponded to a hierarchical social order of ranks." ("Denn so wie der frühromantische Poesiebegriff mit einer republikanischen Verfassung korrespondiert, so Schlegels

[30] Von Petersdorff provocatively argues that Schlegel never gives up on the idea of an invisible church and that his public embrace of Catholicism serves merely as the exoteric guise of the esoteric philosophy that he continues to pursue after Jena. Yet, despite von Petersdorff's appealing thesis that the principles underlying Schlegel's early Romantic thinking become esoteric in the later work (166), his reading is fraught with difficulties. Basing his interpretation largely on Schlegel's identification with Plato, whose esoteric philosophy supposedly offers "a philosophy of revelation . . . which is not provided for by Christian dogmatics," ("eine Offenbarungsphilosophie . . . die in der christlichen Dogmatik nicht vorgesehen ist"; 189), von Petersdorff fails to note that the privately(!) delivered lectures in Cologne do not offer an esoteric espousal, but rather a sophisticated critique on Plato's philosophy. Taking issue with Plato's dualism on purely philosophical grounds, we will come to see that Schlegel integrates Plato's teachings on the soul within an organic philosophy of life that is commensurable with his Catholicism without being able to be subsumed by it. This also shows that, at least philosophically, Schlegel never was the dogmatic Catholic which von Petersdorff and many others take him to be.

Hinwendung zur mittelalterlichen Malerei und Poesie mit einer ständisch-hierarchischen Gesellschaftsordnung."; 251).[31]

Yet, despite this acknowledgment, Schlegel's writings on art remain utterly problematic for Behrens. Otherwise concerned with debunking the myth of Schlegel's conservatism, Behrens sees in Schlegel's advocacy of medieval art one the main causes for the largely negative reception of his later work (249). In contrast with his philosophy of history, which he regards as the core of Schlegel's political Romanticism (268), Behrens characterizes the contributions on painting as unoriginal, restorative, and anachronistic; in short, as an aspect of Schlegel's thinking that hardly holds any relevance for the present (251).[32] Yet, the reasons Behrens gives for his objections reveal that he was unable to recognize what is actually at stake in Schlegel's writings on art. Although he maintained that Schlegel's interest in medieval art corresponded with his political defense of a hierarchical society of ranks, Behrens failed to realize that the relationship between art and politics was for Schlegel himself not merely one of correspondence, but of mutual interdependence. In other words, Schlegel's defense of a conception of painting that was founded on the principles of medieval art should not be seen as separate from his political Romanticism, as Behrens maintains, but actually goes to the heart of it, providing him with the essential means to mediate the realms of politics and religion, state and church. Aware of the strong religious experiences painting evoked during the Middle Ages, Schlegel realized that these same emotions also carried political implications. He understood that the experience that

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[31] Admittedly, Behrens draws the distinction between the constitutions a bit too absolute. As Schlegel argues in his Cologne lectures on philosophy, a limited form of republicanism is still permitted in order to guarantee the relative autonomy and independence of a number of city states (KA XIII 162-163).

[32] Behrens is by no means the only one stressing the irrelevance of Schlegel's thinking on painting. The same argument was already made by Eichner in his introduction to the critical edition of Schlegel's writings on art (XXV).

carries the spirit up toward God is the same as the one that submit the viewer's body to the church, allowing Schlegel to reconceive of painting as not merely an artform, but effectively as an instrument of governance and control.

When seen from this perspective, Schlegel's reflections on painting cease to be a restorative and anachronistic feature of his thinking, but become an integral part of his political Romanticism, the ongoing relevance of which Behrens repeatedly emphasizes in his work. Freeing the artwork from its aesthetic fixtures, Schlegel develops a theory of painting that does not depict the image as the passive and lifeless object of our aesthetic contemplation, but which acknowledges the image's agency in shaping the viewer's experience and response, thereby recognizing its capacity to engage and absorb the viewer in a way that transcends the merely aesthetic. It is particularly this feature of the artwork that allows it to play an important role within Schlegel's religious and political thinking. Just as in the earlier work, the artwork thus remains the principal instrument to unite the community under a symbolic unity. The crucial difference between the early and the later Schlegel is, however, that the artwork is no longer the source of this unity, but rather a mediator that unites the realms of politics and religion under the transcendent authority of the Christian God. In other words, the main intervention of Schlegel's writings on art, often missed by its modern detractors, Behrens and Schmitt among them, is that it offers a complete reconfiguration of the medium of painting that serves no other goal than submitting the individual to the power and authority of the state, which has now become inseparable from the Roman Church that validates it. Schlegel's Cologne writings thus mark the transition from an aesthetic to an iconic conception of painting that puts the artwork on entirely different philosophical footing as it exchanges its modern autonomy for a renewed submission to state and church.

In this respect, Schlegel's rediscovery of medieval art cannot be seen apart from the political and religious framework that he develops in the same period. More precisely, Schlegel comes to

understand painting not merely as a religious symbol that mediates the heavenly and the earthly realms, but also the central element in the economical realm that Giorgio Agamben, Marie-Jose Mondzain, and others recently brought under attention again.[33] That is to say, painting comes to be seen as an instrument that bestows glory on God while simultaneously legitimating the divine plan that is carried out in his name on earth. Breaking at once with the primacy of rationality and subjectivity as the grounds of respectively Classical and Romantic theories of art,[34] Schlegel's turn to medieval painting effectively reclaims the artwork as an instrument of power. No longer able to be understood in conventional aesthetic terms, the artwork is now conceived as the principal means "to cover and dignify what is in itself pure force and domination" (Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory* 212). This consequently means that art can no longer be understood in conventional aesthetic terms for Schlegel. By giving rise to a visionary experience, the artwork not merely mediates between the earthly and the heavenly realms on the level of individual perception. It is precisely by constituting a vision of God that it offers at the same time a concealed glorification of earthly forms of power that are now sanctified in his name. In this respect, Schlegel's iconic turn completes the quest for a normative symbolic system as the constitutive ground for a religious-mythological order that finds its origins in the early Romantic writings.

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[33] See, for instance, the recent studies by Alloa, Kotsko, Leshem and Santner.

[34] For the difference between classical and Romantic aesthetics with Kant as the pivotal turning point, see Beiser, *Diotima's Children*, particularly 4–8. Although problematic in certain respects, the standard account on the emergence of the modern aesthetic tradition remains Paul Oskar Kristeller's "The Modern System of the Arts" from 1952; see especially part II for the German tradition.

iv. Structure Dissertation

One of the goals of this dissertation is to demonstrate that Schlegel's "Descriptions of Paintings" cannot be understood as a unified whole. More specifically, I will show that Schlegel's understanding of painting in the first three contributions is fundamentally at odds with the conception of painting we find in the last two accounts. It is this shift from an aesthetic to an iconic conception of painting in the fourth contribution that I, with a nod to the Swiss art historian Gottfried Boehm, will refer to as the iconic turn in Schlegel's thinking.[35] Although it may be good to stress that it is by no means my intention to fully equate Schlegel's iconic turn with the iconic (or visual) turn in recent scholarship, it is hard to deny that there are important parallels between the two. In fact, when the religious study scholar Birgit Meyer argues that the "iconic turn was born out of a strong dissatisfaction with this state of (the) art, stressing the urge to reinvent art history by a critical reflection about the . . . conceptual stance toward pictures ensued by it" (1031), we will come to see that Schlegel's iconic turn was informed by an equally strong dissatisfaction with the art institutions of his time. Moreover, what underlies the iconic turn in Schlegel's thought more generally, and forms a precedent to the work of the late Hans Belting, who could be seen as one of the other intellectual fathers of the iconic turn, is precisely the ambition to release the medium of painting from its modern autonomy, reconfiguring it instead according to a more universal and inclusive conception of the living image for which both Schlegel and Belting find the prototype in the Byzantine icon.

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[35] It was Gottfried Boehm who in 1994 dubbed the term "the iconic turn" as an epistemological shift that involves a shift of orientation from what the image says to what it does, leading to a new scholarly concern for the agency and life of images, how they function, what kinds of responses they elicit, and their power and agency to enforce or resist dominant visual regimes. For Boehm's original formulation, see his essay "Die Wiederkehr der Bilder" (13–17).

It is this ambition that informs Schlegel's reflections on painting around 1804-05, and which is not merely reflected by the last two contributions on painting itself, but also by the Cologne lectures on philosophy from 1804-05. It is especially in these lectures that Schlegel theoretically grounds his reconfiguration of painting as medium, thereby explicitly distancing himself from the early Romantic framework that informed, as Jean-Marie Schaeffer has called it, the speculative conception of art that we find in the first three contributions (9). In other words, marking a radical departure from the aesthetic framework that Schlegel inherited from Kant, the last two contributions on painting and the Cologne lectures on philosophy mark not merely a transition in how the physical properties of painting itself are conceived, but also develop a different model of spectatorship, recasting the aesthetic into a religious experience that seeks to release the medium from its ties with modern subjectivity. Finally, and this is perhaps the most obvious difference between the early and the late contributions, Schlegel explicitly comes to reclaim art's autonomy by subordinating the medium of painting to the domain of religion again. As such, as I will argue, the iconic turn is not simply a transformation of painting's properties within the domain of art, but marks a radical departure from the discourse of art as a whole for ultimately religious and political motives.

The thesis that the last two contributions thus advance a fundamentally different conception of painting than the previous ones has insufficiently been considered in the scholarly literature. That is to say that any consideration that Schlegel's views on painting, just as on almost any other topic, may have been in flux between 1803 and 1805 has hardly received the attention it deserves.[36] This is

[36] For example, Locher argues explicitly that Schlegel's position "did not fundamentally change" ("sich nicht grundsätzlich verändert . . . hat"; "Bildende Kunst" 267). In another article, Locher understands Schlegel's reflections on painting as a continuation of his early Romantic aesthetics of the fragment ("Construction des Ganzen" 119). Matala de Mazza, on the other hand, follows the opposite direction and reads the "Descriptions of Paintings" backwards as a prefiguration of Schlegel's later conversion to Catholicism (120–21).

unfortunate for several reasons. Written and published over a period of more than two years, the "Descriptions of Paintings" is not merely the best testimony we have of the transformation that Schlegel's thinking underwent at a crucial stage in his intellectual and personal life, but it has also obscured how important and increasingly relevant some of his concerns still are. Moreover, what further complicates the interpretation of the "Descriptions of Paintings" is that they were written for a general audience, meaning that little is spelled out and that much remains implied. It is therefore not surprising that there is hardly any consensus among Schlegel scholars what theory of painting is actually advanced by these texts.

Especially this last point makes it important to situate Schlegel's reflections on painting within their broader philosophical context, which I will do extensively throughout this dissertation. As such, I not merely offer a close reading of the "Descriptions of Painting" in these pages, but also present a more general reflection on Schlegel's views on religious mediation in the period between 1800 and 1812. Despite the fundamental differences between the conception of painting that Schlegel advances in the first and last contributions, there is an important continuity in the sense that they both subscribe to the view that the artwork is the principal mediator between the finite and the infinite. Although the artwork thus occupies a central place in Schlegel's thinking both early and late, its pivotal role as mediator between the finite and the infinite also means that art is the domain where changes in his philosophical and religious outlook find their immediate reflection.

What Locher and Matala de Mazza have in common is that they despite their different interpretations, understand the five contributions form a consistent whole that essentially conveys a uniform approach to and understanding of painting. Something similar one also finds in Behler. While Matala de Mazza and Locher turned respectively to religion and the fragment as the master categories to unlock the meaning of Schlegel's contributions, Behler turns instead to history. Yet also Behler fails to make a distinction between the essays that Schlegel wrote from Paris and those that were written in Cologne. As a result, his conclusion that Schlegel was the first among the speculative idealists to affirm the complementarity of history and theory, and to shift attention from art's ground in a transcendental a priori to the actual historical world, which Behler understands among "the most productive accomplishments of idealist thinking," is, if not altogether false, in serious need of qualification ("Origins" 59).

When we consider Schlegel's contributions on painting from this perspective, we find that these writings have thus far mostly been approached from a literary perspective. Although such an approach is justified when it comes to the first three contributions, in which Schlegel adheres to a conception of painting that is largely modeled on poetry, it becomes somewhat problematic when we consider the last two contributions (and the Cologne lectures). It is from this moment onward that Schlegel sharply begins to demarcate painting from poetry, attributing to each of these artforms a different role in the mediation between the human and the divine. As I will argue, it is with the iconic turn that poetry slowly but steadily ceases to be one of Schlegel's central concerns, and will be replaced by painting as the privileged means to bring the connection between the finite and the infinite about.

Yet, despite the fact that Schlegel's writings increasingly turn to a visual understanding of the sign as a mediator between man and the divine, scholarship on Schlegel's writings on painting have not followed suit. In fact, an opposite tendency has manifested itself in Schlegel scholarship in which the specific visual aspects of the symbol have been reintegrated within a literary discourse that often continues to take Schlegel's early Romantic theory of the sign as the yardstick to understand what is at stake. For example, Philipp Weber has argued that Schlegel's writings on painting imply "a consistent strategy of linguistic representation" ("eine konsequent sprachliche Darstellungsstrategie"; 71). And also Johannes Endres, who likewise identified an iconic turn in Schlegel's writings on painting, is ultimately concerned to mitigate its visual effect, arguing that Schlegel's iconic turn should ultimately be considered as a literary trope which is more concerned with its rhetorical effect on the reader than the lived experience of the viewer (217–18).[37]

[37] For more examples of this tendency to collapse the distinction between word and image, see especially Höltenschmidt "Antizipation und Abbild" and Lanwerd.

Yet, such an overly literary approach to Schlegel's understanding of the symbol misses what is at stake in Schlegel's post-Jena writings on the visual arts, precisely because the turn to an iconic conception of painting was by Schlegel himself conceived as a way to overcome the limitations of the linguistic symbol in mediating the relationship between the human and the divine. It is therefore perhaps not surprising that it was an art historian who most extensively discussed the role of the icon in Schlegel's writings on art. Situating Schlegel's "Description of Paintings" within the artistic context in which they were written, Nina Amstutz directly associates Schlegel's conception of painting with the medieval iconic tradition: "Schlegel's continuum of Christian art is bound together by spirituality rather than strictly by formal properties. His characterization of Old Master paintings hints at continuity between the spiritually charged icons of the medieval image tradition, and quattrocento and early cinquecento art" (12).[38] Picturing Schlegel as an anti-formalist who found in the medieval iconic tradition an alternative to the modern, autonomous conception of art (11), Amstutz's reading provides an accurate analysis of Schlegel's attempt to realign modern art with the iconic tradition.

However, even though Amstutz points to Schlegel's subordination of painting to the domain of religion, her account is ultimately more suggestive than conclusive. Although she is correct that Schlegel tacitly refers to the icon a number of times in the last contributions, and rightly argues that Schlegel took the devotional image of the Middle Ages as a model for his own conception of painting, no attempt is made to come to a better understanding of what Schlegel understood by painting, and how he may have envisioned its relationship to either the Byzantine icon or the Western devotional image. Moreover, by situating Schlegel's work in the artistic and aesthetic discourse of his time,

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[38] Despite Amstutz's remark that Schlegel only hints at such a connection and nowhere "forges a direct link between icons and quattrocento and early cinquecento art" (5), we will come to see that Schlegel offers much more than a hint and actually establishes a historical account of the transition from the Byzantine iconic tradition to the Western Middle Ages and beyond.

Amstutz overlooks what is actually at stake in the "Descriptions of Paintings." As I will argue in this dissertation, the aims and ambitions of Schlegel's iconic turn were never merely artistic, let alone, aesthetic. In fact, the iconic turn marked a departure from the discourse of art that cannot properly be understood without a consideration of Schlegel's philosophical, religious, and political ambitions.

In this dissertation, I will make two related points that directly pertain to the relationship between the image and the political. One of the things that makes the "Descriptions of Paintings" relevant from a contemporary perspective is that they offer two different and incompatible paradigms of the image. Whereas I will argue, following Walter Benjamin and Hans Belting, that the first three contributions on painting subscribe to a conception of autonomous painting in which "the idea of art" began to eclipse the work's physical manifestation, thereby providing the conceptual framework for artistic Modernism, I also maintain that the last two contributions seek to restore this separation by reintegrating idea and object under the rubric of the iconic turn. Secondly, I argue that the religious and political instrumentalization of painting that Schlegel will come to advance in Cologne hinges exactly on this point. In other words, I will argue that it was exactly with Schlegel's political radicalization that he came to realize that the modern artwork is politically mute, and that the image can only be effectively instrumentalized for political and religious purposes when it is founded on an alternative paradigm of the image.

Although I will safe my discussion of the political implications of the iconic turn to the conclusion, it is one of my aims to discuss the five contributions on painting with continuous reference to the political ambitions and circumstances that they reflect, leading to the following chapter outline. In the first two chapters, I will provide a detailed analysis of the first three contributions on painting. As Schlegel shows himself in these contributions as much concerned with the epistemological conditions under which the art of the past can be known as with the ontology of painting in general, I

have structured my argument along these lines. Whereas the first chapter thus concentrates largely on the epistemology that underlies Schlegel's historical reconstructions, situating his writings on painting within the more general framework of his philosophical method of Romantic irony, the second chapter is specifically concerned with the ontology of painting and the role of the aesthetic experience in Schlegel's philosophy more generally. One of the advantages of this approach is that the two chapters together offer a chronological overview of the development of Schlegel's early Romantic thought, gradually moving from his epistemological critique on a systematic philosophy that is based on first principles to his related, but slightly later concern for the role of nature in his philosophy and theory of painting. In the third chapter, I will then continue with a discussion of the last two contributions on painting, pointing to the fundamental differences in aim and approach when compared to the earlier three accounts. It is in this chapter that I will come to introduce the iconic turn in Schlegel's theory of painting, drawing on Schlegel's Cologne lectures on philosophy from 1804-05 for additional support. In the last chapter, I will concentrate on two direct implications of the iconic turn. In the first place, Schlegel's reconfiguration of the history of painting, tracing the origins of German painting all the way back to the art of Byzantium. Secondly, I will concentrate on Schlegel's guidelines for the contemporary painter, and his attempt to integrate his views into the domain of artistic practice. Although it is unlikely that the German Romantic painter Caspar David Friedrich was familiar with any of Schlegel's writing, I will nonetheless make the case that his famous *Tetschen Altarpiece* from 1808 gives a good indication what the iconic turn amounts to in practice. Finally, I will draw everything to a close by discussing the political implications of Schlegel's iconic turn. As I will argue throughout these pages, Schlegel's theory of painting cannot be understood apart from its immediate historical context. In the conclusion, I will tie my earlier allusions to the politics of Schlegel's work together by arguing that the iconic turn plays an instrumental role in Schlegel's critique of Napoleon,

seeking to develop an alternative conception of the image that holds the potential to undermine the image of Napoleon's sovereignty.

CHAPTER ONE

A Politics of Irony:

The Politics and History of Painting in the Early Romantic Framework

i. Introduction

Despite the overtly Christian overtones we find in the last two contributions on painting, Schlegel's engagement with the visual arts was initially informed by political rather than confessional concerns. In sharp contrast to his earlier writings, which were specifically during the *Athenaeum* period strongly engaged in philosophy and religion, and therefore more esoteric in character, his contributions to *Europa* were, by contrast, intended "to be as popular as possible" ("so populär zu sein als nur irgend möglich ist"; Schlegel qtd. in Behrens 160). Apart from more practical concerns such as his precarious financial situation at the time, there are good reasons to believe that Schlegel's ambition to reach a wider audience were largely political. This is not in the least suggested by the title of the periodical itself. As several scholars have argued, the title *Europa* is above all an homage to the essay "Die Christenheit oder Europa" by Novalis, who had prematurely passed away one year before (see e.g., Behler 21, Behrens 171, Campbell 88). And indeed, many of Schlegel's contributions to the periodical, the earlier discussed "Journey to France" prime among them, share many thematic and political concerns with the essay of his late friend, not in the least its enthusiasm for the Middle Ages, and the ardent desire to reunite Europe along the model of medieval German society. But Schlegel's increased concern for politics is also reflected by the fact that many of his Parisian writings are evidently more nationalistic in character, often combined with anti-French sentiments. Günther Oesterle has even gone so far as to argue that many of Schlegel's Parisian writings aim for nothing less than the annihilation

("annihilieren"; 165) of all art, philosophy and criticism of French provenance, only to replace them by their German equivalents.

If Oesterle's observations are correct, then the "Descriptions of Paintings" that Schlegel wrote between 1802 and 1805 is a particularly good representative of this trend. There can be no doubt that when Schlegel turned to the topic of painting for the first time in his career,[39] he found himself increasingly occupied with the fate of Europe, and the role of France as the continent's hegemonic power. These concerns are clearly reflected by the "Descriptions of Paintings." In fact, there is even good reason to believe that his many visits to the Louvre only fueled his anti-French sentiments.[40] In his contributions on painting, Schlegel challenges the museum's emphasis on the French and Italian tradition while drawing attention to the early German schools of painting. Yet, as we will come to see, especially in the first three accounts that Schlegel wrote before his departure to Cologne, the politics resides mostly in the polemical tone that he adopts throughout these writings. The reason for this is primarily to be found in Schlegel's adoption of his method of Romantic irony that had been central to his writings on philosophy and literature, and which also informed his novel *Lucinde* (1799) in which Schlegel offered a thinly concealed account of his adulterous affair with his future wife, the divorced Jewish woman Dorothea Veit-Schlegel, née Brendel Mendelssohn.

In this chapter, we will come to discuss Schlegel's method of Romantic irony in more detail, and discuss not merely its epistemological but also its political implications. What can already be

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[39] Although Margaretmary Daley has claimed that Schlegel contributed to the anonymously published dialogue *Die Gemählde* that appeared in *Athenaeum* in 1799 (93–94), most scholars agree that the text is from the hands of his brother August Wilhelm and his then wife Caroline Schlegel (see e.g., Eichner xiii–xiv and Ziolkowski 360–62).

[40] Schlegel was a frequent visitor of the museum, especially in the first few weeks after his arrival. In a letter to her sister, which forms the first written testimony of Schlegel's arrival in Paris, fellow-German Karoline von Wolzogen reports that Schlegel spent almost all of his days in the museum (Kahn 198).

remarked at this point is that Schlegel's Romantic irony is most pronounced in those sections where he is explicitly engaged with the history of painting. To be sure, especially for a thinker as Schlegel, the historical can never clearly be separated from the theoretical. It is not merely the case, as Wood correctly observed, that "[a] work of art must always already be grasped or recognized as a work of art in order to become the subject of art-historical analysis (7). Schlegel himself also famously noted that "the best theory of art is its history" ("Die beste Theorie der Kunst ist ihre Geschichte."; KA IV 230); an insight that led Behler to remark that Schlegel's philosophical-historical approach to the domains of art and aesthetics is among "the most productive accomplishments of idealist thinking" in general ("Origins" 59). However, I will also point to the ideological motives that particularly inform Schlegel's polemic against the French painterly tradition that he found in the Louvre, and which takes such an important place in the first three contributions on painting. Yet, we will come to see that the political relevance of Schlegel's polemic is almost immediately undermined by the Romantic ironic framework in which it is embedded, turning a philosophical argument into mere subjective rhetoric.

ii. Schlegel and the Politics of the Louvre

Schlegel's contributions on painting did not emerge out of nowhere, but were preceded by an extensive engagement with the topic during his last months in Germany. In the months leading up to his departure to Paris, Schlegel had become a frequent visitor of the famous Dresden picture gallery where he had long conversations on painting with his friend Ludwig Tieck and the young Romantic painter Philipp Otto Runge. Although it has unfortunately proven to be impossible to reconstruct the content of what they discussed, there can be no doubt that Schlegel regarded the first contribution as a continuation of these conversations (Eichner XIX). Directly addressed "to a friend in Dresden" ("an einen Freund in Dresden"; KA IV 9), the text takes the form of a long letter to Ludwig Tieck in which

Schlegel not only comments on his findings in the Louvre, but also occasionally refers to their shared experiences in Dresden (see e.g., KA IV 20).[41] As Schlegel was therefore no stranger to the relatively new phenomenon of public museums, his visits to the Louvre offered him experiences of a whole new kind. With the masterpieces that Napoleon looted from all over Europe on public display, the Louvre was second to none when it came to the sheer quantity, quality, and variety of their collection. Yet what made the Louvre truly unique was its mode of presentation. Organizing its painting collection chronologically and by national school, the Louvre was one of the first museums to present the history of European painting as a single, continuous tradition that ran from the Renaissance all the way up to the present (McClellan 138).

With Napoleon's appointment of Dominique Vivant-Denon as the museum's first director in November 1802, the presentation of the collection underwent a spectacular transformation. Under Vivant-Denon's lead, the museum began to portray the history of western painting more and more as an almost exclusively French and Italian tradition. Mainly inspired by Giorgio Vasari's *The Lives of the Artists*, Vivant-Denon adhered to a classical conception of art that defined artistic progress and perfection in purely formal terms. The problem Vivant-Denon found himself confronted with, however, was that Vasari offered only few clues on how to deal with the development of post-Renaissance art. Tacitly suggesting that the perfection of Raphael and Michelangelo would inevitably be followed by a period of decline, Vasari imposed a huge burden on subsequent generations of critics, stirring a big debate in the 18th century as to whether artistic development after the Renaissance ought

[41] There is general consensus that Tieck and not Runge is the addressee of the first contribution. Tieck himself commented on his role as well, remarking that Schlegel's writings on paintings were half his intellectual property. Although this is somewhat of an overstatement as especially the last two contributions develop in a direction that he could have impossibly foreseen, it is nonetheless safe to say that Tieck played an important role in fueling Schlegel's interest in painting (Eichner XIX).

to be regarded in terms of progress or decline (McClellan 145). One of the most important advocates of the latter view was Johann Joachim Winckelmann. In his famous *History of Ancient Art* from 1764, Winckelmann expanded Vasari's model by dividing the history of classical sculpture into four successive phases that organically passed through an archaic, classical, imitative, and decadent style.[42] Crucially, however, Winckelmann applied this scheme not only to ancient sculpture, but also to more recent painting. Starting from the archaism of the Italian primitives, Winckelmann recognized maturity and perfection in the classical style of Raphael and Michelangelo. This then led to a period of imitation with the mannerist style, eventually followed by the decadence of the Baroque style that marked a period of absolute decline for Winckelmann (118; cf. McClellan 146).

For obvious reasons, such pessimism was tantamount to the message that Vivant-Denon wished to convey. Despite Winckelmann's huge influence on French art criticism, Vivant-Denon opted in line with the optimism of his day for a more progressive view of history; one in which Renaissance painting retained its canonical status, but not without offering later generations of artists the opportunity to emulate and expand on the work of their predecessors. This view on the artistic development of the past three centuries was most clearly conveyed by his spokesman T.B. Eméric David, who wrote that "[b]y following in the footsteps of the Old Masters, art, instead of declining, will make still greater progress" (qtd. in McClellan 147). The practical result was that the Louvre presented the history of modern painting as an almost exclusively French-Italian tradition in which contemporary French painting was presented, if not as the culmination of the Renaissance, then at least as its only worthy and legitimate successor (McClellan 147–48). However, as various commentators

[42] For a consideration of the relationship between Vasari's and Winckelmann's conception of historical time, and their influence on the subsequent development of the art historical discipline, see Didi-Huberman 4–10.

have argued since then, the point was as much art historical as political. By displaying contemporary French painting as the culmination of the classical artistic tradition, Vivant-Denon drew a parallel between the history of art and recent political events, presenting France's cultural hegemony as a mirror image of its political and military dominance over the rest of Europe (Belting 28; Locher, "Construction des Ganzen" 112; Wood 178).

During his stay in Paris, Schlegel witnessed these transformations of the museum's interior first-hand. He understood that the museum's latest transformations further underscored Napoleon's imperial ambitions, popularizing a narrative of artistic development in which, in McClellan's words, "only French art had a future" (148). However, also before Vivant-Denon's reorganization of the Louvre, Schlegel's visits to the museum made him immediately attentive to how a certain presentation of artworks contained a certain take on art as a whole (Locher, "Construction des Ganzen" 110). Directly at the start of his first contribution on painting he writes that "with every new exhibition and composition of old paintings, a peculiar body [of art] is being build, in which much appears to the art lover in a new light, which he up until that point had not seen with such clarity." (". . . durch jede neue Ausstellung und Zusammenstellung alter Gemählde [wird] ein eigner Körper gebildet, wo manches dem Liebhaber in einem neuen Lichte erscheint, was er bisher nicht so klar gesehen hatte."; KA IV 12). Although written before Vivant-Denon's transformation of the museum was beginning to take effect, it is already in the first three contributions on painting that Schlegel seeks to distance himself from the museum's strong emphasis on recent French and Italian painting by directing attention to the achievements of German art (cf. Locher, "Construction des Ganzen" 112).[43] Moreover, seeing the art

[43] Although several commentators have read Schlegel's contributions as a direct response to Vivant-Denon's program, only Locher seems to be aware that the first contributions predate the latter's restructuring of the Louvre ("Construction des Ganzen" 112). Any

of the last two centuries as nothing but decline, Schlegel presents the history of recent painting as a story of alienation with Faustian overtones. Here, particularly the recent French and Italian schools are singled out for demonstrating how a once respectable artform lost track of its true and original vocation, and was now soullessly indulging in mannerisms that were all too easily mistaken for artistic progress. Building on the historical framework laid out by Winckelmann, Schlegel thus turns to the art of the high Renaissance as the onset of painting's decline:

> Of this newer school of Italian painting, which is exquisitely indicated by Raphael, Titian, Correggio, Julio Romano, Michelangelo . . . the original deterioration of art is undisputedly derived. . . . But when one hears talk of much later masters and schools, known as the newer Italians, we doubt whether they can even have a place in art history.
>
> (Von dieser neuern Schule der italiänischen Malerei, die durch Raffael, Tizian, Correggio, Julio Romano, Michel Angelo vorzüglich bezeichnet wird . . . ist unstreitig das Verderben der Kunst ursprünglich abzuleiten. . . . Wenn man aber oft noch weit spätere Meister und Schulen als neuere Italiäner anführen hört, so

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recognition that the Louvre of Schlegel's first visits was a completely different museum from the one he visited shortly before his departure from Paris is absent from Matala de Mazza's and Endres' account, who both treat the collecting as conveying a uniform message (resp. 107; 206). Moreover, Matala de Mazza's interpretation is further compromised by her argument that Schlegel took particular issue with the disorderly and incoherent organization of the museum, combining paintings from different formats and styles on one single wall without any narrative informing the organization as a whole (106). Yet directly at the start of his first contribution, Schlegel gives an account of the museum's organization, which rather confirms McClellan's observation that the painting gallery was organized by national schools. In fact, Schlegel even compliments the museum for the arrangement of its paintings, taking only issue with the bad lighting (KA IV 10). Also later, after Vivant-Denon's reorganization, the Louvre was anything but the disorderly chaos that Matala de Mazza takes it to be. McClellan discusses three etchings that the British artists Julius Griffiths and Maria Cosway made of the museum's interior in 1803. Rather than the "violent joining" ["gewaltsame Zusammenführung"; Matala de Mazza 110) of different formats and styles that "filled the walls from top to bottom" (". . . die Wände vom Boden bis zur Decke füllten."; Matala de Mazza 106), these etchings show that the paintings were not only grouped together with a view on their historical connection, but also symmetrically ordered with much consideration for their mutual dynamics. Matala de Mazza's argument that Schlegel's contributions were intended to restore the order and unity of the history of art that the presentation of the Louvre lacked can thus not be sustained.

> zweifeln wir ob diese überhaupt in der Kunstgeschichte eine Stelle einnehmen können.) (KA IV 56)

This process of deterioration culminates for Schlegel in the classical style of French painting that was in vogue when he wrote his contributions. In a letter to his brother August Wilhelm from just after his arrival in Paris, Schlegel referred to the widely celebrated classical painter Jacques-Louis David as "the most gruesome smudger one can imagine." ("der greulichste Schmierer, den man denken kann."; qtd. in Kahn 200). Moreover, taking particular offense with classicism's sculptural approach to painting, he remarks in his third account on painting that this "nonsense" ("Unsinn"; KA IV 76) is most completely realized in the contemporary French school.

The art-historian Till-Holger Borchert has argued that Schlegel's contributions on painting mark the very first occasion in which "art criticism was instrumentalized for ideological purposes" (Borchert, "A Moving Expression" 133). Although we will come to see in the remainder of this study that the situation is more complex than Borchert assumes, there can be no doubt that Schlegel's "Descriptions of Paintings" was from the very start informed by ideological motives. In the first three contributions, these ideological motives manifest themselves most clearly in Schlegel's insistence on the German artistic tradition as an alternative to the French and Italian schools of painting, and the polemical tone that he adopts throughout the text. Nonetheless, these writings fail to make a political contribution that exceeds the level of mere rhetoric, which has everything to do with the fact that Schlegel inscribes his views on painting within his early Romantic theory of art, applying to painting, as Locher explains, essential aspects of the model he earlier developed in his "Dialogue on Poetry" ("Construction des Ganzen" 112). Although there can be no doubt that Schlegel's conception of painting in the first contributions shares many characteristics with his understanding of poetry in this dialogue, the epistemological framework that underlies these texts dates back even further, and can

already be found in his earliest philosophical writings from before 1800. It is in these writings that Schlegel first developed his method of Romantic irony from which the relativism that Locher correctly identified in the first three contributions immediately derives.

In the remainder of this chapter, we will concentrate on the epistemological framework that underlies the first contributions. We will come to see that Schlege's relativism (which, as I maintain, is more aptly termed perspectivism) is a direct result from the method of Romantic irony that he adopts in these writings, which, in turn, is an immediate consequence of Schlegel's metaphysics and his skepticism about any systematic philosophy (or any form of knowledge for that matter) that is based on first principles. Although we will come to see that this perspectivism allows Schlegel to draw attention to the hitherto unrecognized and marginalized qualities of German Renaissance art before the age of Dürer, it likewise prevents him from developing a normative aesthetic framework that is able to overcome the limits of his individual perspective. In other words, it is precisely because of Schlegel's adherence to the method of Romantic irony that the political effect of the first three contributions is naturally compromised by his inability to offer anything more than just another point of view. Even though the contributions written in Paris counter the predominance of French and Italian painting, we will come to see that they lack any pretense to objectivity, thereby leaving room for equally valid contradicting narratives as the one Schlegel found in the Louvre.

iii. Fragment, Allegory, Wit

The first three contributions on painting form an extension of the early Romantic aesthetics that Schlegel developed in his last contributions for *Athenaeum*, and the lecture series on transcendental philosophy that he delivered at the University of Jena in the winter semester of 1800-01. However, when we look at the epistemological framework that underlies these writings, we find that they are

deeply rooted in Schlegel's theory of the fragment and its accompanying method of Romantic irony with which he began to experiment around 1797. Although the first contributions are largely made up by descriptions and analyses of individual artworks, Schlegel often embeds his observations within a larger theoretical framework in which a particular painting (or group of paintings) is set-off against an infinite and unknowable totality. It is this dialectic between the finite and the infinite, the fragment and the whole that underlies almost every aspect of the first contributions, not in the least Schlegel's ambition to develop a historical perspective on painting that not only counters the Louvre's strong emphasis on the French and Italian tradition, but also offers a new fragmentary perspective on painting as an infinite whole.

However, one of the noticeable features of the three contributions is that Schlegel repeatedly undermines his own authority by drawing attention to the limits and partiality of his personal point of view. This tension between self-affirmation and self-negation is an essential feature of Schlegel's method of Romantic irony. Maintaining that the total body of art is irrevocably destroyed, with its limbs now scattered and dispersed, as he vividly evokes in the first contribution (KA IV 12), Schlegel concludes that it would be naive to assume that our knowledge of art could ever be complete and comprehensive. This is to say that Schlegel's method of Romantic irony is informed by the awareness that the infinite is inaccessible in principle, which is why he maintains that every positive statement should include a self-reflective moment in which it draws attention to its own limits. This is exactly what Schlegel is doing in the first three contributions, and explains why his emphasis on the German painterly tradition takes an ironic form, highlighting its own inability to comprehend anything more than a fragment of an infinite whole.

Schlegel's method of Romantic irony finds its roots in his review of Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer's *Philosophisches Journal* (1797), which he himself regarded as his proper philosophical

debut ("Intro to KA VIII" LV). In this review, Schlegel first provided the original formulation of the philosophical presuppositions that underlie the method, first and foremost, his skepticism about any systematic philosophy that is based on first principles. Expressing his doubts whether such a philosophy could ever fulfill its own ambition to arrive at complete and comprehensive knowledge, this review provides the philosophical seeds from which Schlegel's method of Romantic irony takes root, only to be developed further in his contributions to *Athenaeum* in particular. It is in the latter writings that Romantic irony truly comes into its own and finds its characteristic expression in the fragment as literary form. Isolated and self-contained, yet open-ended and resisting systematic closure, the fragment mirrors the dialectical structure between self-affirmation and self-negation, expressing by its very form that knowledge can never be anything other than fragmentary in character.

Although the first contributions are at face value more systematic than the many fragments that made up the bulk of Schlegel's poetic and philosophical reflections up until that point, they nonetheless bespeak the same realization that our own (historically) conditioned nature prevents us to arrive at a universal viewpoint that allows one to make statements about painting as a whole. Moreover, lacking an empirical referent and resisting objectification, Schlegel subscribes in the first contributions to the position that the whole of painting can never positively be captured in and by thought, but can only be approached negatively through a process of infinite approximation (Locher, "Construction des Ganzen" 118). As the whole of painting has thus no independent reality in and of itself, and cannot ontologically be grounded (Brauers 55), Frank has explained that Schlegel's notion of the infinite is best understood as a regulative idea in the Kantian sense (*The Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism* 179). That is to say that the idea of painting in its totality functions for Schlegel as a necessary fiction that is required to create order in what otherwise would be an infinite chaos of

disparate fragments.[44] As such, the idea of an infinite totality is essential to Schlegel's method of Romantic irony. It is here that the idea of totality and fragment come together as the former integrates the latter under a greater whole, which is why Schlegel writes that "irony is the clear consciousness of eternal agility, of an infinitely teeming chaos" (*Lucinde and the Fragments* 247 #69). That is to say that Romantic irony brings order into an ever-changing chaos by putting the infinite and the fragment in a dynamic relationship with one another. It is for this reason that Millán-Zaibert has argued that the method of Romantic irony allowed Schlegel to capture the tension between the finite and the infinite, but without suspending the eternal dialectic between the two (21).

However, since this dialectic cannot be grasped by knowledge or concepts, a different mode of articulation is required in order to capture the relationship between the two (Frischmann, "The Philosophical Relevance of Romantic Irony" 180). This is where the notions of allegory and wit come in as two different modes of expression that capture the relationship between the fragment and the infinite by means of the imagination.[45] Here, allegory is that mode of expression in which the fragment

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[44] That Schlegel regards the infinite as a necessary fiction is further confirmed by his lectures on transcendental philosophy where he asks himself the rhetorical question: "Is the infinite itself then not a fiction? Is it not an error, or a deception, or a misunderstanding? To this we answer as follows: Yes, it is a fiction. But an absolutely necessary fiction. Our selves have the tendency to approach the infinite, and only because of this . . . we can think the infinite." ("[I]st denn das Unendliche nicht selbst eine Erdichtung? Ist es nicht ein Irrthum, oder Täuschung, oder Mißverstand? Hierauf antworten wir so: Ja, es ist Erdichtung. Aber ein schlechthin notwendige Erdichtung. Unser Ich hat die Tendenz, sich dem Unendlichen zu nähern, und dadurch . . . können wir nur das Unendliche Denken."; KA XII 9).

[45] The fact that Schlegel attributes a crucial role to the imagination in his method of Romantic irony is an apt reflection of his broader philosophical commitments. As Brauers explains, Schlegel's philosophical starting point was not merely his skepticism about the Enlightened absolutization of knowledge that he found in Kant, but likewise his dissatisfaction with the other extreme that he found in the work of Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, and in which philosophical systematicity was rejected in favor of a religion that was based on feeling alone. Wanting to avoid both extremes, Schlegel sought to reconnect faith and reason in such a way that human consciousness did not appear to itself as torn between thinking and feeling, but rather was able to conceive of itself as an unbroken individuality. The central role that Schlegel attributes to the imagination in his philosophy reflects his commitment to avoid the dualism between thinking and feeling (54).

rises above itself, transcends its own finitude, and points to the infinite which otherwise necessarily eludes it. Although Schlegel famously maintained that a fragment "has to be entirely isolated from the surrounding world and be complete in itself like a hedgehog" (*Lucinde and the Fragments* 189 #206; translation modified), this emphasis on its self-contained character is only one side of the equation. That is to say that the fragment is not only the opposite of the infinite, but at the same time also its finite manifestation. As the infinite has no independent reality outside of our perspectives on finite things (Stone 20), Schlegel understands allegory as an imaginative mode of expression in which "[t]he semblance of the finite and the allusion to the infinite flow into each other" ("Der Schein d[es] Endlichen und die Anspielung aufs Unendliche fließen in einander."; KA XVIII 416 #1140), leading Frank to conclude that allegory is that mode of expression in which the finite points to the infinite by drawing attention to itself as that which is not actually meant (*The Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism* 209).

Yet the meaning of the fragment is not only determined by its relation to the infinite, but just as much dependent on the context and circumstances in which it functions. In other words, despite the fragment's closed and self-contained character, its meaning is never static or final, but always co-determined by its relationship with other fragments that make up the whole (Nassar 132). Frank thus writes that the spirit of contradictoriness is woven into the fragment, steering "the bonding power of the Absolute from the infinite to the particular, that is, it creates not totality but rather an ensemble . . . of individual positions, each one of which goes against the other." As such, Frank continues, the fragment is a "necessary effect of the detotalization or decomposition of the highest unity, which is no longer a unity of a whole (or a system), but rather only a unity of a single thing and without systematic relationship to other single things" (*The Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism* 211). It is this dynamic by which the infinite goes out of itself, and fractures into a plurality of different

fragments that is captured by wit. Schlegel thus refers to a "combinatorial spirit" ("combinatorischen Geist"; KA XII 102) which allows consciousness to momentarily apprehend the original unity of the infinite in and through the differences between its various parts. This means that wit should not primarily be understood as a form of humor. As Schlegel understands the term, wit is the capacity to articulate connections between disparate parts that does not so much involve the understanding, but which is rather divined from immediate perception in moments of inspiration (Fernow 30). It is for this reason that Schlegel directly aligns wit with the imagination, arguing that "[w]it is the appearance, the outward lightning bolt of the imagination. Hence the divinity and witty appearance of mysticism" (*Lucinde and the Fragments* 242 26). As the last part of this fragment makes clear, wit should therefore be seen as the counterpart of allegory. Whereas the latter alludes to the infinite by pointing to its own finitude, wit instead generates "irrespective of the variety of the material, nevertheless a visible unity . . . in the apparent formless form ("ungeachtet der Verschiedenheit der Materie, dennoch sichtbare Einheit . . . in der scheinbaren formlosen Form."; KA III 81).

iv. The Body of German Art

The notions of allegory and wit are crucial to understand Schlegel's approach to painting in the first three contributions. Whereas we will come to see in the next chapter that allegory plays an essential role in Schlegel's aesthetics, I will focus in this section on the epistemological structure that underlies the first three contributions on painting. More specifically, in order to understand in what way these writings could be seen as an expression of Schlegel's Romantic irony, I will concentrate on how his theory of the fragment and particularly the notion of wit allow him to construct a limited history of German art. Yet, in order to do so, we will first have to define what Schlegel understands

by a fragment, and establish its relationship with the systematicity that any historical reconstruction requires.

Although some of the earlier passages we discussed explicitly identified the fragment with the individual artwork, the concept of the fragment could also be understood in an epistemological sense, in which case it refers to a collection of artworks that together illuminate a part of painting as an infinite whole. Whereas we have seen earlier that the scattering of the total body of art led to a situation that Schlegel identified with the modern condition of fragmentation in which all individual artworks are scattered and dispersed, we also discussed that the same decomposition of an infinite totality was the necessary precondition for wit. In that case, the mutual relationship between the different fragments leads to a momentary regrouping of some of its individual members into a new body of art, which in turn highlights one particular aspect of painting in its totality. As such, wit is the precondition for the construction of a history of art in Schlegel's thinking. Facilitating the transition from the individual artwork to a body of art, wit not only takes the fragment to an epistemological level but, by doing so, also allows one to comprehend particular aspects of painting's history. It is this particular dynamic that Schlegel refers to when he writes at the beginning of the first contribution that "[a]ll artworks of a type belong together, and they themselves mutually explain each other the best. . . . It is for this reason that one has to accept that only a part of the great whole of divine painting can be comprehended." (Alle Kunstwerke einer Gattung gehören zusammen, und sie selber erklären sich gegenseitig am besten. [...] Es muß sich also jeder bescheiden nur einen Teil des großen Ganzen der göttlichen Malerei umfassen zu können.; KA IV 12).

The theory of the fragment provides the epistemological ground from which Schlegel's history of painting derives. In sharp contrast to the linear narrative of progress that he found in the Louvre, Schlegel's history of painting is one of irony and wit, the result of an imaginative "art of combination"

("Kombinationskunst"; KA XVIII 124 #16) that allowed him to construct a body of art out of painting's disparate elements. Although this body of art is limited in scope, one of its essential features is that it refuses to subsume the differences between the individual fragments under a higher principle. As the binding power of wit does not consist in submitting the fragments to an external rule, but rather in grasping their unity in difference, Schlegel's body of art allows the incompatibilities and contradictions between the different artworks to come to the fore. In other words, rather than submitting the individual artworks to an external principle that erases their mutual differences in favor of a higher unity – such as the principle of influence would do, for example, explaining the development from one work to another in purely causal and mechanical terms – Schlegel's approach to painting refuses to surrender difference to identity. It is precisely for this reason that Schlegel repeatedly speaks of a *body* of art, indicating that he understands the relationship between not only the parts themselves, but also between the parts and the whole in organic rather than in mechanical terms. The crucial difference between the two is that a mechanical model is dualistic, requiring an external principle to establish a unity without internal differentiation. Schlegel's organic model, on the other hand, is fully immanent as the body of art is constituted by the relationality of its different members (Nassar 125). Moreover, as an organic body is never static but always involves development and growth, Schlegel maintains that its unity can only be comprehended by a historical method that analyzes the reciprocal relationship between its different parts: "The explanation of an organic product, an organic being has to be HISTORICAL, not mechanical." (Die Erklärung eines organischen Produkts, eines organischen Wesens muß HISTORISCH seyn, nicht mechanisch."; KA XVIII 21 36). This consequently means that when Schlegel refers to the body of art in the first three contributions, he is signaling a corpus of artworks that is inherently historical. Moreover, considering the organic nature of this body, its unity cannot be described as a linear process in which one development

mechanically leads to the next, but can only be expressed through wit as that mode of articulation that contrasts its constitutive parts, and finds precisely in and through their differences one aspect of the unity of the whole reflected.

This approach is perhaps best illustrated at the end of the first contribution on painting where Schlegel constructs an organic body of German art. A passionate admirer of Winckelmann who once proclaimed that he wanted to do for poetry what the German art historian had done for ancient sculpture (KA III 334), Schlegel readily understood that Winckelmann's approach provided him with an important precedent of how to create a unified and self-contained body of art out of the inherited ruins and fragments of the past.[46] In his eulogy for the German art historian, the French critic Quatremère de Quincy had offered an apt summary of Winckelmann's accomplishments that directly spoke to Schlegel's ambitions at this time, calling him the first historian to trace art's stylistic development over time, thereby "creating a body out of what had been only a pile of debris" (qtd. in Didi-Huberman 3). Moreover, Winckelmann's organic conception of history was in large part derived from his extensive observation of ancient artworks, mostly Roman copies of Greek originals, tracing not merely its formal development over time, but also connecting this development to its cultural and climatological causes. Although Schlegel himself hardly showed any interest in the natural and historical conditions of artistic production in the first contributions, nor followed Winckelmann in his stylistic approach to art, the example of the latter is evident from Schlegel's insistence that "the theory of art may never be separated from visual perception" ("die Theorie der Kunst [darf] nie von der

[46] Another, more indirect precedent was provided by Goethe. Referring to the developments in Paris, Goethe called in his introduction to the first edition of his periodical *Propyläen* for the construction of an "ideal body of art" ("idealen Kunstkörper"; Goethe qtd. in Locher 111) out of its available fragments. Locher suggests that Schlegel takes up Goethe's challenge, with which he was no doubt familiar ("Construction des Ganzen" 111–12) .

Anschauung getrennt werden."; KA IV 79), thereby affirming that an organic body of art can only be constructed immanently, and does not allow for the imposition of external criteria.

It is this model that directly underlies Schlegel's approach when he turns to the largely unexplored fragments of German painting, constructing a new body of art that explains its internal development not in causal or mechanistic terms, but rather seeks to comprehend the whole from the observation of the incommensurable differences between its various parts:

> The oldest and first stage of artistic development, which in the German school is indicated by Eyck, is everywhere the most intelligible and clearest; nor is it remarkable when art ends its development with an accuracy and correctness perfected to the point of external smoothness and softness, as in Holbein. In the middle between these two opposite extremes usually dwells the mysterious, the most unfathomable and intricate profundity. This proves itself quite strikingly in Albrecht Dürer.
>
> (Die älteste und erste Stufe der Kunstentwicklung, die in der deutschen Schule durch Eyck bezeichnet wird, ist überall die verständlichste und deutlichste; auch ist es nicht zu wundern, wenn die Kunst ihre Entwicklung mit einer bis zur äußern Glätte und Weichheit vollendet ausgebildeten Genauigkeit und Richtigkeit beschließt, wie im Holbein. In der Mitte zwischen diesen beiden entgegengesetzten Äußersten pflegt das Geheimnisvolle zu wohnen, der unergründlichste und verwickeltste Tiefsinn. Dies bewährt sich recht auffallend an Albrecht Dürer.) (KA IV 45)

What becomes clear from this description is Schlegel's unwillingness to impose an external principle that would subsume the differences between the different artists under a higher unity. Drawing on Winckelmann's example, Schlegel conceives of their development in organic terms in which there is no mechanical cause for their development, but the body of German art develops instead through

reciprocal determination (Nassar 95). This is to say that the development from van Eyck to Dürer and Holbein is completely internal to the system, running from one stage to the next as it subsequently goes through various stages of intelligibility, mysteriousness, and accuracy. Yet, it would be a mistake to assume that the body of German art consists for Schlegel in the art of van Eyck, Dürer, and Holbein alone. It is particularly in the next paragraph that Schlegel points to the art of Memling as he explains that each body of painting consists of major and minor members, thereby drawing on a biological metaphor that directly connects the physical body with the body of art:

> Just as in an organic body there are only a few of the essential limbs that clearly stand out from the whole and construct the whole itself in a definite relationship; yet, in addition to these, an indefinite abundance of just as organic mass and activity is necessarily present, in order to clothe and fill out the body of those first and most essential members; it is the same in art.
>
> (Wie in einem organischen Körper der wesentlichen Gliedmaßen nur wenige sind, die aus dem Ganzen deutlich hervortreten und das Ganze selbst in einem bestimmten Verhältnis konstruieren; außer diesen aber notwendig auch eine unbestimmte Fülle eben so organischer Masse und Tätigkeit vorhanden ist, um den Körper jener ersten und wesentlichsten Glieder zu bekleiden, und ausfüllend zu umgeben; eben so ist es auch in der Kunst.) (KA IV 44).

Apart from offering a clear parallel between the body of art and the biological body that further underscores the organic nature of both, this passage once again illustrates that the meaning of the individual artwork is not dependent on an external principle, nor can it be said to consists solely in itself, but is reciprocally determined in relation to other artworks within the same body. What Schlegel is arguing is that there are no great artists without lesser artists, no great art without weaker art. The greatness of artists as van Eyck and Dürer, in other words, is depended on the work of lesser artists

who are not only essential for providing mass and quantity to the body, but also provide the work from its essential members with the spirit, depth and quality that is commonly associated with great art.

v. Romantic Irony and Polemic

Although Schlegel has sometimes been characterized as an unsystematic thinker, it cannot be denied that his organic approach to art lends a certain systematicity to his thinking.[47] In the often-quoted *Athenaeum* fragment 53, Schlegel famously remarked that "it is equally deadly for the spirit to have a system and not to have one. It must therefore decide to unite them both" (157 #53; translation modified). This is exactly what Schlegel is doing in the first three contributions, constructing a history of painting out of a reconfiguration of its different members, something which he at other occasions referred to as a system of fragments (KA XVIII 100 #187). Part of what makes Schlegel's approach to painting systematic is that it grasps unity in difference. As a system of fragments, Schlegel's body of art cannot be separated from the individual fragments by which it is constituted, nor can it be reduced to any of them (Nassar 134). Yet, in sharp contrast to a system that is based on first principles, his system of fragments does not aim for comprehensiveness or completeness. Maintaining that even the largest system can never be anything more than a fragment of an infinite whole (KA XVI 163),

[47] Until recently, Schlegel's method of Romantic irony was often seen as a precursor of some form of postmodern relativism. This tendency is particularly prevalent in Paul de Man's well-known article "The Rhetoric of Temporality," but in somewhat different ways no less obvious in the Schlegel interpretations of Phillipe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy or Azade Seyhan. However, as we will come to see in this section, Schlegel's irony is much more systematic than is assumed by many of these thinkers. Although Schlegel's thought is relativistic in the sense that he believes that truth is always partial and limited, he is by no means preaching a postmodern "anything goes." In fact, as Beiser explains, Schlegel's Romantic irony is not anti-systematic per se, but rather reflects a "constant striving for a system combined with the self-critical awareness that it is unattainable" (The Romantic Imperative 4).

Schlegel's body of art is open-ended in character, resting content that it can never achieve totality, but is only ever capable of illuminating one particular aspect of it.

It is exactly this acknowledgement of its own fragmentary character that forms the hallmark of Schlegel's method of Romantic irony. Recognizing that his constructed body of German art is only able to comprehend a fraction of painting's history, Schlegel turns relativism into one of the recurring tropes of the first contributions, thereby openly inviting equally valid counter-interpretations that perfect, supplement, or even contradict his own reading of the history of German art. As such, his Romantic irony defies the absolutization of a singular point of view. It not only recognizes that each perspective is dependent on socio-historical conditions, but also acknowledges the infinite number of viewpoints in which the infinite can appear: "If every infinite individual is a God, then there are as many gods as ideals." ("Wenn jedes unendliche Individuum Gott ist, so gibts so viele Götter als Ideale."; KA II 242 #406). Locher therefore rightly argued that the goal and purpose of Schlegel's "Descriptions" does not so much consist in the reproduction of an affirmative norm, but rather in the construction of a body of art that acknowledges its own partiality ("Construction des Ganzen" 112).

This recognition is most poignantly formulated toward the end of the third contribution. Reflecting not merely his skepticism of first principles, but also his insistence that every philosophical (or, for that matter, historical) construction always has to start in the middle (KA XVIII 518), Schlegel writes that

> it is not possible to represent works of art from a fixed point of view, according to a certain peculiar view of art. Such is the basis of all the representations given here; and even if I'm not counting on general approval, I can say that even those who think quite differently will not miss unity and thorough connection in it.

> (. . . es [ist] nicht möglich, Kunstwerke darzustellen, als aus einem festen Standpunkt, nach einer bestimmten eigentümlichen Ansicht der Kunst. Eine solche liegt bei allen hier mitgeteilten Darstellungen durchaus zum Grunde; und wenn ich dabei gar nicht auf allgemeine Beistimmung rechne, so darf ich doch sagen, auch diejenigen, welche ganz anders denken, werden Einheit und durchgängigen Zusammenhang darin nicht vermissen.) (KA IV 70).

In other words, in the absence of any firm basis that allows for definitive statements on painting as a whole, the first three contributions build a body of art that is constantly undermined by Schlegel's direct and indirect allusions to the limits and presuppositions that govern his approach to painting. This is especially obvious in those passages where Schlegel excludes entire schools of painting, for example when he writes that

> I have on the whole only a sense for old painting. This is the only painting that I understand and comprehend, and only of this I can write. I don't want to speak about the French and late Italian schools.[48]
>
> (Ich habe durchaus nur Sinn für die alte Malerei, nur diese verstehe ich und begreife ich, und nur über diese kann ich reden. Von der französischen Schule und von den ganz späten Italiänern will ich nicht sprechen.) (KA IV 13)

Taken from the opening paragraphs of the first contribution, this statement sets the tone for what is to follow in the first three accounts on painting. Mirroring the passage cited earlier in which Schlegel pointed to the mannerisms of the high Renaissance as the onset of painting's decline, and hinted at the exclusion of the later schools of French and Italian painting from the history of art, Schlegel's

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[48] The general idea here is the same as Schlegel earlier formulated in his Dialogue on Poetry, namely that a sick culture is destined to produce inadequate works of art: "We simply must not make exaggerated demands on the people of our times; what has grown in such a sickly environment naturally cannot be anything else but sickly" (Schlegel qtd. in Bernstein 289).

Romantic irony manifests itself most clearly in that he constantly buttresses his theoretical arguments on personal opinion and bias.[49] Yet what is implied by Schlegel's constant stress on his personal point of view is precisely the realization that an absolute perspective on painting as a whole is inaccessible from a human standpoint. That is to say that Schlegel's approach to painting bespeaks his awareness that historical knowledge of art will always be partial and incomplete, infusing the first contributions with an element of relativism that openly reaffirms the inaccessibility of truth and absolute knowledge in the historical study of art, and which makes it all the more important for the historian "to accurately denote . . . his own individual standpoint" ("seinen eignen individuellen Standpunkt . . . recht bestimmt zu bezeichnen"; KA IV 12).

The historical approach to painting that Schlegel adopts in the first three contributions is in line with the views he propounded in his lectures on transcendental philosophy from a few years earlier. One of the most important novelties of these lectures is that Schlegel brings consciousness and the infinite into a direct relationship to one another. Rather than reducing one to the other, Schlegel construes a dynamic and mutually conditioning relationship between them that cannot be cognized, but manifests itself as such in intellectual intuition. As a result, the infinite does for Schlegel not refer to a transcendent reality that exists outside the sphere of consciousness, but can only be intuited or thought in connection with it: "The only object of consciousness is the infinite, and the only predicate of the infinite is consciousness. Both elements form a closed sphere, in the middle of which lies reality." ("Das einzige Objekt des Bewußtseyns ist das Unendliche, und das einzige Prädikat des Unendlichen ist Bewußtseyn. Die beyden Elemente machen eine geschlossene Sphäre, in deren Mitte

[49] Although all of this may seem to suggest that Schlegel's approach to painting is based on personal sentiment alone, we will come to see in the next chapter that he does provide philosophical and theoretical arguments that lend support to his point of view.

Realität liegt."; KA XII 6). Yet the fact that reality is located in the middle of consciousness and the infinite has important consequences for Schlegel's theory of knowledge. It indicates that knowledge does for Schlegel not consist in the correspondence between a subjective representation of the mind and an objective state of affairs, but that he rather sees it as a mode of comprehension that is able to imaginatively grasp the participation of the infinite within the finite. This is indeed confirmed a little further when Schlegel argues that "all knowledge is symbolic" and "all truth is relative" (alle Wissen ist symbolisch," "alle Wahrheit ist relativ; KA XII 9), meaning that knowledge is not so much deductive or demonstrative, but allegorical for him; suggestive and descriptive rather than an actual grasp of things (Frischmann, *Vom transzendentalen zum frühromantischen Idealismus* 341).[50]

The relativity of truth and the symbolic character of knowledge are intrinsically related for Schlegel. In fact, as Frank explains, it is precisely because knowledge is symbolic that truth could not be anything other than relative (*Einführung* 229). As we have seen, it was this insight that directly informed the ironic and relativizing gestures of the first three contributions, but its implications reach even further. The crucial thing to be remarked here is that the allegorical character of knowledge does not merely pertain to its content, but also to its directionality. As Schlegel writes in the conclusion of his lectures on transcendental philosophy: "Much of what is taken for a fact is just a phenomenon, e.g., the whole of history. The historian believes he has established facts when he has finished his investigations. These facts are philosophically only phenomena as they relate to the development of humanity as a whole." ("Vieles ist nur Phänomen, was für Faktum gehalten wird. Z. B. die ganze Geschichte. Der Historiker glaubt Fakta aufgestellt zu haben, wenn er in seinen Untersuchungen zu

[50] As various commentators have indicated, Schlegel still uses the notions of allegory and symbol interchangeably at this stage of his career (see e.g., Brauers 154 and Frischmann, *Vom transzendentalen zum frühromantischen Idealismus* 314).

Ende gekommen ist. Diese Fakta sind philosophisch nur Phänomene; indem sie sich auf die Entwickelung des Menschen beziehen."; KA XII 99) In other words, one of the reasons why the relativity of truth and symbolic quality of knowledge are central to Schlegel's epistemology is not only because they invite contradiction and criticism, but also because they make knowledge dynamic and progressive. This is why Beiser remarks that "[i]f romantic irony is indeed directed against any claim to completion or closure, that is only because its aim is to goad our striving, to intensify our efforts, so that we approach closer to the ideal of a complete system" (*The Romantic Imperative* 34). It is primarily for this reason that polemic plays such a central role in Schlegel's theory of knowledge. It is only by means of polemic that knowledge is able to move forward, and the infinite can be approximated, eventually leading Frank to conclude that

> [w]ithout the tendency towards the absolute, the living spirit could obviously not be "polemical" towards the finite. . . . If there were no orientation towards a non-relative oneness, it would have been impossible for various interpretations that appeared in history to contradict, and therefore annihilate one another.
>
> ([o]hne die Tendenz aufs Absolute könnte er [der lebendige Geist] sich freilich gegens Endliche nicht »polemisch« verhalten. . . . Gäbe es nicht die Orientierung auf ein nichtrelatives Eins, so könnten die verschiedenen in der Geschichte in Erscheinung getretenen Ausdeutungen desselben gar nicht in Widersprüche zueinander geraten und sich also auch nicht vernichten.) (*Einführung* 229)

As Frank's explanation makes clear, the fact that all truth is relative is for Schlegel the necessary precondition for science and philosophy as living disciplines. Moreover, it is polemics and contradiction that keeps these disciplines alive, both of them playing an essential role in the

overcoming of error and furthering the progression of knowledge, which is why Schlegel maintains that truth "is a product of the conflict of error" ("ein Produkt aus dem Konflikt der Täuschung"; KA XII 9). This is not to suggest, however, that Schlegel thinks of knowledge in a linear fashion in which truth is ever more closely approximated. The ideal of truth cannot be contained within a mechanical system of deductive reasoning, but rather organically in a body of thought that encompasses an infinite number of finite perspectives into a living body, explaining why Schlegel turns toward the end of his lectures to the encyclopedia as the ideal model of knowledge (see e.g., KA XII 104-105).

However, until this ideal is realized, which is not possible until the world is completed, and history has ended (KA XII 42), truth can only be pointed at fragmentarily by ever new attempts to illuminate one particular aspect of it. The necessity of polemics consists therefore not only in furthering the growth of knowledge, but also in highlighting that any claim to truth can never be anything more than merely partial: "The necessity of polemic is to be deduced particularly from the fact that one cannot be everything." (Die Nothwendigkeit d[er] Polemik ist wohl besonders daraus zu deduciren, daß Einer nicht Alles sein kann."; KA XVIII 81 #624). It seems to me that these insights inform Schlegel's epistemology in the first contributions on painting. Their polemical tone, combined with Schlegel's ongoing insistence on the limits and partiality of his own perspective, draw attention to the fact that absolute knowledge of painting cannot be attained. However, although the polemical tone of Schlegel's writings thus bespeaks his philosophical realization that truth is relative, this does not necessarily imply, as Brauers claims, that truth and falsehood is therefore undecidable (60). On the contrary, Schlegel also conceives of polemics as the rhetorical mode that is best capable of annihilating error while acknowledging its own limitations:

> Polemics can only sharpen the mind and should wipe out unreasonableness. It is thoroughly philosophical; religious anger and fury at limitation loses its

> dignity when it appears as a polemic, directed in a definite direction at a single object and purpose.
>
> (Die Polemik kann nur den Verstand schärfen, und soll die Unvernunft vertilgen. Sie ist durchaus philosophisch; der religiöse Zorn und Ingrimm über die Beschränkung verliert seine Würde, wenn er als Polemik erscheint, in bestimmter Richtung auf einen einzelnen Gegenstand und Zweck.) (KA II 265 #93)

This is precisely Schlegel's attitude toward the Louvre in the first three contributions. The polemical tone of these contributions is most prominent when he directly engages with the museum's celebration of the latest French and Italian schools, concentrating particularly on their classicism and adherence to an ancient ideal. To be sure, for Schlegel this rejection of classicism was not a matter of mere subjective taste alone. The prime reason why he saves his polemic for these schools of painting is that he indeed sees in them a manifestation of the unreasonableness that his polemic was supposed to combat. Charging their classicism for offering a false perspective on the infinite and misconstruing the ideal, Schlegel saves his harshest criticism and fiercest polemic for especially these traditional schools of painting. Explicitly commenting on the "nonsense" ("Unsinn"; KA IV 78) of contemporary French painting, accusing the late Italian schools for "the ruination of art" ("das Verderben der Kunst"; KA IV 56), his categorial refusal to consider French painting and hesitation whether late Italian art deserves a place in the history of art; they all evidently show that polemic forms an essential part of Schlegel's argument. Although there are obvious political implications here, it has to be admitted that Schlegel does not only charge the French and Italian schools here, but the whole dominant aesthetic of the time, which found its foremost German representatives in Winckelmann, Mengs, and Goethe. Although Mengs is the only one of them who is briefly mentioned in the text (KA IV 75), it is especially Schlegel's engagement with Winckelmann's classicism that plays an important role in the

background, and which is therefore indispensable to understand the theoretical underpinnings of his polemic against the French and late Italian schools of painting.

vi. The Empty Ideal of Classicism

One of the continuities between the first three and the last two contributions is that all of these writings share a strong criticism on the neoclassicistic style of painting that takes ancient art as its model. In fact, when Schlegel turns against recent French and Italian schools in the contributions, he is not merely arguing against the excesses and mannerisms of the Baroque (see e.g., KA IV 134), but especially pointing at the conflation between ancient sculpture and modern painting that he sees most fully realized in the work of the French painters of his day (KA IV 78). Yet, this criticism on recent French and Italian schools of painting participates in his more extensive diatribes against classicism and neoclassicism in the arts. In fact, when we consider the "Descriptions" as a whole, including the later ones, one easily recognizes that the opposition between the ancient and the modern epoch forms one of the leitmotifs that recurs throughout his contributions. It is therefore perhaps not surprising that various commentators have argued that Schlegel's reflections on art, literature, and history are written against the background of the famous quarrel between the ancients and the moderns that dominated aesthetic and artistic debates in 17th century France.[51] Indeed, his insistence that the ancient and modern era are irreconcilable in principle is so foundational for Schlegel that it not only informs his own conception of modern, and later Christian painting, but also his criticism on the classicism of the French and Italian schools of painting that were predominant in the Louvre. Although one could thus argue that Schlegel's rejection of especially French classicism is consistent with his political leanings

[51] This is one of the recurring motives in Ernst Behler's book on irony, but one also finds the same insistence in Behrens (37–38).

around this time (see e.g., Oesterle 166), one should add that it is no less compatible with the historical framework that guided his reflections on ancient mythology and poetry ever since the publication of his youthful essay *On the Study of Greek Poetry* in 1797. Considering the importance that the distinction between the ancients and the moderns had for Schlegel, and the fact that the development of Schlegel's own conception of painting only gains relief against the background of his views on ancient art, I will first turn to Schlegel's relationship to Winckelmann, and show how his rejection of the latter's classicism provides the basis for his own conception of painting, both in the first as in the latter contributions.

More than anyone else, it was Winckelmann who provided the intellectual framework in which the quarrel between the ancients and the moderns would come to be received in Germany during the second half of the 18th century (Nivala 156). Considering Schlegel's admiration for Winckelmann, and the close parallels in their approach to art, it is not remarkable that several scholars have argued that the "Descriptions" are to a large extent indebted to the latter.[52] Although there can be no doubt that Schlegel was indeed deeply impressed by Winckelmann's work, what often gets lost is that the same contributions also offer a tacit criticism on the German art historian. In fact, it stands to reason that precisely his theoretical departure from Winckelmann provided him with the ammunition for his polemical attack on the Louvre's emphasis on the French and Italian schools of painting.

To understand how and why this is the case, one has to start from what was perhaps Winckelmann's most lasting influence on Schlegel's thinking. As Schlegel's notes from 1797

[52] Behler is among the most prominent one, but one finds the same stress Locher and Eichner as well, see resp. Behler, "Intro to KA XX-XXI" XVI, Eichner XXXVIII, and Locher 104.

demonstrate, what he appreciated most of all was that Winckelmann was the first to draw an absolute distinction between the ancient and the modern epoch:

> The distinction between the classical and progressive [moderns] is of historical origin. It is for this reason that it escapes most philologists. With Winckelmann starts also in this regard a completely new epoch. My master. He perceived the immeasurable difference, the completely unique nature of antiquity. In fact, he remained without a successor.
>
> (Der Unterschied des Klassischen und Progressiven ist historischen Ursprungs. Darum fehlt er den meisten Philologen. Mit Winkelmann [sic] fängt auch in dieser Rücksicht eine ganz neue Epoche an. Mein Meister. Er hat den unermeßlichen Unterschied eingesehn, die ganz eigne Natur des Alterthums. Er ist eigentlich ohne Nachfolger geblieben.) (KA XVI 35.)

It was exactly this insight that was Winckelmann's most important contribution to the quarrel between the ancients and the moderns. As Beiser explains, the novelty of Winckelmann's contribution was that he turned the moderns against themselves by adopting their recent scientific methods to demonstrate the superiority of the ancient art. It was above all the historical approach developed by Montesquieu that allowed Winckelmann to draw a fundamental distinction between the ancient and the modern period, eventually arguing that classical art was, in Beiser's words, "the product of a completely uninhibited and fully developed human nature, one that has not been since so free or completely realized" (*Diotima's Children* 177). Perhaps not surprisingly, exactly the same point would prove to be decisive for Schlegel as well. What he took from Winckelmann was primarily the realization that the ancient and the modern periods were fundamentally incompatible with one another. However, not remaining content with only drawing a distinction between the two epochs, Schlegel further developed Winckelmann's insights into a philosophy of history that reconfigured the relationship between the

ancients and the moderns in a radically novel way. Seeing in the ancient and the modern epochs two conflicting historical laws at work – of natural and artificial cultivation, respectively – a significant part of his philosophical output around 1800 is dedicated to the attempt to unite these opposing laws under a common principle such that it would resolve the tensions of the French quarrel (Nivala 156–58).

Although Schlegel's early Romantic writings are therefore consistent with Winckelmann's fundamental insights, in the "Descriptions of Paintings" Schlegel departs significantly from his "master." What he takes issue with is first and foremost Winckelmann's suggestion that only the imitation of ancient models can help the visual arts out of their current impasse: "[T]he only way for us to become great, and, if indeed it is possible, inimitable, is through the imitation of the ancients" (Winckelmann qtd. in Baur 57). This suggestion was something that Schlegel could not agree with. Dissatisfied with Winckelmann's endorsement of a classicism that took ancient art as its model, Schlegel turns Winckelmann against himself, arguing that the incompatible nature of the ancients and the Greeks immediately precluded whatever it was that was to be gained from such an imitation (Nivala 158). To be sure, Schlegel was well aware that Winckelmann was not simply alluding to a literal copying of ancient culture. When Winckelmann spoke of imitation, he rather referred to the emulation of the ancient principle of idealization, hoping that such an approach would not merely refine people's judgment, but thereby contribute to the cultivation ("Bildung") of mankind as well (Baur 58, 62). For Schlegel, on the other hand, the imitation of the ancients was what needed to be prevented. In fact, the contributions on painting leave no doubt that he regarded the imitation of the ancients, both literally as in its underlying principle of idealization, as one of the main causes of art's degeneration in recent centuries. More precisely, Schlegel maintained that the imitation of ancient art only fostered a confused

naturalism that not merely stripped meaning from form, but precisely for this reason also promoted an aesthetic cult of beauty that did not look any further than the work's sensuous appearance alone.

Considering Schlegel's strong objections to the imitation of classical models, it should come as no surprise that the *Descriptions* offer not only a rebuttal of Winckelmann, but have likewise been understood as a response to Goethe (Osterkamp 237; Eichner xxvii). In the highly influential periodical *Propyläen*, Goethe had shortly before put Winckelmann's recommendation at the center of his artistic program, urging the German artist to deviate from the example of the classics as little as possible (39). No less than Schlegel, Goethe turned to Winckelmann as the "patron saint" who guided his reflections on the visual arts, finding in the latter's call for the imitation of ancient sources an important model for his own support of neoclassicism, which in turn had to protect the arts from what he regarded as the corruptive impact of the Romantics (Beiser, *Diotima's Children* 160). Schlegel, for his part, could not follow Goethe on this score. In fact, by giving his objections to the imitation of classical sources such a prominent place in his writings, Schlegel was not merely offering a tacit critique on Winckelmann's classicism, but presented himself equally as Goethe's most prominent antagonist in the field of art theory (Eichner xxvii).

In order to understand Schlegel's criticism of Winckelmann and Goethe, and to see why he so strongly associates classicism and naturalism, it is best to start with his early reflections on Greek mythology. In his youthful study on Greek poetry, Schlegel directly followed Winckelmann by drawing a sharp distinction between the ancients and the moderns, arguing that the poetry of the Greeks was in contrast to its modern equivalent not a "spontaneous product of the mind but, rather, a felicitous product of a formative nature" (Schlegel, *On the Study of Greek Poetry* 51). As becomes clear from this early passage, Schlegel expands on Winckelmann's original insight by understanding the dichotomy between the ancients and the moderns not in cultural or climatological, but in philosophical

terms. This view that the mythology of the Greeks should be seen as a direct product of nature would become one of the cornerstones of Schlegel's thinking, figuring prominently, among other places, in the fourth contribution where he emphasizes mythology's sensuous and naturalistic character: "The mythology, indeed the religion of the ancients, was entirely sensuous and material; enthusiastic, intoxicated adoration of the infinite vitality and bounty of nature." ("Die Mythologie, ja die Religion der Alten war nun einmal durchaus sinnlich und materiell; begeisterte, trunkene Anbetung der unendlichen Lebenskraft und Naturfülle."; KA IV 111). The reason why Schlegel included this passage in his reflections on painting is because he maintained that the connection between mythology and nature had important ramifications for the arts. In fact, the reason why the visual culture of the Greeks tended so strongly toward sculpture had for Schlegel everything to do with the sensuous and materialistic character of their religion. Regarding sculpture and mythology as natural counterparts, Schlegel explains that the medium of sculpture offered the ancient artist the most adequate means to visually express the vitality and productivity of nature that lay at the heart of Greek mythology.

In his contemporaneous essay "Lessing's Thoughts and Opinions" from 1804, which accompanied his edited volume of Lessing's collected works, Schlegel stresses precisely this point, closely aligning ancient sculpture and naturalism, and thereby countering Lessing's low opinion of the medium:

> [B]ecause the material of sculpture is so heavy and lifeless, its object is life and life alone. This is how we see it done in antiquity; the highest force, and the most thoroughly executed and completed formation of living nature in all its stages of its organic development.
>
> ([W]eil der Stoff der Plastik so schwer und leblos ist, sei ihr Gegenstand des Leben, und nur das Leben allein. So sehen wir es in der Antike ausgeführt; die höchste Kraft und die durchgearbeitetste, vollendeste Ausbildung der

> lebendigen Natur in allen Stufen ihrer organischen Entwicklung klar enthüllt.) (KA III 76)

Although Schlegel is less explicit in the *Descriptions of Paintings*, the close association between nature, mythology, and sculpture is at the least implied or alluded to at various places. In the second contribution, for example, Schlegel laments the fact that contemporary painting, especially that of the Italians, often draws on mythological scenes, only to add that mythology's emphasis on the productivity of nature "corresponds so completely with sculpture that it can hardly be expressed by painting" ("so ganz mit der Plastik übereinstimmt, daß er in der Malerei durchaus nicht ausgedrückt werden kann"; KA IV 58). Yet even in the last two contributions, at the moment when Schlegel is primarily occupied with defending a conception of Christian painting, and when the ancients therefore ceased to carry any authority for him, his criticism on the excesses of high Renaissance art remains essentially unaltered. Challenging painters such as Sebastiano del Piombo, Michelangelo, and Rubens for their overtly sculptural approach to particularly Christian subjects, he criticizes them for their failure to realize that painting and sculpture are fundamentally different media, arguing that this conflation steered them in the direction of a naturalism that is not merely foreign to the medium of painting proper, but therefore also bespeaks a religious outlook that is ultimately more mythological than Christian in essence (see resp. KA IV 90-91, 109, 134).

Although this contrast between the Greek and Christian religion will become a prominent theme only in the last two contributions, Schlegel's criticism of not only Winckelmann and Goethe, but also of the recent French and Italian schools of painting follows basically along the same lines. In the first three contributions on painting, the problem is not that the mythology of the Greeks is irreconcilable with Christianity, but Schlegel rather follows his early work on Greek poetry in defining the difference between the ancients and the moderns in terms of the opposing historical laws of natural

and artificial cultivation. Simply put, the key difference between the two is that the natural cultivation of the ancients is characterized by a harmony between man and nature, whereas this harmony is disrupted in the artificial cultivation of the moderns. That is to say that man now no longer finds himself aligned with nature, but had become with the rise of modernity aware of himself as a free subject that is to a large extent independent from nature, thereby directly impacting the essential features of modern art and poetry (*On the Study of Greek Poetry* 25–26). Thus, whereas Schlegel argued that Greek art was an expression of nature's own creative and formative powers, and therefore followed in its development an unconscious logic of organic growth not dissimilar from the way Winckelmann had described it earlier (*On the Study of Greek Poetry* 66), the art of the moderns necessarily has to stem from the subjectivity of the artist, meaning that not nature but freedom is its most essential characteristic (*On the Study of Greek Poetry* 38). As Barnett summarizes: "Modernity was conditioned by an utterly unique set of circumstances; it could not simply imitate nature because it had entered the philosophically inaugurated era of self-reflexivity. Moreover, these traits are not to be wished away; they comprise the very task of modernity – to account for the self-reflexivity of consciousness" (5).

The problem that Schlegel therefore recognized in Winckelmann and Goethe's support of neoclassical painting was that it insufficiently accounted for the incompatible nature of Greek and modern art. Whereas Winckelmann's work was paradigmatic in offering a historical account that revealed the organic development of Greek art, Schlegel maintained that his insistence on the exemplarity of the Greeks undermined their historicity, imbuing ancient sculpture with a transhistorical element that justified its ongoing relevance in the present. Schlegel, for his part, pointed in his study on Greek poetry particularly to the changed relationship between actuality and ideality that the modern age had brought about, thereby immediately discarding the exemplary character of

Greek art as something that is worthy of imitation (*On the Study of Greek Poetry* 48–51). As Bernstein summarizes Schlegel's position on these matters: "In the Greek world, ideal and actual are joined. In the modern world, in light of the emergence of subjectivity and the experience of freedom as belonging to the individual, as its essence, the ideal is removed from the domain of empirical actuality" (xxvii). The conclusion that Schlegel drew from this was that it would be preposterous to expect that Greek art could ever mean the same thing for us as it did for the ancients. The fact that Schlegel regarded Greek sculpture as the integral expression of a purely naturalistic religion which could no longer be attained, consequently meant that the modern imitation of the ancients could only recuperate classical art by distorting its original meaning.[53] In other words, making their reappearance in world that was fundamentally at odds with the environment that originally gave them life, classical art could now only appear as the mute object of aesthetic contemplation. From this, Schlegel eventually concluded that the imitation of ancient sources that was promulgated by Winckelmann and Goethe, and which had been common practice among artists since the Renaissance, only fostered a lifeless aestheticism that not merely mistook form for meaning, but precisely for this reason only further separated art from the realm of lived experience.

The way in which Winckelmann and Goethe tried to circumvent this issue was by the assumption that beauty was meaningful in itself. For them, it was the process of idealization which allowed the Greek artist to overcome nature, and on which the contemporary relevance of ancient art was founded (Osterkamp 14–15). For Schlegel, on the other hand, such a take on beauty was utterly

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[53] Here, the argument is not that the incompatible nature between the ancient and modern epoch had made the imitation of classical art pointless, as both Barnett (13) and Nivala (158) suggest. If it is true that Schlegel regarded the imitation of ancient art simply pointless, it is difficult to account for the many scattered remarks in both his early and later works in which he confronts the practice of imitation in the harshest terms. The problem with imitation was not merely that it rested on a failure to recognize the historicity of Greek art, but also threatened the integrity of modern art by promoting a false idea of how the ideality of art could be achieved.

problematic as it crucially misconceived what the process of idealization entailed for the Greeks. What distinguished the ancient from the modern era was precisely the fact that the ideal and the real could not strictly be separated. The idealization of the Greeks was, in other words, not so much the product of the artistic imagination per se, but rather an expression of nature's own potency as it was mediated through the artist (Barnett 12). This is exactly what Schlegel means when he describes idealization as the depiction of nature's highest potency in the fourth contribution, identifying the ideal with "the supreme moment and summit of all formations and all life" ("der höchste Augenblick und Gipfel aller Gebilde und alles Lebens") (KA IV 111). The problem Schlegel found with the classicism of Winckelmann and Goethe was accordingly that it basically turned this whole argument on its head. As modern art no longer found its roots in the naturalistic religion of the Greeks but in the isolated subjectivity of the artists, the imitation of Greek art could paradoxically only lead to an idealized naturalism that was devoid of nature's own potency. To be sure, Schlegel is by no means suggesting that painting is unable to represent this potency in visual form. In fact, his extensive discussion of Sebastiano del Piombo's *Martyrdom of Saint Agatha* in the fourth contribution, which is among the longest of all the contributions, stresses precisely this aspect, comparing the painting to Greek tragedy for directly marrying the depiction of the martyr's suffering with the ancient ideas of fate and nature (KA IV 90). Instead, the crux of Schlegel's argument is that these representations of nature's potency can now merely be perceived aesthetically, thereby only underscoring the fundamental difference between the ancients and the moderns rather than bridging it.

Schlegel's critique of Winckelmann and Goethe was therefore that they took insufficient heed of the separation between ancient and modern art that their own theories advanced. Rather than looking for an alternative way to bridge the divide, their aesthetic theories stopped short at the sensuous forms by which these representations of nature's formative power were contained. It is in this context that

Schlegel ultimately refers to beauty as one of the false principles of modern art and aesthetics alike; that is, as an "empty and cold ideal" ("leere kalte Ideal"; KA IV 134) that manifests itself not only in the practical imitation of classical models, but also in the theoretical idea that the artwork can be reduced to its formal properties alone (KA IV 134-135). In other words, precisely because the ideality of beauty was not premised on the integration, but on the exclusion of nature from painting's ideal realm, an aesthetic approach to art, with which his writings are sometimes falsely identified (Rigby 105), could for Schlegel only end up in the "most superficial ideality" ("oberflächlichsten Idealität"; KA IV 58), which was tantamount to the integral function that Schlegel envisioned for the arts.

vii. Conclusion

Although Schlegel's departure from Winckelmann and Goethe's classicism is at face value nothing but a philosophical argument about the relationship between antiquity and modernity, and its implications for the arts, it also provides the theoretical foundation on which his polemic against the exhibition policy of the Louvre, and the recent French and Italian schools of painting more generally is based. This particular circumstance, which remains concealed in the first contributions themselves, immediately raises the stakes of Schlegel's theoretical rejection of classicism to a higher power, marking the turning point where philosophical argument gives way to polemic and political provocation. Although it is true that Schlegel himself attributed an important role to polemic as an indispensable strategy in his quest for an unattainable truth, the fact that he turned his rejection of classicism into the driving force of his polemic against particularly the French artistic tradition also reveals the iconoclastic, and therefore ideological tendencies of his own thinking. Stated in the most blatant terms, his polemic ultimately boils down to the accusation that the French worship a false God, meaning that all their artistic and aesthetic practices have to be extinguished ("vertilgen"; KA II 265

#93), so that the infinite in Schlegel's own sense can shine ever more brightly. What else does the empty and cold ideal of classicism, its adherence to the most superficial of idealities signify other than the incapability to distinguish idol from God?

That said, the absolutism with which Schlegel polemically rejects the classicism of the French and Italian schools in the first contributions stands in sharp contrast with the relativism that he preaches in other parts of these writings. One of the major problems with Schlegel's method of Romantic irony is that it immediately undermines the political message of the text, turning philosophical polemic into mere subjective rhetoric. It is perhaps for this reason that Schlegel's method of Romantic irony has long been associated with subjectivism, starting with Hegel who criticized Schlegel especially on these grounds:

> This form, Romantic irony, had its main proponent in Friedrich von Schlegel. The subject knows itself as the absolute, everything else is vain; it knows how to destroy all determinations again that it makes for itself about what is right and good. It can delude itself about anything, but it is only vain, hypocrisy and impertinence. Irony knows its mastery over all this, it is not serious about anything, it is a play with all forms.
>
> (Diese Form, die *Ironie*, hat zum Anführer *Friedrich von Schlegel*. Das Subjekt weiß sich in sich als das Absolute, alles andere ist eitel; alle Bestimmungen, die es sich selbst vom Rechten, Guten macht, weiß es auch wieder zu zerstören. Alles kann es sich vormachen, es ist aber nur Eitles, Heuchelei und Frechheit. Die Ironie weiß ihre Meiserschaft über alles dieses, es ist ihr ernst mit nichts, es ist Spiel mit allen Formen.) (416).

The question whether Hegel's critique on Schlegel is justified or not does not have to concern us here.[54] What is more important for our purposes is that Hegel's charge of subjectivism will continue to haunt Schlegel's reputation for decades and centuries to come. For example, a critique of irony informs Schmitt's charge of Schlegel's subjective occasionalism and his political futility, identifying irony not merely with the subjective unwillingness to take political responsibility (*Political Romanticism* 56), but also arguing that irony offered the Romantic subject the perfect instrument to keep objective reality at bay (*Political Romanticism* 73). And when Belting charges Romanticism for its absolutization of the idea at the expense of the objectivity of the artwork, he explicitly points to a subjectivism that, as we have seen in the last two chapters, can be traced back to the same metaphysical presuppositions that informed Schlegel's adoption of irony as philosophical method.[55]

As we will come to see in the next chapter, it is especially Schlegel's call for a new mythology that, at least at face value, seems to inaugurate a move beyond the individual subject in two important respects. First of all, Schlegel conceives his new mythology as a universal form of art that transcends the limits of the individual point of view and integrates the manifold of perspectives under a greater whole. Secondly, the way in which Schlegel aims to achieve this is by merging the appearances of art and nature. That is to say that the infinite manifests itself no longer only fragmentarily in art, but also in the appearance of nature. This turn to nature marks an important turning point in Schlegel's philosophical reflections. As we will come to see in the next chapter, it is around 1800 that Schlegel

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[54] For a detailed discussion of this question, see particularly Fred Rush's book on the topic. Although Rush maintains that Hegel's criticism superficially appears as "diffuse and ad hoc, a mixture of personal animus and an overtly simplistic form of the charge that irony cannot constitute a form of critique because it is self-stultifying" (156), he also maintains that on a more sophisticated level their conflict boils down to a philosophical dispute over the nature of dialectical reasoning.

[55] See the introduction, and chapter 2 for more detail on Belting's criticism of Romanticism.

begins to understand art and nature as parallel manifestations of the infinite and comes to the conclusion that their symbolic character also provides the immediate occasion for a politicization of art in which the subjectivism of the earlier perspectivism is transformed into a new mythology that is expected to overcome the current state of modern fragmentation, and establish a new community in which the individual differences between people are reconciled on a higher level.

CHAPTER TWO

Painting as Myth:

The Ontology of Art in the First Three Contributions on Painting

i. Introduction

Although the previous chapter may have given the impression that Schlegel closed the door on classicism once and for all, his criticism on Winckelmann and Goethe tells only half of the story. It would not be until the winter 1803-04 before Schlegel would definitively come to dethrone ancient art and mythology in his lectures on European literature; the timing of which is important as this is exactly the period separating Schlegel's completion of the third contribution from the moment when he started to write the fourth. However, when Schlegel wrote the first three contributions that we will continue to discuss in this chapter, there was yet no indication of such a break. Quite the opposite. Although Schlegel insists on an absolute rupture separating ancient and modern art, I will argue that the first contributions on painting are nonetheless partly informed by the ambition to bridge the gap between the two. In this respect, these writings could be seen as an extension of Schlegel's earlier "Dialogue on Poetry," to which the contributions are indeed largely indebted.

At the same time, however, I will concentrate on the curious role that the philosophy of Kant plays in Schlegel's attempts to reconfigure traditional classicism. More precisely, my aim in this chapter is to demonstrate that the reconfigured classicism in which Schlegel's views on painting participate is not only founded on a rejection of Kantian aesthetics, but also marks in its own peculiar way a continuation of it. Although Schlegel was firm in his rejection of the formalist elements of Kant's third *Critique*, he also discovered in Kant's theory of artistic genius and the latter's concept of

the aesthetic idea fruitful ground to develop a theory of art that was able to reintegrate nature and consciousness under an all-embracing principle. Much of this chapter will therefore be engaged with the relationship between Kant and Schlegel, and how this relationship has been understood in the scholarly literature on German Romanticism. In contrast to Frank and Beiser, I will maintain that Schlegel grounds art neither in consciousness nor nature, as both respectively maintain, but rather within an absolute creative force that underlies both natural as cultural production. This argument will provide the basis for the second part of this question where I directly confront its implications for Schlegel's theory of art. Concentrating specifically on the last part of the third account on painting where Schlegel lays out the theoretical framework that underlies the first contributions as a whole, I will make two important points that not merely situate Schlegel's theory of painting within a broader context, but also direct attention to those views which he will radically break with his iconic turn in the last two contributions on painting.

First, I will argue that Schlegel's theory of painting leads to a complete disregard of not only painting's history, but also of the material and physical properties of the artwork. Especially with respect to its idealistic premises and his predilection of spirit over matter, I will argue that the first contributions provide a philosophical legitimation of the Modernist artwork as it has been theorized by Belting, thereby providing an indispensable document within the history of modern art. However, and this brings me to the second point, I will also maintain that all of this is grounded in Schlegel's reconfiguration of classicism. Schlegel fiercely rejects the classicism of Winckelmann and Goethe in the first three contributions on painting. I will argue that the distinction between the classical and the modern artwork in Schlegel's theory of art is ultimately a matter of kind and not of quality.

This will finally bring me to the conclusion where I will speak about the political implications of Schlegel's theory of art. I will maintain that the conception of painting that Schlegel develops in the

first contributions suffers from the same problem as the Modernist artwork more generally. In sharp contrast to the iconic conception of painting that Schlegel will come to develop in the last two contributions on painting, I maintain that his insistence on art's autonomy and disregard for the work's material properties in the earlier contributions also make the artwork politically superfluous, a problem that will continue to haunt much of 19th and 20th century art in Schlegel's wake.

ii. Moving Beyond Kantian Aesthetics

Because of his strong emphasis on the limits of classicism and his attempt to steer painting away from its traditional occupation with beauty,[56] it is perhaps not remarkable that some scholars have seen in Schlegel's writings on art and poetry the philosophical groundwork for artistic modernism.[57] Although there is some truth to these claims, they also tend to obscure the extent to which Schlegel's views on art remain at least partly indebted to the aesthetic tradition that he inherited. This is especially the case for his relationship with Immanuel Kant, whose *Critique of the Power of Judgment* from 1790 provided the framework within which the philosophical discussion of art came to be understood by the early Romantics, Schlegel among them (see e.g., Beiser, *The Romantic*

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[56] As he closes his extensive discussion of Correggio in the first contribution, Schlegel writes that he by no means considers the art of the Italian painter exemplary, but that he aimed to show that the old painters had a more comprehensive understanding of their work than the shallow categories of the beautiful, the ideal, and antiquity in recent art-theoretical discourse allow us to see (KA IV 30).

[57] This point is made explicitly by Behler in *Irony and the Discourse of Modernity* 60. Ostermann argues that Schlegel's fragmentary conception of art lies at the root of the Modernist dissolution of form in 19th and 20th-century art (189–90). The connection between Schlegel's work and Modernism is at the very least implied by Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, Schaeffer, Benjamin, Belting.

Imperative 78–79, Bowie 50, Frank, *Einführung* 137–38, Schaeffer 49).[58] Even though later critics and theorists such as Clement Greenberg and, more recently, Thierry De Duve have extensively drawn on Kant in their defense of aesthetic modernism,[59] their somewhat idiosyncratic readings of the third *Critique* tend to conceal that some aspects of Kant's aesthetics do not so much mark a departure from tradition, but rather remain faithful to the theories of art that he inherited, Winckelmann's and Goethe's among them. This is by no means to deny the innovative character of the third *Critique*, nor is it to overlook Kant's importance in raising the philosophical status of art and aesthetics by turning his reflections on art and beauty at the center of his system. It is instead to acknowledge that Kant, especially in his concern for formal beauty, was not primarily preoccupied with establishing a new, but instead with legitimating an old and already existing artistic tradition.

This was at least how Kant was initially understood by the young Schlegel. When Schlegel first turned to Kant's aesthetics in his early study of Greek poetry, he not only stripped the aesthetic experience from its universal pretensions but also historicized those aspects of the third *Critique* that most obviously facilitated a formal understanding of art. This becomes particularly clear from Schlegel's response to Kant's stress on the disinterested character of the aesthetic experience. Whereas Kant made disinterested pleasure the distinctive feature of the judgment of taste in general, Schlegel turns it instead into the guiding aesthetic principle of the Greeks alone (Leventhal 263). Something similar is the case with Kant's insistence on the free play of the faculties from which the feeling of disinterested pleasure derives. In Kant's reading, the experience of beauty gives rise to a free play

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[58] For a rejection of Kant's influence on the Romantic philosophy of art, see especially Behler's review of Manfred Frank's *Einführung*. Moreover, to point to the importance of Kant is not to deny the influence of others, most notably Goethe and Fichte. For a defense that not Kant, but Goethe was the most formative influence on Schlegel's views on art, see particularly Förster.

[59] See particularly Greenberg's short essay "Modernist Painting," and de Duve's *Kant after Duchamp*.

between the understanding and the imagination. Whereas the understanding commonly subsumes the manifold of experience under a determinative concept, one of the distinctive features of the aesthetic experience is that such a synthesis is impossible. For Kant, in other words, the aesthetic experience cannot be subsumed under a concept or idea, but pertains to sense impression alone. On Schlegel's reading, on the other hand, all of this was true for the Greeks, but could not be projected unproblematically onto the moderns. He makes clear that the modern age requires an art that is not merely sensuously pleasing, but which is to some extent conceptual as well: "Only in the case of the Greeks was art . . . free from the constraints of necessity and the rule of the understanding. . . . For all barbarians [moderns], however, beauty in itself is not good enough. Lacking a sense for the unconditioned purposefulness of its purposeless play, they required assistance and advice from outside sources" (*On the Study of Greek Poetry* 48).

This passage offers a different perspective on Schlegel's theoretical leanings. It not only confirms that Schlegel regarded sensuous beauty as an insufficient condition for modern art, but also throws an interesting light on how he understood the relationship between Winckelmann (and Goethe), on the one hand, and Kant, on the other. Although Schlegel's engagement with Kant in his study of Greek poetry predates his rejection of classicism in the "Descriptions" by almost a decade,[60] his criticism of them is remarkably similar. What Schlegel holds against Winckelmann, Goethe, and Kant is that they – despite their universal pretensions – subscribe to an aesthetics that may have befitted the

[60] This is not to deny that Schlegel's criticism on the imitation of classical sources in the *Descriptions* was already adumbrated in his early study on Greek poetry, e.g., when he wrote that "'It is true,' one could think: 'an ancient tradition states, and constantly repeats, that the imitation of the Greeks is the only way to reestablish a genuine, beautiful poetry.' Extensive experience has refuted this through the most diverse, yet entirely unsuccessful, attempts. . . . Precisely those modern poems that contrast most decisively with the Greek manner are still alive, animate and thriving with the vigor of youth; they are full of genial originality-despite all their eccentric errors" (*On the Study of Greek Poetry* 77).

ancients but fails to come to terms with the artistic and philosophical demands of the present. For Schlegel, on the other hand, Greek art is an empty form that has outlived its spirit (KA II 58). This is to say that Greek and modern art are fundamentally incompatible for him, meaning that each artwork, and every form of art theory and criticism should correspond to the philosophical and spiritual conditions of the present, which is exactly the reason why he finds classicism and formalism lacking. Where classicism and formalism converge for Schlegel is that they both subscribe to an aesthetic that only recognizes sensuous beauty in art (e.g., KA IV 58, 115, 135). Even though Kant's third *Critique* seems at some points adverse to the ancient standards of beauty (e.g., 119 5:235), Schlegel implies that its spirit is nonetheless classical. Since Kant's aesthetics is, at face value, unable to move beyond sensuous beauty, Schlegel maintains that his formalization of the aesthetic experience speaks to the ancient conception of art and beauty, but misconceives the metaphysical conditions and demands of the present, promoting a lifeless art that purely consists of empty forms devoid of spirit.

Part of Schlegel's aim in the contributions is, therefore, to steer the discussion of painting away from the properly aesthetic, understood in its original meaning of *aisthesis*; that is, as that which pertains to the senses alone. This ambition reaches its culmination toward the end of the third contribution. In this part, Schlegel posits three foundational principles that governed his approach to painting up until that point, and by which he seeks to demarcate his difference from classicism and aesthetic formalism alike. What all of these principles have in common is that they, in one way or another, stress the unity and integrity of painting in a way that prevents it to be understood in mere sensuous terms. Thus, whereas the first principle targets the thematic separation of painting into different genres, the second principle stresses the formal unity of painting's constituent parts. The third and final principle affirms painting's autonomy with respect to other art forms, most notably sculpture. With these principles, Schlegel provides an art-theoretical foundation that supports the conception of

painting that he has been defending throughout the first three contributions. However, at the same time, they participate in a polemical argument in which Schlegel explicitly seeks to distance himself from those artistic practices which he deplores. That polemics is indeed an integral part of Schlegel's argument becomes directly clear at the outset, where he explains that his principles should not be understood as mere theoretical fancy. In fact, they bespeak nothing less than his desire to change the future course of painting, advocating a return to the foundations of the oldest schools of German and Italian painting (KA IV 70).[61]

This polemical tone intensifies when we turn to the first principle in more detail. Here, Schlegel targets the "vain delusion and empty imagination" ("eitler Wahn und leere Einbilding"; KA IV 72) that has led artists and theoreticians alike to classify painting according to genre.[62] For Schlegel, such a classification threatens the unity and integrity of painting, and explains why he only recognizes historical and religious scenes as authentic subjects for representation. Although some commentators assumed that Schlegel's preference for predominantly Christian subjects has dogmatic grounds, his motivation is at this stage not so much Christian but rather art-theoretical. He argues that only historical and religious subjects offer a perspective on painting as a whole, including within themselves the traditionally lesser genres of portraiture, landscape, and still-life. At the same time, Schlegel expresses

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[61] Particularly the last part of this claim has led to some confusion in the scholarly literature. Schlegel's reference to the oldest schools of German and Italian painting means something entirely different in the first three contributions than in the later ones. Although this particular statement has been read as if Schlegel advocated a Christian and medieval conception of painting directly from the beginning of the "Descriptions" (see e.g., Matala de Mazza, Lanwerd), it can be assumed from the examples that Schlegel gives that the earliest schools referred to are those of the mid-15th century at the earliest. This is further confirmed by McClellan who has argued that the Louvre displayed hardly any Italian painting prior to Perugino when Schlegel visited the museum between 1802 and 1804 (145).

[62] With his criticism on genre, Schlegel mirrors his earlier critique on literary genres in his review of Goethe's Wilhelm Meister in 1798. Schlegel saw the notion of genre as an infringement on the autonomy of the artwork which carries its own modes of judgment and evaluation within itself, hence Schlegel's concept of art criticism (compare Bernstein XXX).

his concerns that separation in genres only fosters a reductive and aesthetic approach to painting. In other words, when portraits, landscapes, and still-lives are painted for their own sake, they easily promote an aesthetic in which sensuous beauty is regarded as the ultimate telos of the arts, thereby disrupting painting's actual meaning:

> In connection with the whole full painting, all these things [genres] will be meaningful; yet, the *meaningful*, we believe, is the purpose of all painting, and without it, landscape and still life become mere artificiality. . . or completely stray into deceptive imitation of what is merely pleasing and complete platitude.
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> (In Verbindung mit dem ganzen vollständigen Gemälde werden alle diese Dinge bedeutend sein; das *Bedeutende* aber, so meinen wir, ist überhaupt der Zweck aller Malerei, und ohne dasselbe wird Landschaft und Stilleben in bloße Künstlichkeit . . . oder aber vollends in täuschende Nachahmung des bloß Gefälligen und ganzliche Plattheit sich verirren.) (KA IV 72; emphasis in original)

The essential part of this passage is where Schlegel argues that painting's true purpose consists in the meaningful ("das Bedeutende"). To be sure, by the word meaningful, Schlegel is not referring to the subject matter of the work, let alone to its sensuous appearance. In fact, by suggesting that the individual rendering of portraits, landscapes, and still-lives results in deceptive imitation and platitudes, Schlegel takes particular issue with any approach that prioritizes form over meaning and assumes that the sensuous appearance of beauty is independent of the work's thematic content. With this argument, Schlegel reiterates his earlier criticism of Kant, charging the latter's assumption that the understanding only facilitates the aesthetic experience but is unable to subsume the impression of the artwork under a concept or an idea. By arguing that the purpose of painting consists of meaning, Schlegel thus shows his unwillingness to follow Kant on this score. At the same time, however, it is

important to emphasize that meaning is for Schlegel irreducible to the thematic content of the work. When he speaks of the German verb "bedeuten" (to mean) or one of its variations, the root of the verb ("deuten," i.e., to point or to allude) is always implicated in the concept (compare Frank, *The Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism* 209). That is to say that the meaning of painting consists for Schlegel not so much in its content or subject matter but instead in its allegorical character; that is, its pointing or alluding to an infinite whole that necessarily eludes the work's finite means.

This brings us to the second principle, where Schlegel targets the practical and theoretical primacy of drawing over painting's other elements, especially color and expression. By referring to the division between drawing and color as the fundamental source from which all errors in painting derive (KA IV 96), Schlegel is not only criticizing the artistic and art-theoretical tradition from Vasari to Winckelmann and Goethe. More tacitly, he also targets the foundation of Kant's identification of the aesthetic experience with a judgment of taste.[63] Here, the source of Schlegel's disagreement can be found in one particular passage in the third *Critique*, where Kant not only refers to drawing as painting's most essential element but also identifies it as the formal ground of the judgment of taste: "In painting and sculpture, indeed in all the pictorial arts, . . . the drawing is what is essential, in which what constitutes the ground of all arrangements for taste is not what gratifies in sensation but merely what pleases through its form" (110 5:225). For Schlegel, on the other hand, such a separation between painting's constitutive parts is fundamentally misguided. He argues that it is a "[t]errible delusion to tear apart that which is originally and eternally one, and thereby foolishly destroying the whole."

[63] In the introduction to Propyläen, Goethe recommends the artist to concentrate particularly on proportion, forms, anatomy, and facial expression (here, not to be confused with the artistic expression Schlegel is talking about) while imitating the ancients (48).

("Schrecklicher Irrwahn, so dasjenige, was ursprünglich und ewig eins ist, zu zerreißen, und töricht das Ganze zu vernichten."; KA IV 75). He thus adds that the so-called connoisseur who praises Raphael for his coloring and Correggio for his drawing understands nothing of painting, polemically adding that "[i]t is tiresome still having to say such basics of all art cultivation" ("[e]s ist verdrießlich, solches Alphabet aller Kunstbildung noch sagen zu müssen"; KA IV 75). However, not only the connoisseur is Schlegel's target here. By delegitimizing the primacy of drawing over color and expression, Schlegel also removes the foundation under Kant's aesthetics of painting, challenging the assumption that drawing provides the ground for the judgment of taste.

Although we will come to see that Schlegel's three principles should not merely be understood negatively but also promote an allegorical conception of painting that bespeaks his metaphysical and political ambitions around the time, the first two principles show that Schlegel's theory of art and poetry is at least partly construed in opposition to the aesthetic and art-theoretical tradition that he inherited. This is further underscored by the third principle in which Schlegel most evidently targets the identification of painting and sculpture, stating that "[p]ainting is painting and nothing else" ("[d]ie Malerei sei Malerei und nichts anders"; KA IV 77). As we discussed Schlegel's insistence on a differentiation between the two art forms in some detail already, there is no need to rehearse the same argument here. Although primarily directed at the classicist tradition that takes the model of ancient sculpture as its norm, we have also seen that Schlegel closely identified this tradition with aesthetic formalism, thus marking another deviation from the sensuous approach to art that he associated with Kant.

Schlegel's polemic in the first three contributions aims to steer the discussion of art away from the properly aesthetic, a move which was already prepared by some of the texts he wrote while he was still in Germany. For example, in his essay on Giovanni Boccaccio from 1801, he already hinted at the

connection between aesthetic formalism and classicism when he defined the former in terms that bear a strong similarity to his later rejection of classicism's empty ideal in the "Descriptions." With aesthetics, Schlegel writes, "I mean the completely empty concepts of representation, where there is still no concept of nature, and of beauty, where that of divinity seems as good as lost" ("ich meine die ganz leeren Begriffe von Darstellung, wo noch gar kein Begriff von Natur vorhanden ist, und von Schönheit, wo der von der Gottheit so gut wie verloren scheint"; KA II 388).

One of the interesting aspects of this passage is not merely that Schlegel directly associates aesthetic formalism and classicism but also explicitly aligns the former with the work of Kant. In the sentence immediately preceding the one cited above, Schlegel directly charges Kant's critical philosophy for having turned aesthetics into a science (KA II 414). What Schlegel means is that Kantian aesthetics could only conceive of art in purely subjective terms. According to Schlegel, Kant offered not so much a theory of art but rather an a priori science that only accounted for how the artwork was perceived. In other words, the principal reason why Schlegel regarded aesthetics an empty science was that it had next to nothing to say about the artwork itself,[64] as becomes clear from one of the critical fragments that he already wrote in 1797: "In the sense in which it has been defined and used in Germany, aesthetics is a word that notoriously reveals an equally perfect ignorance of the thing and of the language. Why is it still used?" (*Lucinde and the Fragments* 147 #40). Moreover, in one of his *Athenaeum* fragments from a couple of years later, Schlegel directly targeted the subjectivism of Kant's aesthetics, this time primarily focusing on the reductive understanding of beauty that it promoted:

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[64] This criticism of Kant has more recently been taking up by Podro and Osborne, among others, both arguing that the aesthetic judgment is not saying anything about the object, but doing something with it (Podro 11; Osborne 38).

> The basic error of sophistic [Kantian] aesthetics is to consider beauty merely as something given, as a psychological phenomenon. Of course, beauty isn't simply the empty thought of something that should be created, but at the same time the thing itself, one of the human spirit's original ways of acting: not simply a necessary fiction, but also a fact, that is, an eternally transcendental one" (*Lucinde and the Fragments* 199 #256)

As this passage makes clear, Schlegel's main problem with Kant's aesthetics was not the latter's stress on the beautiful per se, but rather the subjectification of beauty that his aesthetics entailed.

However, this reduction of the beautiful to the merely subjective was symptomatic of a more general fault that Schlegel found with Kant. Schaeffer explains that Schlegel's main problem with Kant's philosophy was that its subjectivism once and for all closed the door on ontology. By arguing that we could only know the world as it appears to our senses, Kant not merely forestalled all forms of metaphysical speculation but also reduced any thought of a unifying principle that encompassed nature and consciousness to the level of a mere rational idea (69). It is primarily this aspect of Kantian philosophy Schlegel could not agree with. Even though Kant alluded in his aesthetics to the experience of beauty as the principal means to bridge the divide between nature and consciousness, the fact that Schlegel refers to Kant's principle of beauty as an "empty thought" and a "necessary fiction" only underscores his criticism that a subjectivist aesthetics could only restore this gap as a rational imperative, thereby leaving not only the artwork but also the world as it is in itself untouched by its efforts.

iii. Continuing the Kantian Legacy

Schlegels main concern with the newly founded aesthetic discipline was not only the view on art and beauty that it promoted, but also what it represented. In "Journey to France," Schlegel had

offered fierce criticism on the modern state of fragmentation, arguing that modernity's drive for separation and division only furthered man's ignorance about his higher orientation, fostering a superficial and materialistic culture of usury, sensitivity, and swindle that had almost turned man into a machine: "Indeed, the art of arbitrary separation, or what is the same thing, mechanism, has come a long way, and in this manner man himself has almost become a machine." ("Man hat es in der Kunst der willlkürlichen Trennung, oder was dasselbe ist, im Mechanismus in der Tat sehr weit gebracht, und so ist auch der Mensch selbst fast zur Maschine geworden."; KA VII 76). For him, Kant's aesthetics was symptomatic of the modern condition in this regard. By not only promoting a formal separation between painting's constituent parts, but also legitimating a division in genres, it furthered the mechanical fragmentation of the arts that was antithetical to Schlegel's concern for unity and completeness. As such, Schlegel's critique of Kant carries direct moral and political implications. This is further confirmed by one of the private notes from Paris. Although not directed at Kant specifically, it clearly illustrates the seriousness of Schlegel's criticism of his day's art and art theory. Targeting specifically the empty ideal that he earlier identified with both classicism and aesthetics, Schlegel writes that "[t]he actual abomination of the modern is the ideal – this idea of a cultivation without art, a beauty without divinity" ("der eigentl[iche] Greuel der modernen Welt ist das Ideal – diese Ideen von einer Bildung ohne Kunst, einer Schönheit ohne Göttlichkeit": KA XIX 13 #109). As such, Kant's aesthetics was for Schlegel symptomatic of the secular and materialistic culture of the Enlightenment. Philosophically, however, Schlegel took particular issue with the subjectivism of Kant's aesthetics, which he considered to lay at the root of the problem. Approaching the arts mechanically as a science and unable to speak about the artwork other than mere appearance, Kant turned beauty into a psychological phenomenon that could only be accounted for in subjective terms.

When Schlegel thus turned to the subject of art and poetry himself in the years before 1800, it was one of his main goals to move beyond the subjectivism of Kantian aesthetics by reintegrating both art and beauty into a new ontological doctrine (Schaeffer 69). This move was not only informed by his dissatisfaction with Kant's aesthetics per se, but stems just as well from his own philosophical work, and pertained particularly to the limits of philosophy. Tangentially related to his skepticism about a systematic philosophy that was based on first principles, Schlegel maintained that art, and especially poetry, could achieve something which philosophy could only reflect upon, and therefore necessarily remained outside the scope of the discipline itself, leading him to proclaim in one of his fragments that poetry has to begin where philosophy ends (*Lucinde and the Fragments* 245 #48).

Although this comment has sometimes been understood as if Schlegel prioritized poetry over philosophy, this is by no means the case. Particularly in his early work, Schlegel understands poetry, philosophy, and religion as complementary, and therefore as different enterprises. As Mayer explained, each of these disciplines had for Schlegel its own authentic way of mediating between the finite and the infinite, approaching the latter respectively by means of an allegorical reflection on the visible world, speculative thinking, and feeling (121). Crucially, however, Schlegel maintained that each discipline was confronted with its own limitations in this regard. Although Schlegel's proposal for a new mythology in his "Dialogue on Poetry" was precisely intended to overcome this problem by reintegrating poetry, philosophy, and science into a unified mythological outlook, it is particularly in his collection of fragments "Ideas" from 1800 that the relationship between poetry, philosophy, and religion becomes one of his central concerns. Here, Schlegel is at pains to present particularly poetry and philosophy as two complementary approaches to the infinite: "Whoever has religion will speak in poetry. But to seek and find religion, you need the instrument of philosophy" (*Lucinde and the Fragments* 244 #34). And a bit later, "[t]he piety of philosophers is theory, pure contemplation of the

divinity, calm and gay in silent solitude. . . . The religious state of the poet is more passionate and more communicative" (*Lucinde and the Fragments* 254 #137).

It is clear that, despite their differences in approach and articulation, poetry and philosophy have direct religious implications for Schlegel. However, it would nonetheless be a mistake to assume that both disciplines are therefore also reducible to religion. Although Schlegel still had a relatively broad understanding of religion at the time, considering every possible relation of man to the infinite as inherently religious (*Lucinde and the Fragments* 248 #81), he nonetheless insists on the autonomy of poetry and philosophy with respect to religion. The aim of both disciplines was thus not to become identical with religion but rather to incorporate the religious perspective on the infinite within themselves and then to transform this outlook by their own means: "The life and the force of poetry consists in the fact that it goes out of itself, tears away a part of religion, and then returns to itself in order to appropriate it. It is the same with philosophy." ("Das Leben und die Kraft der Poesie besteht darin, dass sie aus sich herausgeht, ein Stück von der Religion losreisst, und dann in sich züruckgeht, indem sie es sich aneignet. Ebenso ist es auch mit der Philosophie."; KA II 258 #25).

It is in this basic structure that the ontological features of the artwork already make themselves manifest. As we will see, Schlegel indeed understands art and poetry as media that express the artist's perspective on the infinite in sensuous form, leading Schaeffer to remark that a twofold movement characterizes Schlegel's response to Kant's aesthetics. In response to the subjective understanding of art and beauty that he found in Kant, Schlegel not only endows art with an ontological function but, as Schaeffer explains, also places it at the pinnacle of his speculative philosophy, understanding the artwork as the principal manifestation of the infinite in finite form (70).

Crucially, however, Schlegel's departure from Kant's subjectivism was partially informed by his reading of an altogether different section of the third *Critique*. What he took from Kant was

particularly the idea that the realms of art and nature come together in the artist. More specifically, Kant's theory of artistic genius and the closely related notion of the aesthetic idea motivated Schlegel to think of artistic and natural productivity as allegorical expressions of a single creative force. Attributing a crucial role for art in the mediation between man and nature, Schlegel's work should therefore not merely be seen as a departure from the Kantian tradition, but also as its continuation.

In light of his concerns about the subjective formalism of Kant's aesthetics, it is perhaps not remarkable that Schlegel turned to the notions of genius and aesthetic idea as a way out. By doing so, he turned precisely to those aspects of the third *Critique* that seemingly undermined the formalism with which Kant's aesthetics has often been associated.[65] That Kant's aesthetics does indeed allow for different, even contradictory readings has widely been acknowledged. The German Kant scholar Andrea Kern has argued that the third *Critique* is internally divided, offering a theory of art that first seems to be all about formal beauty, whereas the later parts on genius and the aesthetic idea reintroduce a concern for meaning through the backdoor again (12). And also other scholars have pointed to the paradoxical nature of the notion of the aesthetic idea in particular. Paul Guyer and Michel Chaouli both speak in this regard of an afterthought on Kant's part, seeing the notion of the aesthetic idea as a remarkable inclusion that threatens to remove the ground under the formalism which Kant advanced in the earlier parts of the third *Critique* (respectively "A Surfeit in Thinking" 56, and "Editor's Introduction" XXXIV).

These inconsistencies were certainly not lost on Schlegel. Behler has shown that the conflicted character of Kant's aesthetics was already taken up by Schlegel in his early study on Greek poetry. What Schlegel offered in this work was precisely a historicization of the bifurcated structure of the

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[65] See Guyer's "Editor's Introduction" to Kant's *Third Critique* for a response to the charge of formalism on Kant's address.

third *Critique*, attributing those aspects that invited a formal understanding of art and poetry to the Greeks, whereas Kant's theory of artistic production formed the cornerstone of Schlegel's own conception of modern poetry ("Natur und Kunst" 16). In this respect, Schlegel's youthful work already provides the seeds for Schlegel's early Romantic theory of art. Here, Schlegel returns to Kant's theory of artistic genius and the notion of an aesthetic idea, developing a theory of art and poetry which further developed Kant's original insight into the autonomy of art but not without removing its subjective foundation. No longer grounding art's autonomy in the division of the faculties that underlies the judgment of taste, Schlegel ontologizes Kant's theory of art by founding its autonomy in the infinite creativity of the world at large.[66]

The notions of genius and artistic idea were of crucial importance to Kant as they provided him with the principal means to join the realms of nature and freedom that the first two Critiques had torn asunder. In order to understand why particularly these two aspects became important for Schlegel, it is therefore important to focus our attention not so much on what Kant has to say about the aesthetic experience itself, but rather to concentrate on his theory of artistic production. This requires a shift of emphasis from the aesthetic experience to Kant's theory of artistic production. As Kant writes in the third *Critique*: "For the judging of beautiful objects, as such, taste is required; but for beautiful art itself, i.e., for producing such objects, genius is required" (189 5:311).[67] Although Kant's formal

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[66] I therefore strongly disagree with Chaouli who writes: "Put into the language of aesthetics: the autonomous work of art, a notion commonly understood to have emerged in Jena romanticism, entails an autonomy of art not from social pressures but to an important degree from the artist. The externality of language sponsors a poetological model in which a process bereft of intention or sense is as important in giving rise to the poem as the poet's emotions, hopes, and fears. We may call it "autonomous," but automatic may be a more accurate term" (*The Laboratory of Poetry* 12).

[67] The question of how Kant exactly saw the relationship between the reception and creation of art, especially in relation to nature and natural beauty, is by no means an easy one, but does not have to concern us here. The main issue is that Kant's theory of artistic creation

understanding of beauty may still be compatible with Winckelmann and Goethe's emphasis on the imitation of classical sources, his theory of artistic production is certainly not. This is not in the least because Kant makes directly clear that the notion of genius is incompatible with the stress on imitation that Winckelmann and Goethe propagated: "Everyone agrees that genius is entirely opposed to the spirit of imitation" (187 5:308).[68] The main reason why the notion of genius and imitation are antithetical to Kant has everything to do with the fact that the latter can be learned whereas the former is "the inborn predisposition of the mind (ingenium) through which nature gives the rule to art" (186 5:307). As Kant explains, the genius stands directly in connection with nature; not merely in the sense that his geniality is a "gift of nature" (188 5:309), but also because he sees genius as a direct extension of nature itself. In other words, it is through the genius that nature itself is active, which implied for Kant that the genius is unable to describe or formulate how his art comes about. Moreover, being unaware of how artistic ideas come to him, his artistic production can therefore not be formalized by any rules, but is rather the result of the free use of his own cognitive faculties. Kant thus explains that

directly seems to undermine his earlier insistence that the realms of art and nature, and therefore also the experience of artistic and natural beauty, have to be sharply distinguished. For an evaluation of this problem, see Guyer's "Interest, Nature and Art".

[68] By dismissing imitation, Kant is by no means suggesting that the products of genius are completely independent from tradition. In paragraph 32 of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant makes a clear distinction between succession ("Nachfolge") and imitation ("Nachahmung"). Here, he explains that the artist should not literally imitate the work of his predecessors, but that "[s]uccession, related to a precedent . . . is the correct expression for any influence that the products of an exemplary author can have on others, which means no more than to create from the same sources, and to learn from one's predecessor only the manner of conducting oneself in so doing" (164 5:283). Although this notion of succession may at first seem to comply with Winckelmann's and Goethe's conception of imitation as that which does not pertain to outer form, but rather to the idealizing principles of artistic production, a later passage precludes such a reading. In paragraph 49, Kant writes that "the product of a genius . . . is an example, not for imitation . . . but for emulation ("Nachfolge") by another genius, who is thereby awakened to the feeling of his own originality, to exercise freedom from coercion in his art in such a way that the latter thereby itself acquires a new rule, by which the talent shows itself as exemplary" (195-196 5:318). What Kant is saying here is that genius does therefore not show itself in either the imitation of form or principle, since both can be learned, but rather in the following of the example of genius itself, which leads according to Kant to a new rule for art that stands sharply opposed to Winckelmann's and Goethe's call for the reactivation of old, ancient principles (Gammon 591–92).

genius "displays itself not so much in the execution of the proposed end in the presentation of a determinate concept as in the exposition or the expression of aesthetic ideas" (195 5:317). With this notion of the aesthetic idea, we arrived at the crux of Kant's theory of artistic production, and the point where his theory of artistic genius culminates. "[B]y an aesthetic idea," Kant writes, "I mean that representation of the imagination that occasions much thinking though without it being possible for any determinate thought, i.e., concept, to be adequate to it, which, consequently, no language fully attains or can make intelligible" (192 5:314). Although the notion of the aesthetic idea is a slippery one, the crucial point is that the aesthetic idea infuses the artwork with spirit, the animating principle in the mind (192 5:313). As such, it points the imagination of the viewer in the direction of an ideal that can neither be conceptualized nor fully experienced, but which the artwork can nonetheless intimate, giving the idea the semblance of objective reality (192 5:314).

Among all commentators on Schlegel's work, Frank has perhaps been the most perceptive of how particular aspects of Kant's aesthetics directly informed Schlegel's theory of art and poetry. He pointed out that Kant's understanding of the aesthetic idea lies at the heart of Schlegel's theory of art. More specifically, what Schlegel took from Kant was the idea that art and poetry point to an infinite whole which defies conceptualization and ordinary experience alike (Frank, *Unendliche Annäherung* 521). That Kant's notion of the aesthetic idea shares indeed some essential characteristics with Schlegel's conception of beauty becomes most obvious in "Dialogue on Poetry." Mirroring Kant's definition in the later parts of the aesthetic half of the third *Critique* where beauty is defined as "an expression of the aesthetic idea" (197 5:320), Schlegel proclaims through the mouth of Ludoviko that "all beauty is allegory," adding that "[t]he highest can only be said allegorically precisely because it is inexpressible" ("alle Schönheit ist Allegorie. Das Höchste kann man eben weil es unaussprechlich ist, nur allegorisch' sagen"; KA II 324).

It is exactly in this manner that Schlegel also employs the notions of allegory and beauty in the first contributions on painting. In his discussion of Correggio, he praises the Italian Renaissance painter for not confusing beauty with mere sensuous appearance, but for treating it allegorically; that is, as the clearest expression of "the thought or deeply individual feeling of the whole" ("den Gedanken oder das tiefe individuelle Gefühl des Ganzen"; KA IV 24). However, in the same discussion, Schlegel is not only at pains to distinguish his conception of beauty from sensuous approaches to the arts, but he is equally concerned to demarcate his understanding of allegory from the symbolic way in which the term was commonly understood by artists. After having argued that allegory is "the tendency, the purpose, the character of his [Correggio's] manner" ("die Tendenz, der Zweck, der Charakter seiner Manier"; KA IV 23), he thus clarifies that he is speaking about

> that kind of allegory which aims to clarify the infinite opposition and battle between good and evil; because that we cannot speak here of allegory as it is commonly understood, that is, the way it is almost exclusively known and understood by the textbooks and in the mind of contemporary painters, namely allegory . . . as that which does not point to the infinite, but wants to translate individual abstract, i.e., conditioned and limited, concepts into symbols.
>
> (. . . jene Art der Allegorie, die darauf ausgeht, den unendlichen Gegensatz und Kampf des Guten und des Bösen deutlich zu machen; denn daß hier nicht von der gemeinen Allegorie die Rede sein kann, die in den Lehrbüchern und in den Köpfen der gegenwärtigen Maler fast allein unter diesem Namen gekannt und gemeint wird, die Allegorie nämlich, [...] welche nicht das Unendliche andeuten, sondern einzelne abstrakte, also bestimmte und beschränkte Begriffe in Sinnbilder übersetzen will.) (KA IV 23-24)

This passage underscores once again that allegory should for Schlegel always be oriented toward the infinite. In Correggio's paintings, the contrasts between beauty and ugliness, light and darkness are

transposed to a cosmic scale, alluding to the infinite battle between good and evil as it was understood within the Christian framework within which he was working.

Yet to speak about Correggio's work in these terms is already to disregard what is for Schlegel most essential to it, namely its allegorical character. Indeed, there is something paradoxical about the first contributions as a whole. Although Schlegel shows himself concerned with the allegorical in painting throughout the text, the literary form of the "Descriptions" necessarily prevents him from capturing what he finds most essential about the paintings. Just like Kant's notion of the aesthetic idea, the whole point about allegory is that it always eludes conceptualization or description, which is why Jakob Heller has argued that Schlegel's discussion of Correggio also thematizes the breakdown of language in the face of the allegorical (Heller 263). This aspect was by no means lost on Schlegel himself. In "Dialogue on Poetry," he maintained that one can only speak poetically about poetry, and the same insight recurs in the first contribution as well. After a somewhat dry description of an early 16th century copy of Leonardo's *Madonna of the Yarnwinder* (original ca. 1499), Schlegel thus writes:

> If I would say even more about it, it could only be in the form of poetry, perhaps this is on the whole the best and most natural way to speak of paintings and other works of art. For is not every true intuition of an organic whole, which completely penetrates the interior and also attentively grasps all individuality, poetry in the absolute sense?
>
> (Sollte ich aber noch mehr davon sagen, so könnte es nur in einem Gedichte geschehen, vielleicht wäre dies überall die beste und natürlichste Art von Gemählden und andern Kunstwerken zu reden. Denn ist nicht jede richtige in das Innre ganz eindringende und auch alles Einzelne aufmerksam ergreifende Anschauung eines organischen Ganzen durchaus Poesie?) (KA IV 33)

It is in this argument that we can already find a first glimpse of two aspects that are essential to Schlegel's conception of painting in the first contributions. The first is the almost complete identification of poetry and painting. This identification is, as we will see, legitimated by the allegorical character of both art forms, which brings us immediately to the second point. It is precisely because of the infinite and allegorical nature of poetry and painting that Schlegel is able to maintain Kant's original insight into the autonomy of art. Although it is true that their absolute nature imbues both art forms with quasi-religious significance, the passage above also illustrates that poetry and painting are separate in that they are able to allegorically allude to the infinite in a way that sets them apart from other art forms and prosaic language. Despite the fact that Schlegel's legitimation of art's autonomy is therefore fundamentally different from that of Kant, it was nonetheless the latter's notion of the aesthetic idea which allowed Schlegel to maintain some of Kant's most fundamental insights, and further develop the post-Kantian tradition in a way that would make it particularly resonant with the Modernist tradition.

iv. Pantheism as New Mythology

Whereas we have seen that the concepts of the aesthetic idea and allegory are structurally related in their shared allegorical character, it was perhaps with his conception of the relationship between genius and nature that Kant had the most profound effect on Schlegel's philosophy of art. Although Frank's emphasis on the Kantian roots of Schlegel's identification of beauty and allegory is entirely justified, his account nonetheless fails to make the next step by considering how their understanding of beauty is grounded in their theory of artistic productivity and its relationship to nature. Beiser criticizes Frank on exactly this point, arguing that Frank's reading only accounts for the

subjective side of artistic creation.[69] As Beiser remarks, Frank completely sidesteps the objective part of the equation by disregarding the extent to which nature imposes standards for artistic creation on the subject: "If the activity of the artist originates within the subject alone, then it is cut off from the absolute; it loses its metaphysical dimension, failing to be a revelation or manifestation of the absolute itself" (*The Romantic Imperative* 76). Although this criticism is somewhat justified, it does not discredit Frank's reading entirely. As Alison Stone observed, Schlegel's understanding of the absolute underwent a significant modification at the turn of the century (17–18). Starting around 1798-99, Schlegel began experimenting with integrating the subjectivism of his early Romantic theory of irony and the fragment, which he mainly derived from his engagement with Fichte (Frischmann, *Vom transzendentalen zum frühromantischen Idealismus* 43), with an ontological account of nature. This dimension of Schlegel's thought is largely neglected by Frank, who indeed shows himself mostly concerned with situating the emergence of Schlegel's theory of poetry within the epistemological framework that he inherited from Fichte and Kant (compare Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative* 75). Although such an approach may be justified when it concerns Schlegel's views before 1799, it is somewhat problematic when it comes to his later writings on art and poetry, including the first three contributions on painting.

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[69] Here, it has to be acknowledged that Frank addresses the role of the genius in Schlegel's theory of art in the 8th lecture of his *Einführung in die frühromantische Ästhetik*. However, in this lecture, Frank concentrates on Schlegel's early engagement with Kant (and Schiller) in the period between 1795-97, which is therefore hardly representative of his views on art during the *Athenaeum* period (Frank, *Einführung* 133–36). This might also be a good occasion to briefly comment on the various sources that I draw upon in my discussion of Frank above. My main source in the discussion above is Frank's monumental study of early Romanticism *Unendliche Annäherung*. The references to Frank's *The Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism* concern the same work, of which only the last section has been translated into English. If possible, I referred to the English translation. However, when drawing on sections that remained untranslated, I referred to the German original.

At this point, it might be good to briefly return to Schlegel's epistemology, as his increased concern for nature also informed the perspectivism and Romantic irony that we discussed previously. It should be said, although we did not explicitly acknowledge in the previous chapter, that Schlegel's turn to nature coincides perhaps not surprisingly with the moment when he started thinking about knowledge and systems in organic terms. Whereas his thought before this time still subscribed to a relativism in which knowledge merely amounted to a subjective point of view, the organic model allowed Schlegel to understand each perspective no longer as an isolated instance but rather as a moment in the progressive unfolding of consciousness from fragmentation to wholeness. In "Dialogue on Poetry," this stress on the transformation of consciousness is explicitly connected with a similarly organic model of nature. The result is that Schlegel now conceives of nature as inherently productive or infinitely purposive, as he writes in one of his notes around this time (KA XVIII 149 #308). More specifically, Schlegel starts to think about nature and consciousness historically as two parallel manifestations of one and the same creative principle that underlies the infinite's progressive self-realization in time. As we will come to see, this view has important repercussions for Schlegel's understanding of art and poetry. The most important consequence is that his conceptions of art and nature increasingly converge. In the introduction to "Dialogue of Poetry," Schlegel speaks of nature's formless and unconscious poetry, adding that without it, there "would certainly not be a poetry of words" (gewiß keine Poesie der Worte geben würde"; KA II 285), and in the Jena lectures he identifies the entire universe with a gigantic work of art (KA XII 40).

As these passages show, Schlegel's conceptions of art and nature almost wholly overlap in the years around 1800. That Schlegel no longer only regards art, poetry, and knowledge but also nature as allegorical further underscores the connection between the two. In fact, in one of his notes, he even maintains that "[a]llegory and individuality are indigenous to physics; poetry has them only on loan"

("[a]llegorie und Individualität sind in d[er] Physik einheimisch; die Poesie hat sie nur zu Lehn."; XVIII 155 #385). To understand why he now associates allegory primarily with nature, it might be good to return to one particular passage in the Jena lectures, which immediately demonstrates how far his thoughts had moved in the direction of pantheism by this time:

> Why has the infinite gone out of itself and made itself finite? . . . Or: Why doesn't the game of nature run out in an instant, so that nothing would exist at all? The answer to this question is only possible when we insert a concept. We have the concept of one, infinite substance and individuals. If we want to explain the transition from the one to the other, then we have no other choice but to insert a concept, namely the concept of image or presentation, allegory. The particular is therefore an image of the infinite substance. (We could also express this as follows: God has brought forth the world in order to present himself.)
>
> (Warum ist das Unendliche aus sich heraus gegangen und hat sich endlich gemacht? . . . Oder: Warum läuft das Spiel der Natur nicht in einem Nu ab, so daß also gar nichts existirt? Die Antwort auf diese Frage ist nur möglich, wenn wir einen Begriff einschieben. Wir haben nämlich die Begriffe, eine unendliche Substanz und Individua. Wenn wir uns den Übergang von dem einen zu den andern erklären wollen, so können wir dies nicht anders, als daß wir zwischen beyden noch einen Begriff einschieben, nämlich den Begriff des Bildes oder Darstellung, Allegorie. Das Individuum ist also ein Bild der einen unendlichen Substanz. (Man könnte dies auch ausdrücken: Gott hat die Welt hervorgebracht, um sich selbst darzustellen.)) (KA XII 39)

One of the most important aspects of this passage is the extent to which Schlegel has come to identify God and nature. Rejecting the idea of a transcendent God that exists independently from the world, Schlegel arrives at a religious outlook in which the organic unfolding of creation is seen as the self-

realization of God in time. This means that Schlegel came to embrace a Spinozistic position in which God was fully immanent to the world, explaining why he not only imbues every particular with meaning and spirit ("Bedeutung," "Geist"; KA XII 40) but also argues that each individual is an image, or rather an allegory of the divine. These insights shed, at the same time, a whole new light on the relationship between man and nature, the separation of which, as will be remembered, Schlegel regarded as the quintessential feature of the modern condition. If everything that exists is an image or allegory of an immanent God that realizes itself in creation, then the two of them can no longer be regarded as two distinct and incompatible realms but now appear as two different manifestations of a single creative and self-determining force.

It is this particular premise that informs Schlegel's call for a new mythology. If a new mythology is to reintegrate man and nature under a new symbolic worldview, it can only do so by uniting them under a common principle that is essential to both. Although this seems to suggest that Schlegel ultimately falls back on a systematic philosophy based on a first principle, this is actually not the case. In the Jena lectures, Schlegel demonstrates how the starting point of a dialectic between consciousness and the infinite allows him to understand the realms of man and nature as two manifestations of a single creative principle. Here, Schlegel's first step is to create new concepts out of the dialectic by carrying consciousness and the infinite over to one another. He thus explains that the transmission of the infinite to consciousness gives rise to an infinite consciousness, whereas the same movement in the other direction leads to a conscious infinite, which he identifies with the notions of thinking and God respectively. He then goes on to explain that when each of these notions is applied to reality – the middle term between consciousness and the infinite, as we have seen – they give rise to the realms of knowledge and nature (KA XII 25). This is to say that the domains of knowledge and nature are nothing but two sides of the same coin. Directly following from Schlegel's original dialectic,

they form two parallel but interrelated spheres in which the relationship between consciousness and the infinite progressively unfolds over time (KA XII 28).

This explanation throws an interesting light on the passage cited above. It not only clarifies why the infinite has gone out of itself and made itself finite, but also explains Schlegel's new enthusiasm for Spinoza and his insistence on the allegorical character of nature. As Schlegel continues to explain, the domains of knowledge and nature correspond to the philosophical systems of idealism and realism, which he identifies with Fichte and Spinoza respectively: "The Fichtean philosophy is directed at consciousness. But Spinoza's philosophy aims at the infinite." ("Die Fichtische Philosophie geht auf das Bewußtseyn. Die Philosophie des Spinoza aber geht auf das Unendliche."; KA XII 5). The lectures thus attribute a key role to Spinoza as the foremost representative of philosophical realism; a school of thought that Schlegel rejects on philosophical grounds, but which particularly in the case of Spinoza is credited for its intuitive grasp of the divine in nature. As a result, Schlegel associates realism not so much with philosophy but rather with poetry, something which is clearly reflected by one of his fragments around the same time: "All philosophy is idealism, and there exists no true realism except that of poetry" (*Lucinde and the Fragments* 250 #96). This identification between realism and poetry has important consequences. It not only means that the oppositions between idealism and realism, consciousness and nature, Fichte and Spinoza, are in the end all reducible to the dichotomy between philosophy and poetry, but it also shows that Schlegel praises Spinoza not primarily as a philosopher but as a poet (Mayer 124). This is confirmed by "Dialogue on Poetry," where Ludoviko celebrates Spinoza not so much for his philosophical, but rather for poetic insights: "I hardly understand how one can be a poet without adoring Spinoza, loving him and completely devote oneself to him.' ("[I]ch begreife kaum, wie man ein Dichter sein kann, ohne den Spinosa [*sic.*] zu verehren, zu lieben und ganz der seinige zu werden."; KA II 317).

At the same time, however, Schlegel's identification of poetry and realism has important repercussions for his views on art as well. It explains why art and poetry can never merely be a subjective expression of the artist's private thoughts, feelings, or sentiments, but should always include a reflection on the external world as well. This last claim is directly relevant with respect to the "Descriptions of Paintings." Schlegel's association of art and poetry with the domain of nature immediately informs why he maintains in the first three contributions that painting should be naturalistic in its orientation. More precisely, it allows us to understand that when Schlegel urges the contemporary painter to study the divine in nature, he is directly modelling the role of the painter after Spinoza, whose pantheism he likewise understood as a poetic evocation of reality.

In short, the goal of Schlegel's thinking around 1800 is to integrate Fichte's idealism and Spinoza's realism into one poetic-philosophical framework, which would inaugurate a third epoch in the history of consciousness: "This epoch is a return of all epochs. Here, we grasp the world as a whole for the first time." ("Diese Epoche ist eine Rückkehr aller Epochen. Hier begreifen wir erst die ganze Welt, das Ganze."; KA XII 13). If Schlegel's thinking does not inaugurate this stage by itself, it at least indicates how this epoch could be realized. He does so by explicitly distancing himself from the philosophy of Kant and Fichte. Although he credits their philosophy for surpassing dogmatism (first stage), and redirecting philosophy's attention to the infinite, the fundamental weakness of their idealism (second stage) was its inability to move beyond consciousness (KA XII 14). It is worth noting that Schlegel's critique of idealism mirrors his objections against Kant's aesthetics. He charges both systems for their inability to account for the objective reality of respectively art and nature, thereby inevitably falling back into a dualism which the third epoch eventually surpasses. This is finally the epoch of an idealism that overcomes the subjectivism of the Kantian and Fichtean systems by

incorporating realism within itself, leading to an integrated account of reality (KA XII 91; cf. KA XVIII 358 #431).

This is precisely the structure that underlies Schlegel's new mythology. Offering primarily a symbolic account of nature, the main difference between the new and the Greek mythology lies in their source. Whereas Greek mythology was understood by Schlegel as a direct expression of the vitality and productivity of nature, the new mythology can only be a product of consciousness, an expression of the love and longing for God that finds its source in "the deepest depths of the spirit" ("der tiefsten Tiefe des Geistes"; KA II 312). As such, as Schlegel explains through the mouth of Ludoviko, the new mythology derives in an indirect way from idealism itself:

> Idealism in every form has, in one way or another, to come out of itself in order to be able to return to itself and to remain what it is. That is why a new idealism, just as limitless, must and will rise from its lap; idealism is therefore not only an example of the new mythology in the way it came into being, but also becomes in an indirect manner a source of it.
>
> (Der Idealismus in jeder Form muß auf ein oder die andre Art aus sich herausgehn, um in sich zurückkehren zu können, und zu bleiben was er ist. Deswegen muß und wird sich aus seinem Schoß ein neuer ebenso grenzenloser erheben; und der Idealismus also nicht bloß in seine Enstehungsart ein Beispiel für die neue Mythologie, sondern selbst auf indirekte Art Quelle derselben werden.) (KA II 315)

As a rejuvenated realism that springs from the deepest depths of idealism itself, Schlegel's new mythology offers a pantheistic account of nature that not merely reunites the realms of consciousness and nature under a singular "secret force" ("geheime Kraft"; KA II 315), but by doing so also brings philosophy to its conclusion. What should be remarked, however, is that this pantheistic outlook is not

merely a subjective projection on the external world. The Spinozistic idea of an immanent God that reveals itself in nature is anything but arbitrary, but is a direct consequence from the dialectic between consciousness and the infinite, and its realization into the sphere of nature.[70] As such, the new mythology does indeed follow directly from the premises of Schlegel's own idealistic philosophy.

v. Moving Beyond Nature: The Artist as God

Despite the Spinozistic leanings in both the lectures on transcendental philosophy and the "Dialogue on Poetry," however, Beiser has rightly argued that Schlegel's turn to nature is just as much premised on the framework that Kant had laid out in his third *Critique*. Here, Beiser points not merely to Kant's "Critique of Aesthetic Judgment," in the later sections of which Kant developed his theory of artistic genius and the notion of the aesthetic idea, but particularly to the "Critique of Teleological Judgment," which constitutes the final part of the book. It is here, as Beiser explains, that Kant draws an analogy between artwork and organism, arguing that both not only display a similar structure in which part and whole are organically linked, but where Kant also suggests that artistic genius and nature work according to a not fully conscious "intelligent design" that is inherently purposive without having a determinate end goal (*The Romantic Imperative* 81). This suggestion that the artwork is inherently organic and therefore entirely natural for Schlegel is more than justified. In the introductory essay to his edited collection of Lessing's works from 1803, Schlegel explicitly highlights the organic character of art, explicitly linking it to Kant's notion of a purposeless purposiveness: "The essence of high art and form consists in the relation to the whole. It is for this reason that they are unconditionally purposive and purposeless, which is why one holds them as sacred as the holiest, and loves them

[70] This is why Spinoza forms not only the pinnacle of realism, but also of idealism (KA XVIII 401-402 #975).

endlessly once they have been recognized." (Das Wesen der hohem Kunst und Form besteht in der Beziehung aufs Ganze. Darum sind sie unbedingt zweckmäßig und unbedingt zwecklos, darum hält man sie heilig wie das Heiligste, und liebt sie ohne Ende, wenn man sie einmal erkannt hat."; KA II 414).

Although Beiser is correct in claiming that Kant and Schlegel see both art and nature as the expression of a single force that is self-determining without having a determinate purpose, he eventually pushes the parallel too far when he argues that Schlegel fully submits artistic creation to the productivity of nature. Whereas we have seen at the beginning of this section that Beiser was mainly intent on correcting Frank's one-sided emphasis on the subjective side of artistic creation, it could just as well be argued that Beiser shifts the balance too far to the other side, submitting Schlegel's theory of artistic production to the inner workings of nature. According to Beiser, Schlegel believes that "the creativity of the artist is nothing less than the self-realization and self-manifestation of the powers in nature." This means, according to Beiser, that Schlegel not only sees the products of genius as an expression of nature, but that he also views the artist as "the final link in a chain of production running throughout the whole of nature." Particularly this last comment is noteworthy as it shows that Beiser sees the distinction between artistic and natural production in Schlegel's work as a quantitative rather than a qualitative one. Even though he maintains that the absolute expresses itself through genius, he also argues that artistic production is only of a secondary nature in Schlegel's metaphysical outlook as the genius does not derive his creative powers by virtue of his own participation in the absolute, but only through the mediation of nature (*The Romantic Imperative* 76–77).

One of the major interpretative problems with Beiser's argument is that all of these positions may be attributed to Kant, but certainly not to Schlegel. For example, in order to argue that Schlegel understands the creativity of the artist as "the climax of all the powers inherent in nature," Beiser

assumes that Schlegel's metaphysical outlook allows for "a continuum and hierarchy in nature that reaches its highest level in human activity" (*The Romantic Imperative* 86). Yet, the problem with this view is that it offers a more accurate description of the aesthetics of Kant than that of Schlegel.[71] The whole idea of a continuum and hierarchy in nature that culminates in the artist is hard to square with Schlegel's pantheistic outlook that Beiser otherwise is keen to defend. In contrast to what Beiser maintains, Kant's theory of artistic genius does thus not lead to Schlegel's grounding of artistic creativity in nature, but rather to its opposite. What Schlegel took from Kant is the idea that artistic and natural productivity are structurally related. However, rather than seeing the former as an extension of the latter, as Beiser maintains, Schlegel maintains that modern (as opposed to Greek) art always has to take its departure from the freedom of consciousness. Or, as Schlegel makes clear, it is the imagination that first gives rise to pantheism, to see the world as an artwork or a poem, not the other way around: "Since we assume no other reality than spiritual, everything real is ingenious. Idealism looks at nature like a work of art, like a poem. Man composes the world, as it were, only he doesn't know it at first." ("Da wir keine andere Realität annehmen als geistige, so ist alles Reelle genialisch. Der Idealismus betrachtet die Natur wie ein Kunstwerk, wie ein Gedicht. Der Mensch dichtet gleichsam die Welt, nur weiß er es nicht gleich."; KA XII, 105). That is to say that Schlegel's conception of art cannot be grounded in nature as it requires an aesthetic outlook to see the world in terms of a self-realization of God in the first place, which is precisely why Spinoza is not treated as a philosopher, but rather as a poet.

[71] That is to say, the early Schlegel. In Cologne, Schlegel will indeed come to hold the view that man forms the pinnacle of nature's organization (see e.g., KA XIII 5). However, by this time, his enthusiasm for Spinoza had significantly cooled off.

This is not to say, on the other hand, that we are back with the subjective understanding of artistic creation that formed Beiser's starting point in his critique on Frank. Although Frank is correct to emphasize that for Schlegel artistic production always has to take root from consciousness, we have also seen that Schlegel maintains that art and poetry cannot stay on the level of consciousness alone, but have to get out of themselves. This is exactly what Schlegel means when he referred in "Dialogue on Poetry" to nature as the most original form of poetry. Here, his point is not that artistic creation finds its archetype in natural production, as also Nivala maintains (56), but rather that it is the artist's task to capture nature's productive spirit into his own work. In other words, the goal of Schlegel's new mythology was to unite philosophy and poetry, idealism and realism; an ambition that is only possible when both consciousness and nature are put on an equal footing. This is essentially the oversight of Frank and Beiser alike. Whereas Frank shifts the balance too far in the direction of the subject's unrestricted creative freedom, Beiser's model pushes artistic production too far in the direction of nature. Conflating the revelatory character of the artwork (what it shows) with its ontological grounding (what it is), it becomes difficult to see what is left of the artist's freedom when it is actually nature that is speaking through him. Although Beiser deserves credit for pointing to the extent to which Schlegel's understanding of art was informed by Kant's theory of genius, the religious and mythological function that Schlegel attributed to the work of art depended not on his adoption, but rather is an indication of his deviation from Kant.

At the same time, the evocative parallels that Schlegel draws between nature and art in texts as "Dialogue on Poetry" beg the question how we are to understand the relationship between the two, and how the ontology of the artwork is related to its revelatory character. The key to unlock these problems can be found in the lectures on transcendental philosophy in which Schlegel reframes the production of reception of art within a linear model of communication. Here, Schlegel concentrates

particularly on the role of the genius as the locus where the ontological and the revelatory meet. By analogizing the universal force by which the infinite realizes itself through him, the genius is able to share his perspective on the infinite with the recipient of his work. This means that Schlegel integrates the aesthetic experience within a model of transmission and reception which ultimately allows the recipient to recapture the artist's original perspective of the infinite for himself (Brauers 60–62).

The starting point of Schlegel's explorations is the acknowledgement that philosophy and art are disciplines which find their object in the relationship between the finite and the infinite. Yet, as the infinite can never be fully captured within the finite, Schlegel argues that both disciplines are therefore infinite themselves, accounting for their open-ended character and refusal to be completed. With these arguments we are by now on familiar territory. In the Jena lectures, however, Schlegel further adds that the infinite character of philosophy and poetry makes invention ("Erfindung"; KA XII 101) their first requirement. This view we encountered in a different guise as well. Since truth can only be approximated, as we have seen in the previous chapter, each discipline requires ever new perspectives on the infinite to progressively advance to a higher state of completion. It is for this reason that Schlegel writes in one of his *Athenaeum* fragments that "[o]ne can only become a philosopher, not be one. As soon as one thinks one is a philosopher, one stops becoming one (*Lucinde and the Fragments* 167 #54).

It is peculiar to the lectures on transcendental philosophy, however, that Schlegel's stress on invention is embedded within a linguistic model that separates the notion of invention from communication ("Mittheilung"; KA XII 101). Whereas invention corresponds to the subjective character of creation, communication is the middle term that connects invention with its objective presentation ("Darstellung"; KA XII 102), thereby providing the ground for the crucial distinction

between spirit and letter (resp. "Geist" and "Buchstabe"; KA IV 75) in the contributions on painting.[72] What needs to be remarked here is that Schlegel's communicative model is not about the transmission of information. Crucially, its aim rather consists in the communication of a viewpoint, namely the philosopher or artist's momentary perspective on the infinite within the finite. In fact, Schlegel argues that a presentation should not merely contain the content of the philosopher or artist's perspective, but that it should also be generic, meaning that it recreates the same perspective on the infinite within the experience of the recipient: "Through presentation will that what went on in us also happen to someone else, in this way it has achieved the aim of communication." ("Durch Darstellung soll das in dem andern Vorgehen, was in uns vorgieng, so hat sie den Zweck der Mittheilung erreicht"; KA XII 102).

This model gives us a good impression of Schlegel's understanding of the aesthetic experience. In contrast to Kant's emphasis on its disinterested character, Schlegel understands the reception of art in active rather than in passive terms. In other words, the artwork does not merely give us something to see, but it also effectively changes the way the viewer perceives both the world and himself, making the recipient not merely attentive to the infinite in nature, but also in himself. In other words, it is in the aesthetic experience that consciousness first becomes aware of itself as a manifestation of an infinite whole, which is why Schlegel writes in "Dialogue on Poetry" that the poetic insight that the artwork communicates consists in the realization that "no human being is merely a person, but can and should in reality be the whole of mankind at the same time" ("kein Mensch schlechthin nur ein Mensch ist, sondern zugleich auch die ganze Menschheit wirklich und in Wahrheit sein kann und soll"; KA II 286).

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[72] The opposition between spirit and letter was common at the time and can be found in the works of many of the early Romantics, and derived originally from Fichte.

At the same time, however, the repercussions of Schlegel's communicative model of philosophy and art also reach beyond the aesthetic experience, pertaining not only to the receptive but also the productive side of the artistic process. After having discussed the notion of invention and its objective presentation, Schlegel introduces the concept of development ("Entwickelung"; KA XII 103) as a middle term between these two extremes. What Schlegel means by development is the creative act by which invention materializes itself into a finite presentation; an activity that Schlegel earlier in the lectures identified with formation ("Bildung"; KA XII 8). The crucial thing to point out here is that the notion of *Bildung* applies not only to the cultural domain, as Schlegel specifically points out, but should be seen more generally as the creative force that underlies both nature and consciousness. This force, Schlegel writes, "emanates from and goes out to sense, spirit and meaning. This sentence is applicable to nature and man" (". . . geht aus von und auf Sinn, Geist und Bedeutung. Der Satz ist anwendbar auf Natur und den Menschen"; KA XII 43). Apart from the fact that Schlegel sees *Bildung* as intrinsic to both the natural as the cultural realm, it is equally important to draw attention to the double movement that he is describing here. Crucially, *Bildung* is not only the creative principle by which the infinite realizes itself in the actual world, but also the force by which the infinite eventually returns again to itself from the actual world. This is why he points to sense, spirit, and meaning as mediators by which the infinite is received and emanated. What all of these concepts have in common is that they are allegorical in character, each of them signaling a particular way by which the infinite manifests itself in the finite.[73] This is to say that Schlegel understands *Bildung* as that creative force

[73] Whereas spirit and meaning refer respectively to the perspectival perception of the infinite and its allegorical mode of presentation, Schlegel defines sense ("Sinn"; KA XII 8) as the love and longing for the infinite.

by which the infinite first goes out of itself, and then allegorically refers back to itself by means of sense, spirit, and meaning.

It is this ontological structure that explains the significance of art and the creative genius in Schlegel's early Romantic philosophy. As Schlegel continues to explain, *Bildung* manifests itself within the human realm primarily through the qualities of peculiarity and originality ("Eigentümlichkeit und Originalität; KA XII 48). This immediately indicates that he sees this force particularly realized in the creative genius, which is confirmed toward the end of the lectures when Schlegel argues that genius "designates a spiritual force of higher potency" ("bezeichnet eine geistige Kraft der höhern Potenz."; KA XII 105). Although the genius is therefore privileged for living in harmony with the infinite whole, as Schlegel explains, he also adds that the genius' perspective on the infinite is nonetheless limited, which is why his creations do not so much present truth itself, but rather form a contribution toward its infinite approximation (KA XII 105). Schlegel thus sees it as the genius' task to analogize his own creative powers through invention, and present his limited perspective on the infinite "as if it were completed" ("als wenn sie vollendet sey"; KA XII 101).

As such, the genius plays a crucial role in Schlegel's philosophy. It is not merely the case that he encapsulates within the human domain the force by which the infinite constantly realizes itself, but his allegorical creations also redirect the infinite back to itself by means of their recipient. This means that Schlegel sees the artwork as a mediator in which both of these aspects come together. One could therefore also say that the artwork functions as the gateway through which the universe's creative power is redirected to its source as the genius shares his limited perspective on the infinite with the recipient of his work: "There can be no work of art in which the ideas of bringing the infinite to consciousness, or continuing consciousness into the infinite is not the ultimate principle." ("Es lässt sich kein Kunstwerk aufzeigen, wo nicht die beyden Begriffe, das Unendliche zum Bewußtseyn zu

bringen, oder das Bewußtseyn ins Unendliche fortzusetzen, als der letzte Grundsatz aufgestellt ist."; KA XII 29). One of the crucial interventions of "Dialogue on Poetry," in this respect, is that it explicitly defines this creative power as poetry. As Schlegel writes in the introduction, poetry should not merely be seen as a form of art, but is rather that which is most original ("Ursprünglich"; KA II 284) in man, namely his innermost force. This force, as he continues to explain, is itself infinite: "Immeasurable and inexhaustible . . . like the richness of invigorating nature." ("Unermeßlich und unerschöpflich . . . wie der Reichtum der belebenden Natur."; KA II 285). Here, the parallel between cultural and natural production is particularly relevant. In this passage, Schlegel reconceptualizes poetry in such a way that it comes to signify a primordial force by which the infinite materializes itself in both the realms of culture and nature, explaining why he speaks in "Dialogue on Poetry" of the "unconscious poetry" ("bewußtlose Poesie"; KA II 285) of nature, and refers to the world as "the eternally self-forming work of art" ("dem ewig sich selbst bildende Kunstwerk"; KA II 324).[74] In other words, poetry is the creative force by which the infinite constantly realizes itself anew, and which thus constitutes, in Schaeffer's words, the transcendental unity of art and nature.[75] As such, it is not remarkable that Schlegel identifies poetry especially with the genius in his lectures on transcendental philosophy. The genius realizes the infinite ever anew according to its own peculiarity and originality. This explains why Schlegel raises

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[74] This idea finds its roots in Wackenroder and Tieck: "But if it is permissible to speak of such things, one would perhaps like to say that God may well look at the whole of nature or the whole world in the same way as we look at a work of art." ("Ist es aber erlaubt, also von dergleichen Dingen zu reden, so möchte man vielleicht sagen, daß Gott wohl die ganze Natur oder die ganze Welt auf ähnliche Art, wie wir ein Kunstwerk, ansehen möge."; 99–100).

[75] Returning to the earlier passage in which Schlegel wondered why nature does not suddenly run out, we are now in the position to understand why this is the case. In contrast to the view that Schlegel will come to adopt in Cologne, creation did not simply happen at the beginning of time, but the world is created every single instant anew. It is this perpetual creation of the world which Schlegel understands as nature's poetry. This is why Schlegel argues in the Jena lectures that "nature is the becoming divinity" ("Die Natur ist die werdende Gottheit"; KA XII 79).

the status of the artist to mythic proportions in many of his early Romantic writings. This is not, as Beiser suggests, because the infinite forms the pinnacle of nature (*The Romantic Imperative* 86). Quite the opposite. The main reason why the genius holds a Godlike status for Schlegel is because his creations form within the human domain the analogous expression of the same creative power (or poetry) by which God perpetually realizes itself as nature.

vi. Painting as Poetry

One of the most perceptive interpretations of Schlegel's philosophy of art can be found in the work of Jean-Marie Schaeffer. One of the reasons that makes his reading particularly insightful is that he understands Schlegel's departure from Kant not merely in aesthetic or art-theoretical terms, but looks at its broader philosophical implications. Schaeffer thus argues that Schlegel's reading of Kant's theory of genius does not so much give rise to a conception of art that is grounded in nature, as Beiser and others have suggested, but rather provides the ontological structure in which the products of nature and consciousness are united on a higher plane:

> [T]he theory of genius opens the door to a conception according to which the work is defined . . . by its paradoxical ontic character: the work (of genius) represents nature in art, just as natural beauty represents art in nature. [T]his neutralization of the dichotomy between nature and art in favor of their transcendent unity is at the very heart of the romantic project. (49)

Where many commentators point to the elevated status of the artwork and aesthetic discourse in Romanticism, one of the main strengths of Schaeffer is that he makes clear that the artwork's meaning does not so much consist in what it is, but rather in what it does. By drawing on Kant's notion of the aesthetic idea, and further developing his theory of artistic genius into an ontological doctrine which

allows him to conceptualize the products of consciousness and nature as two sides of the same coin, Schlegel creates a space in which the artwork is conceptualized as a window that offers a sensuous presentation of the infinite. It is in this context that Brauers speaks of a "fundamental *aisthesis* of the infinite" ("fundamentale Aisthesis des Unendlichen"; 61–62), by which she means that the artwork offers a sensuous presentation of that which philosophy can only reflect upon. This is exactly what Schaeffer alluded to when he remarked that the Romantics imbued art not only with an ontological function, but also regarded it as the only possible presentation of speculative metaphysics itself (11).

This claim is more than justified, especially since we have already seen that especially Schlegel's new mythology plays an important role in the completion of philosophy itself. However, on a more modest scale, the same could be said of each individual artwork as well. Although the individual artwork does not have the bonding power to unite perspectives under a new symbolic unity, which was ultimately the ideal of Schlegel's new mythology, it does have the capacity to change the individual's perspective on the world. In other words, if art has a social-political function, it consists in the fact that it potentially provides the recipient with the ability to recognize the reality of the infinite within creation. It thus becomes immediately clear that Schlegel imbues the arts with a quasi-religious function, which is reflected by the first contributions on painting as well. Although hardly reconcilable with the iconic (and more confessional) model that Schlegel would come to advance in Cologne, the first contributions offer a conception of painting which, following Schaeffer, we could describe as an "ontological revelation" (see e.g., 10, 70).

If we are to understand art as an ontological revelation which offers a sensuous presentation of philosophy's speculative content, as Schaeffer observes, then the specific task of art and poetry can only consist in offering a pantheistic outlook on the world. This purpose is perhaps best reflected in "Dialogue on Poetry," where Schlegel argues that "every work [of art] should actually be a new

revelation of nature." ("Eigentlich soll jedes Werk eine neue Offenbarung der Natur sein"; KA II 327). Since we have seen that art cannot remain confined to the level of consciousness, the artist is supposed to go out of himself and incorporate a reflection on nature within his work. Not in order to imitate it, as Schlegel argues in the third contribution on painting, but rather to capture its divine spirit: "One usually says, the painter studies nature! Very well, he studies, or he investigates nature, but I would like to add, particularly the divine in nature."[76] ("Man sagt gewöhnlich, der Maler studiere die Natur! Sehr wohl, er studiere, oder er erforsche die Natur, besonders aber möcht' ich hinzusetzen, die Gottheit in der Natur."; KA IV 77). Crucially, Schlegel adds that the divine should not be confused with the life and force of nature, which is the ancient Greek outlook and therefore conforms to the medium of sculpture. On the contrary, the "actual sphere of painting" ("eigentliche Sphäre der Malerei") consists in "the one and incomprehensible, the spirit, the meaningful, the peculiarity" ("das Eine und Unbegreifliche, der Geist, das Bedeutende, die Eigentümlichkeit"; KA IV 77). It is for this reason that Schlegel models the role of the artistic genius on Spinoza, whose poetic vision not merely recognized the divine in the whole nature, but also provides the contemporary artist with a "deep look into the innermost workshop of poetry" ("tiefer Blick in die innerste Werkstätte der Poesie"; KA II 317).

When we recall Schlegel's ambition to return to the foundations of the oldest schools of German and Italian painting, it now becomes clear that he is not advocating a return to these schools on either the level of form or content. Instead, the reason why Schlegel favors these schools is because they best reflect art's allegorical nature. It is in their work that Schlegel discerns an original perspective on the infinite which he finds lacking in contemporary painting. When he urges a return to these

[76] This passage shows that Schlegel's conception of painting does not so much break with an aesthetics of representation, as Ostermann argues (189), but rather qualifies it.

schools, he is thus not calling for an imitation of their work, but rather urges the artist to take their "poetic intention" ("poetische Absicht"; KA IV 76) as a model. Although this stress may seem to contradict the third principle in which Schlegel affirmed the autonomy of painting with respect to the other arts, Schlegel explicitly acknowledges toward the end of the third contribution that he sees poetry not merely as a particular artform. Instead, he contrasts poetry with the mechanical, arguing that the poetical is rooted in the invention ("Erfindung"; KA IV 78), and precisely for this reason refers to that which is most essential to every form of art.

These closing remarks of the third contribution capture in a nutshell the theoretical model that Schlegel had been advancing in the previous pages. Halfway through the discussion of his three fundamental principles with which we began our discussion in this chapter, Schlegel suddenly interrupts his discussion of the second principle to make a brief excursus which could be seen as the theoretical core of the first three contributions as a whole. After having targeted the practical and theoretical separation of painting's constitutive elements on a formal and thematic level, Schlegel explains that painting only allows for one legitimate separation, which is that between "spirit and letter, invention and execution" ("Geist und Buchstabe, Erfindung und Ausführung"; KA IV 75). One of the reasons why this discussion is absolutely central to Schlegel's views on painting is because it reveals his theoretical agenda, and helps us to explain why his early Romantic philosophy of art is such a good reflection on the Modernist practices that followed in his wake. Moreover, as we will come to see, the distinction between spirit and letter is one of the major subjects on which Schlegel's views will radically change in the fourth contribution, providing the foundation for his iconic turn which we will discuss in the next chapter.

The importance of this distinction consists in Schlegel's full identification of invention and poetry. Although he explains that spirit and letter are both necessary components of painting, the first

three contributions stand out for their almost exclusive emphasis on artistic invention. To be sure, these views are nothing new. We already encountered a similar prioritization of spirit over letter in our discussion of Schlegel's Jena lectures, and in "Ideas" he proclaimed that "[o]nly someone who has his own religion, his own original way of looking at infinity, can be an artist" (*Lucinde and the Fragments* 242 #13). Yet, what makes Schlegel discussion of the distinction between spirit and letter in the first contributions so important is that he brings the distinction for the first time to bear on a physical and tangible object such as painting. He thus explains that all elements of painting which pertain to invention and the original idea of the artist, including composition and arrangement, count as "the poetry in the painting" ("die Poesie in dem Gemälde"; KA IV 75). Yet the flipside of this argument is that he maintains that mere skill and talent in execution are not enough to qualify as an artist. He thus argues that the painter should think and order his vision in his own peculiar manner, "lend it his own meaning, otherwise he does not deserve to be called a painter and is a mere copyist" (". . . seine eigne Bedeutung ihm leihen, sonst trag' er nicht diesen Namen, und sei bloßer Kopist"; KA IV 75).[77]

Reading the first contributions, one gets the impression that Schlegel sees painting, despite its physical component, as a purely immaterial art whose physical and material components are not so much understood as that which enables painting, but rather as inevitable obstacles to overcome. With his opposition between spirit and letter, and his prioritization of the former over the latter, Schlegel almost completely collapses the distinction between painting and poetry, painter and poet. Although their way of execution is different, painting and poetry both derive from the genius's "poetic intention"

[77] Matala de Mazza misreads Schlegel on this point, arguing that his appreciation of Correggio in the first contribution derives from in large part from the mechanical way in which the painter executed his paintings (112–13). Although it is true that Schlegel comes to a more positive appreciation of mechanical execution in the last two contributions, such an appraisal is altogether absent from the first three accounts that include Schlegel's discussion of Correggio.

("poetische Absicht"; KA IV 76) – that is, a peculiar perspective on the world that regards individual objects not merely in their particularity, but rather as part of an infinite whole. This is why Schlegel refers to the painter as a poet who works not with words but with colors, and urges the contemporary painter not to take his example from the old masters, but rather to find his inspiration in the poetry of his day (KA IV 76).

Although especially this latter point may seem to contradict the intention that Schlegel stated earlier, namely to return painting to the oldest schools of German and Italian painting, and which underlay the composition of his three fundamental principles of painting, this is not necessarily the case. With his three principles, Schlegel is not advocating either a stylistic or thematic return to the schools of the early Renaissance, but rather seeks to restore its fundamental qualities which he finds lacking in the art and aesthetics of his own day. In other words, the whole point about his diatribe against the division of painting on either a formal or thematic level is that each separation is arbitrary and only distorts the view of the painting as "a single harmonious and inseparable whole" ("ein einziges harmonisches und untrennbares Ganze"; KA IV 75). Since the separation of painting's constitutive parts is incompatible with its objective to present the artist's perspective on the infinite, the goal of Schlegel's three principles is to guarantee the integrity of the whole. What is important to emphasize here is that the first two of Schlegel's principles pertain directly to the letter and not to the spirit of painting. It is thus even here that the normative weight of the distinction between spirit and letter reveals itself within Schlegel's thinking. If, by Schlegel's own admission, all his principles are negatively defined in the form of restrictions, this is only because he believes that the letter of painting may never form an obstacle for the spirit to shine forth (KA IV 72).

It is this particular quality that he sees reflected by the old masters. What turns them into an example for the present is not so much the quality of their work per se, but rather the "poetic view on

things" ("poetische Ansicht der Dinge"; KA IV 76) that their work reveals, unrestrained by arbitrary formal and thematic separations. If artists as Fra Bartolomeo, Perugino, Leonardo, and Dürer, all of whom are specifically singled out by Schlegel, form an example for the present, it is only for their spirit and poetic orientation toward the infinite and not for their work per se (KA IV 76). In other words, what needs to be emulated in their work is that which is universal and timeless, whereas the imitation of their style and content is to be avoided at all costs.[78]

It is precisely for the latter reason that Schlegel is cautious to uphold the work of these masters as an example for the present. As he points out, the historical form that their perspective on the infinite takes may no longer be suitable for our present-day concerns. In short, whereas it would have been natural for Fra Bartolomeo or Perugino to translate their perspective on the infinite in the form of Christian iconography, or for Dürer or Leonardo to draw on the philosophical or scientific debates of their time, the various ways in which these masters framed their ideas can no longer be regarded as our own. In sharp contrast to the view Schlegel will come to defend in the last two contributions, he maintains that not only philosophy but also Christianity has lost its usefulness for the contemporary artist. Whereas the former has largely under the influence of mathematics and the natural sciences withdrawn into regions of the highest abstractions, he notes that Christianity "has completely disappeared" ("völlig verschwunden ist"; KA IV 76), meaning that both no longer offer any meaningful framework for the contemporary artist to draw on.[79] It is mainly for this reason that

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[78] This suggestion is also raised with respect to Spinoza in "Dialogue on Poetry," whose "barbaric form is simply not enjoyable" (". . . barbarischen Form nun einmal nicht genießbar ist"; KA II 325). This is why Camilla suggests to Ludoviko later in the dialogue to present "the spirit of Spinoza" ("der Geist des Spinosa"; KA II 327) in a beautiful form.

[79] One could particularly think of Correggio whose work we discussed earlier in this chapter. Although Schlegel praised him for the poetic orientation of his work, we also discussed how the infinite was allegorically presented as the conflict between good and evil from

Schlegel urges the painter to take his inspiration from contemporary poetry. It is here that the artist can find the most adequate insight into the modern predicament, an example of how to present his perspective in such a way that it is commensurate with the metaphysical presuppositions of the age, and learn that painting finds its current purpose in the "deeper allegory of nature" ("tiefere Natur-Allegorie"; KA IV 57) alone.[80]

As such, Schlegel's theory of painting should not so much be seen as the break from classicism that it often appears to be. What Schlegel does in the contributions on painting and his other writings from around the same time is taking Winckelmann and Goethe's classicism to a higher level in which the legacy of the ancients shows itself no longer in the imperative to imitate the historical letter of their art, but rather to adhere to what is timeless in them, namely their spirit. Schlegel thus explains in "Dialogue on Poetry" that only the spirit of art can be seen as a universal characteristic that unites artistic production throughout history: "The spirit of poetry is only one and everywhere the same." ("Der Geist der Poesie ist nur einer und überall derselbe."; KA II 348). Despite the fact that the forms in which the infinite manifests itself are historically conditioned, it is the universality of the spirit which allows Schlegel to establish a synthesis between ancient and modern art under a shared principle in "Dialogue on Poetry": "In the spirit may be your unconditional connection between the ancient and the moderns . . . Not so in the letter of poetry. The old rhythm, for instance, and the rhyming syllabic measures remain forever opposed." ("Im Geist mag Ihre unbedingte Verbindung des Antiken und

within a Christian framework. What Schlegel is saying is that this framing may have been suitable in Correggio's time, but for us his work has become a mere letter devoid of spirit.

[80] Since Schlegel rejects the classification of painting in genre, this remark should not be understood as an encouragement to paint landscapes (compare KA II 357).

Modernen stattfinden. . . . Nicht so im Buchstaben der Poesie. Der alte Rhythmus z. B. und die gereimten Sylbenmaße bleiben ewig entgegengesetzt." KA II 348).

When we further zoom in on the spirit that unites the ancients and the moderns, we have seen that the creative invention of the genius was regarded by Schlegel as the expression of a force that underlies the domains of human and natural production, and by which the infinite realizes itself within the finite. The essential point here is that Schlegel reunites ancient and modern art under the umbrella of a single force which manifests itself differently in both periods. Whereas the art of the Greeks is seen by Schlegel as a natural manifestation of this force, it is the same force which works through consciousness in the modern era. When he thus speaks of the naturalistic quality of ancient sculpture in the first contributions and contrasts its natural origins with the genesis of modern art in the subject's own consciousness, the point is not that classical art and modern painting are fundamentally at odds with one another, but rather that they form two different historical manifestations of one and the same underlying force. In other words, the philosophical outlook that underlies the first contributions on painting is informed by a transposition of the natural force of the ancients to a higher plane, now encompassing both natural and cultural production, and thereby providing the transcendent unity of nature and art which Schaeffer regarded as one of the defining features of Schlegel's speculative theory of art.

Despite Schlegel's criticism on the classicism of Winckelmann and Goethe, his own theory of painting should not be seen as a rejection of the authority of ancient art, but rather as a continuation through different means. Although Schlegel maintains that the forms of ancient sculpture – its letter – has outlived its original spirit, and therefore no longer carry any meaning or relevance for us, it is the same spirit which continues to inform artistic production up until the present. In line with the Spinozistic outlook that Schlegel came to advance in "Dialogue on Poetry," and which was implicit in

the Jena lectures on transcendental philosophy and the first contributions on painting as well, his own classicism reveals itself in his shift of emphasis from the so-called *natura naturata* to *natura naturans*; that is, from regarding the unity between the ancients and the moderns not in terms of their sensuous appearance but in the productivity that underlies their art. In other words, what unites the art of both periods is that Schlegel sees both principally as an expression of force. And even though this force expresses itself differently in each era, this should not distract us from the fact that art remains a matter of *poiesis*, now no longer understood in merely naturalistic terms, but as the creative force which underlies the world as a whole.

vii. The Invisible Masterpiece

Although Schlegel famously proclaimed in "Dialogue on Poetry" that "the science of art is its history" ("die beste Wissenschaft der Kunst ist ihre Geschichte"; KA II 290), it would be a mistake to assume that the first descriptions of painting offer an actual history of art. Despite Behler's argument that Schlegel no longer seeks to exchange art and poetry's speculative ground for a historical foundation around 1800 ("Intro to KA XX-XXI" XXV), or Locher's claim that Schlegel develops a mode of criticism which combines visual experience and opinion with a theory of art based on historical knowledge ("From Ekphrasis to History" 178), the first three contributions offer nothing of the sort. Although Schlegel's insight into the historicity of art is no doubt an essential aspect of his theoretical framework, actual historical observations, interpretations, and analyses are largely missing from his text.[81] In other words, even though Schlegel seems at face-value concerned with the history

[81] By which I am not suggesting that Schlegel did not have any historical knowledge of the arts. He obviously did, as especially the last two contributions show. Moreover, it would also be impossible for him to write the first contributions as he did without a thorough grasp

of art, the method with which he approaches the art of van Eyck, Dürer, Holbein, and others is ahistorical, nor are his observations and interpretations historically grounded, as both Behler and Locher seem to suggest. In fact, that Schlegel turns toward the end of the third contribution not to an artist as Dürer or Raphael, but to the contemporary poet as the pivotal figure on whom painting's future depends, only underscores that we are not dealing with art for history's sake, but are engaged in a theoretical argument that is applied to the domain of painting. Even though Schlegel himself maintains that a theory of painting can only follow from perception (KA IV 76), the first contributions reveal that in practice the artwork has to conform to the theoretical framework of the interpreter, not the other way around.

This brings us to an important characteristic of German Romantic aesthetics more generally. In *The Invisible Masterpiece*, Belting points specifically to the discrepancy between the early modern understanding of the devotional image and the modern discourse on art. He maintains that the Romantic reception of Renaissance art was not so much an attempt to come to terms with the historical qualities of the artwork per se, but rather an appropriation of the devotional image for Romanticism's own aesthetic ends and purposes. More specifically, what Belting is pointing at is the emergence of the modern discourse of autonomous art in the early nineteenth century, leading him to remark that when the Romantics "praised a work by the divine Raphael, they celebrated their modern gaze, not Raphael's" (*The Invisible Masterpiece* 11).

The same attitude toward history underlies Schlegel's first contributions on painting. In these writings, Schlegel extracts the painting from tradition and history, submitting not merely the artwork itself, but also the aesthetic experience of it to a philosophical idea of the infinite. It is precisely this

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of art's history. What is at issue here is not Schlegel's historical knowledge, but the extent to which it provides the foundation for his theory of art.

prioritization of an abstract idea above the artwork as a historical and physical object that Belting sees as characteristic for the modern discourse on art. In order to illustrate his point, Belting thus begins his reflections with a discussion of Honoré de Balzac's 1831 novella *The Unknown Masterpiece* in which the protagonist, the renowned painter Frenhofer, has set himself the impossible task of creating a masterpiece that, in Belting's words, "triumphed over reality" (*The Invisible Masterpiece* 11). The outcome of Balzac's story is well-known and has become kind of a legend among such painters as Cézanne and Picasso, finding in Frenhofer's attempt to create an impossible masterpiece an uncanny parallel to their own Modernist practices. Ultimately, the story boils down to the moment when Frenhofer, after years of work, shows his painting to two of his friends and colleagues, the young and yet unknown Nicolas Poussin, and his master Frans Pourbus. When the work is unveiled, the latter two are baffled to find colors and blots of paint everywhere, but, apart from a deformed foot at the bottom of the painting, no recognizable forms or shapes, only the traces of a continuous effacing and repainting of the canvas over and over again. Upon seeing the response of his two colleagues, Frenhofer comes to realize that his attempt has failed, after which he falls into a state of disillusionment, burns all his paintings, and dies the same night.

For Belting, Frenhofer's ambition to paint an impossible masterpiece captures the dynamics that underly the modern discourse of art as whole. Balzac's story illustrates for him the consequences what happens when art is grounded in an absolute idea to which its material realization can only fall short. As Belting explains, it was particularly the emergence of an autonomous conception of art which led to a dramatic shift in the production and reception of the artwork in the early nineteenth century. No longer submitted to any authority other than itself, Belting writes that the work of art was now imbued with the task of legitimating its own validity: "From now on a new work was by definition a kind of programme that was judged as an argument for a general theory of art" (*The Invisible*

Masterpiece 13). Moreover, as Belting continues to explain, this shift in how the artwork was perceived had momentous consequences that would come to have a direct bearing on artistic Modernism. The first of these was that the modern artist was now imbued with the task, or "ontological duty," as Belting writes, to justify his own practices (*The Invisible Masterpiece* 14). In other words, the artist could no longer rest content to treat his product merely as a vehicle of self-expression or representation, but the artwork now had to include a meta-reflection by which it justified its own grounding; an impossible task, as the example of Frenhofer illustrates. Indeed, for Belting, the whole point of Balzac's novella is that it shows that the actual artwork always falls short in the face of art's absolute idea, imposing the artist with the burden to create a work that is infinite, but compared to which he finds his actual realizations always lacking.

The importance of German Romantics in all of this is that they were the first to situate art's absolute grounding at the heart of their philosophical theories. It is particularly at this point that there are close parallels between the works of Belting and Schaeffer. In fact, both highlight art's newly won absolute status with Romanticism, and address the discrepancy between the artwork as object and the infinite idea that it was no expected to address. As we have seen, the realization that the artwork's finite means always fall short when compared to its infinite idea was precisely what drove Frenhofer into madness and caused his death that same night. Yet, although it is tempting to see in Frenhofer the prototype of the Romantic genius, Schlegel's solution to this problem was to theorize all traces of material mediation away.[82] Schaeffer thus writes that "[t]he Romantic work of art is founded on an incompatibility between its discursive form (deductive and apodictic) and its ontological content (or

[82] Obviously, the same problem recurs on a different level in Schlegel's philosophy of art. As we will see at the end of this section, the fact that the art itself becomes open-ended for Schlegel is another manifestation of exactly the same problem.

reference)" (10). The same point is stressed by Belting who points specifically to the separation of form and matter that first emerges with the Romantic theory of art, and which he sees as its lasting impact on the theory and practice of artistic Modernism. Drawing on the work of Arthur Schopenhauer, he addresses the Platonism that underlies the Romantic theory of art, and according to which only the work's dematerialized form is believed to act directly upon the eye, thereby making form alone the carrier of art's absolute idea (*The Invisible Masterpiece* 14).

Perhaps not surprisingly, Belting refers indirectly to Schlegel's theory of art and poetry in his reflections on German Romantic aesthetics. Distancing himself from Benjamin's famous assertion that the aura of the modern artwork marks a secularization of the image's original cultic function, Belting is at pains to defend the modernity of the Romantics' views on art, thereby drawing instead on the former's dissertation on Romantic art criticism, which was largely devoted to the work of Schlegel. It is through Benjamin's dissertation that Belting sees the emergence of the modern discourse of art in German Romanticism, according to which, "[i]n their longing to experience transcendence, the Romantics were ready to reduce art production to an idea . . . detached from the work . . . [and] its material support" (*The Invisible Masterpiece* 19).

We do not have to look very far in the work of Schlegel to find these impressions confirmed. In his Jena lectures on transcendental philosophy, Schlegel argues that "form is the most substantial in particulars" ("Form ist . . . das Sustantielle in den Individuen"; KA XII 34). But also when we read the first contributions on painting, Belting's observations do indeed seem to ring true. The few artworks that Schlegel discusses in depth are not treated as historical documents that reveal something of the moment of their gestation, but are instead understood as timeless and eternal in the sense that their historical features are subordinated to the one thing that really matters for Schlegel, namely their expression of an infinite idea, transcending not merely language and discursive thought, but also the

mere material properties of the artwork in principle. Moreover, and in line with Belting's reflections, it is just as important to consider what is happening on a meta-level. It is not merely the case that each artwork allegorically presents the artist's perspective on the infinite, but, by the same token, it thereby also offers a legitimation of the philosophy on which its own absolute status is grounded. Indeed, as Schaeffer stresses time and again, the artwork opens up to the presentation of the truth-content of philosophy itself. It is important to emphasize this point as it provides the basis for art's autonomy in Schlegel. Rather than following Kant by grounding the autonomy of art subjectively in the distinction of the human faculties, Schlegel sees the roots of art's autonomy in a philosophical idea of the absolute itself. As the perception of art gives rise to a sensuous manifestation of the infinite, the alleged content of the aesthetic experience is not merely derived from a philosophical idea, but also transcends the discursive limits of the same philosophy, buttressing art's autonomous status as the discipline which makes the infinite manifest through its own means.

However, at the same time, it is just as important to stress that art's infinite grounding in Schlegel's theory comes at the expense of the artwork's own physical presence. Belting explains that this abdication of the presence and power of the image cannot be disentangled from the emergence of painting as medium, situating itself between artist and viewer and thereby leading to a different use of images.[83] Locating the moment of this transition with the emergence of realism in the early

[83] By implicitly eluding to Belting's era of art, I am well aware that I am drawing on an aspect of Belting's work that has been heavily criticized since *Likeness and Presence* first appeared in 1989. Whereas Renaissance historians have pointed to the continuing impact of the icon or miraculous images more generally during the Renaissance and after, a host of medievalists have pointed to instances where there is art and aesthetic concerns in medieval art. To some extent, I agree with these criticisms. In fact, part of the aim of this dissertation is to show that art and icon can be co-extensive, even at the threshold of modern art.

Renaissance,[84] Belting points out that "the image, henceforth produced according to the rules of art . . ., presents itself to the beholder as an object of [aesthetic] reflection. Form and content renounce their unmediated meaning in favor of the mediated meaning of aesthetic experience" (*Likeness and Presence* 16). That is to say that the unmediated presence of the cult image is replaced by aesthetic mediation, a development which we find theoretically reflected in Schlegel's early writings on art and poetry. Here, the status of art is entirely derived from the aesthetic experience to which it gives rise, as opposed to the artwork enjoying any privileged ontological status in and of itself. Philipp Weber argues that the significance of art does not derive from the work's physical properties, but rather from the fact that it "*facilitates* the sensuous or also symbolic presentation of the infinite" ("*dient* der sinnlichen oder auch sinnbildlichen Darstellung des Unendlichen" ;Weber 87; my emphasis).

This is to say that the artwork's significance consists not so much in what it is, but rather in what it does, a dynamic that is explicitly captured in "Dialogue on Poetry" where Schlegel proclaims through the mouth of Antonio: "We thus hold ourselves only to the meaning of the whole; what individually stimulates, stirs, occupies, and delights the senses, the heart, and the mind, seems to us only a sign, a means of contemplating the whole at the moment when we elevate ourselves to it." ("Wir halten uns also nur an die Bedeutung des Ganzen; was den Sinn, das Herz, den Verstand, die Einbildung einzeln reizt, rührt, beschäftigt und ergötzt, scheint uns nur Zeichen, Mittel zur Anschauung des Ganzen, in dem Augenblick, wo wir uns zu diesem erheben."; KA II 323). What this passage illustrates is that the artwork is only a means to an end for Schlegel. It is not the artwork itself,

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[84] Interestingly, Belting and Schlegel see this breaking point at exactly the same point. In *Spiegel der Welt*, Belting has extensively argued that particularly the work of van Eyck marks the emergence of a modern aesthetic sensibility. As we will see in the next chapter, Schlegel emphatically conceives of the iconic turn as a return to the art *before* van Eyck, whose art he will come to understand in the last two contributions as a regression.

but the aesthetic experience that is absolutized, leading to a momentary elevation in which the human faculties are stirred and delighted as the artist's perspective on the infinite opens up. Whereas Belting maintains that the emergence of the modern discourse on art coincides with the surrender of the artwork to the aesthetic experience of the beholder (*Likeness and Presence* 16), Brauers ties this primacy of the aesthetic experience directly to Schlegel's pantheism, arguing that the distinction between the artwork and any other physical object is eradicated in principle by pantheism's flat ontology (16).

This emphasis on the aesthetic experience at the expense of the work's physical presence is further underscored by the communicative model which underlies the former, and in which Schlegel's disregard for mediation becomes perhaps most clear. As we already discussed this model in some detail, let me simply draw attention to a passage in Schlegel's Jena lectures that we previously read in passing, and in which his lack of concern for mediation becomes particularly apparent:

> The communication should be representation, there is no other medium between spirit and spirit. But this representation should be such that it produces in the other that which the artist has in himself. When the method is generic, then this is possible.
>
> (Die Mittheilung soll Darstellung seyn, kein anderes Medium giebt es nicht zwischen Geist und Geist. Es soll aber die Darstellung das seyn, wodurch das in dem andern produzirt wird, was derjenige in sich hat, der darstellt. Wenn die Methode genetisch ist, so ist dies möglich.) (KA XII 103).

In other words, there should be a one-on-one correspondence between the artist's perspective and that of the viewer, which is only possible when the medium of communication forms no obstacle in the transmission of the artist's original idea. Applying this model to Schlegel's theory of painting, it turns out that he offers nothing but a slight modification of the old metaphor of painting as window, with

the proviso that the picture does not opens a view on the mere sensuous manifestation of nature. In line with Schlegel's advice to the painter in the third contribution, it rather opens a view on the infinite in nature as it appears to the artist's imagination (compare KA IV 77).[85]

It is this transparency of the picture-plane which allows us to understand the role of the actual painting in Schlegel's theory of art as an early expression of the invisible masterpiece which Belting regarded as the quintessence of Modernism. With its physical properties outshone by the infinite idea that is pictured inside the frame, the painting as physical object indeed remains invisible for Schlegel, which becomes perhaps most obvious from Schlegel's distinction between letter and spirit throughout his early writings. Whereas we have seen that the letter corresponds to the artwork as object or medium, the spirit is the quality that corresponds to the artist's original idea, and which lets the artwork come to life in the experience of the viewer. In other words, the spirit is that which cannot be captured by rules and discursive modes of thought, nor can it be said to simply adhere in matter. Rather, it is the form that inhabits the materiality of the artwork, and which corresponds to that quality which Kant referred to as an aesthetic idea. In other words, it is the perspective of the infinite within the frame, its allegorical beauty that realizes the infinite in the perception of the viewer. All of this underscores once again that the artwork as a physical object is only a means to an end, a ladder that can be discarded as soon as its absolute destination has been reached: "Everything one brings into sentences and conclusions is just letters, which will and must pass away so that only the spirit remains." ("Alles was man in Sätze und Schlüsse bringt, ist nur Buchstabe, und der wird und muß vorübergehen, indem nur

[85] The metaphor of painting as window derives from Leon Battista Alberti's *De Pictura* from 1435. For the impact of this metaphor and its influence on art and technology in the following centuries, see Friedberg's *The Virtual Window*.

der Geist bleibt."; KA XII 95).[86] And in "Dialogue on Poetry" Schlegel remarks: "Wherever any living spirit appears bounded in a formed and cultivated letter, there is art, there is isolation, material to overcome, tools to be used, a design and rules of treatment." ("Wo irgend lebendiger Geist in einem gebildeten Buchstaben gebunden erscheint, da ist Kunst, da ist Absonderung, Stoff zu überwinden, Werkzeuge zu gebrauchen, ein Entwurf und Gesetze der Behandlung."; KA II 290).

All of this puts the artist in a complex relationship to the materiality of his art. Belting explains that the absolute idea of art also imbues the artist with God-like qualities, triumphing by the force of his ideas over the physical limits of his art (*The Invisible Masterpiece* 125). In fact, when we translate the distinction between spirit and letter to the level of artistic production, we find that the contrast between invention and execution, idea and object, points to an element of Gnosticism in Schlegel's thinking, which is only confirmed by the fact that Schlegel repeatedly refers to form as a positive and matter as a negative principle in his Jena lectures on transcendental philosophy (see e.g., KA XII 43). Although materiality is a necessary component of every artwork (KA IV 73), the peculiar quality of the artist consists in his ability to overcome the passivity of the letter, an idea which is perhaps best captured by one of Schlegel's private notes from around this time: "Without letter, no spirit; the letter can only be overcome by making it flow." ("Ohne Buchstabe kein Geist; der Buchstabe nur dadurch zu überwinden, daß er fließend gemacht wird."; KA 18 344 #274).

It is precisely this ability to make the letter of the artwork flow in favor of the spirit, which Schlegel highlights in his discussion of Correggio in the first contribution: "What is often for good reason the ultimate goal for other painters, the forms, the figures, are for Correggio only means,

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[86] This is also affirmed by Frank who writes that the allegorical "is an artistic procedure that extinguishes the finitely presented as that which is not meant and steers our view towards that which was not grasped by this singular synthesis" (*The Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism* 209).

individual tones, syllables or words to express the thought of the whole; all his pictures are allegorical." (Was andern Malern oft mit Recht der letzte Zweck ist, die Formen, die Gestalten, die sind dem Correggio *nur Mittel*, einzelne Töne, Sylben oder *Worte zum Ausdruck für den Gedanken des Ganzen*, alle seine Bilder sind allegorisch."; KA IV 23). Stressing Correggio's ability to transcend that which is merely sensuous and physical, this example precisely demonstrates the difference between art and craft within Schlegel's theory of painting. Whereas the craftsman is able to imitate nature or other artists, it is only through the creative force of the genius that the work is able to overcome its mere physicality, which is precisely what the whole idea of allegorical beauty amounts to. Frank thus writes that allegory "is an artistic procedure that *extinguishes* the finitely presented as that which is not meant and steers our view towards that which was not grasped by this singular synthesis." (*The Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism* 208). If anything, this quotation makes clear that the artwork itself is completely subordinated to the idea, which finds expression in the many instances where Schlegel refers to the physicality of the artwork as a letter, a tool, material to be overcome, etc. What these references suggest is that the physicality of painting is at once an enabling as well as a limiting factor for the infinite to appear, which is exactly what seems to be suggested by Benjamin as well. If art is the medium that derives from the artist's infinite process of reflection, then its absolute grounding necessarily comes at a price. Since the infinite resists determination and fixation in any material form, the process of infinite reflection not only unleashes an ongoing process of open-ended formal experimentation, but also means that the work itself can be realized only when this process is willfully interrupted, meaning that its material realization will always fall short when compared to the infinite idea (Benjamin 154).

In other words, it is precisely because the process of reflection itself is infinite that every realization is in a sense arbitrary, meaning that artistic production (and criticism) is an open-ended

process that can never be fully realized. And since the infinite can never be captured in its entirety, but only ever be approached from a different point of view, the result is that every artistic creation automatically invites a new creation, with no artist ever being able to claim that he has reached the end of his métier. Every artist should therefore rest content that his work can only reveal a perspective on the infinite, leaving room for an infinite number of alternative perspectives for himself and other artists to discover. Schlegel thus writes that every artist

> must strive to expand his poetry and his view on poetry forever, and to approach it to the highest level that is possible on earth; for the reason that he strives to connect his part to the infinite whole in the most definite manner; because the deadening generalization achieves precisely the opposite.
>
> (muß streben, seine Poesie und seine Ansicht der Poesie ewig zu erweitern, und sie der höchsten zu nähern die überhaupt auf der Erde möglich ist; dadurch daß er seinen Teil an das große Ganze auf die bestimmteste Weise anzuschließen strebt: denn die tötende Verallgemeinerung wirkt gerade das Gegenteil) (KA II 286)

As such, Schlegel's ideal of the artist has much in common with Frenhofer. Just as Frenhofer, Schlegel's genius is burdened with a task that is infinite in principle, signaling for Belting that the act of creation had become more important than the actual work itself (*The Invisible Masterpiece* 11). However, although both share the ambition to represent the infinite within their work, the difference between the two is that the Romantic genius is ultimately not defeated by the impossibility of his task. This is no heroic feat on the genius' part, but rather a consequence of the fact that Schlegel leaves the transition from creator to viewer, invention to execution unproblematized. As Agamben has explained in his reading of the novella, it is only at the moment when the unknown masterpiece is revealed that

Frenhofer's perspective shifts from painter to viewer, seeing the discrepancy between his own ambitions and the actual result:

> What happens to Frenhofer? So long as no other eye contemplated his masterpiece, he did not doubt his success for one moment; but one look at the canvas through the eyes of his two spectators is enough for him to appropriate Porbus's and Poussin's opinion: "Nothing! Nothing! And I worked on this for ten years." Frenhofer becomes double. He moves from the point of view of the artist to that of the spectator, from the interested promesse de bonheur to disinterested aesthetics. In this transition, the integrity of his work dissolves. . . . [H]is work alternately presents two sides that cannot be put back together into a unity. The side that faces the artist is the living reality in which he reads his promise of happiness; but the other side, which faces the spectator, is an assemblage of lifeless elements that can only mirror itself in the aesthetic judgment's reflection of it. (*The Man Without Content* 9)

This transition of perspective is altogether absent from Schlegel's theory of painting. What prevents the Romantic genius from falling into madness is precisely the illusion that the work's material conditions can be overcome. In other words, despite his many visits to the Louvre, the numerous paintings that he encountered during his time in Paris, and his conviction that every presentation creates its own body of art, Schlegel did for a long time not cease to view art from the perspective of the creative genius. It is only with his encounter of the radically different aesthetic of late medieval art that his perspective shifts, and he begins to realize that the perspective on the infinite is not enabled by the form or the idea of the artwork, but precisely by the letter which he had ignored for years.

viii. Conclusion

As we have seen in the previous section, the distinction between spirit and letter, invention and execution, idea and object, has important consequences for Schlegel's approach to painting in the first contributions. It not only underlies his disregard for the material and physical properties of the artwork, but also his lack of interest in the historical conditions of the artwork's production and reception can be explained from this perspective. The reason for this is that Schlegel only regards the artist's invention and perspective as those aspects of painting that are meaningful.

One of the most important consequences of this emphasis on artistic productivity is that the actual artwork completely dissolves in Schlegel's theory of art, thereby providing the blueprint for the invisible masterpiece that Belting associated with artistic Modernism. Separating form and matter, idea and object, the physical properties of the painting itself disintegrate as the frame merely opens a window on the artist's original idea. The way in which Schlegel thus conceives of the aesthetic experience leaves no room for any consideration for the way in which the artist's original perspective on the infinite is mediated, which is, at one and the same time, the source of painting's political strengths and weaknesses of Schlegel's early theory of art. To be sure, the aesthetic experience is a kind of epiphany for Schlegel, imaginatively opening the viewer's eyes to the infinite by which he is contained. As such, the aesthetic experience has the potential to restore man's lost sense of unity, thereby temporarily suspending the viewer's fragmented conception of himself, and pointing him to the fact that "no person is merely a human being, but can and should be at the same time also the whole of humanity in reality and in truth" ("kein Mensch schlechthin nur ein Mensch ist, sondern zugleich auch die ganze Menscheit wirklich und in Wahrheit sein kann und soll."; KA II 286).

However, on the other hand, the revelation that the aesthetic experience offers is more of a philosophical than religious kind in Schlegel's theory of art. Precisely because he disregards the role

of mediation in the communication between artist and viewer, the aesthetic experience is unable to offer anything more than merely the artist's point of view. Or, to put it somewhat differently, the individual artwork will always lack the cohesive power that Schlegel expected from a new mythology, as the artist's perspective is ultimately – as Belting and Schaeffer remind us – nothing other than the manifestation of the truth-content of his own pantheistic philosophy, meaning that the projected new mythology signals not so much a revolution through artistic but rather philosophical means. This consequently means that art's transformative power is naturally compromised as it cannot exceed the limits of the philosophical outlook on which it is grounded, and whose truth it is supposed to legitimate.

At the same time, however, it needs to be acknowledged that the limited political effect of Schlegel's views is amply compensated by their art-historical and theoretical importance. Schlegel's philosophy of art stands at the basis of Modernism, inaugurating a new stage in post-Kantian aesthetics. Adopting Kant's argument for art's autonomy by exchanging its subjective grounding for an absolute one, Schlegel further develops Kant's theory of artistic genius and the aesthetic idea in order to arrive at a conception of art and painting that in its open-ended character, prioritization of form over object, transparency, and emphasis on the creative genius as the ground of artistic originality and authenticity foreshadows the future course of painting for more than a century.

Schlegel himself, however, would soon radically break with the views he propounded in the first contributions on painting. In sharp contrast with the classicism and pantheism which he advanced in these first accounts, the concluding two contributions mark a radical departure from the earlier framework. Here, painting is submitted to a fully transcendent and monotheistic God. Schlegel, however, is unwilling to give up on art and poetry altogether. His last contributions reflect his realization that an autonomous conception of art grounded in an abstract and philosophically conceived absolute force was unable to bring about the social change which he increasingly felt was necessary.

More precisely, the fundamental insight informing his later theory of painting in the last two contributions is not only that art is in itself insufficient to establish a new mythology, but especially that art can only have actual social and transformative impact when it no longer offers a view on the artist's individual perspective, but rather leads to the vision of an absolute God who can only manifest itself in the world through material mediation. Having lost his faith that philosophy could ever arrive at an absolute standpoint that would subsume individual differences, Schlegel turns to the established institution of the Catholic Church as the only available authority with mythic proportions. (KA II 319).

CHAPTER THREE

The Romantic Iconic Turn:

Towards a Model of Christian Painting

i. Introduction

Schlegel's first three contributions where written against the background of a pagan rather than a Christian framework. In fact, they were antagonistic to Christianity. This is how Schlegel understood his own philosophy of art, writing in "Ideas" that "the only significant opposition to the religion of man and artist now springing up everywhere is to be expected from the few remaining real Christians. But they too, when the sun really begins to dawn, will fall down and worship" (*Lucinde and the Fragments* 249 #92). A few years later, however, Schlegel would come to hold radically different views. Enamored by the Catholic way of life and finding himself increasingly opposed to secularization, Christianity turned out to be not the problem, but the solution. When reading the last two contributions on painting, one cannot escape the impression that Schlegel, now a half-devout Christian, must have been struck by the pagan implications when he returned to the subject of painting in Cologne.

In this chapter, we will trace Schlegel's transition from paganism to Christianity through a discussion of the last two contributions and their companion piece, the 1804-05 Cologne lectures on philosophy. After a brief discussion of the change in Schlegel's social and political circumstances that his move from Paris to Cologne entailed, I will perform a close reading of certain aspects of the fourth contribution in particular, drawing attention to the many details in the text that indicate a shift in Schlegel's views on and approach to painting. As we will come to see, this culminates in Schlegel's reclamation of painting's autonomy in the fourth contribution. It is this reclamation that marks the

most obvious difference with the aesthetic outlook of the previous contributions, even though it has hardly been touched upon in the scholarly literature.

Moreover, with the reclamation of painting's autonomy comes a shift in the temporal orientation of the image. No longer driven by creativity and invention, the painter is now expected to submit to tradition, which will eventually lead to a reconfiguration of painting as medium in the last two contributions. In order to make this point, I will draw on the Cologne lectures on philosophy in which we find the theoretical framework by which Schlegel's iconic turn is directly informed. Here, two important shifts in Schlegel's philosophical and religious outlook have to be mentioned. Perhaps most important is that his conception of the divine shifts from an immanent to a transcendent God, marking a radical departure from his earlier pantheism that Schlegel now comes to reject in the fiercest terms. However, at the same time, this shift coincides with a radical departure from the earlier paganism. It is with his nascent Christianity that Greek mythology and art increasingly come to be rejected, a process that leads to an opposition between antiquity and the (German) Middle Ages in his work. The most important consequence of this transformation is that Schlegel replaces force with the Christian notion of divine love at the heart of his ontology. In other words, he no longer understands the whole of creation as an expression of some creative force, but now it is the spiritual and dynamic principle of love that underlies creation.

In this context, the notion of revelation will come to play an essential role not only in Schlegel's religious and philosophical thinking, but also in the last contributions on painting. In fact, I will argue that the iconic turn that the last two contributions inaugurate should precisely be seen as a reconfiguration of painting as revelation. It is this conception of painting that Schlegel sees most fully realized in late medieval German painting with which we will close our initial explorations of the iconic turn in Schlegel's thinking.

ii. Schlegel's Conversion to Politics

Whereas we have seen that the politics of the first three contributions mostly resided in the polemical tone that Schlegel adopted throughout these writings, the last two accounts on painting that Schlegel wrote from Cologne show a renewed sense of political urgency not so much in rhetoric, but in approach and argumentation. Antedating the lectures on European literature in which he first distanced himself from the aesthetic framework of his earlier writings, the last two contributions inaugurate this trend by offering a normative framework in which painting is redefined in strictly religious terms, developing a historical conception of art that, in the words of the art historian Till-Holger Borchert, "is not matched with any closeness by any other Romantic author" ("Hans Holbein" 197).

Although it is commonplace to see Schlegel's shifting allegiances during these years as a foreboding of his future conversion to Catholicism,[87] the same period also marked an important change in his political loyalties, when he shifted from his early republicanism to the conservatism of his later thought.[88] In fact, much of the work Schlegel produced after 1804 is inseparable from the immediate social and historical circumstances he found himself in. Whereas he had only a few years earlier heralded the French Revolution as one of the greatest tendencies of the age, it is particularly during

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[87] As earlier noted, particularly Matala de Mazza represents this trend with respect to Schlegel's writings on painting.

[88] Schlegel's republicanism is most obvious from his short essay on Condorcet and his essay on Republicanism, but is also apparent in many of the entries in his notebooks before 1802. On the connection between Schlegel's Catholicism and his politics see Breuer and Jäger. Nathan Ross has pointed to the intertwinement of Schlegel's early Romantic theory of the fragment and his political republicanism (118–20). As we will come to see, the shift in Schlegel's religious and political outlook thus naturally coincides with a shift in his philosophy as well.

his time in Cologne that he comes to distance himself from its most fundamental principles.[89] Although some of his Parisian writings already showed a marked departure from the liberal values that the French Revolution promoted, his criticism in the years after 1804 intensifies when it becomes increasingly clear to him that Napoleon's imperial ambitions impacted society not only on a political, but also on a religious and cultural level (Behrens 162).

The general outline of the political and religious counter-revolution he will advance in these years can immediately be traced back to "Journey to France" from the beginning of Schlegel's Parisian period. Already in this text, he pitched the ideal of a Christian German monarchy against the grim reality of the secular French Republic, upholding the ideal of the Holy Roman Empire between the reigns of the German emperors Charlemagne and Frederick II as a political model for the future (Behrens 170; Oesterle, "Friedrich Schlegel in Paris oder die romantische Gegenrevolution" 164–65). What changes in Cologne, however, is that Schlegel's advocacy of medieval society as a political, cultural, and religious ideal can no longer be seen as merely a rhetorical gesture, but acquires a normative character and moves to the center of his thought (Behler, "Intro to KA XI" XXXIV).

The year 1804 is a watershed moment in this regard. It is in this year that Schlegel exchanges Paris for Cologne, marking the beginning of his political radicalization (Behrens 167).[90] Although his move to Cologne no doubt played a role, this radicalization was certainly informed by political events as well. Most importantly, it was the year when Napoleon crowned himself Emperor of the First

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[89] Here, I obviously refer to the famous *Athenaeum* fragment #216, the beginning of which reads: "The French Revolution, Fichte's philosophy, and Goethe's Meister are the greatest tendencies of the age. Whoever is offended by this juxtaposition, whoever cannot take any revolution seriously that isn't noisy and materialistic, hasn't yet achieved a lofty, broad perspective on the history of mankind" (*Lucinde and the Fragments* 190 #216).

[90] Anstett speaks in this context about Schlegel's political conversion, although he dates it slightly later, at the beginning of 1805 ("Intro to KA XIV" XLVI).

Empire. In front of Pope Pius VII, Napoleon presented himself as the legitimate heir of the Carolingian Empire (Behrens 173) – a claim that gained in virulence when the French defeated the Austrian and Russian armies at Austerlitz in 1806, after which the last emperor, Francis II, immediately abdicated and the Holy Roman Empire was dissolved.[91]

However, even before the Holy Roman Empire disintegrated, the political and cultural reality of many Germans had already undergone significant transformations. When the First French Empire consumed the Eastern part of Germany during the first years of the 19th century, many of the smaller German states fell victim to the process of mediatization by which many smaller kingdoms lost their relative autonomy and were integrated in larger administrative units under French rule. An intended side effect of this governmental reorganization was that especially the religious hotbed of the German Rhineland underwent major waves of secularization. This had a great effect on the arts in particular. The actual separation of church and state meant that many churches and cloisters in the area were stripped of their religious artwork and devotional objects, which now ended up in private hands or those of the state.

When Schlegel moved to Cologne in 1804, he suddenly found himself in the midst of these events. The city was under French rule by the time he arrived. The effects of the impending secularization were particularly heartfelt in the German archdiocese, stimulating an interest in the medieval roots of the Holy Roman Empire among the local intelligentsia (Burgdorf 76). Schlegel's burgeoning interest in the German Middle Ages was thus no exception around the time. Against the background of Napoleon's political and cultural imperialism, Schlegel's intellectual and political

[91] I will return to the topic of Napoleon's identification with Charlemagne in the conclusion.

outlook underwent a significant transformation in which medieval life and culture became a model for widespread cultural and political change in the present.

Schlegel's writings on art and poetry provide the framework in which these new interests most clearly manifest themselves. This is in itself not very remarkable as Schlegel had already dealt with medieval poetry in some of his earlier texts. However, as Behler remarks, part of Schlegel's strategy becomes now to resurrect certain aspects of medieval life and culture primarily through visual means ("Intro to KA XX-XXI" XXXIII).[92] It is in this context that the last two contributions form an indispensable testimony to Schlegel's ambitions. As Till-Holger Borchert writes in this context: "Schlegel felt the need for a renewal of the arts on the basis of a new faith, which was an important part of reforming the entire society from a fervent religious and patriotic perspective. The model for this pious renewal of painting was provided by retrospectively turning to medieval German culture" ("A Moving Expression" 138). In other words, the last contributions on painting are not only a document of Schlegel's nascent interest in the German Middle Ages, but they also reveal the first traces of his attempt to recapture vital aspects of medieval visual culture and make them instrumental for current religious and political purposes.[93]

The way in which he seeks to achieve this is by making the aesthetic experience serviceable to political or communal ends. Just as in the earlier contributions, the aesthetic experience suspends the

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[92] Apart from the texts on Boccaccio mentioned earlier, Schlegel's engagement with medieval poetry in several of his *Athenaeum* fragments and in "Dialogue on Poetry." His emphasis on a visual approach to the Middle Ages clearly reflects Novalis' essay "Christianity or Europe" in which medieval life and culture stands out for their distinctive mode of visuality.

[93] This turn to the model of medieval painting marks a crucial departure from his earlier work. In "Dialogue on Poetry," for example, Schlegel referred to the Middle Ages as an "intermediate world of cultivation" ("Zwischenwelt der Bildung"; KA II 296) that was important as a point of transition from an ancient to a modern consciousness, but whose relevance consisted certainly not in artistic matters.

semblance of the merely finite, thereby potentially providing the occasion for the establishment of an integrated community under a higher ideal. However, even though the artwork thus remains the symbolic center where consciousness and the infinite meet, the way in which this relationship is now conceived undergoes a significant transformation, just as the projected community to which their interaction is expected to give rise. Simply put, in order to establish a community that was able to withstand French imperialism and the absolutism of its new emperor, a higher power was needed than what a pantheistic God could provide for, directing Schlegel in the direction of the one authority that was still able to equal Napoleon's stature: the Christian God.

Crucially, the key difference between the Spinozistic and the Christian God was that the latter was supported by tradition and institutions that cultivated and preserved God's glory. The appeal of the Roman church consisted partly in the fact that it was not merely a religious but also a political power steeped in tradition. This connection between politics and religion would become essential to Schlegel's counterrevolutionary politics, and directly provide the ideological background against which much of his thinking would now take place, including his theory of art and painting.

At the same time, his confessional turn toward Catholicism allowed him to come to terms with some of the unresolved issues that haunted his earlier perspectivism, not in the least the problem of how to overcome social fragmentation. In sharp contrast to his earlier work, the last contributions reflect his recent skepticism whether a politics, religion, or art grounded in the individual could ever lead to social cohesion.[94] Not coincidentally, this break with the individualism of the first contributions

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[94] Anstett argues that the notion of original sin had become fundamental reality for Schlegel in Cologne, informing his rejection of individualism and any political attempt to arrive at a moral society by means of the individual's own powers ("Intro to KA XIV" XLVIII). For Schlegel's earlier organic conception of the state, and how particularly his early Romantic political theory is an attempt to find a balance between the extremes of absolutism and liberalism, see Millán-Brusslan. Beiser makes a similar point in the introduction to his edited volume *The Early Political Writings of the German Romantics*.

coincides with the moment when his opposition against Napoleon becomes more pronounced.[95] As Schlegel's aims are becoming more outspokenly nationalistic and conservative, he comes to promote a political model which grants absolute authority to an integrated state and church, thereby severely restricting the individual's liberal freedoms. This is to say that Schlegel turned for his political thinking to the medieval constitution of the Holy Roman Empire as the archetype for an absolute German state that was to rival Napoleon's, and which provides the immediate background against which the two last contributions on painting have to be read. No longer trusting the artist (or any individual for that matter) to create his own mythology, one of the crucial differences between the first and the later contributions is that poetry no longer provides the model after which painting is modeled. In fact, Schlegel disassociates the art of painting from the creative act with which it was still entangled in the first contributions, instead anchoring it in the inherited late medieval Catholic tradition from before the Reformation (Brauers 71). This consequently means that the history of painting that emerges from these writings is no longer conceived as a narrative of creativity, originality, and genius. Instead, the last two contributions are written against the modern discourse of art, reconfiguring the history of painting as the history of the image's mediation between God and man, making medieval painting not an aberration but instead the ground of art.

[95] Schlegel's opposition to Napoleon and his support of a society of ranks come together in the lectures on philosophy and universal history that Schlegel delivered shortly after the completion of the last contributions on painting. Both lectures have numerous tacit allusions to Napoleon's despotism and his desire for domination and control (Anstett, "Intro to KA XIV" XI).

iii. Fragmenting the Descriptions of Paintings

When we compare the conceptual and thematic differences between the first and last contributions, it is remarkable that the different aims and ambitions of the two sets of writings have remained largely unnoticed.[96] This is unfortunate for several reasons. Written over a period of more than two years, the "Descriptions of Paintings" is not merely the best document we have to trace the development of Schlegel's thinking at a crucial stage of his career and life, but its later parts also offer a foreboding of art's current predicament that gets often obscured by preconceived notions and ideas about the conservativism of these writings.

What makes this oversight in the literature all the more remarkable is that Schlegel implicitly draws the reader's attention to his changed approach and intentions at the beginning of the fourth contribution. Although it has to be acknowledged that Schlegel is never explicit about the shift in his aims and ambitions, he nonetheless offers several indications that the last two contributions transfer the reader to a different discourse which is in many ways fundamentally opposed to what he had presented before.

This becomes most obvious when we compare the last pages of the third contribution with the opening of the fourth. What both of these sections have in common is that Schlegel explicitly refers to the aim that informs his writing. At the end of the third contribution, we thus read that he has no other goal than clarifying painting's poetic intentions: "Our presentation of local works of art from the old schools is nothing but an ongoing contribution to eminently clarify their poetic intention throughout." ("[U]nsre Darstelling hiesiger Kunstwerke der alten Schule ist nichts anders als ein Beitrag dazu, da

[96] To my knowledge, Eichner is the only one who pointed to the differences between the Parisian and Cologne contributions on painting (XXII).

wir vorzüglicherweise die poetische Absicht deutlich zu machen überall uns angelegen sein lassen."; KA IV 76-77). However, when Schlegel wrote the opening passage of the fourth contribution almost a year later, his intentions had significantly shifted: "We thus continue to present the true concept of painting . . . on the basis of a plethora of individual perceptions." ("So fahren wir also fort, den wahren Begriff der Malerei . . . an der Fülle einzelner Anschauungen alter Gemälde ausführlich darzustellen."; KA IV 79).

The most notable difference between these statements is that Schlegel explicitly defines the purpose of the text in reference to a *true* concept of painting at the opening of the fourth contribution. What is most significant about this ambition is that Schlegel claims an absolute viewpoint for himself that stands in marked contrast to the perspectivism and the irony of the first three contributions. As we have seen in the previous chapters, Schlegel's philosophical framework was radically adverse to such an absolutism. Indeed, the basic insight that underlay his theory of the fragment was precisely that the infinite (or any totality for that matter) fractures into an infinite number of finite perspectives, thereby immediately forestalling the possibility that the whole of painting could ever be contained by a singular point of view. The opening of the fourth contribution thus immediately signals a break from Schlegel's early Romantic theory of the fragment, exchanging the irony of the previous three accounts for the ambition to capture painting in its true essence.

Although Schlegel's early theory of the fragment thus gives way to absolutism in the fourth contribution, it would be a mistake to assume that his earlier concerns about painting's fragmented state are no longer of relevance for him. Quite the opposite. Although he continues to maintain that one's individual perspective on the whole of painting is necessarily partial and incomplete, he also adds that this limitation "in no way hinders the unity of view for someone who has correctly grasped the idea of painting" ("hindert . . . keinesweges [sic] die Einheit der Ansicht für denjenigen, welcher

die Idee der Mahlerkunst einmal richtig gefasst hat"; KA IV 80). When we compare this statement with Schlegel's approach in the first contributions, the crucial intervention is that the limits of one's finite perspective can now be overcome when one has grasped the correct idea of painting. This idea, Schlegel maintains, can be acquired when one turns to painting's historical origins. More precisely, what allows Schlegel to shift from a relative to a normative conception of painting is the realization that the limits of one's individual point of view can be supplemented by an objective understanding of painting's earliest history. This centrality of history is explicitly underscored by Schlegel in the fourth contribution when he writes that the totality of art ("das ganze der Kunst") can be captured by anyone who "has correctly captured the spirit of the past" ("der den Geist der Vergangenheid richtig gefaßt hat"; KA IV 80).[97] Schlegel's insistence that historical understanding can make up for the limits of one's individual perspective provides us thus with a first indication how central the notion of divine revelation had become for him around this time.[98] As Susanne Lanwerd explains, Schlegel's underlying assumption in the fourth contribution is precisely that the universal truth of divine revelation provides history with the unity and coherence which it otherwise lacks (63–64).[99]

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[97] It is remarkable that Locher derives his argument for the perspectival nature of Schlegel's conception of painting largely from the same paragraph but chose to ignore the repeated insistence on history to circumvent the partiality of the subjective point of view ("Construction des Ganzen" 119–20).

[98] Revelation is the central point of orientation for Schlegel's conception of history in Cologne. In his 1812 review of Jacobi's *Of Divine Things and Their Revelations ("Von den göttlichen Dingen und ihrer Offenbarung")*, Schlegel most explicitly refers to the "historical fact of salvation" ("geschichtlichen Tatsache der Erlösung") as the "center of all human history" as the ("Mittelpunkt aller Menschengeschichte"; KA VIII 444).

[99] That Schlegel regards divine revelation as truth and a source of knowledge is explicitly affirmed in the Cologne lectures on philosophy: "According to Kant and many others, perception is the source of knowledge with regard to matter, reason with regard to form. With us there is no cognition through either of these two. . . . Feeling and memory are the only sources of knowledge for us, since they encompass the entire sphere of knowledge of the self. . . . In addition to these, revelation could be also mentioned if desired." ("Nach Kant und

Schlegel's changed attitude to painting participates in a more general shift that was largely inspired by his studies of Oriental mythology and religion. As may be recalled, the Parisian lectures on European literature from 1803-04 marked a significant departure from Schlegel's previous work in the sense that he proposed a historical and religious reorientation of poetry that was at odds with everything he had hitherto written. Arguing that "[a]ll poems are only fragments of the first revelation of the human race" ("[a]lle Dichtungen sind nur Bruchstücken der ersten Offenbarung des Menschengeschlechts"; KA XI 136), Schlegel stimulated the poet to turn to the art and mythology of Oriental cultures. Moreover, by urging them to recover the traces of the primordial revelation around which these cultures were centered, these lectures marked a first departure from the stress on the creative act on which his earlier views on poetry had rested.

Written only a few months after these lectures, it is perhaps no surprise that also the last two contributions show a similar concern for revelation as painting's true source. What distinguishes the last contributions from the earlier lectures on poetry, however, is that the concept of revelation is now understood from within a Christian framework. Moreover, the late medieval paintings that he encountered on the way from Paris to Cologne confirmed Schlegel's belief that revelation was also the center around which early Christian art revolved. No doubt impressed by the religious aura that these works conveyed, Schlegel moves the concept of revelation to the center of his theory of painting, leading to the iconic turn in his theory of art that we see reflected in the last two contributions on painting, and which receives its most extensive philosophical justification in the Cologne lectures on philosophy from 1804-05.

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vielen andern ist die Anschauung in Rücksicht auf den Stoff Erkenntnisquelle, die Vernunft in Rücksicht auf die Form. Bei uns gibt es durch keine dieser beiden eine Erkenntnis. . . . Gefühl und Erinnerung sind uns die einzigen Quellen der Erkenntnis, indem sie den ganzen Umkreis der Erkenntnis der Ichheit umfassen. . . . Neben ihnen könnte also auch allenfalls die Offenbarung angeführt werden."; KA XII 355).

The conclusion of all of this is that the last two contributions offer a radical departure from the Romantic irony that governed Schlegel's earlier writings.[100] That this not merely entails a break with the relativism and perspectivism that was part and parcel of Schlegel's earlier writings is aptly summarized by Lanwerd. She explains that the importance of revelation for Schlegel's philosophical and historical thinking also puts the artwork itself into a different relation to the divine. Moreover, she explicitly connects this with a hardening of Schlegel's politics after his arrival in Cologne. It is particularly when Schlegel's ambitions for socio-political reform get more concrete and authoritarian in character, Lanwerd writes, that "[t]he approach of . . . using the fragment as a project of this promise is suspended within the framework of a religiously founded conception of art and symbols." ("Der Ansatz, . . . das Fragment als Projekt dieses Versprechens einzusetzen, wird im Rahmen einer religiös begründeten Kunst- und Symbolauffassung aufgeheben"; 63). As we will return to the relation between art and politics in the conclusion, it suffices to say for now that the authoritarian traits of Schlegel's thinking remain in no way confined to his politics alone, but also infuse his thinking on art. In fact, the last two contributions on painting reveal a similar authoritarianism in the sense that Schlegel severely limits the role of the creative genius in his theory of painting, thereby restricting individual liberties in both the production and reception of painting in favor of a religious absolutism that requires the individual's submission to divine authority.

The complete reversal of the hierarchy between creation and execution is perhaps the most obvious difference between the first and later contributions, and the one in which the authoritarian character of Schlegel's views manifests itself most clearly. Whereas the third contribution fully

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[100] Here, I refer to the concept of the fragment in the philosophical sense. At the beginning of the fourth contribution, Schlegel still refers to artwork as a historical fragment; that is, as a "ruin of past times" (eine Ruine vergangener Zeiten"; KA IV 80).

identified art with the creative act of the artistic genius, indeed even identified the artist's invention and creation with God's own creative force, Schlegel's new historical-religious orientation requires the artist to model his work on the example of Christian painting from the late Middle Ages. Rather than turning inward and relying on his own peculiarity ("Eigentümlichkeit"), Schlegel now expects the artist to turn to tradition as he believes that the "original concept and purpose of art" ("ursprünglichen Begriff und Zweck der Kunst"; KA IV 80) is most purely and correctly conveyed by the oldest schools of painting.[101] If anything, these restrictions on artistic freedom indicate how far Schlegel deviated from his poetic conception of painting in the fourth contribution. Instead of aligning the arts of painting and poetry in their shared poetic intention ("poetische Absicht"), the fourth contribution draws a sharp distinction between the two, arguing that every painter who strives for the "greater freedom of poetry" ("größern Freiheit der Poesie") is destined to create artworks that "only hover in emptiness and ineffectiveness" ("nur in das Leere und Unwirksame verschweben"; KA IV 107). It is precisely for this reason that the role of the artists is no longer modeled on the divinely inspired priest, as Schlegel writes in one of his earlier notes (see e.g., KA XVIII 258 #771). In fact, in the fourth contribution, he radically reverses the relationship between artistry and priesthood, now taking his ideal from the Orthodox iconic tradition in which "the priests tended to practice the art of painting themselves." (". . . die Priester selbst die Malerkunst zu üben pflegten"; KA IV 104).

[101] This leads us to another difference between the two statements of intention that we discussed above. Although not immediately obvious at first, the schools that Schlegel referred to in the third contribution should not be confused with the oldest schools of painting that he refers to here. We will come to see that when Schlegel speaks of the oldest schools of painting in the last contributions, he is referring to the late German medieval schools before van Eyck. References to these schools are absent in the first contributions, where Schlegel still sees early modern art (van Eyck and later) as painting's oldest manifestation.

iv. Reclaiming the Autonomy of Art

This inversion of the hierarchy between creation and execution, and the new insistence on art's religious origins offer a clear indication that the last two contributions were written with a different intention than the previous three accounts. In fact, the difference between both sets of writings already becomes clear from the opening sentence of the fourth contribution that captures in a nutshell the fundamental difference between Schlegel's early and later views on painting, and in which Schlegel immediately reclaims painting's autonomy and places it back within the religious domain. Painting is not to divert, Schlegel writes, "from the original destination, which it everywhere had in ancient times, to glorify religion, and to reveal its mysteries more beautifully and clearly than words can do" ("von der ursprünglichen Bestimmung, die sie in alten Zeiten überall hatte, die Religion zu verherrlichen, und die Geheimnisse derselben noch schöner und deutlicher zu offenbaren, als es durch Worte geschehen kann"; KA IV 79). Speaking of the restoration of painting's original religious vocation, the separation between image and word,[102] and, above all, the reconfiguration of painting as a religious

[102] The last part of this sentence shows why I can ultimately not agree with Endres's claim that the iconic turn in Schlegel's writings on painting is ultimately more a rhetorical gesture than anything else. As the quoted passage demonstrates, it is from the fourth contribution onwards (but also in his Cologne lectures on philosophy from 1805-06) that Schlegel began to draw a sharp distinction between word and image, poetry and painting. As we will come to see further on, in all of these writings, Schlegel treated poetry and painting as two different realms that were in some sense still complementary, but could no longer be reduced to one another. Endres' argument that Schlegel wrote for a literary audience that was largely unfamiliar with the works discussed, and that his decision not to include images with the original publication indicates that he was more after literary than artistic effect is particularly problematic (217–18). Not merely for its anachronism – it was extremely rare for art-historical works of this time to have images – but also because Schlegel continuously refers to the catalogue numbers of the works under scrutiny. As Locher has argued, Schlegel's *Descriptions of Paintings* differs from the more traditional instances of the so-called genre of *Bildbeschreibungen* in that it did not strive for ekphrasis, but rather sought to develop a theoretical argument independent from the individual descriptions ("From Ekphrasis to History" 184). For a more general account of the genre of *Bildbeschreibungen*, particularly in reference to Goethe, see Osterkamp.

instrument of glory and revelation, there can be no doubt that the reader finds himself in a different orbit from the aesthetic-religious framework of the first three contributions.[103]

This reclamation of painting's autonomy and its reappropriation within the religious domain did not happen out of nowhere, but was already prepared by the lectures on European literature that Schlegel delivered in the winter of 1803-04 in Paris. As may be recalled, it was in these lectures that Schlegel first redefined the art of poetry in such a way that its emphasis lay no longer on invention and the creative act, but stood now in the service of God's primordial revelation, the recollection of which it had to foster and to preserve (KA XI 136). In his discussion of these lectures, Behrens argues that the aesthetic autonomy of the individual artwork, just as the aesthetic interest in poetry more generally were no longer of any concern to Schlegel.[104] Without discarding the fundamental differences between Schlegel's views on painting and poetry, one could add that the same tendency is also recognizable in the last two contributions on painting. Here, the key difference with the relative autonomy of the first

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[103] Compare Eichner: "He no longer sought the original source of knowledge in creative enthusiasm, but in divine revelation; the artist no longer received priestly ordination from art, but from religion. Thus, for Schlegel, art had lost its autonomy and had been placed under the tutelage of theology. His last effort had to be aimed at this and not at art." ("Nicht mehr in der kunstschöpferischen Begeisterung suchte er nun den Urquell der Erkenntnis, sondern in der göttlichen Offenbarung; nicht mehr von der Kunst empfing der Künstler nun die Priesterweihe, sondern von der Religion. So hatte die Kunst für Schlegel ihre Autonomie eingebüßt und war der Vormundschaft der Theologie unterstellt worden. Dieser und nicht der Kunst mußte also auch sein letztes Bemühen gelten.": LIV). Among Schlegel's more recent interpreters, Osterkamp and Brauers have proven to be most perceptive to what is actually at stake in the "Descriptions of Painting." Both of them identify a paradigm change in Schlegel's reclamation of painting's autonomy, one that is for Osterkamp directly connected with Schlegel's turn to the painterly tradition of the Middle Ages (237), and for Brauers related to the changed function of the religious symbol in Schlegel's Cologne writings and lectures on art, poetry, and philosophy (16).

[104] Behrens speaks particularly about the changed status of Greek mythology in the lectures. The full passage reads: "What distinguishes mythology is no longer the aesthetic autonomy of the individual work of art. . . but the bondage to historical traditions and supra-individual orders. The actual aesthetic interest in poetry gets thereby lost." ("Was die Mythologie auszeichnet, ist jetzt nicht mehr die ästhetische Autonomie des einzelnen Kunstwerks . . . sondern die Gebundenheit an geschichtliche Traditionen und überindividuelle Ordnungen. Das eigentlich ästhetische Interesse an der Poesie geht damit verloren."; 180). Endres makes a similar point, speaking of a "de-aestheticization of the artwork" ("Entästhetiserung des Kunstwerks"; 226) that reconceives the image in terms of its originally sacred and cultic historical context.

contributions consists not so much in painting's religious orientation per se, which is in itself not very different from the conception of painting that we discussed earlier, but rather in the way in which this religious orientation is now conceived. Whereas painting's relative autonomy in the first contributions was intrinsic to the arts, the last two contributions mark a departure from Schlegel's previous aesthetic religious framework in that painting is no longer expected to poetically present the religious outlook by its own means, but is now effectively submitted to the religious domain as a whole. In other words, rather than venturing into the domain of religion in order return to itself again, as Schlegel wrote in "Ideas," painting now finds its ultimate end and purpose in religion itself, whose mysteries it is now expected to reveal and glorify.[105]

As such, the last two contributions mark the end of the complementarity of religion, poetry, and philosophy as the latter two are now submitted to the former as an external authority. Moreover, the reclamation of art's autonomy is inseparable from the different aesthetic that Schlegel now comes to advance. Concerned that a conception of art and poetry grounded in the creative capacities of the individual only ends up "in all kinds of vanity" ("in alle Arten von Eitelkeit"; KA IV 79) which are incompatible with painting's religious purpose, Schlegel comes to advance a functional account of painting in the last two contributions, thereby shifting orientation from the picture as a self-contained object to its inclusion within a larger functional and, as we will see, institutional space. After emphasizing the importance of painting's external conditions, Schlegel thus immediately continues to tie the artwork to the location for which it was originally conceived: "The location . . . is of the utmost importance, and would be a much better principle of division than the classification according to

[105] It is remarkable that Lanwerd, who quotes exactly the same sentence as the one cited above, insists on the unity of art and the religious in Schlegel's thinking whereas not only this passage, but also numerous fragments from the Cologne years demonstrate that Schlegel came to regard painting as in the service of religion (67).

subject-matter. Every good painting ought to be painted for a specific place." ("Der Ort . . . ist von der größten Wichtigkeit und wäre schon ein weit besseres Prinzip der Einteilung als die Klassifikation der Gegenstände. Ein jedes gute Gemälde soll für einen bestimmten Ort gemalt sein."; KA IV 107).[106] To be sure, Schlegel is by no means referring to the modern exhibition rooms which he had earlier visited in Paris and Dresden. In fact, his emphasis on the functionality of painting coincides with a devaluation of the public museum, now arguing that the museum strips the work from its lived environment and only presents art in its "undetermined generality" ("unbestimmter Allgemeinheit"; KA IV 107). Reading this comment, one cannot help to read this remark as a tacit critique on not only the Louvre, which is now tacitly accused of presenting a corrupted body of art by distorting painting's original function, but also Napoleon's confiscation of religious art from sacred places in the Rhineland and beyond. Especially since Schlegel immediately goes on to contrast the modern exhibition room with the positive example of late medieval churches and monasteries that once determined the work's function and conditioned its effects (KA IV 107).

Schlegel's reclamation of painting's autonomy and return to a functional conception of painting are just two of the more obvious indications of Schlegel's medievalism. A third, and by far the most obvious one, is his idealization of the medieval guild structure throughout the fourth and fifth contributions. In his defense of the guild structure, Schlegel encapsulates many of themes previously discussed. What he sees above all reflected by the medieval guilds is his own preference for execution over invention and creation. More precisely, the guilds exemplify a model of artistic production that is not so much centered around the artistic genius, but rather founded on the anonymous craftsman.

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[106] This remark foreshadows Schlegel's more extensive argument for a functional account of the arts more generally in his much later essay "Aussichten für die Kunst in dem Österreichischen Kaiserstaat" that was published in his periodical *Deutsches Museum* in 1812, which we will come to discuss in the conclusion.

Adhering to an altogether different ethos than the modern artist, the medieval craftsman in Schlegel's highly idealized picture was driven by devotion for God and love of his work (KA IV 142), leading to an art that was full of feeling and enthusiasm, as Schlegel elsewhere points out, thoroughly and objectively executed (KA IV 101). Another crucial difference between the modern and the medieval artist is that the latter is not isolated from, but fully integrated in society. As Schlegel explains in the Cologne lectures on philosophy, the guilds were structured like a family business in which the secrets of the craft were passed on from master to student from generation to generation (KA XIII 152). If anything, this once again demonstrates how far we are removed from the aesthetic-religious framework of the first contributions. The picture that emerges in the last two accounts on painting is not that of a creative art but of a mechanical craft. Even though Schlegel never goes as far as to reject the importance of talent altogether, the artist's skills are no longer reducible to his innate genius, but are rather commensurate with his feeling, ethos, and devotion, only to be supplemented by years of practical training and education.

As such, the practice and organization of the medieval guild form the exemplar to which the last two contributions on painting aspire. Predating the separation between art and religion that the Reformation and Renaissance had brought about, the medieval painter's guild represents for Schlegel an artistic culture in which aesthetic and functional concerns were inseparable from one another (KA IV 143). This is further underscored by the fact that the medieval artist had a much broader understanding of his craft than the modern painter. In fact, the many activities that went on in the medieval workshop offer a good model to appreciate not only the broad scope of objects discussed in the last two contributions, but also show how inclusive Schlegel's conception of painting had become by this time. Placing the so-called decorative arts of glass painting, mosaics, textiles, and tapestries back within the painterly domain (KA IV 106, 143), Schlegel's unwillingness to conform to his earlier

speculative aesthetics is further illustrated by his attempt to release painting from its modern associations with the frame and its material support. Although it would go too far to see the last contributions as a postmodern deconstruction of the Kantian parergon, there can be no doubt that Schlegel aims to shift the emphasis from what happens inside the frame to what is external to it. In fact, as we will come to see, Schlegel's iconic turn could precisely be understood as an attempt to release the image from its confinement within the frame and its identification with its material support, both of which could be seen as preconditions for painting's autonomy (Belting, *Spiegel der Welt* 11). The irony of all of this is that Schlegel's conservatism also turns him into a postmodern critic *avant la lettre*. Writing at the moment when the secular category of art became institutionalized, Schlegel's turn to medieval and, as we will see, non-western forms of art foreshadows recent criticism on the universal pretensions of the modern conception of art with almost two centuries. Not only that, but a similar attentiveness to the iconic qualities of the medieval and non-western image underlies much of the pictorial or iconic turn in contemporary criticism, exposing not only the exclusive and reductive character of the modern category of art, but also drawing attention to modernity's disregard for the agency and physical presence of the image as such.

v. The Iconic Turn

Although it may seem that Schlegel's specific doctrinal and confessional concerns set him apart from much of today's theory and make his work irrelevant to contemporary concerns, this is anything but the case. In fact, one of the key points of the present study is that the relevance of Schlegel's later theory of painting consists precisely in his appropriation of the medieval image for economic-theological purposes. This brings us immediately to what is perhaps the most striking aspect of the opening sentence of the fourth contribution, namely Schlegel's explicit insistence that the goal

of painting consists in the glorification of religion, revealing its mysteries more clearly and beautifully than words can do. As becomes immediately obvious from this passage, the last two contributions introduce a fundamental distinction between the realms of image and word, painting and poetry.[107] If anything, this separation points to a fundamental change within his philosophical outlook. Whereas Schlegel earlier understood poetry as the creative principle which underlies reality as a whole, he now significantly reduces its scope. This suggests that the reclamation of art's autonomy was by no means informed by considerations that were internal to the philosophy of art alone, but has to be understood as an expression of a much broader transformation of Schlegel's religious-philosophical worldview as he exchanged his Spinozistic pantheism for the Christian belief in a transcendent God.

The private lectures on philosophy that Schlegel held in 1804-05 give a good impression of the direction in which his thought had moved around this time. Most important for our purposes is Schlegel's new affirmation of a positive concept of divinity. In the previous chapter, we have seen that Schlegel's earlier philosophy only allowed for a negative intimation of the divine, as something that could only be approximated by philosophy and poetry, but never completely be obtained. Here, it was especially the quasi-mystical framework that Schlegel espoused in the "Dialogue on Poetry" that reunited consciousness and world by advancing a pantheistic philosophy in which the infinite permeated the whole of reality – a view that directly informed Schlegel's theory of painting in the first contributions as well.

When Schlegel started writing the last two contributions on painting one year after the third account, however, his conception of the infinite had undergone a radical transformation. Whereas the

[107] This distinction is often ignored in scholarship on Schlegel, which often shows a tendency to read his contributions on painting from a literary perspective, thereby often eclipsing Schlegel's insistence on the unique properties and qualities of the visual symbol.

Jena lectures on transcendental philosophy still offered a negative conception of the divine that was deduced by means of abstraction, arguing that religion could only be construed by philosophical means without taking recourse to the concepts of belief, wonder, and revelation (KA XII 12), the Cologne lectures openly draw on wonder to arrive at the conception of a positive God that transcends creation.[108] Whatever Schlegel's reasons may have been for this fundamental shift in orientation – religious, political, philosophical, or perhaps a combination of them – the key difference between the Jena and Cologne lectures is that the latter reintroduce modes of differentiation that not only directly impact Schlegel's theory of mediation, but also allow him to incorporate his theory of art within a counterrevolutionary politics in which the church was at once conceived as religious authority and political force.

One of the most striking results of this new affirmation of a positive conception of the Divinity is that Schlegel's philosophy should now be able to account for the actual manifestation of the divine on earth. It is therefore not surprising that the concept of revelation will from here on out play an important role in his work. Rank has argued that Schlegel substitutes "the concept of infinity derived from the perception of the universe. . . by a transcendent deity who reveals to us the true meaning of the infinite" (". . . den durch die Anschauung des Universum gefüllten Unendlichkeitsbegriff . . . durch eine transzendente Gottheit, die uns den wahren Inhallt des Unendlichen offenbart"; qtd. in Brauers 210). Moreover, Anstett argues that the notion of revelation immediately cancels the dialectic between the finite and the infinite of the earlier work: "The opposition between the finite and the infinite loses from this moment onward all normative value, since, through revelation, the finite is now able to know

[108] Schlegel writes: "The only true miracles that our philosophy accepts are spiritual miracles, signs, intimations, forebodings." ("Die einzigen wahren Wunder, die unsere Philosophie annimmt, sind geistige Wunder, Zeichen, Andeutungen, Warnungen."; KA XIII 54).

the infinite." ("Der Gegensatz des Endlichen und des Unendlichen verliert von nun an jeden normativen Wert, da ja, durch die Offenbarung, das Endliche das Unendliche zu kennen vermag."; LV). It is thus in the face of revelation that realism in general, and pantheism in particular lose their appeal for Schlegel. In other words, the reasons that accounted for the philosophical appeal of pantheism five years earlier now contribute to its downfall, namely the fact that it only offers a negative conception of the divine (Mayer 132). As Schlegel notes in the introductory remarks to his lecture course, the problem with pantheism is that it can only account for the infinite and the universal. Yet, as it brings the whole of nature back under the principle of an unchanging and unified whole, it not only effectively denies change and variation, but also history and particularity. For this reason, Schlegel argues that all forms of pantheism, whether they are philosophical (Spinoza) or mystical (as that of the Indian yogis), only allow for a negative concept of the divine as unified oneness, thereby effectively denying that the divine can also be grasped positively through predicates and symbols (KA XII 130-132).[109]

This leaves idealism in the 1805 as the only viable alternative. In fact, the difference between pantheism and idealism consists in the fact that "pantheism is based on the negative, while idealism is based on the positive knowledge of infinite reality" (der Pantheismus auf die negative, der Idealismus hingegen auf die positive Erkenntnis der unendlichen Realität ausgeht"; KA XII 131). The crucial distinction between the two is that idealism takes a unified concept as its starting point without collapsing particularity under the weight of an infinite and unified whole: "Idealism derives everything

[109] Schlegel not merely criticizes Spinoza for his atheism, but now also refers to pantheism as an evil principle: "Spinoza's substance is actually the evil principle, so that he deserves the name of atheist in the worst sense." ("Spinosa's Substanz ist wohl ganz eigent[lich] das böse Princip, so dass der d[en] Namen Atheist in schlimmsten Sinne verdiente."; Schlegel qtd. in Mayer 133). For a more extensive discussion of Schlegel's rejection of Spinoza in the Cologne lectures, see Mayer 132-133.

from one spirit, explains the origin of matter from spirit, or subordinates matter to it." ("Der Idealismus leitet alles aus einem Geist, erklärt das Entstehen der Materie aus dem Geiste, oder ordnet ihm doch die Materie unter." KA XII 115). Although idealism is therefore capable of understanding the particular in relation to the universal, the finite to the infinite, and therefore is the only method "which is on the true path, that is, which is really philosophical" ("welche auf wahrem Weg, d.h. recht eigentlich philosophisch ist"; KA XII 114), Schlegel still believes that idealists such as Fichte go wrong when they assume that philosophy can be reduced to a first principle (KA XII 311). As a first principle would circumscribe the meaning and the freedom of God in advance, he maintains that philosophy cannot arrive at a positive conception of the divine by itself, but is dependent on other forms of knowledge or experience in this regard.

This limitation accounts for the philosophical import that revelation now comes to play in Schlegel's philosophy. To arrive at a positive conception of the divine, Schlegel writes that there is no other option "than to take recourse to the supernatural sources of knowledge, from which . . . the positive concept of deity is very explainable" ("als zu den übernatürliche Erkenntnisquellen seine Zuflucht zu nehmen, aus denen, . . . der positive Begriff der Gottheit sehr erklärlich ist"; KA XII 300). It is exactly in this context that painting comes to play a new role for Schlegel. As he writes in the conclusion of his Cologne lectures on philosophy:

> Philosophy taught us that everything divine can only be alluded to, only assumed with probability, and that therefore we must accept revelation as the highest truth. However, revelation is actually a knowledge that is too sublime for the sensuous human being, and so art steps in to clearly present the objects of revelation to the human eye through sensuous representation.
>
> (Die Philosophie lehrte uns, daß alles Göttliche sich nur andeuten, nur mit Wahrscheinlichkeit voraussetzen lasse, und daß wir daher die Offenbarung für

> die höchste Wahrheit annehmen müssen. Die Offenbarung aber ist eigentlich eine für den sinnlichen Menschen zu erhabene Erkenntnis, und so tritt die Kunst sehr gut ins Mittel, um durch sinnliche Darstellung und Deutlichkeit dem Menschen die Gegenstände der Offenbarung vor Augen zu stellen.) (KA XIII 174)

This insistence on divine revelation as the highest truth will from now on come to infuse all aspects of Schlegel's thinking. Most important for our purposes is that Schlegel's insistence on revelation as a transcendent source of knowledge leads to a significant reconfiguration of the work of art. Whereas Schlegel earlier considered art and poetry as a form of revelation in their own right, both art forms are now subordinated to the revelation of the Christian God. Crucially, this transition is predicated on what is perhaps the most important change in Schlegel's philosophical and religious outlook. The shift from the immanent God of pantheism to the transcendent God Christianity directly implies that consciousness no longer has unmediated access to the divine, which was, as we have seen, the fundamental assumption that underlay Schlegel's theory of artistic production in the first contributions. This change in outlook thus removes the ground under Schlegel's early theory of art and poetry, and explains why he comes to subordinate both art forms to the Christian revelation in Cologne.

For obvious reasons, all of this has significant consequences for Schlegel's views on painting, and its relationship to poetry. Perhaps most importantly, he comes to insist on material mediation to reestablish man's connection with God. Since consciousness is no longer able to arrive at a positive intimation of the divine by itself, he insists that some form of material mediation is required in order for God to reveal himself in the world. It is in this particular context that painting comes to play an essential role for Schlegel. In sharp contrast with poetry, which he equips with the immanent tasks of

keeping the memory of divine revelation alive and cultivate man's desire for his heavenly future,[110] Schlegel now attributes a privileged role to painting as the only art form that is able to work on a transcendent plane. Yet, as we will see, it can only do so when it does not discard but instead affirms its material properties. That is to say that painting is no longer regarded as a window on the infinite that presents itself for aesthetic contemplation. Rather, the artwork's explicit affirmation of its own material presence is now seen as the precondition for the mediation between the divine and the viewer, leading to an altered state of consciousness that leads to mystical union with God.[111]

Later in this chapter, we will see how painting is able to establish this effect. For now, I briefly want to draw attention to how radically different these views on painting are when compared to the first contributions and Schlegel's earlier philosophy of art more generally. What makes me speaks of an iconic turn in Schlegel's theory of painting is not simply his reclamation of art's autonomy in the fourth contribution, but also the fundamental change in Schlegel's views on mediation by which it is supported. In order to understand why these ideas on mediation change it is necessary to situate Schlegel's later theory of art within the larger framework of the transformation of his philosophical and religious outlook in Cologne. It is with his shifting belief from an immanent to a transcendent God that his ideas on aesthetic and religious mediation undergo significant change. Since consciousness has no longer unmediated access to the divine, Schlegel now comes to rely on material mediation to

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[110] The full passage reads: "In relation to the highest purpose of the church, poetry thus has the double purpose of keeping the old tradition alive and – as a premonition of the heavenly future – of being the common medium, the bond and the language of the church." ("Die Poesie erhält also im Verhältnis zu dem höchsten Zwecke der Kirche die doppelte Bestimmung, jene alte Tradition lebendig zu erhalten und als Ahnung der himmlischen Zukunft das gemeinschaftliche Medium, das Band und die Sprache der Kirche zu sein."; KA XIII 55).

[111] Schlegel actually speaks of a double consciousness in this regard. In contrast to ordinary states of consciousness, he refers particularly to ecstasy and enthusiasm ("Begeisterung"; KA XII 397-98). Apart from love and friendship, Schlegel points particularly to painting as the medium that leads to moments of ecstasy, See KA XII 427-428.

bring the absent God into presence, meaning that his theory of painting moves away from his earlier occupation with the genius and his creative inventions to a more emphatic engagement with painting's physical presence. This development is mirrored by the inversion of the hierarchy between invention and execution in the last two contributions, marking the end of Schlegel's earlier insistence on the genius' poetic view and intention as the creative ground of painting. Instead, the reclamation of painting's autonomy coincides with its subordination to divine revelation. No longer able to offer a perspective on the infinite, the iconic turn in Schlegel's thinking means that the aim and purpose of painting now consist in the production of an affect or sensation rather than in the communication of a view. That is to say that painting is from now on primarily regarded as a religious medium, which places the object itself in an altogether different relationship to the viewer. As such, the iconic turn marks a radical break from the individualism that informed Schlegel's earlier writings. The artwork no longer offers a mediation between artist and viewer, but now submits the viewer to God (and the institution dedicated to the preservation and continuation of His glory). It is to this topic that I will turn in the next section, where I will concentrate on how the earlier role of the artist is now replaced by painting's firm establishment in the Catholic religious tradition.

vi. The Turn to Tradition

When Schlegel's reclaims the autonomy of painting in the fourth contributions, this gesture should not simply be understood as a religious instrumentalization of painting. The aim of Schlegel's reclamation of painting's autonomy is not to make painting serviceable to religion, but to reconfigure the artform in such a way that it becomes identical with it. This distinction is central to the iconic turn in Schlegel's thinking. Whereas the former keeps the modern aesthetic discourse of art in place, the latter marks a radical departure from it, thereby directly undermining painting's ontological status as

a form of art. This is further confirmed by Schlegel's explicit espousal of medieval artistic practices. With his insistence on a functional account of painting, the celebration of the medieval guild structure, and the significant increase of painting's scope to include applied and decorative arts, Schlegel left no doubt that he aimed to realign painting with the medieval Catholic tradition from which it originated before it found itself reborn as art.

It is therefore no coincidence that Schlegel turns to German painting of the late Middle Ages as the model on which his new conception of painting is based: "For the old German painting is not only more precise and thorough in its mechanical execution than Italian painting is, but also remained longer faithful to the oldest, peculiar and more profound Christian-Catholic symbols, and by which it contains a far greater richness." ("Denn die altdeutsche Malerei ist nicht nur im Mechanischen der Ausführung genauer und gründlicher, als es die italiänische meistens ist, sondern auch den ältesten, seltsamern und tiefsinnigern christlich katholischen Sinnbildern länger treu geblieben, deren sie einen weit größern Reichtum enthält."; KA IV 151-152). Although not explicitly acknowledged in this passage, the two reasons that Schlegel gives for his support of German painting are closely related. For Belting, it is only at the historical moment when the stress on artistic invention begins to take precedence over the interest in execution that painting is elevated from craft to art, thereby shedding its traditional religious function at the beginning of the 15th century:

> Invention, which first elevates craft to art, differs from mere illustration and technique by the artistic idea that was born in the painter's mind: he had a concept of the world which he sought to transpose into painted form. It was his artistic idea that could be translated into a painted picture, which forms the material instantiation of a mental image. Every invention points back to an inventor. . . . The work of the medieval craftsman belonged to a profession whose mode of production was controlled by a professional association, while

> the artistic idea pertains to an inventor who vouched for it with his personal name.
>
> (Die Erfindung, welche erst das Handwerk zur Kunst erhebt, unterscheidet sich von der bloßen Abbildung und der bloßen Maltechnik durch die Idee, die im Geist des Malers geboren wurde: Er besaß ein Konzept von der Welt, für das er eine gemalte Form suchte. Es war seine Vorstellung, die sich in ein gemaltes Bild umsetzen ließ, das also ein Vorstellungsbild wiedergibt. Jede Erfindung weist auf einen Erfinder zurück. . . . Das Werk vertrat ein Metier, dessen Produktionsweise von einer beruflichen Genossenschaft kontrolliert wurde, die Idee dagegen einen Erfinder, der dafür mit seinem persönlichen Namen bürgte.) (*Spiegel der Welt* 114–15)

It is no coincidence that the development described here by Belting shows striking similarities with Schlegel's conception of painting in the first contributions. Belting explains that the conception of art that emerged with the birth of panel painting in the 15th century found its capstone in post-Kantian philosophy where it was philosophically legitimated (*Spiegel der Welt* 99). At the same time, Belting makes clear that this development replaced the medieval iconic tradition that was rooted in an altogether different conception of the image (*Spiegel der Welt* 12). It was only with the primacy of invention over execution that the framed panel became the emblematic medium for the new autonomous conception of painting, opening itself as a window on the artist's imagination to the aesthetic contemplation of the viewer.

In Belting's work, we find on many different levels a historical account of what was intuitively grasped by Schlegel. Just as Belting, Schlegel sees in the work of Jan van Eyck a historical turning point when the image's original ritualistic function starts to give way to a conception of autonomous painting that first enabled the aesthetic experience as its distinctive mode of response. Although it has to be admitted that much of this remains merely implied in Schlegel, there can be no doubt that in the

last two contributions, he sees in the work of van Eyck an important turning point. Moreover, when Schlegel turns to late medieval German art as the model for his religious conception of painting, he does so in the belief that these images do not glorify the artist but God, and thus served a ritualistic function that left no place for disinterested aesthetic contemplation.

Part of the appeal of late medieval painting consisted for Schlegel in its ritualistic function within the liturgy. It may therefore come as no surprise that the reclamation of painting's autonomy in the fourth contribution coincides with its institutionalization by the Roman Church. Although the multiple references to the church leave no doubt about Schlegel's intentions, the argument for painting's subordination to the church is most fully developed in the Cologne lectures on philosophy. It is here that Schlegel pictures the Catholic Church as the institution that historically aligned itself with the image of the incarnated Son as a reformulation of God's original revelation, thereby preserving and spreading the truth and authenticity of this original revelation in postclassical times: "The Church is a . . . covenant among man instituted by the deity, and by which revelation is to be preserved, propagated, and cleansed from all misunderstanding." ("Die Kirche ist ein . . . von der Gottheit instituierter Bund unter den Menschen, wodurch die Offenbarung erhalten, lebendig fortgepflanzt und von alle Mißverständnissen gereinigt werden soll."; KA XIII 45). Yet, what accounts for the absolutism on Schlegel's part is that he grants the Catholic church absolute authority in this regard. That is to say, he sees Catholicism as the only institution that is entitled to interpret, preserve, and communicate God's revelation: "The interpretation of revelation, its history and sources, and with all the knowledge and resources belonging to it, belongs only to the church itself and its theologians; . . . therefore the Protestants are wrong in the highest degree in rejecting everything symbolic." ("Die Interpretation der Offenbarung, die Geschichte und Quellen derselben mit allen dazu gehörigen

Kenntnissen und Hilfsmitteln kommt nur der Kirche selbst und ihren Theologen zu; . . . darum haben die Protestanten im höchsten Grade unrecht, alles Symbolische zu verwerfen."; KA XIII 271).[112]

What immediately becomes clear is that the autonomy of painting had to be rejected if painting was to bear on divine revelation at all. Moreover, Schlegel clearly recognized that some kind of institutional and historical reframing was required in order for painting to have its desired effect. As the religious studies scholar Birgit Meyer has argued, the way in which a picture is perceived and experienced is not merely dependent on tradition, but just as much on the spatial and institutional framing that accompanies it. Writing that "pictures do not command belief by themselves," but instead demand "the belief of our look," Meyer draws attention to the constitutive role of institutions and traditions that place the encounter with any religious object in a larger experiential framework (1051). Schlegel's reconfiguration of painting within the institutional bounds of the church achieves exactly this, placing not only the artwork itself, but also the rituals in which the viewing experience is embedded in a tradition that dates back until the formation of the early church.

This is further underscored by Schlegel's theory of artistic production. With the priority of execution over creation and invention, Schlegel also comes to promote a certain standardization of the image (Brauers 61), which is further suggested by the medieval guild structure that he endorses. In fact, released from the imperative of infinite creation, Schlegel urges the artist to stay faithful to the inherited symbols of the Christian tradition, which becomes particularly clear in his discussion of

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[112] It is thus not remarkable that Schlegel increasingly comes to identify the Reformation as the onset of painting's decline in the last two contributions For example, following upon his discussion of Dürer in the fourth contribution, Schlegel writes that "[w]hen I think of the torrent of sketches and engravings that we are currently living among, I believe to see Luther in front of me with his fiery zeal and his great intentions, and following immediately after him a bunch of sweetish enlighteners, whose chatter we now hear in all the markets." ("[w]enn ich . . . an den Schwall von Skizzen und Kupferstichen denke unter denen wir gegenwärtig leben, so glaube ich Luthern vor mir zu sehen mit seinem Feuereifer und seine größen Absichten, und dann den gleich nachfolgenden Haufen der süßlichen Aufklärer, deren Geschwätz wir jetzt auf allen Märkten vernehmen."; KA IV 97).

subject-matter in the fourth contribution. After having argued that the true subjects for painting can never be derived from nature alone (KA IV 91), Schlegel expresses his concern that painting in his day lacks a thematic focus. Pointing to the abundance of subjects that painters employ in their work, Schlegel suggests that contemporary painting returns to the inherited Christian symbols that one finds in the work of the oldest German and Italian painters (KA IV 95). In a passage that deserves to be quoted in full detail, he suggests that it is not enough for painting to allude merely to the divine as an abstract and transcendent being, but that it is particularly to depict those moments when God reveals itself in human history:

> Art, however, and religion, from which it can never be separated without losing itself, should not only hint at the divine to man, so that the viewer can imagine and judge Him in peace and quiet, but also through its own finite means show how the divine breaks through in earthly existence and appears there, i.e., it must and should present to us the deep pains of the highest love that are inherent to mortality, and which voluntarily gives itself up to all tortures on the way back to heaven!
>
> (Die Kunst aber, und die Religion von der sie nie getrennt werden kann ohne sich selbst zu verlieren, sollen dem Menschen nicht allein das Göttliche andeuten, wie er es rein von allen Verhältnissen und im heitern Frieden sich denken und ahnden kann, sondern auch in seinem beschränkten Verhältnis, wie das Göttliche selbst im irdischen Dasein noch durchbricht und auch da erscheint: d.h. sie müssen und sollen uns darstellen die tiefen Schmerzen der in die Sterblichkeit eingeschloßnen, und auf dem himmlischen Rückwege allen Martern sich selbst freiwillig hingebenden höchsten Liebe!) (KA IV 92)

One of the reasons why this passage is important for our purposes is because it offers a first indication of the importance that the notion of love now comes to play in Schlegel's philosophical outlook.

Although this theme will be explored further in the next sections, it becomes clear that Schlegel favors a thematic treatment of religious scenes that depict the sublimation of physical pain and suffering by divine love. Although he particularly refers to a martyr scene here, Schlegel further explains that these depictions of pain and suffering find their prototype in representations of Christ's passion, pointing particularly to depictions of the crucifixion and Saint Veronica's sudarium in this context (KA IV 92). However, at the same time, Schlegel is also proposing an alternative for painters. Here, he points particularly to the depiction of the Madonna with child, which he describes as the purest and most primitive expression of an infinite love for the divine (KA IV 92).

In concluding, it may be worth briefly reflecting on Schlegel's preferences, and the arguments he gives for them. What is perhaps most striking about his choices is that he explicitly situates himself within the iconic tradition. It is not merely the case that Schlegel's thematic preferences, as he himself acknowledges, return painting the oldest subjects of Christian painting, but he also directly aligns his own theory of painting with the tradition of miraculous images, or so-called *acheiropoieta*, i.e., images not painted by the human hand. In fact, precisely the representations of the Madonna and Saint Veronica originally legitimated the iconic tradition, deriving from apocryphal legends that alluded to Saint Luke's original portrait of the Madonna and Christ, and the imprint of Christ's face on Veronica's sudarium during the Passion respectively (Belting, *Likeness and Presence* 11). There can be no doubt that Schlegel was familiar with these legends. Without commenting on the miraculous nature of both images, he refers in the fourth contribution to both legends as evidence that the depiction of the Madonna and the Passion are the oldest themes of Christian painting (KA IV 91). In other words, the themes that Schlegel singles out for representation are precisely those scenes on whose miraculous origins the iconic tradition was founded, and whose legacy Schlegel now with his own theory of painting seeks to recover.

vii. From Allegory to Symbol

The philosophical foundations of Schlegel's conception of painting in the last two contributions can largely be found in the Cologne lectures on philosophy. It is especially in his discussion of Plato in which Schlegel not only develops the starting point for the construction of his own Christian idealism, but also provides the foundation for the centrality of love in his metaphysics and theory of painting alike. If we look at the basic outline of the philosophy that Schlegel develops in these lectures and his discussion of Plato in particular, one readily notices that there are striking parallels with the philosophical framework of the Jena lectures in particular. The main reason for these similarities can mainly be found in the fact that Fichte continues to remain an important reference for Schlegel, whose subjective idealism he now seeks to overcome by taking recourse to religious means. Although the parallels between the Jena and Cologne lectures have therefore led some scholars to suggest that Schlegel's philosophical position did not fundamentally change in the half decade separating the two (see e.g., Nassar 291fn26-28),[113] there are in fact significant differences that go to the heart of Schlegel's philosophy. Some of these we already discussed at an earlier stage, most notably Schlegel's departure from pantheism and his embrace of the notion of a transcendent God. Moreover, as we have seen, it was precisely because the immanent God of Spinoza was replaced by the

[113] Although Nassar acknowledges that the theory of art and poetry that the Cologne lectures advance is different from the early Romantic theory of art that we find for example in Schlegel's "Dialogue on Poetry," she nonetheless maintains that the basic outlook of Schlegel's metaphysics is still the same. However, this view is problematic for several reasons. We have already seen in the section above that Schlegel's transition from pantheism to Christianity led him to embrace the notion of a transcendent God that is irreconcilable with the Jena lectures. Moreover, Nassar completely foregoes the crucial role of revelation in the Cologne lectures, leading Schlegel to accept wonder as a starting point for his philosophy. Finally, Nassar does not explain how it is possible that Schlegel's philosophy of art in these lectures is fundamentally different in that case. Since it continues to play a central role as mediation between the infinite (or God) and the finite, its changing role can only be explained as a result of a shift in Schlegel's most fundamental positions.

transcendent God of Christianity that the idea of divine revelation became increasingly important for Schlegel as a way to reestablish man's relationship with the divine. Directly related to all these changes, and what is perhaps most important to our purposes, is that the Cologne lectures also introduce a distinction between allegory and symbol that directly impacts Schlegel's views on religious mediation, and therefore go to the heart of his theory of painting.[114]

Secondly, the most obvious parallel between the Jena and the Cologne lectures on philosophy can be found in their shared concern to reunite the domains of nature and consciousness under a unifying principle. Yet it is precisely at the point where the two lectures seem to overlap that the differences between the Jena and Cologne lectures are most pronounced. Whereas we have seen that Schlegel earlier sought to bridge nature and consciousness through a single creative force, it is in the Cologne lectures that this naturalistic force is replace by the spiritual quality of love. This new outlook manifests itself particularly in Schlegel's discussion of Plato. It is here that Schlegel takes the first steps in developing a Christian idealism that no longer finds its starting point in the self's infinite capacity for reflection, but rather in the idea of a recollection of an originary revelation.

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[114] Interestingly, Schlegel does not draw a conceptual distinction between allegory and the symbol in the Cologne lectures. Although he comes to insist on a mode of (inner) vision that grants the human unmediated access to the divine, he does not (yet) refer to this mode of access as symbolic. Although we will return to Schlegel's theory of religious mediation below, it might already be good to briefly comment on the literature on this topic. One of the most extensive discussions on the role allegory and symbol can be found in Brauers. For another discussion, see Liselotte Dieckmann, although her account is not without its problems. Dieckmann argues that Schlegel's understanding of the symbolic is largely derived from Schelling's Philosophy of Art (1804), and Goethe's and Creuzer's work on the symbol. Although there can be no doubt that Schelling played an important role in the development of Schlegel's philosophy in the Cologne lectures, his and Goethe's immanent understanding of the symbol is fundamentally different from that of Schlegel. And although it is true that Schlegel's understanding of the symbol shares many characteristics with the notion of the mystical symbol in Creuzer's Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker (1810 - 1812), most notably its character as unmediated perception of the divine grounded in revelation, Dieckmann completely passes over the Cologne lectures in which Schlegel first developed his theory of the symbolic in distinction from the allegorical. As a result, she fails to notice that Schlegel's theory of the symbol was already largely in place when Creuzer's magnum opus was published.

Although Plato always enjoyed a special status in Schlegel's pantheon of great thinkers, it is largely as a result of his nascent Christianity that the nature of his Platonism begins to change. In contrast with Schlegel's earlier writings such as "Dialogue on Poetry," Plato is now no longer regarded as philosophical poet, but particularly praised for his intuition into the relationship between man and the divine (Frischmann, "Friedrich Schlegels Platonrezeption und das hermeneutische Paradigma" 81). However, even though Schlegel extensively draws on Plato's theory of recollection in the Cologne lectures, he does so not without criticizing it. The main problem that he identifies in Plato's idea of recollection is that it construes the relationship between the divine and man in terms of knowledge, making it impossible for him to arrive at an affirmative conception of nature. One of the goals that Schlegel sets for himself in his discussion of Plato is thus to overcome the latter's dualism between God and nature by rethinking the relationship between the divine and creation (including the human) in terms of love.

In order to do so, Schlegel reverses the argument that Plato developed in his *Phaedo*. Here, Plato famously argued that the human soul preexists a person's natural birth, hovering in a spiritual world close to God where he had direct access to divine forms. As is well known, this access took the form of the perception of archetypal images, of which on earth only dim and imperfect copies could be perceived. Plato maintains that when such a perception occurs in this world, consciousness is vaguely reminded its original and full perception of these archetypal images in the realm of ideas. Moreover, he saw it as the task of philosophy to further this process of recollection by returning consciousness to its divine source through a form of knowledge or cognition that allowed man to access these archetypal images again. However, a crucial aspect of Plato's theory was that this spiritual ascent could only ever be partial and incomplete as a result of our finite and physical nature which keeps man tied to the body and the earth.

For Schlegel, the main problem of Plato's account is that he conceives of man's relationship with the divine in terms of knowledge and cognition. Although he praises Plato for his idealism, and subscribes to the idea that recollection plays a central role in the mediation between man and God, he also argues that the relationship between the two should not be seen in terms of cognition alone (KA XII 219). As Schlegel points out, by seeing the relationship between man and God above all in terms of knowledge, Plato is unable to account for the existence of matter, meaning that his system automatically relapses into a dualism as an alternative principle is needed to explain how matter has come about.

Interestingly, Schlegel draws an analogy between the artist and God in order to explain the implications of Plato's dualism (KA XII 215, 217). Just as the artist is in the execution of his ideas bounded by the inherent limitations of his material, so preexisting matter should likewise be conceived as a limiting factor that restricts the freedom of Plato's demiurge in the creation of the cosmos. In other words, as Schlegel explains, Plato's dualism between spirit and matter inherently leads to a view of creation that can only account for materiality in negative terms. Not only that, but as Schlegel's reference to the artist illustrates, each creation will in that case be only an insufficient and imperfect copy of the original idea – the spiritual image torn down by the heaviness and imperfection of matter. Thus, even though Plato maintains that it is the goal of every finite being to aspire to its ideal form as much as possible, he also acknowledges that this ambition is ultimately doomed to fail (KA XII 224). Never able to shed its material skin and fully participate in its divine source, Schlegel concludes that the relationship between God and nature in Plato can ultimately only lead to "a pictorial-allegorical form of knowledge" ("eine bildliche allegorische Erkenntnis"; KA XII 208-09).

Here, it is worth pausing for a moment as Schlegel's criticism on Plato contains a concealed rejection of his earlier thinking as well. If we recall the discussion of allegory in the Jena lectures, we

find that allegory was defined precisely as the image ("Bild") between the infinite and nature that Schlegel here associates with Plato. In other words, what Schlegel is criticizing here is not only the earlier metaphysical framework that he developed in his lectures on transcendental philosophy, but also the central role of allegory in the theory of poetry and painting that he espoused in such texts as "Dialogue on Poetry" and the first contributions on painting. The most important thing to note here is that he is not rejecting allegory as a mode of religious mediation per se. What matters is rather his suggestion that allegory is only a secondary form of religious mediation; a mode of alluding to the divine that is mediated by the finite and therefore only leads to a negative idea of God. As such, Schlegel's relegation of allegory is indicative of the primacy that revelation now comes to play in Schlegel's philosophy, allowing him to conceive of an unmediated mode of positive access to the divine that is central to his theory of painting and understanding of religious mediation more generally.

At the beginning of the next section, we will briefly come back to Schlegel's criticism of Plato's dualism and how it pertains to his earlier theory of painting, especially in relation to ancient art and classicism. What I would like to do in the remainder of this section is to concentrate on Schlegel's response to Plato. As we will come to see, it is precisely in his attempt to maintain the overall structure of Plato's *Phaedo* in such a way that all dualistic implications are avoided that we can find the seeds of Schlegel's new ideas on religious mediation. In order to do so, Schlegel proposes two important modifications to Plato's original account. In the first place, he suggests that the relationship between the divine and man should not be seen in terms of knowledge but as love and longing. Secondly, he suggests that the object of recollection is not a set of archetypal images, but rather God's originary revelation.

To start with the former, Schlegel reverses the relationship between knowledge, recollection, and love that we find in Plato's tripartite model of the soul. Whereas Plato originally saw knowledge

as the soul's primary mode of access to the divine, from which then recollection and love were derived, Schlegel inverses Plato's structure by putting love at the top of the hierarchy. In other words, Schlegel maintains that is not through cognition that the divine can be apprehended but rather through love and longing. By doing so, he not merely relegates cognition to a secondary role when it comes to man's relationship to the divine, and which will become essential to the allegorical mode of religious mediation, but he also claims that the primacy of love and longing does not impose a dualism between God and nature, which he considered to be the biggest weakness of Plato's original account. In fact, by deriving recollection from love instead of cognition, a more affirmative understanding of matter is implied. If it can be demonstrated, Schlegel argues, that the highest and most original form of consciousness

> is both in nature as in man, then the only way to remove all difficulty is found. In addition to the intellect and reason, there is a faculty of desire in us, if this were to be the source, the beginning, the root of consciousness, which in its original form was conceived as a longing, as a striving, as love, then all difficulty with respect to substance would be resolved.
>
> (in der Natur wie im Menschen ist, so ist der einzige Weg, alle Schwierigkeit zu heben, gefunden. In uns gibt es aber außer dem Verstande, der Vernunft ein Begehrungsvermögen fände sich in diesem die Quelle, der Anfang, die Wurzel des Bewußtseins, welches in dieser ursprünglichen Form als ein Sehnen, als ein Streben, als Liebe aufgefasst wurde, so wäre alle Schwierigkeit in Rücksicht des Stoffes gehoben.) (KA XII 217-218)

This passage is absolutely crucial in order to understand one of the main differences between the Jena and the Cologne lectures, and therefore between Schlegel's earlier and later philosophy more generally. The most important thing to note here is that love is defined as a dynamic principle that

underlies creation as a whole. In other words, what is crucial here is not so much that Schlegel exchanges the static character of cognition in Plato with a conception of love that is understood as striving and longing, but rather the fact that the Christian notion of love now comes to fulfill exactly the role of *poiesis* in his earlier framework. What ties nature and consciousness together is therefore no longer the quasi-naturalistic force of creative production that we found in the Jena lectures and "Dialogue on Poetry" but rather the spiritual quality of love that inhabits both the human mind and matter.

The immediate consequences of this fundamental shift in Schlegel's philosophical outlook can perhaps best be gathered from the cosmogony that he develops in his book on nature in the Cologne lectures. Although the details of this cosmogony do not have to concern us here, it is important to acknowledge that Schlegel develops an account in which love is the dominating force that drives the whole of creation to the point where it finds its absolute fulfillment in a reunification with God. To be sure, the implications of all of this are not merely ontological. That is to say that love is not simply regarded as the cosmic principle from which the totality of creation flows, but also as the enabling condition for man to transcend his temporal and earthbound existence and become God-like himself: "The individual being who has found love within himself, would have created the world at the same time and be a God himself." ("Das einzelne Wesen, welche die Liebe in sich erfunden hätte, würde zugleich die Welt erschaffen haben, selbst Gott sein."; KA XII 219).

The question remains, however, how the principle of love is able to bridge the gap between man and the divine. In other words, how is it possible for the human being to not merely approach the divine allegorically, but to obtain symbolic access to God? Here, we arrive at Schlegel's second key intervention with respect to Plato's account, replacing the latter's notion of archetypal images for the idea of divine revelation. This strand is not pursued further in Schlegel's discussion of Plato but rather

in the later section on the theory of man where he argues that not the archetypal images of Plato, but divine revelation forms the true object of recollection (KA XIII 31-32). Here, it is important to note that Schlegel draws a crucial distinction between knowledge, recollection, and love in relationship to the divine. Whereas cognition is an abstract faculty which allows man to make connections with and comparisons to the divine on an immanent plane, and is thus the faculty through which an allegorical relationship to the divine can be established, Schlegel explains that recollection pertains directly to God's originary revelation at the beginning of time. The problem with recollection is that this experience is too deeply buried within our consciousness for it to be actualized. That is to say that the mnemonic intimation of the divine is too weak to counter the many forces that bound man to this world, meaning that recollection in itself is insufficient to create the strong longing for reunification necessary for spiritual elevation, and therefore only leads to a negative idea of the divine (KA XIII 32).

However, this does not mean that the role of revelation in Schlegel's philosophy is thereby explained. Although revelation in and of itself is insufficient to arrive at a positive experience of the divine, it nonetheless stands at the basis from which the unmediated experience of God through love takes its roots. In order to explain why, Schlegel draws a distinction between two prehistorical forms of revelation. The first of these, and the most original of the two, concerns God's bestowment of reason. It is through this gift that the human being was able to transcend the animal kingdom, making him aware of his own divine essence. The second revelation is the bestowment of enthusiasm which Schlegel sees as an exalted state that allows God to reveal "his own essence" ("ihr eignes Wesen"; KA XIII 33). Schlegel thus writes that "[w]hat elevates man . . . above the narrow limits of his earthly consciousness, lifts him up from the finite to the infinite and opens his eyes to the higher divine world, is enthusiasm" ("[w]as den Menschen . . . über die engen Schranken seines irdischen Bewusstsein

hinaus, von dem Endlichen zu dem Unendlichen erhebt und ihm den Blick in die höhere göttliche Welt öffnet, ist die Begeistering"; KA XIII 32.). It is precisely this second bestowment that explains why revelation plays such an important role in Schlegel's Cologne lectures and writings on art. God's bestowment of enthusiasm should not merely be seen as a revelation in itself, but forms at the same time the precondition for any future revelation of the divine to emerge.

The fact that Schlegel takes recourse to visual metaphors to describe what happens in a state of enthusiasm is important for our purposes. As he explains, enthusiasm is an exalted state that allows man to transcend his finite perspective by means of a spiritual vision of the divine realm. This spiritual vision entails not only an immediate perception of God, but is also accompanied by the experience of transcendence. As we will come to see, the domain that Schlegel particularly imbues with the capacity to incite these experiences is painting. As a result, painting ceases to be merely an allegorical art for Schlegel, but is now imbued with symbolic significance, which is one of the principal features of the iconic conception of painting that Schlegel adheres to in the last two contributions (KA IV 92).

viii. An Aesthetics of Love

Considering the scholarly literature on the "Descriptions of Paintings," one soon notices that there are only few accounts that actually situate Schlegel's reflections on painting within their broader philosophical context. Although this may be justified for several reasons, it is important to stress that some of the most fundamental concepts in the "Descriptions" only gain relief and depth when they are considered in light of Schlegel's philosophical endeavors more broadly. A good example of such a concept is that of love, which is absolutely central to the last contributions on painting. Far from being merely a matter of personal feeling or sentiment, the concept of love is for Schlegel a philosophical category, whose significance he directly derives from his reading of Plato, as we have seen. More

specifically, the concept of love carries immediate religious and philosophical implications, functioning as a dynamic principle that not merely underlies consciousness and matter, but which therefore also has a strong temporal component. This is to say that when Schlegel speaks of love in the last two contributions, he is not simply referring to a painting's emotional appeal, but also reconfigures the object as an agent that plays a transformative role in the progressive unfolding of creation toward its future reunification with God.

In this section, I would like to concentrate on the relationship between love and beauty in the philosophical framework that Schlegel developed in Cologne. For obvious reasons, both concepts are absolutely crucial to arrive at a complete understanding of the last two contributions on painting. No less than love, the concept of beauty is seen as inherently dynamic and transformative by Schlegel, carrying immediate transcendent connotations. More precisely, the reason why love and beauty are central to Schlegel's later philosophy of painting is because the experience of both allows man to escape his temporal condition, leading to a premature vision of the infinite that otherwise only marks the end of creation.

In order to understand the role of love and beauty within Schlegel's philosophical outlook, and the last contributions on painting specifically, it may be good to start with a crucial distinction that Schlegel introduces in his Cologne lectures, namely that between infinite unity and infinite abundance: "There is only one idea of the infinite in the human mind, but this infinite is of two kinds: an infinite unity and an infinite abundance and variety." ("Es gibt in dem menschlichen Geiste nur eine Idee des Unendlichen, aber dieses Unendliche ist zweifacher Art: eine unendliche Einheit und eine unendliche

Fülle und Mannigfaltigkeit."; KA XIII 245).[115] Although this distinction is strongly reminiscent of Schlegel's earlier philosophy, where the organic relationship between part and whole was conceived in a similar way, the crucial intervention of the Cologne lectures is that the distinction between these two different modalities of the infinite is transposed to a transcendent plane. More specifically, infinite unity and abundance now come to mark respectively the beginning and end of historical time, embedded within a cosmogony that, as Holtenschmidt explains, directly pertains to the nature of time itself ("Antizipation und Abbild" 286). That is to say that time has become the medium in which the transition from infinite unity to infinite abundance takes place, and in which the history of the world unfolds as an ever-continuing process of becoming: "Time is the world itself, the epitome of all becoming, the becoming deity." ("Die Zeit ist die Welt selbst, der Inbegriff alles Werdens, die werdende Gottheit." KA XIV 65 234). Holtenschmidt therefore rightly observes that historical time directly participates in the infinite, meaning that the process of becoming plays itself out at different registers, functioning at one and the same time both on an immanent and transcendent plane ("Antizipation und Abbild" 286–87). Or, as Schlegel formulates it, the concept of becoming unites the temporal and the eternal, the finite and the infinite, and forms as such the precondition for not only our individual recollection of our participation in the infinite, but also of divine revelation in which the finite and the infinite come together (KA XII 353).

Although Schlegel's reference to "a becoming deity" reveals that there are structural parallels between the Jena and the Cologne lectures, this should not conceal the fact that Schlegel's position has radically shifted. Whereas the Jena lectures fully identified this becoming deity with nature itself,

[115] Although this quote is taken from Schlegel's Cologne lectures on logic from 1806, the same distinction is developed in the lectures on philosophy from a year earlier, see e.g., KA XII 381-82.

what is at issue in the Cologne lectures is not so much identification, but participation. Precisely because this becoming God now works on both a transcendent as an immanent plane, Schlegel's philosophical outlook has undergone a transformation from pantheism to, what we today would call, panentheism; that is, a philosophical position in which God is not circumscribed by its manifestation, but rather encompasses the whole of reality (compare Anstett's commentary in KA XIII 464 #17).

It is precisely in this philosophical framework that the role of beauty and love have to be understood. For Schlegel, beauty is not reducible to one's subjective experience of an object, nor is it a property of the object itself. Instead, beauty is what happens in the interaction between the subject and the object, when the viewer comes to recognize and experience his union with God in and through the perception of the artwork. More precisely, Schlegel conceives of beauty as a spiritual mode of seeing in which the recollection of infinite unity and the longing for infinite abundance coincide in a state of enthusiasm: "One could place the essence of the highest in the most perfect spiritual perception, namely that of the beautiful. In the fact that both the longing and prophecy of infinite fullness and the memory of infinite unity originally came together in it." ("Man könnte das Wesen des Höchsten in der volkommenensten geistigen Anschauung, nämlich des Schönen, darin setzen, daß beides, die Ahnung und Weissagung der unendlichen Fülle und die Erinnerung an die unendliche Einheit, ursprünglich darin zusammentraf."; KA XII 388). In order to explain what he means, Schlegel immediately distinguishes his conception of spiritual beauty from mere sensuous beauty. Arguing that both could be seen in terms of an organic unity between unity and plurality, he maintains that spiritual beauty is irreducible to the experience of the formal properties of the object, but rather consists in the feeling of love when recollection and longing coincide in the perception of the harmony between the work's physical properties and its content:

> Every being, both in nature as in art, which claims to be perfect, must be organic, must unite both of these components through its organization. The organization is precisely what the concept of completion expresses in itself. Organization is the means by which unity is maintained in fullness. But this always only affects the outside, the form; in regard to the subject matter and content, we find love in the middle. As has already been mentioned, this unites the memory of infinite unity with the longing for infinite fullness, and is therefore the highest, the most essential, what matters most.
>
> (Jedes Wesen, sowohl der Natur, als der Kunst, das auf Vollkommenheit Anspruch macht, muß organisch sein, muß durch Gliederung jene beiden Bestandteile in sich vereinigen. Das Gegliederte ist eben, was den Begriff des in sich Vollendeten ausspricht. Die Gliederung ist das Mittel, wodurch bei der Fülle die Einheit erhalten wird. Aber dies betrifft doch nur immer das Äußere, die Form; in Rücksicht auf den Stoff und Inhalt finden wir die Liebe in der Mitte; diese vereinigt, wie schon früher erwähnt worden, die Erinnerung an die unendliche Einheit mit der Ahnung der unendlichen Fülle; ist also das Höhere, Wesentliche, worauf es am meisten ankommt.) (KA XII 401).

One of the reasons that makes this passage so insightful is that it not merely illustrates the distinction between sensuous and spiritual beauty, but that Schlegel explicitly situates love and beauty in the middle between the work's physical properties and its content.

With this reference to the material ("Stoff") of the artwork, Schlegel is implicitly referring back to his discussion of Plato where the issue of matter was one of his central concerns. As we have seen, it was here that Schlegel explicitly pointed to Plato's dualism and the dismissive attitude toward matter that it entailed, which he illustrated by referring to the relationship between the artist and the materiality of his craft. Moreover, in order to circumvent this problem, we have seen that Schlegel reversed the hierarchy between cognition and love in Plato's thinking, ultimately allowing him to

understand matter more affirmatively as a dynamic expression of longing and love. The direct result of this is that it automatically places the artist in a different relationship to the materiality of his work, which is precisely indicated by the shift of emphasis from invention to execution in the last two contributions on painting. Although Schlegel does not develop the analogy further in his discussion of Plato, it is in a later section of the lectures that he comes back to this point. Interestingly enough, it is in the section on politics that he returns to the relationship between the artist and the materiality of his craft, and where he no longer models the role of the artist on that of the Creator, but rather on that of the farmer (KA XIII 147).

This radical transformation of Schlegel's conception of the artist is more than illustrative for the gap separating his early from his later thinking. Here, the point is not that his esteem for either art or the artist has changed, but rather that his thoughts on these matters have radically shifted, indicating a more fundamental transformation in Schlegel's attitude toward matter and creation more generally. Most importantly, the artist is no longer seen as someone who stands above matter, but is now rather expected to cultivate matter. In other words, what leads Schlegel to assume that the artist and farmer are engaged in comparable enterprises is not that they shape matter according to their ideas, which was exactly the Platonic model of the artist, but instead their cultivation ("Bildung") of the material. This means that the artist has more of a facilitating than that of a creative role. Although Schlegel never goes as far to dismiss the role of creativity altogether,[116] the Cologne lectures leave no doubt that his main activity is to facilitate the life that is always already present within the material so that the artwork can become a living entity itself in the perception of the viewer (KA XIII 147-49).

[116] The role of creativity is precisely why Schlegel places the artist above the farmer in hierarchy.

What all of this makes clear is that the materiality of the artwork is no longer regarded as something passive or that needs to be overcome, but as an agent that has a transformative power on the experience of the beholder. Moreover, this affirmative stance toward the materiality of the artwork also implies that the goal of art has significantly changed. What is implied by the shift from invention to execution in the last contributions, and the acknowledgement of the agency of the artwork's material properties is that the purpose of art no longer consists in the communication of an idea nor in the presentation of the artist's poetic view on nature, but rather in the production of an affect. When we turn to the last two contributions, it thus becomes clear that Schlegel is at pains to release painting from any association with nature, arguing that its physical limits when it comes to the representation of nature are precisely what allow it "to grasp what is most peculiar and truly spiritual in the sensuous realm, and to magically fix it in its play of colors" ("das Eigenste und wahrhaft Geistige im Sinnlichen zu ergreifen und in ihrem Farbenspiele magisch zu fixieren" KA IV 123). Moreover, defining painting as an "in the material, and immediately in matter acting form of art" ("in der materiellen und unmittelbare in der Materie arbeitenden Kunst"; KA IV 107), the last two contributions underscore that the work's material properties are no longer seen as something that needs to be overcome, but what enables painting to achieve its effect.

However, at the same time, Schlegel makes clear that the work's material properties are not enough for establishing this effect. Since love is not only the driving force of matter but also that of consciousness, the two should be brought in harmony by the artwork. It is here that the discussion of subject-matter becomes relevant again. As we have seen in our discussion above, Schlegel precisely advocated the depiction of those Christian themes that directly pertained to love. Although these scenes may be instructive or edifying, it is the harmonious unison of the love that inhabits both painting's material and content, respectively, as longing and recollection (KA XII 376), which leads to a new

experience. This affective dimension of painting is expressed by Schlegel when he writes that the meaning of the whole ("Bedeutung des Ganzen") cannot be found in either the work's physical presence or content, but is precisely there "where contradictory forces penetrate each other to the point of saturation. This is where a new life will always emerge. For this reason, it is true that not only truth but also beauty itself lie in the middle" (". . . wo widersprechende Kräfte sich bis zur Sättigung durchdringen, und da wird immer auch ein neues Lebendiges hervorgehen; von dieser gilt es, daß die Wahrheit nicht nur, sondern auch die Schönheit selber in der Mitte liegen"; KA IV 135). In other words, it is only when painting's content and materiality are brought in harmony that recollection and longing are activated in the aesthetic experience, thereby shifting the orientation of the viewer from the sensuous manifestation of the artwork to the spiritual experience of, respectively, infinite unity and abundance, which now manifests itself as a mystical feeling of love. It is in this way that painting holds the potential to suspend time, and offer the viewer a temporary intimation of the heavenly future that is waiting for him:

> Visual art is a visible manifestation of the kingdom of God on earth, even now, before nature is freed from its bonds and is transfigured. In this respect, art is a branch of divine magic, which has the purpose of establishing the heavenly visible kingdom of God, glorifying nature, untying the earth and perfecting it.
>
> (Die [bildende] Kunst ist eine sichtbare Erscheinung des Reichs Gottes auf Erden, auch schon jetzt, ehe noch die Natur ihrer Fesseln entledigt ist und verklärt ist. In dieser Hinsicht ist die Kunst ein Zweig der göttlichen Magie,[117] welche den Zweck hat, das himmlische sichtbare Reich Gottes herzustellen, die

[117] At the end of his lectures, Schlegel defines magic as "the practice directed towards the infinite, and which succeeds in presenting it" ("die auf das Unendliche gerichtete Praxis, der es gelingt, dasselbe darzustellen"; KA XIII 174).

> Natur zu verklären, die Erde ihrer Fesseln zu entledigen und sie zu vollenden.) (KA XIII 55)[118]

As such, as Schlegel most forcefully explains in the Cologne lectures, painting should be seen as form of revelation itself:

> Revelation, on which everything higher in the human spirit rests, is too sublime for man in order to be acquired naturally. Here, the visual arts step in to present it [revelation] clearly and distinctly in front of the eyes through the clarity of its sensuous presentation, to surround the viewer from all sides with signs and indications of the infinite divine life by means of meaningful pictures and forms, and thus to vividly present to him his high destiny.
>
> (Die Offenbarung, auf der alles Höhere im menschlichen Geiste beruht, ist für den Menschen, als zu erhaben, doch nicht natürlich. Hier tritt nun die bildende Kunst ins Mittel, um durch die Deutlichkeit der sinnlichen Darstellung ihm diese [Offenbarung] klar und deutlich *vor die Augen* zu stellen, und ihn in sinnvollen Bildern und Gestalten *von allen Seiten* mit Zeichen und Andeutungen des unendlichen göttlichen Lebens zu umgeben, und ihm so seine hohe Bestimmung lebendig zu vergegenwartigen.) (KA XIII 55-56)

As becomes clear from this passage, painting's purpose does not consist in the representation or perfection of nature, but rather in its completion. In this respect, Schlegel's conception of painting in the last two contributions carries strong eschatological overtones. It does not merely give the viewer something to see, but it offers a revelation in which man's heavenly future is vividly actualized. It is with the shift of emphasis from the allegorical to the symbolic that Schlegel's conception of painting

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[118] Holtenschmidt misreads Schlegel on this point, relating this passage directly to Schlegel's conception of poetry ("Antizipation und Abbild" 289). Yet, as the paragraphs above clearly indicate, Schlegel, in contrast to his early Romantic theory of art, draws an absolute distinction between poetry and painting.

is no longer representational, but has become inherently performative. By unleashing its material as spiritual energy, it brings about an elevation of the viewer's soul, leading him from the natural to the spiritual world in which God and man, unity and multiplicity, are reunited (compare Anstett XVII).

ix. The Supreme Image of Love

When we return to Schlegel's discussion of Plato, we find almost halfway in his account an insightful parallel between divine creation and classical sculpture. Here, Schlegel maintains that a philosophy which conceives of creation as a divine or spiritual command over matter finds its natural counterpart in a theory of artistic production that imposes an insurmountable breach between artist and nature, form and matter, thereby leading to an understanding of the artwork that is remarkably similar to Belting's conception of the invisible masterpiece: "No matter how high one praises the power and wisdom of the divine sculptor, he was still bound by the original laws of matter and could only produce an imperfect work of art from it." ("[P]reise man dann auch die Macht und Weisheit des gottlichen Bildners noch so hoch, so hat sie doch, durch die ursprüngliche Gesetze der Materie gebunden, aus dieser nur ein unvollkommnes Kunstwerk hervorbringen können."; KA XII 217). What Schlegel affirms here is precisely what he skipped over in his earlier theory of art, namely the transition from artist to viewer that drove Frenhofer into madness, realizing that however noble his artistic ideas, they will always have to go through a process of material mediation, making the idea of their unmediated communication to the viewer an illusion in principle.

What led to this insight is not so much the transition from artist to viewer, but rather that of artist to Christian. It is with his nascent belief in Christianity that his attitude toward Greek mythology and art begins to harden, seeing in them no longer the forceful expression of nature's own creative powers, but a misconceived revelation that understands creation in terms of strength and violence

instead of love. It is in this context that he explicitly comes to associate allegory with all the faults and shortcomings of the Greek worldview. In sharp contrast to his earlier views, he no longer sees in the Greek sculptor an extension of nature, but someone who is placed in opposition to materiality, and who can therefore only allegorically intimate the divine through the force of his ideas. In the fifth contribution, we thus find Schlegel identifies the depiction of the tragic and the sublime as the point where allegory finds its limits, writing that both ancient categories form "the furthest region which it [allegory] can reach and where it most closely touches the eternal. As such, it stands at the closed entrance of eternal beauty" ("die äußerste Linie, welche sie [allegorie] erreichen kann und wo sie das Ewige am nächsten berührt. So stehen für sie an dem verschlossnen Eingang des ewigen Schönen"; KA IV 150).

The same point also underlies Schlegel's extensive discussion of Sebastiano del Piombo's *Martyrdom of Saint Agatha* from 1520 in the fourth contribution. Counting among the longest discussions devoted to one single artwork in the entire "Descriptions," Schlegel's reading highlights the irreconcilable nature of ancient and Christian art, pointing specifically to the problems that occur when a Christian painting is treated allegorically. After having stressed the sheer force and strength of the characters depicted (KA IV 90), Schlegel points to the irreconcilable differences between Greek mythology and Christianity, signaling that his conceptual framework with regards to the arts had radically changed. Likening the painting to a Greek tragedy for directly marrying the depiction of the martyr's suffering with the ancient ideas of fate and nature, Schlegel's ultimate conclusion is that such a naturalistic approach to painting leaves no room for a transcendent God to release the martyr from her suffering: "No glory, no angels descend to hand the martyr the palm of heaven, but her steadfast soul, confident in her own strength, rushes towards nature and eternal freedom. . . . Certainly it is religious, but more in the ancient sense, more Stoic and Roman than actually Christian." (Keine Glorie,

keine Engel schweben nieder um der Märtyrerin die Himmelspalme zu reichen, sondern ihre standhafte Seele eilt mit Zuversicht auf die eigne Kraft, der Natur zu und der ewigen Freiheit. . . . Gewiß es ist religiös, aber doch mehr im antiken Sinn, mehr stoisch und römisch als eigentlich christlich."; KA IV 90-91)

Schlegel's reading of Sebastiano indicates that his attitude toward classicism has changed by the time he wrote the fourth contribution. Whereas the first three contributions opposed classicism without dismissing either mythology or ancient sculpture itself, it is in his discussion of Sebastiano's work that Schlegel explicitly contrasts the ancient religious attitude with the Christian one, signaling a more fundamental disagreement with the principles of ancient art, let alone classicism. Whereas the first contributions still sought to bridge the ancient and the moderns by reducing the artistic production of each epoch to one and the same ontological force, such concerns are altogether foreign to the later accounts on painting. Instead, the contributions that Schlegel wrote from Cologne no longer seek to bridge the historical gap between the ancients and the moderns, but rather insist on an absolute rupture separating the two.

This entails a radical departure from the first contributions as he no longer regards force but love as the dominant power that underlies artistic production. Although Schlegel continues to sharply distinguish his views from the classicism of Winckelmann and Goethe in the last contributions, the terms of the opposition have changed in the sense that all attempts to unite ancient and modern art are now definitively postponed. The distinction between classicism and his own views on painting is therefore no longer conceived as merely a matter of emphasis, that between form and force, *natura naturata* and *natura naturans*, respectively, but has acquired an absolute quality in the sense that is recast as a difference between paganism and Christianity. Or, to put it slightly differently, if painting should give expression to the dynamic principle that underlies the entirety of creation, it should not

draw on the quasi-naturalistic force that was worshipped by the Greeks, but on the spiritual quality of love that is preached by Christianity (compare Eichner LIV).

Considering the fact that Schlegel now regards Greek mythology and art as the expression of a false religion and misconceived revelation, it comes not as a surprise that the writings from Cologne, including the last two contributions, seek to cut the ties with the ancients altogether. In fact, Schlegel even goes so far to argue that only divine intervention could stop a further relapse into paganism, maintain in the Cologne lectures on philosophy that the error of the Greeks was so great that the coming of Christ was necessary to restore the true order:

> There had to come a Son of God when the first revelation was to be cleaned of all misunderstandings that distorted it. And this new revelation, which was propagated in its purity through the foundation of the church, with the prophecy of providence, the proclamation of the future kingdom of God, and the living hope of the heavenly glory, should led man to the highest purpose of their destiny.
>
> (Es mußte also ein Sohn Gottes kommen, wenn die Reinigung der ersten Offenbarung von allen sie entstellenden Mißverständnissen erreicht und durch Stiftung der Kirche diese hergestellte Offenbarung in ihrer Reinheit fortgepflanzt und durch Weissagung der letzten Weltentwicklung, Verkündigung des zukünftigen Reichs Gottes, und lebendige Hoffnung der himmlischen Herrlichkeit die Menschen zu dem höchsten Ziele ihrer Bestimmung geleitet werden sollten.) (KA XIII 49).

However, the coming of Christ not only meant that truth was restored, but also that a new paradigm of the image was born. As Schlegel would come to write in his notes a few years later: "The first commandment is no longer valid as the Jews had no mediator, no living image of the divine on earth to worship. ("Das erste Gebot sey nicht mehr gültig, weil die Juden auch keinen Mittler, kein lebendes

Bild der Gottheit auf Erden gehabt und verehrt hätten."; KA XX 327 #260).[119] In other words, it is with the coming of Christ that the symbol as living image was born, turning particularly ancient art into a form of idolatry that has to be overcome at all costs: "The sculpture of the ancients is merely a false art. *Sunt idola antiquorum*. But one should study it in order to conquer it." ("Die Sculptur der Alten ist bloß eine falsche Kunst. *Sunt idola antiquorum*. Doch soll man sie studieren um sie zu besiegen"; qtd. in Behler "Wendepunkt" 269).

When Schlegel thus turns to classicism in the last two contributions, the stakes have radically changed. The classicism of Winckelmann and Goethe, of Sebastiano and Michelangelo is no longer criticized for its adherence to the letter rather than the spirit of ancient art, but because it is heretical. As the discussion of Sebastiano shows, it is in this context that not only ancient art but also classicism is negatively contrasted with painting from the late Middle Ages. It is in medieval painting that love appears in its true splendor, as also Schlegel's discussion of Michelangelo in the fourth contribution explicitly shows. Contrasting Michelangelo's drawing of the three Parcae with a painted series of apostles that were taken from the Church of San Luigi in Rome, the classical and sculptural approach of Michelangelo falls short on every level. With their golden background that is reminiscent of "the oldest times of Christian painting in the Byzantine style" (die ältesten Zeiten der christlichen Malerei im griechischen Styl"; KA IV 109),[120] the portraits of the apostles illustrate a childlike simplicity that is, as Schlegel notes, always very attractive, instructive, and touching for the contemplative

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[119] This should obviously be not the first but the second commandment.

[120] Schlegel commonly refers to what we would now call Byzantine art by the terms "Greek or "new-Greek." When he or other people in his circle thus refers to "Greek painting" ("(neu-)griechische Malerei") or "Greek style" ("(neu-)griechischer Styl"), they are generally referring to either Byzantine art or architecture, or other objects within the Orthodox tradition. For a discussion of the terms Greek and new Greek in relation to Byzantine art and architecture in the nineteenth century, see the short article by David B. Brownlee.

observer.[121] Yet, by praising the apostles' heads for their sincerity and naive charm, Schlegel is hardly passing an aesthetic judgment on these paintings, but rather points to their potential for spiritual edification; a quality that is altogether absent in ancient mythology: "For such a beautiful and deeply significant symbols of the highest love and gentleness . . . we would look in the old doctrine of the gods in vain. . . . Its center and hidden principle is the fullness of life and lust, in the most sensuous grace and drunkenness in naked strength and development." ("Nach so schönen und so tiefbedeutenden Symbolen der höchsten Liebe und Lieblichkeit . . . möchten wir uns in der alte Götterlehre wohl vergeblich umsehen. . . . Ihr Mittelpunkt und verborgnes Prinzip ist die Fülle des Lebens und der Lust, in der sinnlichsten Anmut und Trunkenheit in nackter Kraft und Enwicklungsspiele."; KA IV 111).

When Schlegel then continues to contrast these paintings with Michelangelo's work, this gesture has to be understood as much rhetorical as it is critical. Reversing the relationship between what was generally considered the highest and the lowest that the visual arts had to offer, Schlegel explicitly sets himself apart from an aesthetic that worships creativity, originality, and genius, but, for exactly the same reason, lacks any feeling, meaning and depth. In sharp contrast with the love and sincere piety that is reflected by the apostles' heads, Michelangelo's drawing preaches nothing but the artist's caprice and vanity. This work marks the other extreme for Schlegel in which the degeneration

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[121] I read Schlegel's reference to childlike simplicity as a tacit reference to the "noble simplicity and quiet grandeur" of classical sculpture in Winckelmann. Especially since the comparison with the caprice of Michelangelo's drawing also draws attention to the quietness and restraint in the paintings of the apostles. It seems to me that Schlegel is trying to free Winckelmann's famous dictum from its classical pathos by stressing a mode of simplicity and quietness (or restraint) that is authentic to (Christian) painting, and elegantly sets it apart from the qualities of classical sculpture. To draw the parallel between Schlegel and Winckelmann a bit further, I would even suggest that Michelangelo plays the same role for Schlegel as the Laocoon did for Winckelmann, marking a degeneration of the arts in which simplicity and restraint starts to give rise to caprice and vanity.

("Entartung") of modern painting reaches its culmination, employing the pure force of drawing to create "the most abominable ugliness" ("die abscheulichste Häßlichkeit"; KA IV 109).

The point of Schlegel's criticism of Michelangelo is not that he misconceived the spirit of ancient art by concentrating on their form rather than their spirit, which would have been in line with the framework of the first contributions, but rather the fact that he more than any other painter promoted an aesthetics that took the ancients as its orientation. It is in this respect that the work of Michelangelo marks a historical turning point for Schlegel. It was largely under his towering influence that painting came to discard its own religious origins altogether. In fact, such was his influence that even a painter as Raphael did not manage to escape from his corrupting impact, eventually becoming unfaithful to himself as his work began to deviate from "the original and true direction of his beautiful and pious spirit" ("der ursprünglichen wahren Richtung seines schönen und frommen Geistes"; KA IV 133).[122] However, as Schlegel explains immediately after his comparison between the series of apostles and Michelangelo's drawing, the ancients cannot be a model for contemporary painting. Since Christianity's "spiritual essence is not its tendency at all" ("geistige Wesen ganz und gar nicht ihre Tendenz [ist]"; KA IV 111), ancient art is irreconcilable with painting's orientation toward love in principle.

However, the lack of any spiritual component is not the only problem that Schlegel sees with the predominance of the ancients in art theory and practice. Accounting for the nationalistic tendency that his thoughts began to take in Cologne, he also argues that the pull of ancient art on contemporary

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[122] The position of Raphael in the last contributions is comparable to that of Dürer. Although they still hold a special place within Schlegel's aesthetic outlook, his attitude has become more ambivalent, seeing in their work also the first traces of the degeneration of painting after them. Interestingly, Schlegel specifically accuses Michelangelo of putting Raphael in the wrong direction, thereby corrupting not merely painting's essence, but also alienating Raphael from his true self.

artists and theoreticians distorts the local and national spheres in which painting functions. It is perhaps at this point that the political intentions of the last contributions are most pronounced, showing that Schlegel attributed an important role to the establishment of community, a topic to which I will return in the conclusion. He explains that when national schools of painting begin to imitate models from foreign schools, and thereby subsume elements in their own art that are alien to it, it has not merely negative consequences for painting itself, leading to "very shallow and useless things" ("ganz seichte und nichtsnütze Dinge"; KA IV 121), but there is also a danger that it will distort the sense of national character and the people's understanding of themselves. In line with his defense of the guild structure, Schlegel thus argues that the sphere of painting has to be locally restricted as it as in the Middle Ages. Just as each nation used to have its own morals, customs, sentiments, and form (KA IV 123), he maintains that the same is the case for the arts. Every form of painting should be national and local, not in the sense of style or form, but rather in its expression of a national sentiment: "Painterly beauty in particular . . . must absolutely be individual in the ideal sense; but certainly also individual on a larger scale, that is, objectively individual, as is the case with the truly local and national schools" ("Die malerische Schönheit insonderheit . . . muß durchaus eine individuelle sein im Idealischen; aber freilich individuell in größerer Dimension, objektiv individuell, wie dies bei dem wahrhaft Lokalen und Nationalen der Fall ist."; KA IV 123).

It comes as no surprise that these considerations lead Schlegel to the late medieval school of the German Middle Ages. It is here that he not only sees painting's Christian orientation most fully realized, but where he also sees the national characteristics of German painting most realized. Here, Schlegel points particularly to the Cologne school where the old German and Netherlandish traditions come together, providing not merely the seeds from which the later works by van Eyck, Dürer and Holbein evolved, but also containing single works that "unites the best of the three great fathers or

epochs of the German School" ("das beste jener drei großen Vater oder Epochen der deutsche Schule in sich vereinigen"; KA IV 137). Locating the origin of this school back in the days of Wolfram von Eschenbach, thereby tracing its genesis to approximately two hundred years before van Eyck, he maintains that this school preserved the old spirit of painting more than any other tradition (KA IV 137).[123] The oldness of this school by no means discredits the quality of its works. Although largely forgotten because of the moderns' obsession with the imitation of the ancients, he maintains that "the old Germans were no less great and inventive in the art of painting; it is only the case that one is ignorant of it, and that the shallow imitators do not want to recognize it (". . . die alten Deutschen waren nicht minder groß und erfinderisch in der Malerkunst; nur daß die Unwissenheit nicht davon unterrichtet ist, und seichte Nachahmungssucht es nicht erkennen will"; KA IV 121).

It is especially in the fifth contribution that Schlegel begins to advocate a return to the Cologne School for the contemporary painter. Invoking Dürer, he writes: "If painters would only heed the well-considered principle of the old Dürer and make it their own, who said: 'I don't want to paint in the ancient or Italian style at all, but I want to paint German.'" ("Möchten also doch die Maler den wohlbedachten Grundsatz des alten Dürer beherzigen und zu dem ihren machen, der da sagte: "Ich will gar nicht antikisch malen, oder italisch, sondern ich will deutsch malen!"; KA IV 123.). However, it is precisely because of the primacy that the Cologne school of painting now comes to have for Schlegel that his appreciation for Dürer as an artist significantly diminishes. Already in the fourth contribution, he explicitly contrasted Dürer negatively with Memling as the artist in whose work he now recognized the specific German quality of painting most clearly. Whereas he argues that Dürer's work shows a tendency to resort to caricature, it is in Memling's work that he finds a more quiet,

[123] Here, Schlegel goes wrong in his dating as the school was largely contemporaneous with van Eyck.

moving, and therefore all the more meaningful approach to painting (KA IV 109). In the end, however, it is not Memling's work that forms the pinnacle of German painting, but rather that of an anonymous medieval painter from the Cologne School whose work represents the totality of painting, and in whose expression of divine love Schlegel now finds the ultimate example for the contemporary painter.

Indeed, the work that forms the crown of the Cologne school – and thereby of the contributions on painting as a whole – is a painting whose maker was still unknown to Schlegel (KA IV 139), but which can now be identified as Stefan Lochner's *Altar der Stadtpatrone* from 1440-1442. Originally conceived as an altarpiece for the chapel of Cologne's city council, this triptych, which Schlegel encountered in the private collection of the local priest Ferdinand Franz Wallraf, celebrated the city's most important patron saints. Centered on a representation of the adoration of the Magi, the painting's middle panel shows the three Kings surrounding the Madonna and Child who are enthroned against a golden background. The left and right panels are respectively dedicated to the local saints Ursula and Gedeon, and include two of the city's important bishops in the background: St. Severin and St. Cunibert (KA IV 139).

According to Schlegel, the work is unique for high, but simple stylistic beauty. He remarks that some have attributed the work to Dürer. An attribution that makes sense to Schlegel as some of the heads, particularly that of the figures in the background, indeed are strong reminders of Dürer's characteristic preference for the caricature and the bizarre. Schlegel, however, rejects this attribution, remarking that the character of the portraits is more reminiscent of Holbein, whereas the foreground is more characteristic for the style of van Eyck.[124] More than any other work, Lochner's altarpiece thus

[124] Knowing next to nothing about the painting's origin, Schlegel's remarks in hindsight demonstrate his keen eye for detail and knowledge of art. As it turns out, Dürer was indeed familiar with this work and commented on his experiences in his diary. In fact, it is

demonstrates for Schlegel that the Old Cologne School of painting not merely unites different features of later German painting, but also shows that these qualities can be harmonized in one single work (KA IV 139).

However, the work not only stands out for uniting the characteristic features of the "later" work of van Eyck, Dürer and Holbein, but is also significant as it marks an approach to art that is fundamentally at odds with more recent painting. Rather than being an expression of creativity, what firmly situates the painting in the iconic tradition is, as Schlegel remarks, that it was conceived in the spirit and under the enthusiasm of divine love. It is precisely in this respect that Lochner's work is to be preferred over that of his successors: "[T]here is yet something in it that one does not feel in the paintings of the other three artists: the flower of grace appeared to this happy master, he saw the eye of beauty, and all his formations were bathed in its breath." ("[E]s ist noch etwas darin, was man in den Gemälden jener drei Künstler doch nicht fühlt: die Blüte der Anmut ist diesem beglückten Meister erschienen, er hat das Auge der Schönheit gesehen, und von ihrem Hauch sind alle seine Bildungen übergossen"; KA IV 140). To be sure, Schlegel is not referring here to mere sensuous beauty, but is speaking of a divine beauty that manifests itself in devotion and divine inspiration, and which later artists as van Eyck, Dürer and Holbein lacked: "The religious feeling, devotion, and love, and their most intimate and silent enthusiasm was it that led the hand of the old painter." ("Das religiöse Gefühl, Andacht und Liebe, und die innigste stille Begeistrung derselben war es, was den alten Malern die Hand führte."; KA IV 149. That the artist of this altarpiece remained anonymous for Schlegel testifies

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Dürer's comment that he has seen a work by a certain "Maister Steffan" that formed the key to later attributions of this work to Lochner. Also Schlegel's reference to van Eyck in the treatment of the foreground was a good observation, even though he got the chronology wrong. In contrast to what Schlegel assumed, Lochner's work was not older, but a few years younger than van Eyck's pivotal Ghent Altarpiece. Instead of assuming that Lochner stands at the basis of van Eyck, it is more correct to assume that the relationship was the other way around and van Eyck's influence had reached Cologne by the time Lochner started painting.

to this kind of art that was not driven ("trieb") by ego and vanity, but rather by a kind of love that transcends the self (KA IV 142).

One of the elements of the painting that Schlegel particularly singles out is the relation between the martyrs on the side panels and the Madonna and Child in the central piece. If not indifferent then at least in peace with the horrible fate that awaits them, the stern face of Gedeon, and the tender sorrow with which Ursula looks at the Christ figure in the central panel, testify to a future pain and death that is sublimated by divine love. A martyrdom, as Schlegel writes, in which "only so much is hinted at in order to melt the joyous majesty of the main piece through this wistful setting into an even more intimate, gentle feeling of love. . . . In a work like this, the whole art is contained" ("nur so viel angedeutet ist, um die freudige Hoheit des Hauptstückes durch diese wehmütige Umgebung in ein noch innigeres sanftes Liebesgefühl zu verschmelzen. . . . In einem Werke wie dieses, liegt die ganze Kunst beschlossen"; KA IV 140-141).[125]

x. Conclusion

Whereas we started this study with the observation that the totality of painting was an unattainable ideal, by the end of the fifth contribution Schlegel presents us with an altarpiece that encapsulates this whole in one single image. The discussion of Lochner's work is indicative of the gap that separates the first from the last contributions on painting, marking a trajectory in which Schlegel exchanged his early enthusiasm for ancient mythology and poetry for a new advocacy of late medieval

[125] This is another indication that Locher's theory simply does not hold for the last two accounts on painting. Although the body of art is still fragmented, this last remark shows that the totality of painting is accessible, even in one single work. Suffice it to say that Locher does not discuss Schlegel's discussion of Lochner's altarpiece.

Christian painting, seeing the entirety of creation no longer as the expression of a single creative force, but rather as the manifestation of a divine love that renders his earlier paganism idolatrous.

What happens in the middle between those extremes is Schlegel's iconic turn. As repeatedly stressed throughout this chapter, Schlegel's conception of painting undergoes a fundamental transformation between the third and fourth contribution, marking the transition from a modern to a premodern discourse on art that replaces the emphasis of the former on allegory and transparency with a new Christian occupation with the materiality of the symbol. Moreover, recasting the artist from the towering God-like genius into a craftsman, priest, and farmer, the last two contributions leave no doubt that Schlegel no longer views creation, innovation, and originality as painting's principal characteristics, but has come to value the artist's cultivation of his material, his faithfulness to tradition, and, above all, his piety and religious devotion.

In other words, what Schlegel offers in the last two contributions on painting (and the Cologne lectures on philosophy) is *an iconic conception of painting* in which the traditional western emphasis on representation is exchanged for a premodern concern with the physical presence of the image. In order to contrast the difference between the first and the later contributions, we may therefore well draw on Otto Demus's observations on the distinction between Western and Byzantine art. As Demus writes:

> The western artist . . . subjected his figures to the laws of perspective. . . . He created an illusion of space whereas the Byzantine artist aimed at eliminating the optical accidents of space. Western practice leads to a picture of reality, Byzantine practice to preserving the reality of the image. (qtd. in Verstegen 7)

This characterization captures an important element of what is at stake in Schlegel's "Descriptions of Paintings." Subscribing to an anti-naturalistic conception of painting in which the presence of the

image is more important than what is represented, the last two contributions paradoxically draw partly on the artwork's own material presence in order to overcome materiality altogether. Here, the role of the work's subject-matter also needs to be mentioned. It is precisely when the spiritual and the material are in unison that the viewer's recollection of and longing for the divine coincide, and the veil of time is lifted in a way not dissimilar to the Byzantine icon. As Belting explains:

> In the medieval context the image was the representative or symbol of something that could be experienced only indirectly in the present, namely, the former and future presence of God in the life of humankind. An image shared with its beholder a present in which only a little of the divine activity was visible. At the same time, the image reached into the immediate experience of God in past history and likewise ahead to a promised time to come. (*Likeness and Presence* 10–11)

These important parallels should not be taken for granted. They signal that Schlegel's iconic turn is aimed at a radical transformation of painting as medium in which not merely its appearance and mode of production, but also its reception undergoes a fundamental transformation. Moreover, no longer expected to address the viewer as an individual, painting is now supposed to target his inclusion within a larger religious and political tradition. Not coincidentally, this shift coincides with the transformation from an aesthetic to a religious experience that the object is now to impart on the viewer. Precisely by relinquishing painting from its frame and its transparent picture-plane, and reinstalling the artwork within the functional and institutional context of the historical church, Schlegel is able to reconfigure the medium in such a way that it no longer addresses the viewer as an individual, but creates an experience in which the viewer's own individuality is transcended: first, through a mystical union with

God; secondly, by the institution that presents itself as the historical guardian and protector of this experience.[126]

Despite the many differences with his earlier framework, there is thus one element in particular with which Schlegel remains truthful to his earlier views, namely his belief that art – which he now understands primarily as painting – holds the potential to establish a community under a symbolic unity. Although this symbolic unity is no longer conceived under the umbrella of a new mythology, but through the prism of God's originary revelation, this difference does not lead to an abdication of Schlegel's earlier ambition but rather to an intensification. No doubt informed by the political and social unrest on the European continent, the reclamation of painting's autonomy and its placement under the auspices of the church reconfigure painting, by Schlegel's own admission, as an instrument of glory in both the political as religious sense.

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[126] This is another instance where Schlegel departs from his earlier individualism, which he increasingly came to associate with liberal values as individual freedom. As we discussed in the first chapter, Schlegel regarded individualism as one of the prime characteristics of modernity. His restoration of the Middle Ages in the realms of both art and politics is therefore a much broader attempt to replace modern subjectivity with a different notion of personhood in which the human being experienced himself in direct relation to the state and church by which it was embedded. The new role of art can thus not be disentangled from this notion of personhood. The reception of the artwork therefore not only leads to an experience in which the viewer transcends his own individuality in a mystical oneness with God, but it also facilitates the viewer's subjugation to the Church (and by extension the state) as that historical institution that is divinely sanctioned to receive, preserve, and develop the truth of God's revelation.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Byzantine Revival and the Future of German Art:

From the Orthodox Iconostasis to Caspar David Friedrich

i. Introduction

Schlegel's last two contributions on painting stand out in the history of art as a fierce criticism on the modern discourse of autonomous art at the moment of its emergence. As discussed in the previous chapter, the last two contributions were written against the background of Napoleon's mediatization of the Rhineland, and the institutionalization of art in secular institutions as the public museum and the academy – developments, as we have seen, to which Schlegel found himself radically opposed. That Schlegel was serious in his attempt to reconceptualize painting, and exchange art's newly won autonomy for a renewed submission to the authority of the church, can be gathered from his lecture courses, private notes, correspondences, and several of his essays. In this chapter, we will discuss a number of these writings, examine the aftermath of the iconic turn, and trace Schlegel's attempts to expand his ideas and have them more widely accepted.

The core idea underlying this chapter is that Schlegel's theoretical reconfiguration of painting cannot remain confined to the level of mere theory alone. Especially in light of Schlegel's dissatisfaction with the state of the continent, the political and cultural hegemony of France, the fall of the Holy Roman Empire, and the process of secularization and mediatization that he experienced firsthand, it is my contention that the goals of the iconic turn were never merely theoretical, but always also had a practical application. In this regard it is somewhat disappointing that I will not be able to engage with Schlegel's relationship with the brothers Boisserée in more detail. As Borchert has written: "Schlegel's theories on German art would have been only of interest for literary and

philosophical inquiries, if they did not have an initiatory impact on the collecting activities of the Boisserée brothers" ("A Moving Expression" 139–40). Indeed, it was through their extensive and well-known collection of late medieval German art that Schlegel's iconic turn found its immediate practical application, directly informing the collecting activities of the two brothers and the eventual display of their 215 works in Heidelberg from 1810-19 before the entire collection was sold to the Alte Pinakothek in Munich.

Although Schlegel's relationship to the brothers Boisserée is therefore of crucial importance to understanding the practical application of the iconic turn, I will concentrate in this chapter primarily on Schlegel's attempt to reconstruct what we could call, analogously to the first contributions, a body of iconic art. That is to say that I will move away from the theoretical and analytical discussions of the previous chapter, and consider the different ways in which Schlegel provided his iconic tradition with a solid history and a future vocation. Especially in light of the political ambitions behind Schlegel's iconic turn, it was of critical importance that his views on painting did not remain confined to the level of theory alone. If painting would have to play a crucial role on a political level, Schlegel's iconic conception of painting would have to be grounded in tradition and introduced to the realm of current artistic practice, the latter being essential to maintain the continuity of the tradition. this chapter will serve as a prelude to the next chapter in which I will discuss the politics of the iconic turn in more detail.

In this chapter, I will start by concentrating on Schlegel's reconfiguration of the history of painting, which is in my opinion one of the most innovative and exciting parts of all his writings on the visual arts. A crucial document in this regard is Schlegel's relatively unknown essay on Karlstejn Castle from 1808. It is in this brief text that Schlegel deals most extensively with the history of the eastern and western devotional image, tracing the origins of late medieval painting all the way back to

the iconic tradition in Byzantium. Focusing on the interior of the castle's private chapel, Schlegel sees in its extensive decorative program a hybrid between the Byzantine and late medieval German tradition, leading him to assume that the two traditions are historically related. Perhaps the most striking aspect of his essay is his suggestion that hybrid spaces as Karlstejn Castle provided the birth ground of western painting, when he argues that the differences between the Orthodox and Catholic liturgies required a different organization of the church interior, which eventually set the course of painting on a different trajectory as soon as the Roman church had adopted the eastern cult of images.

In the last section, I will concentrate on the future course of painting that Schlegel propagated. Here, I will mainly concentrate on his guidelines for the contemporary painter in the conclusion of the fifth contribution. We will come to see that the iconic turn entailed in practice not simply the formal or thematic imitation of medieval models, but that Schlegel rather advised the contemporary artist to conform to the underlying principles of the iconic tradition. An essential aspect in all of this, is that the Middle Ages were not seen by Schlegel as a lost ideal, but instead as an era that remained unfinished and open-ended. Perhaps not surprisingly, Schlegel sees it as the task of the present to finish what in the Middle Ages remained uncompleted, thereby attributing an important function to the contemporary painter. In the last two sections, which could be considered as a kind of coda to this study, I will finally suggest the Romantic iconic turn found perhaps its foremost representative in the German Romantic painter Caspar David Friedrich. By concentrating on Friedrich's so-called *Tetschen Altarpiece* from 1808, I will argue that both the painting and its reception may give a good indication of the artistic counter-revolution that Schlegel had in mind.

ii. The Byzantine Origins of German Painting

The fact that it took almost seven years before Schlegel would publish another work on the visual arts after the completion of his last two contributions, seems to suggest that the subject of painting gradually moved from the center to the periphery of Schlegel's thought during this period. Although this suggestion is to some extent justified, it should be remarked that the period between 1806 and 1812 marked a steep decline in Schlegel's intellectual output more generally.[127] Moving as a converted Catholic from Cologne to Vienna in 1808, Schlegel was in this period mainly occupied with his new role as court secretary in the former capital of the Holy Roman Empire, occupying from 1809 onwards a position as writer and editor in Metternich's propaganda machine for the Austrian court.[128]

As a result, the absence of any published record on the visual arts during this period tells only part of the story. When Schlegel was appointed as editor of the new periodical *Deutsches Museum* in 1812, he still wrote to Sulpiz Boisserée that "old German art, poetry, and art history is one of my main purposes with this *Museum*" ("altdeutsche Kunst, Poesie und Kunstgeschichte [ist] einer meiner Hauptzwecke bei diesem Museum"; qtd. in Eichner XXXIII), thereby indicating that the visual arts and art history were still very much of interest to him. Moreover, in the background, Schlegel worked on several unfinished book projects during the same period, just as he was preparing a multivolume

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[127] Here, the major exception is of course Schlegel's groundbreaking work *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier* published in 1808. At the same time, however it has to be admitted that the bulk of the work was already done during his Parisian years.

[128] Schlegel's main contributions during these years were the two lecture series that he organized for the Viennese nobility and intelligentsia in 1810 and 1812, which are known by the titles of "On modern history" and "History of old and new literature" respectively.

edition of his collected works, which would not be published until more than a decade later in 1822.[129] It was particularly as part of the latter ambition that the visual arts moved to the forefront of his attention again in the years around 1810. Especially in his private correspondence, there are several insightful allusions to the so-called "Letters on art" ("Briefe über die Kunst"), which were to contain Schlegel's writings on the visual arts, the "Descriptions of Painting" prime among them.[130] The most insightful reference to Schlegel's plans for this work is to be found in a letter to Sulpiz Boisserée from 1810, in which Schlegel writes:

> My main intention will be to illustrate the gradual transition of Cologne and perhaps Netherlandish painting in general from the purely idealistic Byzantine style to the increasingly characteristic and finally caricature-like German style.
>
> (Meine Hauptansicht wird die sein, den allmählichen Übergang der kölnischen und vielleicht überhaupt der niederländischen Malerei von dem rein idealisch neugriechischen Stil bis zum immer mehr Chararakteristischen und endlich Karikatur-deutschen anschaulich zu machen.)

Although we are only halfway through the passage, it is worth pausing for a moment and briefly reflect on what Schlegel is saying here. What is obviously most striking here is the surprising allusion to Byzantine art in this context, provocatively suggesting that the German and Netherlandish painting of the late Middle Ages developed out of Byzantium. Schlegel proceeds:

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[129] The most ambitious of these projects was a multivolume work on the Middle Ages which he planned to write with his brother August Wilhelm. See Höltenschmidt *Die Mittelalter-Rezeption der Brüder Schlegel* 83–84.

[130] See for example Friedrich's letter to his brother August Wilhelm from November 1810 in which he specifically asks him to go over the "Descriptions on Paintings" and make suggestions for corrections. In the same letter, he also expresses his ambition to write a number of new essays on visual art.

> With regards to the Byzantine style, I shall touch upon some of the paintings at Karlstejn, as well as the decoration of Greek churches and Greek worship. This course of Cologne and German painting is in itself very remarkable and instructive, not dissimilar to the course of German poetry, but quite opposed to that of Italian painting and poetry, and even more so to the imaginary stages of art development and cultivation (such as Goethe after Winckelmann assumed) a priori.
>
> (Bei dem neugriechischen Stil werde ich einiges von den Gemälden in Karlstein berühren, desgleichen von der Einrichtung der griechischen Kirchen und des griechischen Kultus. Dieser Gang der kölnischen und deutschen Malerei ist an sich sehr merkwürdig und belehrend, nicht unähnlich dem Gange der deutschen Poesie, aber ganz entgegengesetzt dem der italienischen Malerei und Poesie, und *noch mehr* verschieden von eingebildeten Kunstentwicklungs- und Bildungsstufenleitern (wie Goethe nach Winckelmann sie hat) *a priori*.) (qtd. in Eichner XLVIII)

If anything, this passage illustrates is that the iconic turn was not merely a theoretical gesture on Schlegel's part, but also conceived by him as a historical continuation of the iconic tradition that emerged in Byzantium in the early Middle Ages. Apart from the allusion to Goethe and Winckelmann, whose imaginative and a priori model of artistic development he had already rebutted in the "Descriptions of Paintings," Schlegel suggests nothing less than a paradigm shift in the way the history of art was generally conceived. Breaking through the confines of western art, one of the most astonishing features of Schlegel's art theory more generally is the daring implication that the origins of German painting were not the be found in classical Athens, but rather in medieval Constantinople. Moreover, in line with the functional account of painting that he developed in the last contributions, this suggestion is only reinforced by the fact that the passage above explicitly embeds the genesis of late medieval German painting in the image cult of the Orthodox Church, referring at other occasions

particularly to the Hagia Sophia as the prototype for a model of church architecture which allows for these kind of practices (see e.g. KA IV 177-78).

It is worth reflecting for a moment on how revolutionary these views actually were. Since the fall of Constantinople in 1453, Byzantium had always enjoyed a poor reputation in the Christian West. Despite a short-lived upsurge of interest in scholarly circles halfway through the 17th century, it was especially with the onset of the Enlightenment that its reputation declined further. For Voltaire, Byzantine history was a "worthless collection of orations and miracles," while Montesquieu saw Byzantium as a "tissue of rebellious insurrections and treachery." Moreover, by the time that Schlegel entered the scene, it was above all Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* that had further buttressed Byzantium's reputation as a superstitious and corrupt empire, representing for Gibbon nothing but a "dead uniformity of abject vices" (all qtd. in Bullen 7). Having read Gibbon's work years before (Møller 211), it is perhaps no surprise that Schlegel joined the chorus, explicitly identifying the Byzantine Empire with barbarism and despotism in his lecture courses on universal and modern history (see e.g., KA XIV 122-23 and KA VII 184).[131] Considering these widely shared prejudices against Byzantium, it is therefore all the more remarkable that Schlegel argued for a historical connection between Byzantine and German art almost a century and a half before the connection would be rediscovered by modern art-historical scholarship.

To be sure, that the Byzantine and German schools of art were historically related was not a completely new idea for Schlegel when he wrote his letter to Sulpiz Boisserée. A few years earlier, he

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[131] Here, it is worth noting that Schlegel's opinion got slightly more positive in the lectures on modern history from 1810 when he made an exception for Constantinople, and only associated the backlands of the empire with barbarism (KA VII 184). In the lectures on old and new literature from 1812, Schlegel openly acknowledges the cultural and religious influence of Byzantium on European culture, pointing particularly to the Hagia Sophia as the prototype for medieval church architecture (KA VI 176-177).

had already pointed quite clearly to the correspondences between Byzantine and Gothic architecture (KA IV 176). Moreover, the last two contributions on painting themselves contain some tacit suggestions that hint in this direction. Here, Schlegel had pointed specifically to the parallels between late medieval German and Italian art, suggesting on several occasions that these correspondences could be explained by the fact that both schools derived from the same original source (KA IV 84, 116). This common origin is defined later in the fifth contribution where Schlegel comes to speak about two anonymous medieval paintings which he encountered in Brussels. These works, which offer "a true foundational perception the old style of the German school in the Low Countries and the Lower Rhenish regions" "eine wahre Grundanschauung für den alten Styl der deutsche Schule in den niederländischen und niederrheinischen Gegenden"; KA IV 130), are dated by him at least one century before van Eyck, providing him with another indication how close the late medieval schools of German and Italian painting were originally related. Not only that, but Schlegel also suggests for the first time that the art of the Byzantines could be seen as the historical ground for their relationship: "The whole manner is closely tied to the oldest Italian paintings, which are still in the Greek style; and yet the old German is unmistakable in it." ("Die ganze Art schließt sich ganz nah an die ältesten italiänischen Gemälde, die noch im griechischen Styl sind; und doch ist auch das Altdeutsche darin unverkennbar."; KA IV 130).

Although this reference to the Byzantine style is too suggestive to be entirely convincing, it is indicative of the direction in which Schlegel's thoughts were moving around this time. In fact, as the remainder of his discussion shows, Schlegel not merely perceived a historical relationship between Byzantine art and the oldest schools of German and Italian painting, but the alleged Byzantine origins of German art also formed the basis for a reconfiguration of the history of painting more generally. Continuing his discussion of the two paintings he remarks that the transformation from Byzantine into

German art culminated in the late Middle Ages, after which painting declined with van Eyck before disappearing altogether with the emergence of high Renaissance art. Although it has to be admitted that these stages of historical development are, at most, only hinted at in the fifth contribution itself, Schlegel no doubt points in this direction when he directly compared the Brussels paintings with the art of van Eyck and Dürer. In sharp contrast to the history of painting that he presented in the first contributions, and in which the work of van Eyck and Dürer marked the pinnacle of German art, their paintings are now negatively contrasted with the anonymous paintings in Brussels. We thus read that in the latter's beautiful treatment of the faces, their power of expression, their wealth of color, and the gracious completion of its shapes, both works are to be preferred over the best works of van Eyck. Moreover, Schlegel further suggests in the same discussion that Dürer must have been familiar with the oldest Dutch and German schools of painting, disrupting their original beauty into his own caricaturesque style (KA IV 130). Although it has to be admitted that Schlegel's reading and comparison remain merely suggestive at this point, they nonetheless offer an important indication that he began to conceive of the history of painting as a lineage that ran all the way from the Byzantine iconic tradition to the late Middle Ages, until its downfall in the early modern period.

What makes these remarks all the more interesting is that the connection between the iconic tradition and late medieval German art would no longer be accepted at face-value, but that Schlegel would soon come to make an attempt to explain the relationship between the two schools historically. Continuing the trajectory already started in the last two contributions in which Schlegel exchanged his philosophical approach for a deliberate effort to reconstruct the medieval conception of painting on the basis of historical observations, it is particularly in the 1810 Viennese lecture course on modern history that Schlegel offers an explanation of the historical connection between Byzantine and late medieval German art. Delivered a few months before he wrote his letter to Sulpiz Boisserée, Schlegel

traces the source of their relationship back to the Ottonian dynasty at the turn of the first millennium. It was at this moment when increased commerce between East and West, and the marriage between Otto II and the niece of the Byzantine emperor Theophanu led not only to an increased contact between the two empires, but also to the imitation of Byzantine ceremonies at the German court (KA VII 211). As Schlegel explains, this period provided the ground for another period of intensive contact between the two empires more than a century later at the moment of the Christian crusades to Jerusalem, marking another moment of interaction between northern Europe and Byzantium at the moment when the European cities arose, and a new class of workers emerged in Europe. It is particularly at this point, Schlegel maintains, that the Byzantines would come to have a direct impact on the course of European art and architecture. Following his earlier suggestion that the "German" Gothic style was directly derived from Byzantine church architecture, he suggests that the European encounter with Orthodox church imagery directly contributed to the emergence of a Greek (that is, Byzantine) style in both Italy and Germany, after which each of these countries would further develop the iconic painting of the Byzantines into their own national schools:

> The art of painting, which was initially intended for the decoration of churches, followed church architecture; the sight of magnificent Greek Orthodox churches rich in pictures may have revived them, which is why the oldest Italian and Dutch-German paintings appear very similar to the Byzantine ones, until soon a unique character developed in painting in both countries, and the most glorious, eternally admired masterpieces were produced.
>
> Der in Kirchen sich darstellenden Baukunst schloß sich die zunächst zur Ausschmückung der Kirchen bestimmte Malerkunst an; der Anblick prächtiger bilderreicher griechischer Kirchen mag sie von neuem belebt haben, weshalb auch die ältesten italienischen und niederländisch deutschen Gemälde den neugriechischen ganz ähnlich erscheinen, bis sich bald in beiden Ländern ein

> eigner Charakter in der Malerei entwickelte, und die herrlichsten ewig bewunderten Meisterwerke hervorbrachte. (KA VII 230)

In the Viennese lectures on modern history, Schlegel first provides a historical explanation for what could perhaps be seen as his most perceptive contribution to the theory of painting in general. This concerns the unfortunately largely forgotten text on his visit to Karlstejn Castle in 1808, and to which Schlegel briefly referred in his letter to Sulpiz Boisserée.[132] As this essay not only holds a central place within Schlegel's iconic turn, but also contains some of his most acute and perceptive insights into the history of painting more generally, we will turn to a detailed discussion of this essay in the next section.

iii. Rewriting the History of Painting

Named after the King of Bohemia and later Holy Roman Emperor Charles IV (1316-1378), Karlstejn Castle was founded in 1348, some 20 miles southwest of Prague in the Czech Republic. Both today as in Schlegel's days, the castle is well known for its "Chapel of the Holy Cross" which was consecrated in 1365. Located at the center of the castle's fortified main tower, this chapel originally functioned as the castle's treasury and sanctuary which contained, among other things, the emperor's collection of Passion relics. As the art-historian Kim Woods has recently suggested, the chapel's unique decoration of 129 half-length figures of saints, knights and kings derived most likely from the emperor's interest in icons painted by the hand of Saint Luke (142). Painted by the so-called Master Theodoric from Prague, it is the description and analysis of what Susie Nash has called, "the most lavish and exceptional of all private chapels" which forms the bulk of Schlegel's account (255).

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[132] As far as I have been able to determine, there has been no substantive engagement with this particular text in the Anglo-American literature. Unfortunately, the situation has not been that much different in Germany, although the art historian Barbara Schellewald recently picked up the subject. Her article also provides a good overview of the literature on Schlegel's text in German.

Published in the second volume of *Deutsches Museum* in 1812, Schlegel's brief essay "Karlstejn Castle near Prague" ("Schloss Karlstein bei Prag") is a text of first importance within the reception history of Byzantine and medieval art. Originally written in 1808 after Schlegel had visited the castle on his journey from Cologne to Vienna, it is among the earliest, if not the first document in modern art historiography to treat Byzantine painting no longer as a mere historical curiosity, but to incorporate it within the history of western art.[133] At the same time, the essay also offers a complete reconfiguration of the history of art, regarding the Byzantine icon no longer as a historical aberration from art's originally Greek legacy, but turning it instead into the ground of western painting. As such, the essay proposes a transcultural understanding of painting's historical development that crosses the borders between East and West, thereby arriving at an understanding of late medieval German painting as directly developing out of the Byzantine iconic tradition.

At the same time, the essay holds a central place in Schlegel's iconic turn. Continuing the trajectory started by the last two contributions on painting, Schlegel constructs a history of painting that no longer departs from an abstract or speculative conception of art – the a priori referred to in relation to Goethe and Winckelmann in his letter to Sulpiz Boisserée, just as much as the poetic notion of art in the first contributions – but traces the early history of painting in relation to the image's changing function. That is to say that for Schlegel the history of painting is embedded within a broader functional and spatial context in which the iconic tradition of the Byzantines gradually transitions into the late medieval altarpiece, responding to the different demands that the Catholic mass made on the

[133] The historian Anthony Kaldellis has traced the history of the Byzantine reception in the West, and argued that the first positive appraisals of Byzantium in western Europe date only from the 1820s. Although historians before Schlegel had considered Byzantine art, their models were informed by inclusion, Vasari prime among them. The field of Byzantine art history would not emerge until late in the nineteenth century (Kaldellis 21–25).

church architecture, and the location and function of images within it. This consequently means that the gap between icon and altarpiece cannot merely be reduced to form or style for Schlegel. In fact, what both unites and separates both objects is their function within a broader religious constellation. Although the late medieval altarpiece forms a continuation of painting's original religious vocation, it also adopts its shape and form in accordance with the new demands made by its new religious setting, and the changed physical position of the viewer within it. In short, rather than treating the category of painting as a fixed essence tied to the modern frame, Schlegel's essay on Karlstejn Castle once again confirms that painting is a much more fluid category for him, changing its medium, physical properties, and relationship to the viewer in response to different functional demands that are made on the image. Moreover, and in sharp contrast to the histories of art that would follow in his wake, Schlegel does therefore not conceive of the history of painting as the development of an autonomous and static object, but rather reconstructs it more broadly as the development of the religious image as it changes its shape and material support according to its historical functionality.

The starting point for Schlegel's observations are the many half-length figures of saints which occupy one of the chapel's main walls. Being aware of their late medieval origin, it is not so much the individual Byzantine style of these paintings that catches Schlegel's attention, but rather the way in which all the portraits are organized and located in their spatial environment. In other words, instead of considering each painting individually, he considers all of them together as a unified decorative program, whose total impression reminds him "somewhat of the interior of the Greek Church, which is so very different from the Catholic one" ("noch einigermaßen an die Einrichtung der griechischen Kirche, welche von der katholischen so sehr verschieden ist"; KA IV 209). It is this distinction between the internal organization of Orthodox and Catholic churches, and the role of the image within it, which then leads him to remark that this difference in spatial organization "also had a very big and essential

impact on the application of painting" ("auch auf die Anwendung der Malerei einen sehr großen und wesentlichen Einfluß gehabt hat"; KA IV 209).

Situating the development of painting within an architectural framework in which its characteristics are significantly influenced by the spatial organization in which it is located, Schlegel immediately connects the church architecture and the role of the image within it with the limitations that the liturgy imposes on the church's spatial design. He does so by concentrating on the role of the iconostasis within the Orthodox church. Because the Orthodox tradition celebrates the mass in such a way that the altar remains hidden from the public eye, Schlegel argues that the iconostasis is decorated with a tapestry of images so that "the eye and spirit of the pious are perpetually satisfied with sacred thoughts and images" ("das Auge und Gemüt der Frommen immerwährend mit heiligen Gedanken und Bildern [zu] erfüllen"; KA IV 209).

For this reason, as Schlegel continues to explain, the demands of the interior of Orthodox churches are completely different from what we see within the Catholic tradition. Since the altar remains visible during the service, and the mass is therefore openly celebrated, the interior of Catholic churches is expected to conform to different demands, and thus requires a different role of the devotional image as well. Instead of surrounding the people with a plethora of images that constantly remind the devotees what is going on inside the sanctuary, the most important requirement of the interior space of Catholic churches is that they offer a focal point that keeps the eyes of the people attentive to that which is most essential, namely the altar. According to Schlegel, it is exactly this role which the Catholic altarpiece fulfills. In the Catholic church, Schlegel writes, the altar is "for the architect and painter the chief aim and center of the whole, to which all the forces of the arts must be directed in order to emphasize and glorify it in every possible way" ("für den Architekten und Maler das Hauptziel und der Mittelpunkt des Ganzen, welchen herauszuheben, und auf jede Weise zu

verherrlichen, alle Kräfte der Kunst aufgeboten werden müssen"; KA IV 209-10). One of the main points of Schlegel's reflections is thus to show that the demands of the liturgy cannot be separated from the internal organization of church interior, and the shape and function of the image within it. Whereas the many images on the Orthodox iconostasis are essential to let the pious internally experience what remains invisible to the naked eye, the Catholic altarpiece functions as the focal point of attention and devotion, glorifying the transubstantiation that takes place before it, and intensifying its effect on the viewer.

For Schlegel, the importance of Karlstejn Castle is that it reveals the historical transition from the Orthodox image tradition to the Catholic one. Displaying not only the iconic portraits of saints in the Byzantine style, but also a contemporaneous altarpiece and a fresco cycle dedicated to Mary in the old German style, Karlstejn Castle staged a confrontation between the different image cults of Byzantium and Germany. Having moved the iconic portraits from the absent iconostasis to the wall in order to create a visual space that would allow for an undisturbed view on the altar, the chapel marked for Schlegel an intermediate stage that not merely showed that the western devotional image originally developed out of the Orthodox tradition, but also demonstrated how that image itself was transformed in order to adopt it to a new role within the Catholic church. Moreover, as Schlegel continues to make clear, this transition was of the greatest importance for the development of the devotional image, and determined the future course of western art. Precisely because the image was freed from the material support of the iconostasis and its fixtures within the Orthodox tradition, its adoption by the Catholic church gave the art of painting "a completely new playing ground and a more pronounced momentum" (einen ganz neuen Spielraum, und einen höheren Schwung"; KA IV 210). The value of Karlstejn Castle consists for Schlegel precisely in the fact that it provides insight into this historical moment,

revealing the birth of German painting out of the "venerable remains of Christian antiquity" ("ehrwürdigen Reste des christlichen Alterthums"; KA IV 210).[134]

iv. The Middle Ages as Unfinished Project

What becomes clear from Schlegel's brief essay on Karlstejn Castle is that the iconic turn in his theory of painting marks historically both a continuation and a departure from Byzantine tradition. Although the medium, shape, and physical properties of the image all significantly transform as the devotional image is adopted to the needs of the Catholic service, it is essential that its function does not. Here, it is important to be specific about what we understand by function. Although it is true that the function of the image within the spatial environment of the church changes, and thereby comes to be positioned differently within the visual field of the observer, this difference is ultimately one of degree not kind. Even though the Catholic churches put in plain sight what remained hidden within the Orthodox tradition, the main function of the iconostasis and the altarpiece alike is not what they reveal or conceal on a physical plane, but precisely their ability to move the viewer beyond the merely visible and elevate him to the spiritual level through the material presence of the image. In other words, when Schlegel writes that the iconostasis fills the eye and the spirit of the pious with thoughts and images, he is basically saying that the purpose of its images is entirely commensurable with the theory of painting he defended in the Cologne lectures on philosophy.

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[134] A similar position can already be found in the fourth contribution: "For more than a thousand years, since the first concrete foundation of Christianity, one replicated the holy images designated for devotion in the same symbolic manner." ("Schon hatte man länger als ein Jahrtausend, seit der ersten festeren Begründung des Christentums, die zur Andacht bestimmten Heiligenbilder, immer in der gleichen bloß sinnbildlichen Weise...wiederholt."; KA IV 115), until "a new morning sun for Christian painting emerged with Giotto in Italy and with the precursors of van Eyck in the German Low Countries" ("mit Giotto in Italien und mit den Vorgängern von Eyck in den deutschen Niederlanden eine neue Morgensonne für die christliche Malerkunst aufging."; KA IV115).

In short, what separates in Schlegel's view both the icon and late medieval painting from their modern counterpart is that they mediate between the visible and the invisible, the temporal and the timeless. Precisely because Schlegel attributes a symbolic function to the image, facilitating the viewer's elevation from an immanent to a transcendent plane, he is in his later writings unwilling to recognize any form of painting that merely touches the senses without moving the soul. It is in this light that we should read Schlegel's comments on the development of the history of art toward the end of the fourth contribution. Drawing on his extensive knowledge of ancient art and poetry, Schlegel remarks that most critics mistakably assume that the history of art can be seen as a continuous and linear development. However, as he explains, it only appears this way because people are unaware of art's original vocation. In other words, it is only from a secular viewpoint, which strips the work from its original environment, and is therefore unable to move beyond the confines of the frame, that the history of art appears as an uninterrupted tradition. As he makes clear, it was precisely his knowledge of ancient art and poetry that made him attentive that the history of art should not be seen in terms of evolution and development, but rather in terms of ruptures. He thus draws a comparison between ancient Greece and modern Europe. Whereas an absolute rupture separates the great style of ancient art from its later depravation, it was a similar "violent leap" ("gewaltsamer Sprung"; KA IV 115) which divorced the art of the moderns from its original aspirations to something higher: "The supreme, which alone is beautiful and right, suddenly entered the astonished world like a spirit; but just as suddenly the lofty apparition vanished, leaving only a long line of faint shadows to commemorate the past glory." ("Das Große, welches allein das Schöne und das Rechte ist, trat mit einemmale wie ein Geist in die erstaunte Welt; aber eben so plötzlich verschwand auch die hohe Erscheinung wieder, und ließ nur eine lange Reihe schwacher Schatten zurück, zur Erinnerung an die vergangene Herrlichkeit."; KA IV 115).

With this passage, we are back at our original starting point. In the introduction, we have seen that the experience of rupture is constitutive for Schlegel's historical thinking throughout. It was especially as a result of the perceived historical rupture that the French Revolution had brought about that Schlegel came to embrace the idea of a radically open future, thereby not detaching himself from history per se, but rather from the idea that past, present, and future stand in a linear and progressive relationship to one another. Although Schlegel never gives up on the idea that there is a telos in history, the historical progression toward this goal was never straightforward and uninterrupted for him. What distinguishes the historical model of Schlegel's later thought from the organic conception of history that we encountered in the first contributions is that precisely his emphasis on historical rupture becomes much more pronounced and absolute. Largely as a result of his own historical circumstances and the predominance of France as a political and cultural power in Europe, Schlegel comes to distance himself from the organic model of history in which every period contains within itself the seeds for a better world. It is this idea that he gradually comes to discard in Paris and Cologne, explaining his turn to tradition and an idealized conception of the Middle Ages as a historical moment that provides the seeds from which the triumphant church will grow.

It is the latter model which would come to determine Schlegel's views on not only the history but also the future of painting, and art more generally. It is especially in his article "Prospects for the Arts in the Austrian Imperial State" ("Aussichten für die Kunst in dem Österreichischen Kaiserstaat") which was published in *Deutsches Museum* in 1812 that Schlegel arrives at his most elaborate account of the history of painting, and explicitly connects his historical outlook with his ideas for a future

regeneration of the arts.[135] What underlies Schlegel's historical outlook is again the idea of an absolute rupture separating the Middle Ages from the (early) modern present, this time also including the iconic tradition within his historical model. Schlegel thus begins his historical overview by debunking the modern idea that sensuous beauty is intrinsic to the arts. Specifically referring to the Byzantine iconic tradition, Schlegel remarks that painting originally had only a spiritual and religious orientation. He remarks that this lack of aesthetic concerns is reflected by the earliest history of Christian painting when the image's higher aims precluded any significant formal development for over a period of thousand years:

> The plain symbols of Christianity had served devotion with little change for a full millennium and even more, until finally in the 14th and 15th centuries in Italy and Germany the art of painting suddenly took a higher momentum, which still appears as wonderful in its origin and unattainable in in its productions.
>
> (Die einfache Symbole des Christentums hatten mit geringer Veränderung ein volles Jahrtausend und noch darüber der Andacht gedient, bis endlich im 14ten und 15ten Jahrhunderte in Italien und Deutschland die Malerkunst mit einemmale einen höhern Aufschwung nahm, welcher noch jetzt wunderbar in seiner Entstehung und unerreichbar in seinen Hervorbringungen erscheint.) (KA IV 229.)

By pointing to the 14th and 15th century as a moment of transition when the iconic tradition gives way to a new stage within the history of painting, Schlegel explicitly aligns himself with the views he had propounded in his essay on Karlstejn Castle, which was published in the previous volume of *Deutsches*

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[135] Although it has to be admitted that this article dates from a considerably later moment than the other writings we discussed so far, we will see that Schlegel's views are entirely commensurate with the writings that he wrote before, especially his essay on Karlstejn Castle.

Museum. The leap that separates the transition from the iconic tradition to the late medieval schools of German and Italian painting is precisely the moment when a creative spirit ("schöpferische Sinn"; KA IV 229) first begins to manifest itself, suddenly bringing a new concern for beauty within the scope of painting. In fact, as Schlegel explains, what sets the work of the late medieval German and Italian school apart from both the iconic tradition and modern painting is precisely that a concern for beauty and meaning go hand in hand, mutually reinforcing one another (KA IV 229).

Where things go wrong, however, is when painting becomes solely concerned with sensuous appearance, and gradually begins to discard "the symbolism, and the serious meaning in which it finds its origin" ("jene Symbolik und ernste Bedeutung von welcher sie ihren Ursprung genommen [hat]"; KA IV 229). This is the moment when artistic taste begins to deteriorate, and painting becomes increasingly theatrical and manneristic, losing itself in empty self-gratification, fashion, and fancy, until it completely disintegrates into a fascination for imitation (of either classical art or the natural world) which characterizes painting's current predicament. As a result, Schlegel concludes that paining can only be cured from these errors when it tries to recover its original power and dignity by reorienting itself again to its original religious meaning. As in all domains of life, the negligence of heritage and tradition cannot remain without dramatic consequences. The same goes when one tries to create an art detached from its historical origins and without historical ties. It is in this context that Schlegel makes his famous claim that "[t]he best theory of art is its history" ("[d]ie beste Theorie der Kunst ist ihre Geschichte"; KA IV 230), and makes a claim for the importance of art-historical studies.

The consequence of all of this was that Schlegel came to promote a return to the principles of late medieval German painting. Although this claim is easily misunderstood by assuming that Schlegel promoted either a formal or thematic return to the art of the late Middle Ages, it is important to emphasize that he is not making a call for the imitation of medieval painting per se. As we have seen

throughout the present study, Schlegel firmly opposed imitation of any sort. Indeed, in "Prospects for the Arts," he even identified the principle of imitation with the modern degeneration of painting more generally. This makes it all the more necessary to emphasize that Schlegel's iconic turn should not be seen as a recovery of medieval painting as such, but rather as a return to the religious principles which underlie painting's earliest history. In other words, if there was a future for modern German painting, it needed to realign itself again with the Byzantine origins from which it sprung forth: "Is art truly to flourish, in harmony with what man's education generally requires . . . with all the outward charm and the most diverse development, [then it] should never completely depart from its first, serious origin." ("Soll die Kunst wahrhaft gedeihen, in Harmonie mit dem, was die Bildung des Menschen überhaupt erfordert . . . [so] darf [sie] sich bei allem äußern Reiz und der mannichfaltigsten Entwicklung nie ganz von ihrem ersten, ernsten Ursprung entfernen."; KA IV 227).

When seen from this perspective, the restorative tendencies in Schlegel's aesthetic (and political) thinking should not be understood as naive call for a return to the medieval world. Schlegel was too acute a thinker and historian to believe that such a return would ever be possible. His point was not, as Holtenschmidt had made clear, that medieval forms of life and institutions should be recovered in their original form, but that their underlying principles and objectives should be the basis for their reintegration in the modern world (*Die Mittelalter-Rezeption der Brüder Schlegel* 194). This impression is only confirmed by Schlegel's private notes from his period in Cologne and early years in Vienna. What they show is that he did not simply regard the Middle Ages as an ideal, but rather as an unfinished project.[136]

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[136] Additionally, one could turn for Schlegel's own response to the charges of conservatism at his address to his review of count Stolberg's book *History of the Religion of Jesus Christ* (*Geschichte der Religion Jesu Christi*) from 1808. In this review, Schlegel

For Schlegel, it was particularly the medieval schism of the Roman church that prematurely marked the end of the Middle Ages (compare Behler "Intro to KA XX-XXI" XXXVIII). With the schism of the medieval church, the medieval conflict between emperor and church reached its climax, meaning that the Middle Ages fell victim to their own internal dynamics and the whole continent disintegrated on both a profane and a religious level.[137] In other words, Schlegel saw a direct parallel between the schism of the medieval church and the moral disintegration of both church and empire as institutions that used to guarantee the social and political stability during the Middle Ages. More specifically, whereas the church came to distance itself from its own moral and religious teachings after the schism, becoming involved in all kinds of dubious activities such as bribing and corruption, Schlegel argues that the European empires became all the more secular during this period, finding themselves increasingly in conflict with one another without the moral and religious compass of the church. This is to say that for Schlegel, the social and political unrest of his own day can directly be traced back to the medieval schism of the church, which would explain why he comes to show himself concerned with restoring the medieval balance between church and empire in his political thinking: "The papacy, like the art and poetry of the Middle Ages, remained only a design; this is true of the whole Middle Ages. Our job is to carry out that great project." ("[D]as Pabstthum wie die Kunst und

explicitly addresses his critics who accuse him of nostalgia, and assume that he wants to revive the Middle Ages in its original form (KA VIII 90).

[137] Schlegel thus writes in his notes that the schism was "a consequence of the struggle between emperor and church, whereby both mutually destroyed themselves. This is the main event of the Middle Ages" ("eine Folge des Kampfs zwischen Kaiser und Kirche, wodurch beide sich selbst gegenseitig zerstörten. Dieß ist die Hauptbegebenheit des Mittelalters"; KA XX 118 #79).

die Poesie des Mittelalters ist nur ein Entwurf geblieben; dieß gilt überhaupt vom ganzen Mittelalter. Unser Beruf ist, jenen großen Entwurf auszuführen." KA XX 279 #40).[138]

The core idea which informs Schlegel's later political thinking in Cologne and Vienna is thus that the task of the present consists in realizing the medieval ambition of a triumphant church. As we will come back to its political implications in the conclusion, I briefly want to touch on the implications of this ambition for Schlegel's views on painting. In order for the balance between church and empire to be restored, the first requirement Schlegel sees is that the true church needs to become a visible power again. In both his notes as in his Cologne lecture course on universal history, Schlegel explains that the medieval church's original religious teaching went underground and were taken up by secret societies and mystics (KA XIV 240-41, KA XX 213 #49). The main task of the present consists therefore in bringing the religious orientation of the medieval church back into the visible realm again, which is precisely where the role of painting comes in. In fact, we are now in a position to understand Schlegel's earlier insistence on painting's importance to turn the church into a visible reality again. As discussed in the previous chapter, the reason why Schlegel reclaimed art's autonomy and submitted it once again to the authority of the church was precisely because of its capacity to present God's revelation before the viewer's eyes, thereby playing an essential role in restoring the original authority of the church and reintegrating its teachings within the public domain.

[138] Although many of these quotations are from the period around 1810, the same thematic was already treated in the lectures on universal history from 1805-06, see KA XIV 240-41.

v. Schlegel's Guidelines for the Contemporary Artist

There are good reasons to believe that the last contributions on painting are directly informed by these ambitions and form a concealed attempt to complete the process that the Middle Ages had started. Written shortly before Schlegel would come to expound his political views in the Cologne lectures on philosophy and universal history, the last two contributions share with his later lectures their insistence on the unfinished character of the Middle Ages, and medieval painting in particular. He thus writes halfway through the fourth contribution that "one would be greatly mistaken if one believed that the Christian cycle had been exhausted" ("man würde sehr irren, wenn man glaubte, der christliche Zyklus sei schön erschöpft"; KA IV 94). Moreover, in the conclusion of the fifth contribution, Schlegel specifically addresses the contemporary painter, providing him with rules and guidelines for the execution of his craft. After his extensive discussion of Stefan Lochner, Schlegel concludes his encomium with a rhetorical question that immediately ties the glorious past of German art to the open future of painting: "Is it probable that also now, in our present time, a true painter will stand up again and elevate himself" ("Ist es wahrscheinlich, daß auch jetzt in unsrer gegenwärtigen Zeit noch von neuem ein wahrer Maler wieder entstehen und sich erheben wird"; KA IV 147)? In the answer to his own question, Schlegel does not conceal his skepticism whether such a renaissance of medieval painting is still possible. Pointing specifically to the artist's neglect of painting's mechanical elements, and, above all, the absence of "the intimate and deep feeling" ("das innige und tiefe Gefühl"; KA IV 147) on the part of the contemporary painter, Schlegel nonetheless maintains that an imminent rebirth of painting cannot be ruled out, explaining the urgency with which he specifically addresses the contemporary painter in the last few pages of the fifth contribution.

When we read the last two contributions from this perspective, one easily gets the impression that the instruction and education of the contemporary painter was Schlegel's intention from the very

start. The instructions he gives in the conclusion of the fifth contribution are commensurate with his theoretical discussions throughout the text, giving the reader the impression that he was above all concerned to make a new generation of artists receptive to the heartfelt religious feelings – as opposed to the creativity – that he regarded as the precondition for the continuation of medieval painting in the present. This impression is further confirmed by several allusions throughout the last contributions in which Schlegel expresses his hope that a reappraisal of late medieval German art will lead the contemporary painter to realign himself with the religious vocation and orientation of his craft. Immediately at the opening of the fourth contribution, he thus writes that a correct understanding of the spirit of the past will reignite the true idea of painting for the future again (KA IV 80), and a bit further, in his discussion of painting's appropriate subject-matter, he explicitly urges the contemporary painter to continue the trajectory that was started by the late medieval schools of German and Italian art: "One better tries to continue on the well-trodden path of the great old painters of Italy and Germany." ("Versuchte man doch lieber auf dem gebahnten Wege der grosse alten Maler Italiens und Deutschlands weiter fortzugehen."; KA IV 94).

In the conclusion of the fifth contribution, these suggestions are further developed into a number of practical guidelines which instruct the contemporary painter on how this reorientation may be realized. Schlegel starts off by arguing that feeling forms the foundation of all artistic practice. It is through feeling alone that the artists may reach the necessary contemplative state to grasp the "true conception and purpose" ("der richtige Begriff und Zweck"; KA IV 149) of painting, leading him to the realization that "it was the religious feeling, devotion, and love, and the deepest and most quiet enthusiasm for them, which guided the hand of the old painters" ("[d]as religiöse Gefühl, Andacht und Liebe, und die innigste stille Begeistrung derselben war es, was den alten Malern die Hand führte";

KA IV 149). Schlegel thus writes that it is useless to aim for a rehabilitation of painting when religion or philosophical mysticism do not first lead to the correct of idea of it.

One of the central features of Schlegel's discussion is that he frames his argument in terms of an opposition between a true and a false conception of painting. It is worth emphasizing this aspect as it shows that Schlegel was not primarily interested in a stylistic or a thematic return to medieval painting, but rather sees the distinction between medieval and modern painting in conceptual terms, thereby indicating that both are different objects (and media) for him, each of them with its own characteristics. In line with my argument for an iconic turn, and Brauer's and Osterkamp's identification of a paradigm shift in Schlegel's views on painting, the distinction he draws between a true and false conception of painting does indeed illustrate that Schlegel's conception of painting in the last two contributions cannot be equated with the modern understanding of painting which he upheld in the first contributions, and with how one still understands the art of painting today for the most part.

When we zoom in on Schlegel's distinction between a true and false conception of painting, we find that the former favors tradition, imitation, and execution, whereas the latter prioritizes individuality, originality, and creativity. With this distinction, we are obviously back with the two conceptions of painting which Schlegel develops in, respectively, the first three and the latter two contributions. Yet even though Schlegel is very clear that imitation should be the starting point of the painter's practice, he nonetheless acknowledges that the practice of imitation may also inspire the painter's desire for originality. This was already a theme Schlegel briefly touched upon in his discussion of Dürer in the fourth contribution. Here, he urged the painter to restrain his desire for originality and creativity, arguing that artistic freedom was not an "essential" ("wesentlich"; KA IV

95) property of the arts. It is therefore no surprise that Schlegel arrives at the same conclusion in the fifth contribution, albeit with an important twist.

When it comes to painting's subject-matter, Schlegel points to the danger of developing one's own allegories of the divine, and explains that the artist does better to concentrate on those themes that "are given and sanctified by tradition" ("durch Tradition gegeben und geheiligt sind"; KA IV 151). Moreover, he urges the contemporary painter to do so by remaining faithful to the style of oldest German schools of painting, which is not only more precise and thorough than the style of the Italians, but also remained historically more faithful to "the oldest, peculiar, and most profound Christian-Catholic symbols" (den ältesten, seltsamem und tiefsinnigem christlich katholischen Sinnbildern"; KA IV 152). In other words, if the contemporary artist "follows the old painters . . . and reconstructs that which is only right and naive for as long as possible," then he can be sure to find himself on "the right way of the old truth and the hieroglyphic, to which - as the essence of art, even where knowledge of it was lost - true poetry and mysticism must first lead again, even independent from all observation, as the first naked idea of where art and painting can lead." (". . . den alten Malern zu folgen, besonders den ältesten, und das einzig Rechte und Naive so lange treulich nachzubilden," ". . . der sichre Weg der alten Wahrheit und das Hieroglyphische, worauf, als auf das Wesen der Kunst, selbst da, wo die Kenntnis derselben verloren war, wahre Poesie und Mystik zuerst wieder führen muß, und selbst unabhängig von aller Anschauung, als auf die bloße erste Idee der Kunst und Malerei führen kann."; KA IV 151).

If Schlegel would have left his advice to the contemporary painter at this, the criticism on the restorative tendencies of his theory of painting would have been fully justified. However, as we have seen, Schlegel never understood the Middle Ages as an ideal bygone era, but rather as a period whose unfulfilled aims and ambitions were waiting to be realized in the present. For this reason alone, it

would have been unfeasible for him to endorse an aesthetics of imitation, which explains his important disclaimer in the last lines of the fifth contribution. Although there can be no doubt that he generally stresses imitation rather than creation, he does make an exception in this respect for the gifted painter who has showed himself sufficiently steeped in the tradition of German late medieval art. It is only when the paintings of the oldest German school "have become another nature for the eye and spirit" (". . . dem Aug und Geiste zur andern Natur geworden wäre"; KA IV 151), Schlegel maintains, that the gifted painter is allowed to try his hand on actual nature. Referring to the talented artist who is driven by a "wish for absolute originality" ("Wunsch absoluter Originalität"; KA IV 151), Schlegel remarks that such a desire would have to be fulfilled within the parameters of the correct conception of painting:

> If such a talent had first rediscovered the right conception of art, and found that the symbolic meaning and allusion to divine mysteries is its actual purpose, and everything else only a means, a serving link and letter, then he would perhaps produce remarkable works of a completely new kind.
>
> (Hätte nun ein solcher [Talent] erst *den richtigen Begriff von der Kunst wiedergefunden*, daß die symbolische Bedeutung und Andeutung göttlicher Geheimnisse ihr eigentlicher Zweck, alles übrige aber nur Mittel, dienendes Glied und Buchstabe sei, so würde er vielleicht merkwürdige Werke ganz neuer Art hervorbringen") (KA IV 151).

These paintings, as Schlegel continues to explain, would still have to be coextensive with the tradition of late medieval German painting, but they would reincorporate nature back into the painterly domain. As such, they would be

> hieroglyphs, true symbols, but more arbitrarily composed out of feelings and perceptions of nature or intuitions than aligning themselves with the old way of

> former times. Every work that can truly be called a painting should be a hieroglyph, a divine symbol.
>
> ([h]ieroglyphen, wahrhafte Sinnbilder, aber mehr aus Naturgefühlen und Naturansichten oder Ahnungen willkürlich zusammengesetzt, als sich anschließend an die alte Weise der Vorwelt. Eine Hieroglyphe, ein göttliches Sinnbild soll jedes wahrhaft so zu nennende Gemälde sein.) (KA IV 151)

This is a remarkable passage for many reasons, not in the least, because it immediately seems to contradict much of what Schlegel discussed previously in the last two contributions. By suddenly reintroducing a concern for nature again, we seem to be back with the pantheistic framework that the beginning of the fourth contribution so obviously had left behind.

Nonetheless, I maintain that there are crucial differences between the role of nature in this passage from what we have seen before in the first three contributions. Most importantly, it has to be remembered that the fifth contribution reintroduces a concern for nature within a strictly Christian framework. Not only that, but the painter's engagement with nature has to conform to the painterly tradition of the late Middle Ages. This is to say that the artwork should not merely present God's revelation, but do so with such spiritual beauty that the viewer is elevated from the temporal to the timeless. In other words, the picture should not merely be an allegorical representation of nature, but actually be a form of divine revelation itself, which Schlegel's references to the hieroglyph and the divine symbol further confirm. However, the most crucial difference between the role of nature in the earlier contributions, and the way it is employed here pertains directly to the iconic turn in Schlegel's thinking. Whereas we have seen that the first contributions took the mediality of the image for granted and were written under the assumption that painting was able offer an immediate view on nature as it was originally perceived by the artist, the iconic turn in Schlegel's thought meant that the idea of a transparent picture-plane was firmly rejected. This is to say that when Schlegel reintroduces the

external world as a possible object for painting at this late point, the underlying assumption is that the scene should not appear as nature, but precisely *as an image*.

This becomes especially clear in the concluding remarks of the Cologne lectures on philosophy where Schlegel draws an explicit contrast between art and nature, arguing that the sensuous representation of nature is superfluous as art will never be able to compete with nature's sensuous beauty:

> If one wanted to make adornment and charm the purpose of visual art, it would be ill-founded. One would then have to agree with those who reject them as completely superfluous. . . . After all, nature offers enough and far more adornment, and the beauty of nature is always greater than art can ever produce.
>
> (Wollte man Zierde und Anmut zum Zweck der bildenden Kunst machen, so wäre sie schlecht begründet. Man müßte dann denjenigen recht geben, die sie als ganz überflüssig verwerfen. . . . Bietet ja doch die Natur genug und weit mehr Zierde dar, und ist die Schönheit der Natur doch immer größer, als sie die Kunst je hervorbringen kann.) (KA XIII 174).[139]

With this passage, Schlegel not merely releases painting from its traditional occupation to represent nature, but he also permits the artist to transform nature in accordance with painting's own means and objectives. This is further confirmed by the second part of the same passage, where he writes that "if meaning is the end of art, then art is necessary; for meaning, like beauty and grace, cannot be found in

[139] Cf. the fourth contribution where Schlegel writes: "[A]ctually, however, one should not demand charm and beauty from a work of art, but only the high, even divine meaning, because without this it does not deserve to be called a work of art at all." ("[E]igentlich fodern sollte man aber von einem Kunstwerke nicht Reiz und Schönheit, sondern nur die hohe, ja göttliche Bedeutung weil es ohne diese gar kein Kunstwerk zu heissen verdient."; KA IV 93).

nature" ("[i]st . . . Bedeutung der Zweck der Kunst, so ist die Kunst allerdings nötig; denn die Bedeutung kann nicht, wie die Schönheit und Anmut, in der Natur gefunden werden"; KA XIII 174).

Here, it seems that we are left with a conundrum. Whereas Schlegel in the fifth contribution explains that the painter is free to compose his pictures out of feelings and perceptions of nature, the near-contemporaneous lectures on philosophy seem to deny that nature is ever able to provide the divine symbols that are required for art to achieve its ends. In order to solve this dilemma, a footnote which Schlegel later added to the fifth contribution proves particularly helpful.[140] In this footnote, Schlegel turns to the paintings and drawings of his former friend Philipp Otto Runge, seeing in his work a negative example of the kind of errors that may occur when tradition is completely discarded. Concentrating particularly on Runge's famous allegories of nature, Schlegel writes:

> From this example of such a fortunate talent, one can see what it leads to if one wants to paint mere natural hieroglyphs, torn away from all historical and sacred tradition, which, after all, forms the solid, maternal ground for the artist, which he never may leave without danger and without irreparable disadvantage.
>
> ([A]n diesem Beispiele von einem so glücklichen Talente [kann man] sehen, wohin es führt, wenn man bloße Natur-Hieroglyphen malen will, losgerissen von aller geschichtlichen und geheiligten Überlieferung, welche nun einmal für den Künstler, den festen, mütterlichen Boden bildet, den er nie ohne Gefahr und ohne unersetzlichen Nachteil verlassen darf.) (KA IV 151).

This passage sheds a crucial light on Schlegel's earlier instructions to the gifted painter. Although the painter is entitled to express his creativity and originality by means by incorporating nature into his scenes, he should neither aim to compete with nature's natural beauty, nor mistake nature, as Runge

[140] This footnote was added in 1822 when Schlegel significantly edited his writings on art for their inclusion in his collected works.

did, as inherently meaningful in itself. This means that the contemporary painter remains always bounded by tradition, requiring the inherited Christian symbols in order to arrive at spiritual beauty in his art. If nature is therefore to play a role in painting, it is merely as the background against which the Christian symbols are situated. Not in order to create a naturalistic illusion of a naturalistic landscape in which these symbols are placed, but rather to do so in such a way that the scene does not appear as nature, but *as an image*.

v. Caspar David Friedrich and the Tetschen Altarpiece

One of the factors which has hindered a positive appreciation of Schlegel's theory of painting is his later association with the painters of the Viennese brotherhood of Saint Luke, better known as the Nazarene movement, including painters such as Peter von Cornelius, Friedrich Wilhelm Schadow, Johann Friedrich Overbeck, and Franz Pforr. Although it is true that Schlegel came to endorse this now often maligned movement later in life, which included his stepsons Johannes and Philipp Veit, and even dedicated his 1819 essay "On the German Art Exhibition in Rome" ("Über die deutsche Kunstausstellung zu Rom") entirely to their art, there is a tendency among art historians and Schlegel scholars alike to see the "Descriptions of Paintings" as a reflection or prefiguration of the aesthetic and religious concerns of the Nazarenes.[141] Susanne Lanwerd and Claudia Becker thus maintain that Schlegel's contributions provided the theoretical framework that legitimated the restorative aims of

[141] In her book on the Nazarene movement, Cordula Grewe extensively touches on the negative appraisal of the Nazarene movement within the art-historical discipline. She explicitly points to the contradiction between the discipline's insistence on value-free judgments, while at the same time pointing to the negative reception of the Nazarenes in the art-historical literature. In her work, Grewe seeks to arrive at a more positive appreciation of the movement, linking them explicitly with the avant-garde of the 20th century with respect to their conceptual concern for art. For the reception history of the Nazarenes, see Gossman. For Schlegel's relationship to the Nazarene brotherhood, see Höltenschmidt *Die Mittelalter Rezeption* 139–43.

the brotherhood, favoring a thematic and stylistic return to the art of the Italian Renaissance until Raphael (Lanwerd 68–69; Becker 233). These views are confirmed by Holtenschmidt. She holds that Schlegel's writings on painting marked the most extensive theoretical defense of a form of Romantic painting which she later associates with the Nazarene brotherhood (*Die Mittelalter-Rezeption der Brüder Schlegel* 60). And finally, Gianna Piantoni has argued that the period of artistic development between Giotto and Raphael, as allegedly traced by Schlegel, becomes for the Nazaranes the dogma on which their religious and artistic beliefs are founded (19).

These points are more than justified and especially Grewe has pointed to the iconic qualities of the Nazarene image: "What is at stake in the Nazarene project is a redefinition of style from arbitrary aesthetic choice to expression of holiness that, not unlike the Holy Image, can transmit the sanctity of the original to its replica. It is my contention that the Nazarenes expanded the substitutional principle of painted icons to pictorial appearance" (103). Her views are justified. Despite the fact that Schlegel called for a return to the principles of late medieval German painting, the Nazarenes turned to the pre-Raphaelite painting of the Italian Renaissance of roughly a century later, there are indeed striking parallels that connect Schlegel's theoretical work with the aesthetic and religious convictions of the members of the Nazarene movement. Indeed, it is hard to miss the parallels of intent in Peter Cornelius' famous letter to Joseph Görres, arguing for a rebirth of the spirit of late medieval and early Renaissance fresco painting to strengthen the relationship between God, nation, and people. These frescoes should have "no other adornment than love, purity, and the power of faith as the true patent of its divine origin," he writes, freeing art from the museum and bringing it "gloriously into life," speaking to the

nation "from the walls of our high cathedrals, our peaceful chapels and solitary cloisters, from our town halls and warehouses and markets" (1135–37).[142]

A perhaps a more unexpected ally of Schlegel can be found in the work of Caspar David Friedrich. Although Friedrich is often pictured as the Protestant painter par excellence, I nonetheless maintain that particularly his early work is informed by similar principles that underlie the iconic turn in Schlegel's thought. In what could be considered as a kind of coda to this dissertation, I would like to concentrate on Friedrich's famous *Tetschen Altarpiece* (also known as *Cross in the Mountains*) from 1808 as the artist's most ambitious attempt to come to terms with art's iconic origins. I will do so by concentrating on the dispute that occurred almost immediately after the work's first public showing in December 1808. Named after the conservative art critic Basilius von Ramdohr who first sparked the dispute with his devastating review of Friedrich's painting, I will argue that the *Ramdohrstreit* reveals that Friedrich's *Tetschen Altarpiece* does not mark the secularization of art (Koerner, *Caspar David Friedrich* 148), much less offers a reflection on the fate of the Protestant image (Grave, *Glaubensbild und Bildkritik* 112), but should instead be seen as an attempt to realign the artwork with its historical iconic origins. Although the *Ramdohrstreit* is often understood as a dispute between proponents of a classical and romantic aesthetics, I will particularly concentrate on the framing and rhetoric of Ramdohr's review in order to demonstrate that the dispute does not find its roots in the critic's inability to account for Friedrich's modernity, but rather in the aesthetic, religious and conceptual instability of the modern category of art at the moment that Friedrich painted his altarpiece.

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[142] Unfortunately, my own views of Nazarene art long suffered from the same stereotypes and prejudices that prevented the movement from becoming fully accepted within the history of art. However, especially the work of Cordula Grewe has been an eyeopener, introducing me to the richness and complexity of Nazarene art and convincing me of its close parallels with the iconic turn in Schlegel's thought, not only in aims and intentions, but also with respect to their ideas about art and the image. Unfortunately, I got my hand on Grewe's two books on Nazarene art too late for a more extensive discussion of the Nazarenes to be included in this study.

Despite being one of his earliest paintings, the *Tetschen Altarpiece* from 1808 counts as one of the most complex and ambitious works the artist ever painted. With the prominence of its antiquated Gothic frame, the representation of a soaring crucifix on what appears to be a rather desolate and rocky mountain peak, where a set of some pine trees mark the only trace of life, and with its diverging golden rays of sunlight set against a pinkish morning sky, hiding the original light source behind the mountain summit, the *Tetschen Altarpiece* has challenged and fascinated its viewers for more than two centuries.

This widespread attention for the *Tetschen Altarpiece* is mirrored by the art-historical interest that the work received in the last half century or so. When one looks at the art-historical reception of Friedrich's work, one easily notices a tendency to understand his art within the constraints of Protestant belief. As a fervent Lutheran who was supposedly preoccupied with the problematic status of the Protestant image throughout his life, it is perhaps not remarkable that many art historians have seen the Tetschen Altarpiece as one of the artist's most explicit statements on religious art. In his book on the reformation of the Protestant image, the art historian Joseph Koerner begins and ends his discussion with a reference to the *Tetschen Altarpiece*, which he sees as the culmination of a Protestant artistic tradition in which the summit cross no longer mediates divine presence, but rather "frames itself as the inner content of [the painter's] experience" (*The Reformation of the Image* 444).

Koerner's interpretation is just one of the many examples that understand the *Tetschen Altarpiece* in – what we could call - iconoclastic terms. What I mean by this is the widespread tendency to view Friedrich's painting as a confirmation of the image's inability to mediate divine presence. The German art historians Johannes Grave and Christian Scholl, to mention only two of Friedrich's recent interpreters, have seen the *Tetschen Altarpiece* as, respectively, the visual embodiment of the disenchanted Protestant image, and as an allegorical critique on the "naïve" believe that the image provides direct, unmediated communication with God. What these positions share, despite their

significant differences, is that they ultimately understand the meaning of Friedrich's painting in discursive terms, namely as a visual commentary on the new status of art in modernity. Whether this new status of the artwork is subsequently read through the Weberian prism of Protestant disenchantment (Grave, *Glaubensbild und Bildkritik* 112) or through the Schillerian framework of naïve and sentimental poetry (Scholl 173), what is crucial is that both interpreters subscribe – in one way or another – to a variation of what is often seen as Hegel's so-called end of art thesis.[143]

This also applies to Koerner's interpretation of the *Tetschen Altarpiece*. In fact, in his monograph on Friedrich he even directly invokes Hegel when he writes that "the night that darkens the landscape of Cross in the Mountains represents the end of art as religious object stylized as the birth of art as historical object" (*Caspar David Friedrich* 63). By thus representing the modern artwork as the historical successor to the devotional cult image, Koerner's interpretation of the *Tetschen Altarpiece* directly invokes the end of art as an epochal confrontation between the Middle Ages and modernity where the image's self-proclaimed loss of iconic presence is exchanged for an allegedly new and modern aesthetics that understands the artwork in mimetic terms: that is, as an objective representation of nature, as a mirror of the artist's subjective feelings and beliefs or, as is the case with Friedrich, as a combination between the two.

It is within this mimetic framework that also the *Ramdohrstreit* is commonly understood. Often regarded as a conflict between classical and romantic aesthetics, the line that divides the conflicting parties could schematically be described along the axis separating objectivity from subjectivity, exteriority from interiority, nature from freedom. Whereas Ramdohr's criticism on the Tetschen

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[143] As Eva Geulen reminds us in her book on the so-called end of art, Hegel never directly referred to the end of art as such. What does begin with the work of Hegel, as Geulen explains, is the emergence of the end of art as discourse to validate and legitimate modernity's secular aesthetics (8–11).

Altarpiece is premised on an artistic tradition in which art takes its model from nature, Friedrich's romantic defenders advocated the liberties of the artistic genius against the external constraints imposed on him by either nature or tradition. For them, Ramdohr's review not only marked a failure to appreciate Friedrich's modernity, but his conservatism also prevented him from grasping the new Kantian conception of artistic genius, namely as someone who does not follow, but rather makes the rules for art.

This view of the *Ramdohrstreit* as a conflict between a subjective and objective aesthetics seems initially to be supported by the historical document that lies at the root of the whole dispute, Ramdohr's original review in the *Zeitung für die elegante Welt* in January 1809. Written immediately after the first public showing of the painting in the artist's studio one month earlier, Ramdohr makes the case that Friedrich's work repeatedly oversteps the boundaries of traditional landscape painting. In the extensive middle section of his essay, Ramdohr elaborates on the classical principles of landscape painting. Whereas Friedrich's supporters were quick to point out that the liberties Friedrich takes with respect to nature form a testament to the freedom and genius of his creative spirit, Ramdohr judged Friedrich's liberties as nothing but a violation of the classical rules of painting. With the rocky mountain blocking the viewer's gaze into the scene, its disregard for the appropriate standards of coloring – with its dark foreground, the hard and abrupt transition between colors and the incorrect treatment of light – and the absence of fixed viewpoint from which the landscape could be seen, Ramdohr concludes that "Mr. Friedrich has now practically and quite deliberately acted against all the basic principles of landscape painting in his altarpiece" ("Herr Friedrich hat nun allen jenen Grundsätzen in seinem Altarblatt geradezu und recht absichtlich entgegengehandelt"; 141).

This violation of the classical rules of landscape painting was not merely a formal problem for Ramdohr, but intimately tied to the question of meaning. Concentrating on the frame with its

traditional Christian symbols of the Eucharist, God's all-seeing eye in the predella, and the combination of palm leaves, children's heads, and star at the top, Ramdohr writes that it leaves no doubt that the work as a whole was intended as a Christian allegory (148).[144] However, it is here that similar problems recur. Not only does Ramdohr take exception with the lack of any clear relationship between allegorizing frame and landscape, but the main issue is that Friedrich's attempt to allegorize the landscape violates the fundamental rules of the genre: "It will never be possible to allegorize with a well-composed landscape painting." ("Nie wird man mit einer gut zusammengesetzten Landschaft allegorisieren können"; 148). Whereas landscape's task consists in the faithful imitation of nature, Ramdohr explains that allegory is rather founded on the opposite principle of estrangement (147). Since the allegory can only become recognizable by disrupting the representation of nature, landscape can only allegorize if it violates its own basic principles and compromises the aesthetic criteria according to which it ought to be judged.

It is according to this line of reasoning that Ramdohr ultimately arrives at what is perhaps his most fundamental criticism. In one of the most famous parts of his review, Ramdohr takes issue with Friedrich's attempt to elevate the profane genre of landscape to the level of the altarpiece. The reason for Ramdohr's offense is again related to the landscape's relationship to allegory. Whereas a well-painted landscape makes allegory impossible, the altarpiece depends by its very nature on allegory for its effect, leading Ramdohr to the conclusion that it is "true presumption when landscape painting wants to slink into the church and creep onto the altars" (eine wahre Anmaßung, wenn die Landschaftsmalerei sich in die Kirchen schleichen und auf Altäre kriechen will"; 149–50).

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[144] Admittedly, not in the sense that Schlegel understood the term, but rather as a visual symbolic that did not refer to the infinite, but represented Christian ideas and concepts through visual means.

It is perhaps his rejection of the landscape as altarpiece that more than any other cemented Ramdohr's image as the stubborn and conservative art critic whose classicism prevented him from appreciating art's new and modern turn.[145] When the *Ramdohrstreit* is viewed as a conflict between classical and romantic aesthetics, there can indeed be no doubt that Ramdohr eventually did not win out and that his position could hardly count on any approval from later generations. Although his insistent classicism makes this forgetfulness partly inevitable, I do nonetheless think that his position is not always correctly portrayed in the art-historical literature. In my opinion, Ramdohr's review remains a crucial document because it not only reminds us how revolutionary Friedrich's painting actually was, but also points to a larger and more fundamental dispute that lies concealed behind the more superficial debate behind classical and romantic aesthetics.

The nature of this dispute is not only revealed by the content of Ramdohr's review, but also by the tone and rhetoric of his words. They reveal a sense of urgency and dread which are, in my opinion, not only crucial to understand Ramdohr's position, but also to acknowledge the huge disparity between artist and critic at the moment of *Tetschen's* first public showing. Whereas Ramdohr had been a central figure in German artistic and cultural circles for decades, and was one of the most influential critics of his time, Friedrich was at this moment a young and relatively unknown artist who was mostly experimenting in drawing and sepia. In fact, the *Tetschen Altarpiece* counts as one of Friedrich's first completed paintings without any of the previous works having made any significant impact. As Ramdohr admits at the beginning of his review, he did not personally know either the artist or his work

[145] Although it is well-known that Wackenroder and Tieck took particular issue with Ramdohr, it is interesting to note in this context that Dorothea Schlegel also wrote a critical piece on Ramdohr that was published in *Athenaeum* in 1800.

when he first encountered the *Tetschen Altarpiece*, and – indeed – one could make a good case that it was Ramdohr's own negative review that quite suddenly catapulted Friedrich's career.

Considering this disparity between artist and critic, it is all the more astonishing that Ramdohr publishes a 22-page review (he even apologizes for the length!) of one single work by an unknown painter in one of the most influential art magazines in Germany at the time. If it is true that Ramdohr's concerns about Friedrich's work were merely of an aesthetic nature, it is hardly imaginable that the famous art critic would bother to write such an extensive review of a work, by a young painter almost no one had ever heard of. Instead, I would like to argue, something else must have been at stake which accounts for the urgency of Ramdohr's review, and informed his ambition to denounce Friedrich's painting in the strongest possible terms. Despite his conservatism and his classical leanings, it is my guess that Ramdohr was acutely aware of the counter-revolutionary character of Friedrich's painting and immediately sensed the dangers of the new direction art was taking. A switch of direction which was much more fundamental than a mere subjective turn in the direction of a romantic aesthetics, but rather concerned the autonomy of art, and as such the paradigm on which the modern category of art was founded.

In what follows, I will make the case that Ramdohr's criticism was not primarily reserved for either artist or artwork, but rather directed at Friedrich's audience in an attempt to protect the modern category of art from the specters that surround the premodern cult of the image. Departing from a close reading that concentrates particularly on the rhetoric and framing of Ramdohr's review, I will demonstrate that the end of art was not an accomplished fact at the time of the *Ramdohrstreit*, but rather presented itself as a battle to be won.

vi. Reinterpreting the *Ramdohrstreit*

The first sign that the modern category of art might not have been a given, is the distinction that Ramdohr makes between a proper aesthetic mode of response and the pathological emotions that an artwork may invoke. In a passage where he criticizes Friedrich's allegories for being at once too indeterminate and vague, alluding to the possibility that they might refer to a mystical devotion of nature, Ramdohr frames his criticism as the distinction between these two forms of effect: "Here comes the important difference between pathological and aesthetic effect into consideration. Go rather into nature! . . . It is ridiculous to expect a truly pathological effect from a painting that lacks the main means for providing it." (Hier kommt die wichtige Unterschied zwischen pathologischer und ästhetischer Rührung in Betracht. Geht in die wirkliche Natur! . . . Es ist lächerlich, wahrhaft pathologische Rührungen von dem Gemälde zu erwarten, das der Hauptmittel dazu völlig entbehrt."; 149). It is worth pausing here to consider the similarity between Ramdohr and Schlegel on this point. In his advice to the contemporary artist in the fifth contribution, Schlegel had precisely turned to nature to argue that adornment and charm can never be the true purpose of painting, maintaining that the aesthetics gratification that one derives from art would always fall short when compared to natural beauty. Here, Ramdohr is making a similar point, albeit with completely different aims. According to him, it would be useless if painting were aiming to evoke a devotional and mystical attitude through the rendering of landscape, urging the viewer to go out into nature itself. Despite their significant difference in intentions, what both position share is that they draw an explicit opposition between art and nature, diminishing landscape's potential for the experience of beauty and spiritual elevation.

The reason for highlighting the relationship between Ramdohr and Schlegel on this point is because I consider it indicative of Friedrich's position. Aiming neither for beauty nor the evocation of mystical feelings through landscape, the *Tetschen Altarpiece*, I claim, aims for spiritual elevation not

through the representation of nature, but through the physical presence of the image itself. In fact, Ramdohr's review goes a long way in highlighting this aspect. Especially in his formal analysis of the painting, he does an excellent job in drawing attention to the different ways in which the landscape does not aim at drawing the viewer into the scene, but rather at keeping him outside of it. As Ramdohr points out, traditional landscape painting invites the viewer into the picture by a steady progression from foreground and midground to background. However, he observes that Friedrich's painting makes such a progression impossible as he immediately obstructs the viewer's gaze through the placement of a huge mountain top right at the forefront. What makes Friedrich's composition even worse from a traditional perspective is that this is accompanied by a spatial distortion that doubles the implied viewpoint of the observer. Although one's first impression is that Friedrich has located the viewer at the bottom of the painting, hanging in mid-air and several meters above the ground (another violation of the classical rules), this implied viewpoint is severely complicated when one turns attention to the crucifix at the mountain peak. Considering the initial viewpoint at the bottom of the canvas, one would expect to view the crucifix from below. However, upon closer consideration it turns out that the position of the crucifix in the viewer's visual field has shifted, now being located right in front of the viewer, meaning that the viewer finds himself elevated as soon as his attention shifts from the slope to the crucifix at the top (141–42).[146]

By contrasting Friedrich's treatment of landscape with the academic conventions, Ramdohr draws attention to the ambiguous relationship of the painting to the viewer. By blocking the view into

[146] This ambiguity in implied viewpoint is emphasized by the curious way in which Friedrich dealt with the light sources in the painting. Whereas the golden sun rays seem to shine from below and would situate the mountain right between the viewer and the sun, Ramdohr indicates that the lightening in the scene violates all the rules of optics as it would be impossible for the sun to illuminate the gilt Christ from below (142).

the scene by the mountain, leaving the viewer hanging in mid-air, and doubling the implied position of the viewer, Friedrich breaks deliberately from the idea that the painting opens a window to the world. In fact, as Ramdohr's analysis clearly shows, Friedrich's painting is at pains to keep the viewer out of the scene, and instead aims at drawing attention to itself as a physical object in space and time. In other words, rather than situating itself in the tradition of landscape painting as a genre that conforms to objective rules, as Ramdohr would have no doubt preferred, the work's effect depends precisely on the fact that it draws attention to the material presence of the artwork as such. Instead of aiming at competing with nature, Friedrich draws attention to its own constructed nature, mirroring the primacy of letter over spirit, execution over invention, without compromising the latter altogether. In this respect, the *Tetschen Altarpiece* deliberately departs from both classical as well as Romantic aesthetic conventions, situating itself within an alternative lineage altogether as it shifts attention not to what is happening inside the frame, but rather outside of it, something of which the painter himself was acutely aware. As Friedrich emphatically states in one of his few writings on art: "[a]ny kind of illusion has a repugnant effect, like any deception. . . . A painting must stand as a painting, made by human hand; not seek to disguise itself as nature" (qtd. in Grave *Caspar David Friedrich* 96).

By keeping the viewer outside of the scene and pointing attention to the painting as material object, Friedrich automatically redefines the role of the viewer by literally transforming his perspective (Grave, *Caspar David Friedrich* 61). The ways in which Friedrich effects this transformation is not only by equipping his painting with multiple viewpoints, but also by disrupting the principles of linear perspective as such. Koerner has remarked that one of the ways in which Friedrich breaks from tradition is not by constructing his landscapes as view, but rather as obstruction of view (*Caspar David Friedrich* 114). However, the way the artist does so is precisely by appropriating the rules of linear perspective for radically different purposes. Whereas linear perspective normally employs converging

diagonals that guide the gaze into scene and unite themselves in the painting's vanishing point, the composition of the Tetschen Altarpiece utilizes similar converging diagonals in order to frame the mountain. That is to say that the diagonals do not guide the viewer into depth, but rather upwards along the painting's vertical axis, only to come together at the mountain peak at the base of the cross (Koerner, *Caspar David Friedrich* 114). Moreover, it is precisely in guiding the eye from slope to summit that the viewer becomes aware that his position vis-à-vis the scene has changed. From his original position in front of the mountain at the canvas' edge, the viewer suddenly finds himself elevated to the level of the cross. That this trajectory ends at the crucifix should not be taken for granted, but is precisely the point of the painting's intended effect.

When we recall the ambiguous role of nature in Schlegel's advice to the contemporary artist, Friedrich's *Tetschen Altarpiece* gives a good indication what Schlegel may have had in mind when he stimulated the gifted painter to compose out of "feelings or perceptions of nature." In fact, there can be little doubt that exactly the same sentiments provide one of the anchor points of Friedrich's art. In his short essay "On Art and the Spirit of Art" ("Über Kunst und Kunstgeist") from 1807, the same year he most likely started working on the *Tetschen Altarpiece*, Friedrich explicitly addressed the engagement with nature in his artistic practice. In this programmatic text, we not merely find a like-minded emphasis on religious feeling and spiritual beauty as respectively the source and aim of artistic production, but the connection between Schlegel and Friedrich is further underscored when the latter indeed affirms that perception and feeling lie at the root of his attitude toward nature: "You should see with your own eyes and faithfully reproduce how objects appear to you; reflect in the picture how everything affects you." ("Mit eignem Auge sollst du sehen, und wie dir die Gegenstände erscheinen, sie treulich wiedergeben; wie alles auf dich wirkt, so gib es im Bilde wieder."; 83).

Although this famous statement has often been singled out as support for the subjectification of landscape in Friedrich's work, it is important to read this passage in the context of the paintings he produced around the same time. Comparing Friedrich's remark with the *Tetschen Altarpiece*, it is hard to miss the dramatization of the landscape, which indeed presents the natural scene as something that is deeply and intensely felt. On the other hand, however, one also easily notices that the mere rendering of landscape was not the end of the story for Friedrich. In fact, it turns out that the landscape is depicted in such a way that it immediately draws the viewer's attention to the crucifix on the mountain as the painting's true symbolic and compositional center. In other words, it is through the rendering of landscape that Friedrich is not merely able to keep the viewer out of the scene, but also manages to intensify his experience of the Christian symbol as the focal point of the painting. As such, the landscape directly shapes the visual experience of the viewer, effectuating a transformation of both empirical as spiritual vision in the interaction between viewer and painting. It is through the confrontation with the mountain and the painting's lack of depth that the viewer is able to leave his earth-bound position as he gets elevated to the level of the cross, thereby enabling him to ascent to a spiritual level, which is the true aim of Friedrich's painting.

The conclusion of all of this is that the rendering of landscape is neither the end of Friedrich's *Tetschen Altarpiece*, nor does it merely play a supporting role. Instead, the whole point of situating the crucifix in a non-illusionistic natural space is to heighten the effect of the viewer's encounter with the quintessential Christian symbol. This means that Friedrich's landscape is not aiming to compete with natural beauty, nor is it preaching a devotional attitude toward nature. On the contrary, it is not by presenting itself as nature, but by highlighting its own physical presence as an image that the work is aiming for religious effect. In fact, what makes Friedrich's *Tetschen Altarpiece* such an apt example of the Romantic iconic turn is that is marks a radical departure from how painting was traditionally

conceived, which was precisely the danger sensed by Ramdohr. Drawing on a distinctively modern artistic idiom, Friedrich turns art against itself by breaking with the illusion of painting as an autonomous and self-contained object. Moreover, releasing painting from the confines of the frame, Friedrich reinstalls the artwork within a broader physical and functional space in which it is now supposed to perform a devotional and ritualistic function, thereby breaking from the modern discourse on art and realigning itself with the iconic tradition that Schlegel sought to revive.

To underscore this last point, it might be worthwhile to briefly concentrate on the gestation of the work before we finally return to Ramdohr's review of the *Tetschen Altarpiece*. Although it has to be admitted that much remains unclear about the commission of the work, just as the location for which it was initially intended, there can be no doubt that, at some point in the work's gestation process, Friedrich assumed that the work would come to function as an actual altarpiece in the private chapel of Tetschen Castle, belonging to Catholic count Franz Anton von Thun-Hohenstein and his partner Theresia.[147] In fact, Friedrich showed a marked enthusiasm for what he presumed would be the work's new role within the Catholic rite, making serious efforts to visit the castle to overlook the work's placement and consecration – a journey that was only barely prevented by the count and countess after they decided to place the work not in the private chapel but in the countess's bedroom instead. Moreover, that Friedrich was concerned with the work's function and configuration within sacred space is further confirmed by his friend Rühle von Lilienstern who wrote that Friedrich showed himself reluctant to exhibit his completed "altarpiece" divorced from the original context of the chapel for

[147] It is my conviction that this was conforming to the commission and original intention of the patrons. Friedrich's friend Rühle von Lilienstern's letter indicates this. Although Koerner tries to debunk this story, his alternative – that the painting may have been commissioned by the King of Sweden – leaves more questions than answers. The most detailed account of the gestation of the work, can be found in Reitharovà and Sumowski.

which the installation at least by the end of 1808 was conceived (compare Koerner *Caspar David Friedrich* 48).

Despite these hesitations, Friedrich eventually decided to exhibit the work in its original frame in his studio on Christmas Day 1808, where not only friends and acquaintances, but also critics and connoisseurs had a chance to see the artist's most ambitious work to date. Concerned that the work would lose its effect when divorced from the functional context of the liturgy and the sacred space for which it was originally intended, Friedrich eventually tried to replicate the work's presumed location as much as possible by turning his studio into a small chapel. Von Lilienstern wrote that

> [i]n order to counteract the bad effect of the totally white walls of his small room, and to imitate as well as possible the twilight of the lamplit chapel, a window was veiled and the painting, which was too heavy for an ordinary easel, was erected on a table over which was spread a black cloth. (qtd. in Koerner *Caspar David Friedrich* 48–49)

With his studio transformed into a makeshift chapel and a black-clothed table resembling the altar, the setting in which the work was first presented to the public did not miss its desired effect. One of the visitors to the artist's studio that day reported that "[e]veryone who entered the room was deeply moved, as if they had set foot in a temple. The loudest bawlers . . . spoke quietly and solemnly, as if in a church" (qtd. in Koerner *Caspar David Friedrich* 49). Even Ramdohr, arguably not the biggest supporter of Friedrich's work, felt compelled to acknowledge the powerful effect of the *Tetschen Altarpiece* at the beginning of his review (135–36).

However, Ramdohr does so not without warning that the force of Friedrich's painting should above all be seen as a threat to good taste. In fact, the opening pages of Ramdohr's review offer a good indication of his intentions, which goes a long way to explain the urgency behind his extensive review

of the relatively unknow Friedrich. Here, it turns out that Ramdohr's review should not primarily be seen as a critique on either artist or painting, but rather as a warning to the general public that "gets enchanted through surprise" ("durch . . . Überraschung bezaubert wird"; 134–35). In other words, what is at stake in Ramdohr's review is a particular mode of viewership that is for him intimately tied to the work's pathological effect**.** At the beginning of his review, Ramdohr thus directly draws attention to what he refers to as "the system" that reveals itself in Friedrich's painting. Although Koerner understands this rather cryptic formulation as a reference to Friedrich's "fully developed method of landscape composition" (*Caspar David Friedrich* 97), Ramdohr is actually very careful to distinguish this system from anything artistic. Explaining that his review offers a criticism on a number of external views and concepts that started to infiltrate the domains of art and science (134), what does become clear at the start of his review is that Ramdohr's prime concern is with the autonomy of art; an autonomy that he sees threatened by a particular mode of viewership in response to Friedrich's work.

One of the interesting elements in Ramdohr's review, especially from today's perspective, is that he frames this threat to art's autonomy in explicitly historical terms. Still without defining what he exactly means, Ramdohr acknowledges that this system forms an acute treat to the artistic tradition of landscape painting as it is connected to a particular spirit that offers **"**the dreadful anticipation of a fast-approaching barbarism" ("das schauderhafte Vorgefühl der schnell heraneilenden Barbarei"; 134). Rather than being the conservative advocate of an outmoded classical aesthetics as he is often portrayed, Ramdohr's viewpoint suddenly starts to appear strikingly modern. With the strong temporal connotation of the word barbarism, signifying a relapse into earlier uncultivated times, Ramdohr now appears as the starch defender of the modern autonomy of art. With the profane genre of landscape threatened by a relapse into the premodern cult of images, it becomes clear that Ramdohr did not take so much issue with the modernity of Friedrich's painting, but rather with its orthodoxy.

Although Ramdohr leaves no doubt that the system that emanates from Friedrich's painting should be understood in religious terms, it is not until the conclusion that it finally gets a name: mysticism. What Ramdohr sees in Friedrich's painting is the invocation of an aesthetic sensibility that not merely borders on a dangerous religiosity, but also prioritizes the Middle Ages and its institutions [the church] above the accomplishments of the modern world [among other things, art]. A mysticism, moreover, that manifests itself above all in a particular mode of viewership that has exchanged disinterested aesthetic contemplation for the inspired and devotional responses which he directly ties to the work's intention "to visualize the belief in the mysterious effects of the Lord's Supper" ("[das] glauben an die geheimnisvollen Wirkungen des Abendmahls zu versinnlichen"; 150).

What Ramdohr recognized much better than most of Friedrich's recent interpreters is that *Tetschen's* conflation between altar and landscape does not so much signal secularization of the religious, but rather a consecration of the profane (namely landscape). The sense of urgency that infuses his review in argumentation, tone and rhetoric is therefore not so much informed by the threat of a romantic aesthetics that celebrates artistic freedom, but rather by a fear of the image and the threat it posed to art's modern autonomy. If we consequently understand the impetus behind the *Ramdohrstreit* not in terms of a conflict between classical and romantic aesthetics, but rather as a more fundamental confrontation between two incommensurable paradigms with regard to the image, it will likewise become clear that Ramdohr's review was not primarily a defense of an outmoded classical aesthetics, but rather an attempt to silence a relapse to a pre-modern conception of art that invites religious and devotional response.

vii. Conclusion

When Schlegel returned to the fifth contribution when editing the "Descriptions of Paintings" in the early 1820s, he added a remarkable conclusion to the fifth contribution. Immediately after the section in which he advised the contemporary painter, he concludes the fifth contribution with the following invocation: "[I]t is the quiet and pious spirit of the old days that should inspire the painter and lead him back to the pure Christian beauty, so that it can shine as a new dawn, and with the brightest splendor through the creations of a newly blossoming art." ("[D]er stille, fromme Geist der alten Zeit ist es, welcher den Maler beseelen und wieder hinführen soll zu der reinen christlichen Schönheit, daß diese, mit dem hellsten Glanze, die Gebilde der wieder aufblühenden Kunst in neuer Morgenröte durchstrahlen."; KA IV 152). Reading this passage, one cannot help to be struck by the close parallel between Schlegel's evocative poetic language and the luminous cross on the mountain in Friedrich's *Tetschen Altarpiece*. Picturing a dawn whose ray of lights precisely illuminate the gilded Christ-figure on the cross, bathing the sculpture with light, it is tempting to see Friedrich's painting not merely as a visual rendering, but also as the artistic realization of Schlegel's hopes.

Yet we have seen that this interpretation of the *Tetschen Altarpiece* is fundamentally at odds with modern scholarship on Friedrich. Reading the various interpretations that Friedrich's painting has evoked, one easily recognizes a tendency to turn the *Tetschen Altarpiece* into a mute object that only testifies to its own impotence to be anything more than a mere painting, having renounced the image's outdated ambition to mediate between the mundane and divine. Although this is not the place to discuss the recent scholarly reception of Friedrich's painting in great detail, it would be fair to say that many interpreters would agree on the basis of either a Protestant or secular viewpoint with Koerner's

interpretation that the *Tetschen Altarpiece* stages the so-called end of art, marking the moment when the religious image is once and for all replaced by the modern work of art.[148]

One of the reasons that makes this interpretation problematic is that it stands in sharp contrast with the powerful responses which Friedrich's work evoked in its own time, and which led Ramdohr to publish his extensive review of the painting. Although it is true that Hegel would famously proclaim a decade later that "art, considered in its highest vocation, is and remains for us a thing of the past," and is therefore for good or bad reasons often considered the intellectual father of the so-called end of art thesis, it would in this context be just as interesting to return to Schlegel's passage with which we began this chapter. Calling for a new dawn of the old tradition of Christian painting only a few years after Hegel's famous lecture course on aesthetics, Schlegel's hope for rebirth points just as much to the instability of the concept of art around that moment as Hegel's insistence on its end does.

It is this instability in the concept of art in the first decades of the nineteenth century that is aptly reflected by Ramdohr's review. Staging a confrontation between a modern aesthetic sensibility and a religious or devotional response to images, the urgency of his review demonstrates that the end of art was anything but a done deal by the time Friedrich painted his altarpiece. However, as Ramdohr stresses throughout the review, what was at stake was not merely a particular mode of response, but also the image that provoked it. As we have seen, Friedrich's *Tetschen Altarpiece* deliberately breaks

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[148] There is a tendency in contemporary scholarship to understand Friedrich's work, in one way or another, as the disenchanted corrective to the Catholic cult of images. For instance, Grave sees in Friedrich's art a pictorial warning against idolatry and the belief that the divine is present in the image itself (*Caspar David Friedrich* 100). A similar point could be made about Koerner's work on the artist as well. Situating Friedrich's art between the symbolic and the allegorical, the image is turned into merely an unfulfilled promise of divine presence, leading Koerner to remark that Friedrich "fashions his work as altars but must leave out the gods" (*Caspar David Friedrich* 20). Finally, Manfred Frank has aligned Friedrich's art with Hölderlin's elegy "Brot und Wein" and Jean Paul's "Rede des Toten Christus," seeing in the artist's work the expression of an atheism that seeks to replace the Christian cult with a secular mythology ("Religionslose Kathedralen" 135–36).

with the conventions of western painting. With its stress on the human hand and its own physical presence, its destabilization of the viewer, the way in which the painting not merely reflects but constitutes vision, and its religious and spiritual aims that befit the supposed functional space of the private chapel – all these elements indicate that the painting's aesthetic shortcomings, so painstakingly singled out by Ramdohr, marked on a different level a decisive religious and spiritual gain.

Rather than marking the end of art, Friedrich's *Tetschen Altarpiece* stages the new dawn of the devotional image in a distinctively modern context. The work thereby forms the continuation of a tradition which Ramdohr considered as medieval and barbaric, but which was at exactly the same moment resurrected by Schlegel's iconic turn, leading him all the way back to Christian art's earliest origins in the Byzantine icon. As such, Friedrich Schlegel stands at the root of the rediscovery of Byzantine art in modern Europe. Although he was obviously not the first to write about Byzantine art, it had before him mostly been treated as a curiosity, unfit for art-critical or theoretical reflection. What makes Schlegel's rediscovery of Byzantine art such a momentous episode in the history of art is that he not merely brings the icon within the purview of art history, but even turns it into the historical and ontological ground of western painting. Relocating painting's historical origins from Athens to Constantinople, the icon is turned into the forgotten archetype of what it means to be a painting, a view so revolutionary that it would not find any parallel until the visual and iconic turn in the humanities of almost two centuries later.

Although one is hard-pressed to find a cultural movement that glorified both art and artist as much as the Romantics did, it has unfortunately largely been forgotten that Romanticism gave birth to a countermovement that turned to the Byzantine icon as the religious alternative to the secular category of art. One of the things that makes Schlegel's "Descriptions of Paintings" such an important document within the German Romantic tradition is that it brings both tendencies together. If there ever was

anything as an "end of art," Schlegel's contributions make clear that this endpoint did not merely lead to a new beginning, but to new beginnings. Whereas the first three contributions adhere, despite their spiritual leanings, to a secular and disenchanted framework that is constitutive for the modern discourse of art, it is in the last two contributions that Schlegel embarks on the path of re-enchantment, seeking to realign painting with its medieval and Christian origins again. It is in these writings and their immediate aftermath that a new dawn of Christian painting emerges, and where Schlegel seeks to bring western painting under the rubric of the icon, thereby restoring the Byzantine iconic tradition as the origin of an artistic and religious heritage that was at the same time believed to be quintessentially German.

In other words, if Schlegel stands at the root of the rediscovery of Byzantine and late medieval art, it is of crucial importance to acknowledge that this discovery did not take place within an artistic or aesthetic discourse, but precisely in opposition to it.[149] In fact, as I have tried to show, this rediscovery was precisely enabled by the economic-theological framework in which the Romantic iconic turn took place; a framework which depended for its success on a religious reconfiguration of the secular understanding of painting. When Mondzain writes in her book on the Byzantine icon that the "attempt to rule over the whole world by organizing an empire that derived its power and authority by linking together the visual and the imaginal was Christianity's true genius" (151), she expresses one of the core ideas that lies at the basis of Schlegel's attempt to revive the tradition of Christian painting. In the conclusion, I will thus end this study with a brief consideration of the motives that

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[149] Leading obviously to all kinds of problems when Byzantine art was subsequently imported in the modern aesthetic discourse. The art historian Robert S. Nelson has therefore argued that it is a falsification to treat the icon as art. The same insight is also constitutive of Belting's work since *Likeness and Presence*: "Art, as it is studied by the discipline of Art History today, existed in the Middle Ages no less than it did afterwards. After the Middle Ages, however, art took on a different meaning and became acknowledged for its own sake—art as invented by a famous artist and defined by a proper theory" (*Likeness and Presence* XXI).

informed the Romantic iconic turn all along. Perceived as a holy mission that was to restore the true and original sense of Christianity that the West had lost with modernity, Schlegel's iconic turn was from the very start informed by a nationalist agenda that regarded iconic painting as an essential means to establish a political, religious, and artistic counter-revolution. In other words, it was founded on the perceived failure of Schlegel's new mythology as it precisely sought to establish a new community under the symbolic unity of the Christian God, thereby providing the seeds for the overthrowing of Napoleon's France as the continent's hegemonic power.

CONCLUSION

The Economic-Theological Origins of Schlegel's Romantic Turn

i. Introduction

This conclusion marks both an ending and a beginning. An ending because I will close this study with some reflections on Schlegel's politics that I have touched on throughout, but did not develop in more detail in the individual chapters. And a beginning because it is precisely the political dimension of Schlegel's later theory of painting that I consider to be one of the most exciting (and relevant) aspects of his later thinking, and which I hope to develop more fully in the near future. Due to time constraints, I am unfortunately unable to develop the political (or rather economical) background of Schlegel's theory of painting in more detail in this dissertation, but in this conclusion I nonetheless wish to offer some indications where a consideration of this subject may lead, and underscore – even as I cannot do justice to the scope, depth, and complexity of the matter at hand – the centrality of painting in Schlegel's attempt to come to terms with Napoleon and the kind of politics he represented.

In this dissertation, I traced the development of Schlegel's theory of poetry and painting in the years between 1795 and 1812; that is, starting from the moment of his earliest engagement with ancient art and mythology until the time when he resided in Vienna, and where he worked directly under Metternich as the imperial court secretary to the first Austrian emperor Franz I. It was during this period that Schlegel wrote his most important contributions on the visual arts, starting with the "Descriptions of Paintings" until his two contributions on the visual arts in *Deutsches Museum* from 1812. During this period, Schlegel's thinking on the visual arts developed alongside his religious beliefs from the early-Romantic framework of the *Athenaeum* period to the formation of an iconic

conception of painting which entailed a reconfiguration of painting's historical origins from Athens to Constantinople.

Constitutive for this development was Schlegel's changed understanding of the infinite, leading him from the Spinozistic belief in an immanent divinity to an explicitly Christian conception of a transcendent God in Cologne and Vienna. As a result, the last two contributions on painting, and the Cologne lectures on philosophy show a renewed engagement with the topic of religious mediation, which the iconic turn in Schlegel's thinking directly reflects. No longer understanding the image as a transparent medium that communicates the artist's unique perspective on the infinite, the iconic turn reaffirms the materiality of painting as an essential component of the mediation process, thereby facilitating the transition from an allegorical to a symbolic understanding of painting in the last two contributions and after. Moreover, by subordinating painting to the institution of the church, Schlegel's later theory of painting not merely marks a departure from the post-Kantian, speculative aesthetics that he himself partly inaugurated, but also aims for a reconsecration of the artform in the face of its impending secularization.

As I have indicated throughout this dissertation, Schlegel's ideas on painting (and the arts more generally) were never fully detached from his concern for social and cultural reform. While still in Paris, Schlegel construed the "Descriptions of Painting" as a polemic and ironic attempt to challenge the art-historical narrative that he encountered in the Louvre. Moreover, he conceived of painting in such a way that it participated in his call for a new mythology. Although Schlegel recognized the limits of painting in order to bring this new mythology about, he regarded it specifically as a means to develop a mode of vision that would not merely stop at the surface but penetrate into the heart of things where the infinite revealed itself in the finite.

With the beginning of his studies in Oriental mythology, and the subsequent move from Paris and Cologne, this pantheistic (and ultimately classical) outlook was discarded in favor of a turn to the Christian tradition. No longer believing that a new mythology could be established on the basis of the individual alone, Schlegel's nascent Christianity pushes him into the direction of the church as institution. Conceived not merely as a religious, but also as a worldly power steeped in tradition, he now places all his hopes on clerical power to effectuate a political and religious counter-revolution that would restore order on the continent, and put a halt on the ongoing processes of secularization that had peaked under Napoleon's rule over Europe.

Part of this development was Schlegel's emerging interest in the (German) Middle Ages, which is directly reflected by the last two contributions on painting, and the iconic turn in general. As we have seen, it was late medieval painting in particular in which Schlegel recognized not so much sensuous but spiritual beauty, providing him with the model to develop an alternative paradigm in which the perception of painting would lead to a mystical rather than an aesthetic experience. In short, the iconic turn in Schlegel's thinking led to a reconfiguration of painting as a form of revelation, thereby holding the capacity to further yoke the viewer to the church as the institution by which God's revelation is guarded and preserved.

To speak of the political implications of Schlegel's iconic turn in these terms is only to scratch the surface of what is actually at stake in his theory of painting. In the conclusion, I would therefore like to develop this last point a bit further by considering perhaps the most striking parallel between Schlegel's iconic conception of painting and its Byzantine predecessor. This has less to do with the object itself than the religious and governmental structure in which the image is embedded. As Mondzain has shown in her groundbreaking book on Byzantine iconoclasm, the icon originally functioned not merely as a religious or devotional object, but derived its power largely from its

inclusion within a larger structure, which she refers to as an economy (*oikonomia*). In fact, as Mondzain painstakingly points out, the iconoclastic controversy over images that captivated the Byzantines for more than a century was not merely informed by doctrinal concerns regarding the nature of the icon and the representation of Christ, but was much more a political conflict between the emperor and the Orthodox church over who was in control over the image and had the right to utilize it. She writes that "the two camps constantly accused each other of being slaves to the idol, because each would like to seize [its] power" (152). As such, the stakes of this conflict went to the heart of political power. As she somewhat cryptically explains at the beginning of her book: "An economic conception of the natural image founds the artificial image, and an economic conception of the artificial image, in turn, founds temporal power" (2).

In this conclusion, I will argue that a similar structure underlies Schlegel's understanding of painting as well, thereby ultimately driving the connection between the Romantic iconic turn and its Byzantine heritage home. Apart from the Cologne lectures on philosophy and universal history, which both provide the political groundwork to think of Schlegel's politics in terms of a divine economy, I will mainly draw on his private notes from the period 1806-12 to argue that the aim of painting consists for Schlegel not merely in the glorification of God, but also in the reflection of God's glory back into society.[150] More specifically, I will argue Schlegel's earlier call for a new mythology ultimately finds its fulfillment in a divine economy that draws on the distribution of media as a form of power. When seen from this perspective, Schlegel's theory of painting suddenly appears in a different light. I will

[150] The fact that I draw on the notes here also has partly to do with the nature of the topic itself, but also the lack of major publications other than Schlegel's study on Orientalism. As indicated earlier, it is in the last year in Cologne and the first years in Vienna that Schlegel's intellectual output dropped. The main events of the early Vienna years are the lecture series on modern history and old and new literature from 1810 and 1812 respectively, but these hardly lent themselves to a discussion of doctrinal and theological arguments.

thus argue toward the end of this conclusion that it is especially his inscription of the arts within an economic structure that accounts for the contemporary relevance of Schlegel's later thought.

ii. From Politics to Economy

A good starting point for this, is to reconsider Schlegel's stance toward the Middle Ages. As briefly discussed in the introduction, Schlegel's ideas about the Middle Ages crystallize on a political level in the ideal of a Christian universal monarchy in which a number of semi-autonomous states are united under a common empire and emperor:

> A constitutional universal monarchy is what Europe really [needs] - certainly not through the French, but through both the Germans and Italians. . . . Such a Germanic free and corporate legal Christian universal monarchy is precisely the idea of the empire.
>
> (Eine constitutionelle Universalmonarchie ist überhaupt das, dessen Europa [bedarf] - aber freilich nicht durch die Franzosen; durch die Deutschen und Italiäner, zwiefach. . . . Eine solch germanisch freie und ständische gesetzliche christliche Universalmonarchie ist ja eben die Idee des Kaiserthums.) (KA XX 115 #56)

What underlies Schlegel's advocacy of a universal monarchy is that he views it as the constitution that allows for the utmost realization of both the individual and the community at large, provided that it is combined with a hierarchical internal ordering of society according to ranks. In other words, the monarchy should be modeled organically with each of the different ranks contributing to the optimal functioning of the whole. At the same time, however, Schlegel beliefs that this structure will ultimately also serve the individual for whom the active participation in his country's realization will infuse him, among other things, with the right set of moral standards and love for his country (KA XIII 151).

At the same time, Schlegel contrasts his notion of a universal monarchy with inorganic models of society that are founded on equality and individual freedom, such as democracy. Marking a clear break from his earlier defense of republicanism, he now advocates an internal ordering that finds its inspiration in medieval feudal society in which personal freedoms are limited, but the people are led back to the "original and only moral and sanctified form of national life" ("ursprünglichen und allein sittlichen und geheiligten Form des nationalen Lebens"; KA III 101). Schlegel finds the model for such a form of life particularly in the German Middle Ages:

> Formerly there was a spirit and a power of connections that produced the most glorious phenomena in war and peace, in trade as well as in art; but with no other nation was this always so active and so great as with the Germans in former times.
>
> (Ehedem war überhaupt ein Geist und eine Kraft der Verbindungen vorhanden, der in Krieg und Frieden, im Handel wie in der Kunst die herrlichsten Erscheinungen hervorgebracht hat; bei keiner Nation aber war immer dies so rege und so groß als bei der deutschen in ehemaliger Zeit.) (KA III 102)

Taken from his introduction to Lessing's collected works from 1803-04, this passage offers a concretization of what remained merely suggestive in "Journey to France," but which would soon become the substance of Schlegel's political thinking at large. It was especially with his move to Cologne shortly after his long essay on Lessing was published that these ideas were more fully developed in the lectures on philosophy and universal history, and in which the restoration of the medieval constitution and its religious and moral standards is conceived as the first preliminary step in a political and cultural counter-revolution that was supposed to replace modern liberal ideals with a restored sense of community (see e.g., KA XIII 167).

As Daub has explained, it is especially in the Cologne lectures on philosophy that Schlegel not merely turns to the Middle Ages but also takes the family as a model for his conception of the state ("State as Family" 146). By modeling the public on the private, the *polis* on the *oikos*, Schlegel arrives at a conception of the state, Daub writes, in which private life "constitutes public life as its more complex analogue" (Daub, "State as Family" 151). What allowed this modeling was the mediation of the church. It was the church that "reintegrated family and state," thereby turning the former into "a middle term, ushering subjects into quasi-political arenas and ultimately into the state itself" ("State as Family" 146). Daub thus concludes that unlike "Novalis, whose Europa envisioned the continent's postrevolutionary rebirth as a church that would transcend the state and turn into a self-motivated and spontaneous community, Schlegel understands the church as an aspect of state sovereignty, as an institution that demands assent and enforces rules" ("State as Family" 147).

In another article from the same year, Daub once again turns to Schlegel's theory of the state. Largely covering the same ground as in the previous article, he now suggests that we find in Schlegel a "full-fledged political theology" ("All Evil" 149). Although this description may seem convincing at first, as the political and the religious go indeed hand in hand in Schlegel's politics, it is also a somewhat puzzling remark. To be sure, Schlegel models his ideal state on the family and writes in the Cologne lectures that "a nation is like a big, all-encompassing family" ("eine Nation ist gleichsam eine große allumfassende Familie"; KA XIII 145). However, it is at the same time precisely the state's resemblance to the family that suggests that we are ultimately not dealing with a political but rather with an economic theology as recently brought to attention again by Agamben, Mondzain, and others. Conceived as two political paradigms that are functionally related to another, Agamben explains at the beginning of *The Kingdom and the Glory* that political theology "founds the transcendence of sovereign power on the single God," whereas economic theology "replaces this transcendence with

the idea of an *oikonomia*, conceived as an immanent ordering – domestic and not political in a strict sense – of both divine and human life" (*The Kingdom and the Glory* 1).

One of the main problems of Daub's account, and what ultimately prevents him from grasping the economic base of Schlegel's political thought, is that he does not make a clear distinction between the role of the church and that of the state. By arguing that the church mediates between the state and the family, demands assent, and enforces rules, and thus forms a part of state sovereignty, Daub's reading threatens to collapse the crucial distinction between state and church in the Cologne lectures. To be sure, Daub is by no means the only one to confuse the roles of state and church in Schlegel's thinking. Behrens, for example, speaks of a balance ("Gleichgewicht"; 227) between state and church, which is for different reasons equally problematic. However, before we turn to the relationship between state and church in Schlegel's thinking, it may be good to first introduce the two political paradigms around which the remainder of this conclusion will revolve, namely the political model of sovereignty and the economic model of government.

iii. The Politics and Economics of the Image

As the art historian and philosopher Emmanuel Alloa argues in his article on economic theology, the separation between state and church is anything but a modern invention, but has been part of church doctrine from the moment of its inception. In fact, it forms the foundation on which the conception of a divine economy is founded, the roots of which can already be founded in Paul's letter to the Romans where the apostle argues that the coming of Christ had ushered a new political paradigm. Quoting Paul's famous phrase that with God's revelation in Christ, man no longer stands "under law but under grace" (6,14), Alloa draws attention to the fact that the coming of Christ led to a permanent state of exception in which earthly law would forever be suspended. Moreover, as Alloa argues, it is

with Paul that the notion of economy is introduced as a form of government, placing itself in direct opposition with not only the political domain but especially theology. Whereas theology is concerned with the being and nature of God, economy is the domain that is concerned with the ways God acts and reveals himself in the world, even though these workings and revelations are always indirect because of God's impenetrable and transcendent nature (296). Indeed, drawing on the 5th century theologian Theodoret of Cyrus, Alloa even suggests that Paul was hardly concerned with theology at all, but that all of his letters and teachings were economic in character. In other words, rather than offering theological reflections on the nature of God, Paul shows himself most of all concerned with the administration of belief on an immanent plane; that is, the question how the world and church should be organized and structured in order to lead mankind to redemption and salvation (282).

When seen from this perspective, the conception of a political theology begins to appear as something of an oxymoron, which is exactly the subject of the debate between Erik Peterson and Carl Schmitt, and with which Agamben opens his book on economy and governmental power. Although the debate between Peterson and Schmitt has led to extensive scholarly literature and reflection, the details and complexities of their debate do not have to concern us here. What matters most is the starting point of their debate, namely Peterson's suggestion that the doctrine of the Trinity directly undercuts Schmitt's conception of political theology, which culminated in a model of sovereignty that was based on the idea of a singular God. Taking sides with neither Peterson nor Schmitt, Agamben shows himself most puzzled with the unwillingness of both scholars to directly confront what he sees as the core of their disagreement, namely the formulation of an economic doctrine around the trinity. More precisely, as Agamben points out, it was precisely in the work of the Cappadocian church fathers on whom Peterson had drawn to phrase his objections to Schmitt's political theology that we find a sophisticated economic apparatus to prevent God's unity from fracturing in the face of the trinity (*The*

Kingdom and the Glory 13). Moreover, crediting Michel Foucault for drawing attention to the paradigm of governmental power, Agamben set himself the goal of tracing its genealogy back to doctrine of the divine economy in which modern forms of governmentality find their origin, but the centrality of which has almost completely been obscured in the secular West. The aim of Agamben's book is therefore to demonstrate that Christian theology not only gave rise to a political-theological paradigm of sovereignty, but also to an economic-theological model of governmental power, the last flickers of which he detects in the work of Hegel and the late Schelling in particular (*The Kingdom and the Glory* 5).[151]

Considering his close proximity of Hegel and Schelling, it is not unreasonable to expect that the same economic doctrine may have been a central concern for a Catholic thinker such as Schlegel as well. If this is the case, which I indeed suggest, then it may be all the more worthwhile to investigate how the political and the economic doctrine gave rise to two different paradigms of the image, and to see if we could draw a parallel with the iconic turn in Schlegel's theory of painting. That the political and the economic doctrine led indeed to two different paradigms of the image is one of the lessons of Mondzain's book on the Byzantine iconoclastic controversy. In *Image, Icon, Economy: The Byzantine Origins of the Contemporary Imaginary*, Mondzain argues that the conflict between empire and church, emperor and patriarch, was a clash between two different institutions that relied respectively on sovereign and governmental power, concentrating on the role and function of the image within these respective paradigms. Mondzain thus explains that the ulterior motive for the emperor's ban on images of Christ, the Virgin, and the Saints was not doctrinal or theological, but precisely political,

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[151] Here, Agamben points particularly to the conclusion of the Philosophy of Revelation in which Schelling situates his work within the tradition of a divine economy. The goal of Agamben's study is by his own admission to make the relationship between economy and theology comprehensible again (*The Kingdom and the Glory* 5).

wanting to cut the ties between profane and spiritual power, which could most effectively be done by targeting the instrument by which the church's power was diffused, namely the icon. It is therefore no coincidence that the two iconoclastic periods in the eighth and ninth century did not lead to a ban on images per se. On the contrary, it was, as Mondzain writes, at "the very moment when the emperor was ordering the destruction of religious images [that] he was spreading his own portrait as well as the signs of his pomp, pleasures, and glories throughout the empire" (15). In other words, what Mondzain pictures here is the conflict between an imperial and Christian cult of the image; the former insisting on a direct relationship between God and sovereign for the legitimation of power through divine right, turning "the king [into] the direct emanation of paternal will" (158), whereas the later adheres to a mediated representation of the divine, turning Christ and the ecclesial body of the church as the mediator through which divine power is actually dispersed into the world (*The Kingdom and the Glory* 115).

What I will argue in the next section is that the role of painting in Schlegel's theory cannot properly be understood apart from this economic model. Not only that, but I also wish to suggest that the two different models of political power correspond to two different paradigms of the image, which will ultimately bring us back to our starting point in the Louvre again by the end of the conclusion. Here, I will suggest that the way in which Schlegel sought to counter Napoleon was by undermining his imperial model of sovereignty with a Christian economy in which painting (and the image more generally) was to play a pivotal role.

iv. State and Church in the Cologne Lectures

A good place to start these orientations is by concentrating on the relationship between state and church in Schlegel's political thinking, a topic which is most systematically treated in the Cologne

lectures on philosophy. It is especially in the last two lectures on politics and popular law ("Volksrecht") where Schlegel develops a political model that insists on the relative autonomy of both institutions while at the same time subordinating the state to the authority of the church. Although church and state are therefore functionally independent as they operate in distinct spheres, they are nonetheless united in their shared eschatological orientation. This practically means that politics now becomes a function of a larger religious plan, which requires a point of contact between church and state in order to bring this orientation about.

Although Daub is correct to point to the analogy between state and family in Schlegel's politics, I will argue that this correspondence is justified to the extent that both find their ultimate model in the trinity. What Schlegel's economic model shares with the trinitarian doctrine, as we will come to see, is precisely its underlying structure of difference in unity, which is not to be understood in organic but in hierarchical terms here. In fact, the relationship between Father and Son in the trinity directly mirrors the respective roles of church and state in the sense that both are different persons, but are nonetheless part of the same operative structure. Although the transcendent nature of God the Father separates him from creation, he is nonetheless still able to guide the course of history as if by an invisible hand, which is, following Adam Smith, what an economy amounts to after all. Agamben thus writes in this context that "[i]f the Kingdom and the Government are separated in God by a clear opposition, then no government of the world is actually possible . . . The government is possible only if the Kingdom and the Government are correlated in a bipolar machine." (*The Kingdom and the Glory* 114).

It is this notion of a bipolar machine that also offers an adequate description of the relation between state and church in Schlegel's thinking. Although the economic system of government could be seen as the opposite of the political model of sovereignty, it can at the same time not do without the latter either. Just as God is dependent on immanent powers to accomplish his work on earth, so the

church has to rely on the state in order to fulfill its mission. This means that sovereign power is not so much discarded, but rather integrated within the economic model, its power and legislation now becoming an intrinsic part of the governmental machine: "Here lies the first ground for all Christian politics worthy of its name (state in the church, not church in the state)." ("Hier liegt d.[er] erste Grund aller wahrhaft so zu nennend[en] christlichen Politik (Staat in d.[er] Kirche, nicht Kirche im Staat)."; KA XX 291 # 2).

This integration of the state into the church has important consequences for the sovereign power of the emperor, and indeed removes the ground under the core of Schmitt's political theology. The sovereign is no longer the one who transcends the law and has the power to decide over the state of exception, as Schmitt famously put it (*Political Theology* 5), but his power is now severely restricted by Schlegel, who sees him above all as a judge who speaks order where it is due: "The king is judge; when he is not, then he is not what he is supposed to be, and everything falls into disorder and disarray." ("Der König ist Richter; wenn er das nicht ist so ist er nicht, was er sein soll und alles gerät in Unordnung und Auflösung."; KA XIII 126).[152] Yet, this does not mean that the role of the sovereign is now transposed to the pope in Schlegel's politics. Mirroring the separation of God's unity into father and son in order to salvage and redeem humanity, the role of the sovereign splits as well in Schlegel's politics, reappearing as a functional distinction between church and state as legislative and executive power respectively.

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[152] Also compare: "The king is even more a judge than a warrior, and he shall exercise this office himself. If the laws are not too intricate and artificial, but firmly and correctly determined and kept sacred, then no special talent is required to administer and practice justice according to them." ("Richter ist der König mehr noch als Krieger, und dieses Amt soll er selbst ausüben. Sind die Gesetze nicht zu verwickelt und künstlich, sondern fest und richtig bestimmt und heilig gehalten, so bedarf es keines besonderen Talents, nach ihnen Recht zu sprechen und zu üben."; KA XIII 160).

Although Schlegel's politics is thus preconditioned on the integration of the state into the church, it is just as crucial to remark that the latter remains free and autonomous with respect to the former: "The church should be the highest community, free and independent from the conditioned political state. This freedom is essential to the church." ("Die Kirche muß also als höchste Gesellschaft frei und von dem bedingten politischen Staate unabhängig sein. Diese Freiheit ist der Kirche zu ihrem Wesen nötig."; KA XIII 173). In sharp contrast to Behrens' insistence on an equal balance between state and church, this passage suggests that their relationship is anything but one of equals. Not only is the church the highest form of community, and thus an example for the state, but it also is unconditioned, which means that it only finds its purpose in itself (KA XIII 169). In other words, Schlegel conceives of the state as an instrument of the church, which immediately implies that a point of contact between the two is required in order to bring the state in accordance with the church's orientation, which is the role which Schlegel attributes to the pope (KA XIII 170-71).

At the same time, this point of contact between the sacred and the profane forms a delicate balance that is all too easily distorted. In fact, it was the intermingling of sacred and worldly affairs which pushed the medieval church too far into the worldly domain, leading to the schism between church and empire that would come to inaugurate the end of the Middle Ages for Schlegel. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Schlegel sees it thus as the goal of the present age to return to the basic principles that informed the Middle Ages, and to complete what the medieval era has left unfinished, which is nothing less than the redemption and salvation of mankind as a whole. In order to bring God's plan for humanity about, church and state should therefore work in unison until their cooperation is no longer required. This marks the moment when the church has become triumphant, and can discard the state in its supporting role: "If the church were alone and universally dominant, then there would be no need for the empire; until this is realized, however, the empire is necessary ("Wäre die Kirche allein

und allgemein herrschend, so bedürfte es des Kaiserthums nicht; bis dahin aber bedarf es allerdings desselben."; KA XX 154 #301).

If we zoom in a little bit further on the role of the church vis-à-vis the state in the Cologne lectures, we find that Schlegel often refers to the former as Hierarchy. This term is deeply rooted in the Catholic tradition and goes back to the work of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite in the 5th century. Interestingly, Agamben deals at length with the notion of hierarchy in *The Kingdom and the Glory*, tracing its roots from Pseudo-Dionysius to Thomas Aquinas, and further to modern forms of government. Although the details of this discussion do not have to concern us here, it is important to note that Agamben points to the economic-theological roots of the term. In fact, in the work of Pseudo-Dionysius, as Agamben explains, the notion of hierarchy forms the connective tissue between the sacred and the profane, pointing at once to the celestial hierarchy of angels as well as to the ecclesiastical hierarchy of the church. The conclusion that Agamben draws from this is that hierarchy plays an essential role in the mystification of the profane and vice versa, transforming not only the ministry into a mystery, but likewise the mystery into ministry as well. He thus concludes that

> the central idea that runs throughout the Dionysian corpus is that what is sacred and divine is hierarchically ordered, and its barely disguised strategy aims – through the obsessive repetition of a triadic schema that descends from the Trinity, via the angelic triarchies, to the earthly hierarchy – at the sacralization of power. (*The Kingdom and the Glory* 153)

This is to say that, for Agamben, the notion of hierarchy establishes a fusion between the bureaucrat and the angel as a means to sacralize profane power. This underlying structure finds a remarkable

parallel in the way Schlegel utilizes the term to demarcate profane from spiritual power.[153] In the Cologne lectures on universal history, we thus find Schlegel defining hierarchy as a "spiritual supremacy" ("geistliche Oberherrschaft"; KA XIV 139) that, if not opposed to the world, is at least placed alongside it. It is this divine sanctioning of power (or sacralization, to use Agamben's terms) which ultimately justifies the subordination of state to church in Schlegel's politics. Schlegel thus argues in the Cologne lectures on philosophy that the state is partially conditioned by the church, which now has to engage with the worldly sphere from which the church itself is exempted: "In this subordinate determination, the state is to be regarded as a means, as the bearer of the church, which in its higher absolute absoluteness exists as an end in and for itself." ("In dieser untergeordneten Bestimmung ist der Staat als Mittel, als Träger der Kirche anzusehen, welche in ihrer höheren absoluten Unbedingtheit als Zweck an und für sich selbst besteht."; KA XIII 144).

By referring to a notion of hierarchy, Schlegel effectively draws upon an ecclesial tradition in which the term was used to sanctify (and therefore legitimize) the church's own privileged position vis-à-vis the state, which seems to be exactly Schlegel's intended effect (KA XIII 172).[154] Crucially, however, the role of the state is not merely to enforce the church's rule through jurisdiction, but also to provide the preconditions under which the education and cultivation of people can take place: "The state is merely concerned with providing the conditions for culture, not with the content of culture itself. . . .[T]he hierarchy is based on unconditional fellowship and connection." ("Der Staat hat es bloß mit den Bedingungen zur Kultur nicht mit dieser selbst zu tun. . . .[D]ie Hierarchie geht auf

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[153] Mondzain points specifically to the icon's sacralization of power in the economic structure (158).

[154] Schlegel explains that "[t]he clergy should be the most powerful rank, and must thus have privileges. Its supremacy rests on the nature of things" ("[d]er geistliche Stand soll der mächtigste sein, er muß also Vorrechte haben, und der Natur der Sache nach gebührt ihm insofern eine Oberherrschaft"; KA XIII 172).

unbedingte Gemeinschaft und Verbindung..”; KA XIII 168). As such, part of the state’s task is to harbor a space within society from which the church can exercise its indirect (that is, governmental) power through moral and religious cultivation and education:

> The church is the unconditional society and community of all human beings in their relationship to themselves and to the divinity, which goes beyond the narrow limits of this earthly existence and deals directly with the moral education of the human race as an approach to the highest, most unconditional of all goods, the end of all ends, occupied.
>
> (Die Kirche ist die unbedingte Gesellschaft und Gemeinschaft aller Menschen in ihrem Verhältnis zu sich selbst und zur Gottheit, die über die engen Schranken dieses irdischen Daseins hinaus sich unmittelbar mit der sittlichen Bildung des Menschengeschlechts als Annäherung zu dem höchsten unbedingtesten aller Güter, dem Zwecke aller Zwecke, beschäftigt.) (KA XIII 143)

Despite the Catholic overtones of the lectures and Schlegel’s ongoing insistence on the unconditioned nature of the church, this passage underscores an important continuity between the early and the later work. In fact, the ambition to establish a universal community under the pretense of a shared ideal sounds remarkably similar to Schlegel’s call for a new mythology in “Dialogue on Poetry,” even though the means by which he wants to establish this community have radically changed. Leaning heavily on the tradition of the institutional church, the notions of education and cultivation not merely acquired an eschatological dimension, but also became economic principles by which God’s will is done. This is to say that both terms now derive their meaning from their role within an economy of salvation, functioning as an instrument of governmental power that is aimed at building and expanding the community under the pretense of what ultimately must remain a mystery.

v. Trinity, Economy, and the Sanctification of Power

Although there is no reason to question Schlegel's religious sincerity, it is important not to forget about the political convictions that informed the iconic turn from the start. Although Schlegel's core doctrines are commensurable with the Catholic doctrine of the church, this does by no means imply that his religious beliefs were apolitical, quite the opposite. This suggestion is only confirmed by the fact that Schlegel has left us numerous notes that evidently demonstrate that the political and the religious are not that easily separable in his thinking, especially when it comes to the fate of the European continent and the role of France within it. These tendencies become all the more obvious with his move from Cologne to Vienna in 1808. In his notebooks from these years, Schlegel credits Austria for having kept the Catholic religion alive in Germany (KA XX 117 # 67). Yet, as another of his notes makes clear, it is precisely for this reason that the country can be the only starting point for a political and religious counter-revolution, which should lead the continent toward salvation and redemption again (KA XX 236-37 #99).

One of the ironies of Schlegel's employment for the Austrian state is thus that he does so in the name of religion. It is perhaps for this reason that Schlegel was met with suspicion by many of the Austrian state officials in the period between 1810-15, and even became the target of investigations of the Austrian secret police (Breuer 22). Moreover, although a confidant of Metternich, to whom Schlegel would even dedicate his public lecture series on modern history from 1810, their relationship proved in the end not sustainable, and their fall-out was precisely over the role of the Roman Church in Austrian state politics; a role that Metternich for obvious reasons wanted to keep as minimal as possible (Dierkes 66). Be that as it may, there can be no doubt that Schlegel privately understood the Coalition Wars between Austria and France of those years as an epochal confrontation that carried

immediate religious overtones: "Just as Rome was regarded by the early Christians as the visible kingdom of the Antichrist, so is France in the modern times." ("Wie Rom von d.[en] ersten Christen als das sichtbare Reich des Antichristen betrachtet wurde, so ist es in d[en] neuern Zeiten Frankreich."; KA XX 3356 #151). Indeed, what becomes clear from Schlegel's notes around this time is that he pictures Austria and France as two diametrically opposed countries, which represent respectively the best and the worst the continent had to offer: "Austria and France are the two revolutionary states, but in a diametrically opposed sense." ("Oesterreich und Frankreich sind die beiden revolutionären Staaten, aber in einem ganz entgegengesettpen Sinne."; KA XX 237 #100). The thesis that I shall be advancing in the remainder of this conclusion is that their diametrically opposed revolutionary character should not merely be understood in moral and religious terms, as Schlegel himself states a few notes later (KA XX 238 #108), but translates into a difference between a political-theological model of sovereign power and an economic-theological model that is rooted in the trinity, a difference that ultimately leads to two radically opposed paradigms of the image.

When we stay with Schlegel's philosophical, religious, and political notebooks a bit longer, it becomes clear that the trinity ("Dreieinigkeit") was one of his central concerns throughout his time in Cologne and the first years in Vienna. To be sure, Schlegel's interest in the trinity was not merely religious, but went to the heart of his thinking, and became a leading concept for his ideas about social and political reform. How central the doctrine of the trinity was becomes clear in a note from 1807 in which he not merely points to the French Revolution as the highest crisis in history, but directly connects this moment of crisis with the potential resurrection of truth, which can only happen when "the idea of the trinity would become the center of all science, thinking, and acting" ("die Idee der Dreieinigkeit Mittelpunkt aller Wissenschaften und alles Denkens und Handelns würde"; KA XX 154 #300).

In order to understand why the trinity became such an important topic for Schlegel during these years, it may be good to briefly concentrate on its relationship with the formulation of a divine economy in the work of the early church fathers. Finding its origin in the conflict between the imperial cult of the emperor that early Christianity inherited from paganism, the Cappadocian church fathers further developed the trinitarian dogma to safeguard the uniqueness of Christ against the threat of his association with the Roman emperor. Although the details of this conflict do not have to concern us here, what matters most is that their attempt to distinguish Christ from emperor gave way to the formation of a divine economy that immediately found itself in opposition to any form of worldly sovereignty. What we find in the work of these early church fathers is thus an attempt to separate theology from economy with immediate political consequences. More precisely, the trinitarian model led them to construct a framework in which any form of speculation on the being of God was relegated to the domain of theology, whereas economy became the realm that dealt with God's delegated works in the world. Here, the underlying assumption was that God could only be known on an economic level. That is, to the extent that he revealed his will indirectly in the world. More precisely, the divine economy of the early church fathers gave rise to a governmental structure that posited a legislative God (the Father) against an executive God (Christ), thereby scattering the unity of God that provided the foundation for the imperial cult of absolute sovereignty (Alloa 296).

When we reconsider the relationship between state and church in Schlegel's politics, we not only find that the trinitarian dogma gave rise to a similar economic structure in which Father and Son were functionally separated, but that this distinction between a legislative and an executive God also carried similar political implications for him. We thus read in one of his notes from 1806 that the reconciliation between God and humanity through the incarnation was an intervention on the part of the Father to execute his will: "The reconciliation is to be understood such that the Father's will is

done; that he does not want to dissolve the world but to complete it." ("Die Versöhnung ist so zu begreifen; damit des Vaters Willen geschehe, der die Welt nicht schnell auflösen, sondern vollenden will"; KA XIX 217 #128). What we find here is exactly the separation of roles between the different persons of the trinity that the Cappadocian church fathers first introduced. Moreover, that Schlegel not merely inherited the economic structure of their thought, but that the governmental model also carried similar political implications for him is obvious in some of his notes from around the same time. These notes not only demonstrate that he found himself in fierce opposition with absolute sovereignty, e.g., when he writes that "it is a completely false system . . . when kings do everything by themselves, see everything for themselves, and decide and rule for themselves" ("[e]in ganz falsches System . . . ist es, wenn Könige alles selbst thun, selbst einsehen, selbst entscheiden und regieren wollen"; KA XX 170 #53), but they also demonstrate that he regarded this form of absolutism as irreconcilable with the doctrine of the trinity. We thus read that "[t]he usurper would infallibly attack the dogma of the Trinity; . . . One God like a ruler on earth - that is the basic attitude of all tyrants. Every false religion which is still able to arise will have this character" ("[d]er Usurpator würde das Dogma der Dreieinigkeit unfehlbar angreifen**;** . . . Ein Gott wie ein Herrscher auf Erden - das ist die Grundgesinnung aller Tyrannen. Jede falsche Religion, die noch entstehen kann, wird diesen Charakter haben"; KA XX 154 #303).[155] What this comment demonstrate is not merely that the doctrine of the trinity carried immediate political implications for Schlegel, but also stood for a form of government that found itself in direct opposition with a political theology that was based on divine right. In line with the separation

[155] Here, the identification of tyranny with a false religion further explains why Schlegel came to regard France as the anti-Christ in the earlier comment. Moreover, the religious quality that his dislike of France now began to take also explains his suggestion to place France under the authority of the church again: "For France there is no other salvation than to give the whole country to the pope after the provinces that do not belong to it have been cut off." ("Für Frankreich gäbe es keine andre Rettung als nach Abschneidung der nicht dazu gehörenden Provinzen das Ganze d[em] Pabst zu geben."; KA XX 70 #119).

of church and state that we discussed above, he is thus intent upon limiting the power of the king to that of mere executioner and judge in secular affairs; that is, as an instrument who carries out God's plan under the gift of the Holy Spirit: "True kings stand, like the church, under a special command of providence." ("Wahrhafte Könige stehen so wie die Kirche unter einer besondern Leitung der Vorsehung."; KA XX 79 #182).

As a discussion on the roles of the Son and the Holy Spirit would lead us too far astray, I will briefly concentrate on those aspects that are most relevant for understanding the functioning of the economic structure that underlies Schlegel's thinking. In general, Schlegel follows Saint Augustine in his understanding of the Holy Trinity, making a fundamental distinction between the Son and Spirit as, respectively, the one who is born and that which has being given by grace. Moreover, citing a passage from Augustine's *On the Trinity*, Schlegel explicitly defines the Holy Spirit as that element within the trinity that conjoins Father and Son in their mutual love for one another (KA XIX 313 #129-30). However, and this is perhaps the most crucial part, it is through the Holy Spirit that man is able to participate in God's plan. In another note from 1806, Schlegel explicitly defines the gift of the Holy Spirit with the human desire and will for infinite abundance. As such, Schlegel makes a fundamental distinction between the role of the Son and that of the Holy Spirit. Although both are seen as the immanent executioners of God's will, Schlegel argues that the role of the Son is to provide man with a foresight of infinite abundance, whereas the Holy Spirit leads to the human desire for salvation in what he describes as an "excess of overflowing love" ("Uebermaaß der überfließenden Liebe"; KA XIX 243 #325). This same distinction between Son and Holy Spirit returns again in another note from a year later. Although the human capacity to act is still identified with the Holy Spirit, Schlegel attributes to the Son the essential role of making sure that the desire and will are headed in the right direction. That is to say that the role of Christ is to make sure that the desire and will to act correspond

to the plans of the Father, and are not arbitrary expressions of one's own individual whims (KA XIX 270 #44).[156]

What is important to recognize here is that the divine economy of the trinity gives rise to an immanent economic structure in which the immanent manifestations of Christ and the Holy Spirit are employed to place not only the king but also the artwork under the same law of divine providence. As I will concentrate in the next section on the role of painting within this system, let me close with a brief reflection on the political implications of all of this. When we concentrate on the role of the king in Schlegel's politics, we find that the internal structure of the trinity not merely legitimizes, but also sanctifies the subordination of sovereign power to the rule of the church. The immediate consequence is that the sphere of the king's sovereign power is significantly reduced. Not only that, but he is also expected to conform to God's will, which essentially means that he is no longer sovereign at all. To conclude, it is important to highlight what is actually at stake here. It is not only the case that the internal structure of the trinity legitimizes and sanctifies the hegemony of the church vis-à-vis the state, but the force of the whole economic structure derives precisely from the constant cross-over from the transcendent to the immanent sphere. In other words, instead of being merely a model for the immanent ordering and governing of the world, the divine economy of the trinity is intrinsically connected with it. As such, it could be seen as the logical conclusion of the metaphysical system that Schlegel developed in his Cologne lectures on philosophy. What connects the divine with the immanent economy is that they are united under the same operative principle of love, which is just as in the Cologne lectures the principle that pushes history forward until the two spheres coincide at the end of

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[156] That Schlegel understands the Holy Spirit in terms of love is significant, especially in relation to the metaphysics and theory of painting espoused in the Cologne lectures. As we have seen in chapter three, Schlegel understood love as the dynamic principle underlying the creation as a whole, which implies that he sees creation as pervaded by the Holy Spirit.

time. It is precisely this directionality toward the moment when the heavenly and earthly spheres coincide which lends the Schlegel's economy its providential character, and that bestows the church with the divine sanctioning and power to bring this order about (Alloa 296).

vi. Painting as Glory

If the power of the state manifests itself in the sovereignty of the king, then painting forms one of the principal instruments of church's governmental power. In his discussion of painting in the Cologne lectures, Schlegel explicitly places the fate and future of the church in the hand of the visual arts (KA XIII 55), a point that was apparently important enough for him to repeat almost verbatim at the end of his lecture course:

> If the hierarchy or the moral community of the divine is to gain a definite rank in external reality among men, then it is necessary that the spiritual kingdom of God is brought to sensuous appearance. But this is the true aim of the fine arts. It should present the visible kingdom of God in a sensuous way. The fine arts are therefore closely aligned to magic, or are a part of it.
>
> (Soll die Hierarchie oder die sittliche Gemeinschaft des Göttlichen unter den Menschen als ein bestimmter Stand äußere Realität gewinnen, so ist es nötig, daß auch das geistige göttliche Reich derselben zur Erscheinung gebracht versinnlicht werde. Hierin aber besteht die wahre Bestimmung der bildenden Kunst. Sie soll das sichtbare Reich Gottes sinnlich darstellen. Die bildende Kunst schließt sich demnach nahe an die Magie an, oder ist ein Teil derselben.) (KA XIII 173-74)

The question that I will try to answer in this section is why Schlegel came to hold painting in such a high regard, how he managed to turn painting into a form of governmental power, and, above all, at

what cost. The first of these questions is perhaps both the easiest and the most difficult to answer. Easy because the beginning of an answer is given by Schlegel a few lines further down when he writes that

> the fine arts are a necessary part of the hierarchy, and all the more so because it finds its domain on the border between history and religion. One can say that art is complement to history at the point where history and religion meet.[157]
>
> ([d]ie bildende Kunst ist also ein notwendiger Teil der Hierarchie und zwar um so mehr, da sie ihr Gebiet auf der Grenze zwischen der Wissenschaft und Religion hat. Man kann sagen, die Kunst ist eine Ergänzung der Wissenschaft auf dem Punkt, wo Wissenschaft und Religion sich berühren.) (KA XIII 174)

It is this particular claim that I will be developing a bit further in these last pages. What this passage already makes clear is that painting is part of the ecclesial apparatus, being explicitly defined here as an inherent part of the church. What I will argue in this section is that the power of painting consists for Schlegel in that it marks the pivotal point in the governmental apparatus where the divine and the immanent economy intersect.

As we have seen in the previous section, Schlegel's economy is effectively a way of managing the unbridgeable gap between God and the world on the basis of the internal structure of the trinity, thereby leading to an immanent order in which the church can exercise its (governmental) power over state and people within an overall providential design. Yet, what unites the work of Agamben and

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[157] In line with the content of the lectures, I decided to translate science as history at this point. The conjoining of science and art is a point that recurs a number of times in the middle section of the lectures, and it is then also a few pages earlier that Schlegel equates science with history: "All completed science is history. The purpose of all knowledge is understanding and wisdom of the world, history in one word; - to the extent that history encompassed all becoming. From the highest point of view, however, there is only a singular becoming, and therefore also only one science, which divides itself into different spheres." ("Alle vollendete Wissenschaft ist Geschichte. Der Zweck alles Wissens ist Weltverständnis, Weltweisheit, Geschichte mit einem Wort; — insofern die Geschichte alles Werden umfaßt. Auf dem höchsten Standpunkte aber gibt es nur ein Werden, also auch nur eine Wissenschaft, die Geschichte, die sich aber in verschiedene Sphären einteilt."; KA XIII 23-24)

Mondzain in particular, is that they both point to something inherently paradoxical within this general scheme. Since God's transcendence forestalls any attempt to contain or circumscribe his being within a discursive system, Agamben and Mondzain point out that any economic system is faced with the challenge of how to build a structure of governmental power which lets people participate in a transcendent God while at the same time concealing his ultimately mysterious nature (Agamben, The Kingdom and the Glory 59; Mondzain 92). Or, as in Schlegel's case, how to employ visual means as painting to let the viewer experience what is essentially invisible?

It is this thematic concern of how to deal with the concealed and uncircumscribable nature of God that we also encounter in Schlegel's work after his move to Cologne. In fact, there are number of passages in his lectures, published work, and private notes in which he specifically addresses the hidden and mysterious core of Christianity as, for example, in the fragment below from the Cologne lectures on philosophy:

> According to our philosophy, . . . the concept of the divine spirit is absolutely certain, the concept of the Son is highly probable; it reveals itself to us in history as full truth. The concept of the father is the most difficult, understandable only through revelation, and philosophy can in fact only show the possibility of a ruling king of the world, showing the place that he occupies in relation to the world. Yet, the conviction of his living reality can only be a matter of religion.
>
> (Nach unserer Philosophie ist . . . der Begriff des göttlichen Geistes schlechthin gewiß, der Begriff des Sohnes im höchsten Grade wahrscheinlich, als volle Wahrheit offenbart er sich uns in der Geschichte. Der Begriff des Vaters ist der schwierigste, nur durch die Offenbarung verständlich, und die Philosophie kann hier für sich in der Tat nur die Möglichkeit eines herrschenden Weltkönigs zeigen, und die Stelle aufweisen, die er einnimmt in Beziehung auf die Welt,

> die Überzeugung von seiner lebendigen Wirklichkeit kann nur Sache der Religion sein.) (KA XIII 40)

This passage precisely underscores the paradox at the heart of the economic doctrine. Even though Schlegel acknowledges the difficulties in grounding the role of the Father philosophically, the same passage nonetheless circumscribes his role by picturing him as the king and ruler over the world, even though Schlegel admits that this is merely a matter of belief and revelation than anything else. However, by doing so, he reveals exactly that the power of the economy derives from its capacity of make-belief. For Schlegel, the Catholic Mass played an important role in this, which he essentially regarded as nothing but a symbolic rite of mystification that successfully managed to conceal its inner core to the public: "The public nature of the Mass is also a requirement in the poetic sense, and its highest satisfaction. – It is admirable how, despite its public nature, that which should be secretive remains a secret." ("Das Oeffentliche der Messe ist auch ein Bedürfniß des poetischen Sinnes und die höchste Befriedigung desselben. – Bewundernswerth dabei wie ungeachtet des Oeffentlichen doch geheim bleibt — was geheim bleiben soll."; KA XIX 265 #13).

As this and numerous other passages demonstrate, the management of the hidden and secret core of religion was not so much an intellectual problem, as we found in the Cologne lectures, but above all a practical one (see e.g., KA XIX 251 # 376 and KA XIX 258 #424). What the example above demonstrates was that Schlegel particularly favored symbolic ways to navigate this problem. The mass was one way, painting was another. Although Schlegel's review of Count Stolberg's book on the history of Christianity from 1808 does not specifically address the visual arts, it stands as a testament to the importance that symbolic mediation carried for him at this point. Although he shows himself largely sympathetic to Stolberg's book, he zooms in on the author's disregard of religious symbolism:

> It is then well known how much not one or the other of the Church Fathers, but the great majority of them, including the oldest and otherwise the most important ones . . . tend toward this symbolic view, which . . . is directed to the inner, often hidden meaning, to the idea, and above all seeks to reveal it. And is not in fact this view for religion the first and most important?
>
> (Denn bekannt ist es, wie sehr nicht etwa einer oder der andere der Kirchenväter, sondern die große Mehrzahl auch der ältesten und sonst gewichtvollsten . . . zu dieser symbolischen Ansicht sich neigen, die . . . auf den Innern, oft verborgenen Sinn, auf die Idee zunächst geht, und diese vor allem zu enthüllen sucht. Und ist nicht in der Tat diese Ansicht für die Religion die erste und wichtigste?) (KA VIII 100)

Following the early church fathers, Schlegel points to the capacity of the symbol to reveal religion's hidden and most innermost core, a matter that he apparently considered to be of utmost importance. What is for us most striking here is that the symbol (and by extension painting) comes to play a kind of double role. It seeks to penetrate into the mystery, but Schlegel's language also reveals his own ambivalence to what it is that the symbol actually reveals.

However, what does become clear, when we turn to one last passage from the notebooks, is why the symbol carried such enormous significance for Schlegel, even to the extent that he came to consider it as the most important aspect of religion in general. Written by the time that he delivered his Cologne lectures, Schlegel left a brief comment that puts the symbol at the nexus of his thinking: "With regards to religion, the system of belief is the symbol, not the religion itself but only the objective form of communication . . . – it is therefore for everyone the bond of spiritual community." ("In Rücksicht der Religion ist das System d[es] Glaubens das Symbol nicht die Rel[igion] selbst sondern nur die objektive Form der Mittheilung . . . – für alle daher das Band d[er] geistigen Gemeinschaft."; KA XIX 126 #381). This is a remarkable passage for several reasons. First of all, it

demonstrates why Schlegel came to hold the symbol in such a high regard. If we read Schlegel to the letter, it becomes clear that the bond of the religious community does apparently not depend on belief or religion, but on the symbol itself. This seems to suggest that Schlegel turns the symbol into a floating signifier that is ultimately more important than the religion it (re)presents. This is further confirmed by the fact that Schlegel explicitly defines the symbol as the system of belief. Once again, a separation is made between the system and religion, suggesting that the former is somewhat arbitrary when compared to religion itself.

All of this is compatible with the paradoxical nature of the economic system. Especially in this last passage, we find several indications that Schlegel upheld a distinction between religion and belief. What immediately follows from this is that Schlegel's religious thinking is ultimately more economical than theological. If the church was after secular power and control, so he seems to suggest, it would have to depart from a fixed and stable doctrine that tied the transcendent and the immanent together, and would need to have access to symbolic means through which this power could be diffused. What the Catholic tradition showed him was that all of this could be done by taking the trinitarian dogma as the starting point. When Schlegel defines the symbol as the system of belief in the passage above, he is essentially affirming an insight that informed the Catholic economy from the very start, namely the realization that the symbol forms the pivotal point around which the whole economic system revolves. That is to say that the symbol forms the nexus where the divine and the immanent economy meet, and thereby forms the place where the church's power is concentrated.

In the last chapter of the *Kingdom and the Glory*, Agamben specifically targets this symbolic nexus within the economic system, focusing particularly on the glorious acclamation to which the symbol gives rise. Holding that every economy contains the mechanisms for its own glorification, his main objective is to investigate the connection between power and glory within the economic system.

After having pointed to the etymological connections between the German words of glory ("Herrlichkeit") and dominion ("Herrschaft) (*The Kingdom and the Glory* 197), Agamben argues that power is always in need of glorification in order to conceal what has to remain hidden. In other words, the function of glory is to cover up the vacuousness (or what Agamben refers to as the inoperativity) at the heart of governmental power: "Glory, both in theology and in politics, is precisely what takes the place of that unthinkable emptiness that amounts to the inoperativity of power. And yet, precisely this unsayable vacuity is what nourishes and feeds power (or, rather, what the machine of power transforms into nourishment)" (*The Kingdom and the Glory* 242).

When we return to the last two contributions on painting, we are now in a position to see that all of this was already implicit in Schlegel's iconic turn from the very start. Let us turn back to the opening sentence of the fourth contribution in which Schlegel reclaimed painting's autonomy. What we immediately find is that glory and mystery are tied together in one and the same sentence. Painting is not to divert, we read, from its original purpose "to glorify religion, and to reveal its mysteries more beautifully and clearly than words can do" (". . . die Religion zu verherrlichen, und die Geheimnisse derselben noch schöner und deutlicher zu offenbaren, als es durch Worte geschehen kann"; KA IV 79). What we have here is the same paradox once again. What are the mysteries that Schlegel is talking about? Is he referring to the unity or trinity of God? Are we dealing with a truth that cannot be disclosed in principle or is the revelation of painting precisely the lie that gives power to the truth? If Schlegel would have been truthful to the last part of the same sentence, he would have remained silent indeed. This would have been, as Agamben explains, the typical form of glory outside of the tradition of the church, a "mysticism which – in the face of the glorious figure of power – can do nothing except fall silent" (*The Kingdom and the Glory* 163). But Schlegel did not, leaving us pages and pages in which he legitimated and sanctified painting by reinscribing it within an economic system in order to conceal

the image's ultimate mystery. As such, Schlegel's later writings on painting are economic through and through. They explicitly incorporate the ineffable and the invisible within a Catholic economy with no other purpose than giving voice to silence, a view on the invisible, thereby making operative what is inoperative by its very essence.

In his ultimate response to Peterson, Agamben writes that "the doctrine of Glory as the final end of man and as the figure of the divine that outlives the government of the world is the answer that theologians give to the problem of the end of the economy. The angelic ministries survive the universal judgment only as a hymnological hierarchy, as contemplation and praise of the glory of the divine" (*The Kingdom and the Glory* 162). There can be no doubt that Schlegel was one of those theologians. We have seen that the spiritual elevation that the aesthetic experience gives rise to was theorized by Schlegel in terms of love, which we now can understand with the help of the Augustinian doctrine of the Holy Spirit as a moment of grace, that is, a moment in which the Holy Spirit descends upon the viewer, supposedly giving him a vision of redemption and salvation that is waiting for him at the end of time. That is to say the aesthetic-religious experience of art is immediately reinscribed within a providential order, offering the promise of the endless glory under the condition that the viewer submits himself to the worldly power and authority of the church as the earthly guardian of salvation and grace. As Agamben writes, "[p]rovidence is the name of the [Trinitarian] *oikonomia*. insofar as the latter presents itself as the government of the world" (*The Kingdom and the Glory* 111); a statement that offers an adequate description of what Schlegel's iconic turn ultimately amounts to.

In the Cologne lectures on philosophy, Schlegel maintains that "the Orthodox Catholic religion contains everything that is essential to religion, but the system as such and the symbols are not yet the religion itself, but only the objective form for the communication" ("[d]as orthodoxe katholische System enthält eben alles Wesentliche der Religion, die System aber als solches und die Symbole sind

noch nicht die Religion selbst, sondern nur die objetive [sic.] Form für die Mitteilung"; KA XIII 62). Again, we encounter the same opposition between religion and system, this time in explicit reference to the Orthodox Catholic tradition as the historical origin from which the religious system and its symbolism derive. This view is only confirmed by Mondzain. As she explains, Orthodox belief was originally founded on the conviction that the essence of God was uncircumscribable in principle. However, it was in the face of the rivalling imperial cult during the Byzantine iconoclastic period that a new doctrine was needed to safeguard the worldly power and authority of the Orthodox church. This was exactly what the divine economy provided, reconceiving the icon as a powerful instrument to bring the visible and the invisible in direct relationship to one another within a providential system. Mondzain thus emphasizes that the economy of the Orthodox church was to guarantee the connection between the transcendent and the immanent that the icon had to bring about: "The image [God] is a mystery. The icon is an enigma. The economy was the concept of their relation and their intimacy. The image is eternal similitude, the icon is temporal resemblance. The economy was the theory of the transfiguration of history" (3).

Whatever experience, feeling or emotion the icon may have given rise to, Mondzain explains that the icon itself is nothing but a void, the emptying out of form that mirrors the kenosis of Christ himself, and in which the emptiness of the flesh provides in turn the precondition for its economic resurrection by the Holy Spirit. The emptiness that "resists all symbols is then symbolized, and the transfiguration is that living resurrection of the world that by pneumatic grace allows humans and things to appear anew in the time and space of the sacred" (142). Mondzain thus locates a similar kenosis at the heart of the icon, pointing explicitly to the role of the church to inspirit the body of the icon and to infuse its empty form with life (155). When seen from this perspective, it is no wonder that Schlegel's iconic turn coincides not merely with the reclamation of painting's autonomy, but also with

its reinscription within the body of the church. It points to the necessity of institution and tradition to reinfuse the emptiness at the heart of the image; an emptiness that is only reflected by his failure to provide his new mythology with the symbolic unity it required. The church not merely offered Schlegel the symbolic unity that he was looking for, but also the means and the power of its dispersal. A power that, in Mondzain's words, "is nothing other than the appropriation of iconic authority and its symbolic fertility" (115).

If there is a direct relation between Schlegel's iconic turn and the Byzantine iconic tradition, it consists most of all in the economic structure in which the image was embedded. Considering the high stakes of painting as the locus where the divine and the immanent economy meet, it is no wonder that the symbolic fertility of painting was one of Schlegel's central concerns in the period between 1805 and 1812. In fact, one of the continuities of Schlegel's work in this period is that he understands painting as an essential instrument for the "government of souls," which Foucault not without reason explicitly related to the Christian pastorate. In one of his notes from 1810, Schlegel explicitly connects the circulation of painting with the missionary work of the church, which he regards as essential to the life, and fertility of the institution: "The vitality and the life force of the true church shows itself in missionary work, in the expansion of its peculiar Christian art, philosophy, and the Christian ordering of the state." ("Die Lebenskraft und Fruchtbarkeit der wahren Kirche zeigt sich in Missionen, in Verbreitung einer eigenthümlichen christlichen Kunst, Philosophie und christlichen Staatseinrichtung."; KA XIX 296-97 #16). But also in the Cologne lectures on philosophy, Schlegel's claim that the fate and future of the church are dependent on the visual arts is met with a number of suggestions to give painting an essential role in the moral-religious education of the people (see e.g., KA XIII 148). Not only that, but Schlegel even goes so far as to argue that the different ranks of the

ecclesial hierarchy should be located in the cities where they can "exercise supreme dominion over the rank of the artists" ("eine Oberherrschaft ausüben über diesen Stand der Künstler"; KA XIII 172).

These suggestions culminate in a talk that Schlegel delivered at a celebration of the Viennese art academy in 1812, and which was subsequently published as "Prospects for the Arts in the Austrian Imperial State" in his periodical *Deutsches Museum* of that same year. Although nominally concerned with the facilitating role of the state in the public cultivation of the arts, it should come as no surprise that Schlegel shows himself most concerned with painting's religious orientation. Most importantly, Schlegel's talk is above all a plea for the complete integration of art and life, arguing that it is the state's responsibility to cultivate the public in such a way that this can become a reality. In what must have been a rather awkward situation, Schlegel preaches his by now familiar gospel of late medieval German painting in front of not only Metternich, who was the curator of the academy at that point, but also of the classically minded audience that he found in front of him: "The arts must have a general effect and permeate all of life, and despite all its external charm and the variance of its development, it must never quite stray from its first, serious origin." ("Die Kunst muß allgemein wirken, und das ganze Leben durchdringen, und sie darf sich bei allem äußern Reiz und der mannichfaltigsten Entwicklung nie ganz von ihrem ersten, ernsten Ursprung entfernen."; KA IV 227). In other words, what Schlegel is promoting is an aestheticization of life that takes the late German Middle Ages as its model, emphasizing that "no form, no material, no object of life is to be excluded" ("[k]eine Art, kein Stoff, kein Gegenstand des Lebens sei ausgeschlossen"; KA IV 227). It is only in this way, Schlegel argues, that the life of the public can be exalted and their spirit ennobled, urging the state to facilitate the public commission of artworks that not merely befit art's historical orientation, but are also accessible and comprehensible to the public at large, pointing specifically to religious commissions "which are destined for the use of devotion and for the glorification of the churches, [would be] the

most worthy and the most advantageous for art" ("welche zum Gebrauch der Andacht und zur Verherrlichung der Kirchen bestimmt sind, [würde] für die Kunst die würdigsten und die vorteilhafftesten sein"; KA IV 230).

It is at this point that we have come full circle. If the Cologne lectures put the fate and future of the church in the hands of painting's iconic authority, then Schlegel's talk before the Viennese art academy reflects his ambition to put the responsibility of its symbolic fertility in the hands of the Austrian state. Yet this should not deflect us from the fact that the image itself remains empty at heart. An emptiness that is shrouded by the economic apparatus of the church, but which nonetheless shines through at certain moments when the alleged unity between religion and belief breaks down. For example, at those moments when the symbol or painting, which Schlegel identified with the system of belief itself, reveals itself to be nothing but a "mere instrument of preaching" ("bloß Werkzeug der Verkündigung"; KA XIX 306 #87). It is at moments like these that we get a glimpse of what is perhaps the ultimate secret at the heart of Schlegel's economy, namely his relapse into dogma, the universal call for power which does not shy away from sacrificing the truth.

vi. Conclusion

Although Napoleon was not a religious man, he did believe in the spiritual dimension of power, and the legitimacy that any association with the divine could give to his reign. In fact, the semblance of divine sanctioning was important enough for him to decide that his coronation in 1804 would have to take place in the famous cathedral of the Notre Dame in Paris, even though his personal preferences were more in favor of Les Invalides. Encouraged by his advisors and ministers, Napoleon got convinced in the months preceding the coronation that it was important for the new emperor to appear as holy to the public eye, abolishing the separation between heaven and earth as no mere mortal could

ever do (Rowe, "Die Sichtbarkeit der Macht: Symbolische Repräsentation von Herrschaft im napoleonischen Kaiserreich" 369).

What seemed more sincere were the imperial connections with which Napoleon wanted to enshrine his rule. To be sure, Napoleon's Charlemagne was certainly not Schlegel's. What mattered to him was not the Holy, but the Roman and the Empire. After earlier having visited Aachen where he kneeled in front of the throne of Charlemagne, Notre Dame on the day of the coronation was adorned with imperial relics that left no doubt in which lineage Napoleon wanted to situate himself, containing Charlemagne's sword, the scepter of Charles V with an insignia of Charlemagne, and a replica of the latter's crown which was made especially for the occasion (Dwyer 49).

Although Napoleon's coronation thus marked the unison of religious and imperial symbolics of power, both ultimately served the same purpose, namely that of guaranteeing the legitimacy of the newly crowned emperor. That the religious aspects of these ultimately stood in the service of political legitimation becomes all the more clear from the Imperial Catechism that Napoleon commissioned in 1806. Although officially intended to establish order and uniformity to Catholic devotional practices, what the document eventually preached was not so much religious custom but rather the gospel of the state and its new emperor. Moreover, as the art historian Jonathan P. Ribner narrates, it was Napoleon himself who wrote an addendum to the instruction of the fourth commandment, instructing the publisher to mark the written passage with an asterisk to highlight its importance. If one was to honor one's father and mother, as the commandment demanded, Napoleon wanted the reader to know that the emperor himself had to be thanked since "God, who creates empires and distributes them according to his will, in lavishing gifts on our emperor . . . has established him as our sovereign, has rendered him minister of his might and his image on Earth. To honor and serve our emperor is thus to honor and serve God Himself" (qtd. in Ribner 43).

What we find in this passage is the political-theological model of sovereign power in full ornate. Perhaps most striking about Napoleon's addendum are especially the strong iconic overtones that the last sentence conveys. However, since the mediating function of Christ, the Virgin, or any other saint has been replaced by the secular figure of the sovereign, there can be no doubt that we have left the economic paradigm, and find ourselves in the company of an emperor who only finds his equal in God. In fact, the Imperial Catechism was a deliberate attempt on Napoleon's part to silence the liberal and democratic values that had inspired the French Revolution, and eventually led, among the bloodshed and terror, to the Civil Code that was established in 1804. With the Imperial Catechism, Napoleon partly sought to undo these events by situating himself within the European monarchal tradition, directly legitimating his own rule through the traditional emphasis on divine right (Dwyer 56).

These events were only one part of a more extensive campaign to submit the legislative powers to Napoleon's will. That the French Civil Code would be renamed after the emperor in 1807, only marked the end point of this trajectory, which had started as early as 1802 when Napoleon, who in the same year appointed himself as First Consul for life, indirectly seized power over the constitution through the Senate. It was especially with the appointment of Napoleon's confidant Louis de Fontanes as president of the legislative chamber in 1804 that he practically seized executive power and control over the law, only further confirming his absolutist intentions that same year by openly remarking that he was the constituent power himself (Ribner 35–38).

It should therefore not come as a surprise that the Palais Bourbon, where the legislative body assembled, was increasingly adorned with portraits and paintings that underscored the emperor's control over the law. One of the paintings intended to fulfill this task was Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres' famous portrait of *Napoleon on his Imperial Throne* from 1806. Showing the emperor on his

imperial throne, the art historian Albert Boime interpreted the work as an overt assault on the social reforms that informed the French Revolution (51). And Ribner even argued that the work, with its extensive display of imperial regalia and the rod with the hand of justice at the top, "offers an unblushing expression of the emperor's domination over the Legislative Body" (40). At the same time, the painting offers a compressed representation of the symbolics of power that were on display during the coronation two years earlier. Napoleon is wearing his coronation robes, and carries all the imperial regalia that accompanied him during the coronation, including Charlemagne's sword and the scepter of Charles the fifth. Moreover, with the illusion of the frontality of the icon and its deliberate archaic style, Ingres's painting was not so much an attempt to move art four hundred years back in time, as one contemporary critic noted (Boime 52), but above all an allusion to a bygone political era of imperial dynasty and divine rule that Napoleon actively sought to revive.

However, as Robert Rosenblum has argued, perhaps the most obvious reference in the painting was to Jan van Eyck's *Ghent Altarpiece* from 1432, which was one of Napoleon's trophies that was then on display in the Musée Napoleon (60). Modelling the emperor on the figure of God the Father in van Eyck's famous work, the painting immediately underscored the connection between emperor and God, which must have been obvious to many a visitor of the Salon in 1806 where Ingres's painting was first displayed. Although the art historians Todd Porterfield and Susan Siegfried have argued that Ingres's portrait therefore evokes the Christian iconic tradition (106), it must be said that precisely the opposite is the case. Taking a closer look at van Eyck's original, it is hard to miss the explicit rendering of the trinity in the Ghent altarpiece. When we shift attention from the representation of God the Father to the central panel below, it becomes immediately clear that the dove, as symbol of the Holy Spirit, is situated directly under the Father's feet, with the symbolic representation of Christ as lamb immediately under it. Moreover, the fountain of life that arises from the bottom of painting at eye-

level draws the viewer's attention to the central vertical axis of the painting where the three persons of the trinity are located, and around which the whole painting revolves. Turning back to Ingres's painting, we find that van Eyck's emphasis on the trinity has collapsed into unity. What the painting presents is a portrait of the emperor that is modeled on God the Father alone, thereby placing itself in the imperial cult of imperial representation of the Christian Roman Empire that is governed, as Susan Buck-Morss explains, by a "mimetic logic of correspondences: one God, one Emperor, uniting church and empire into a single world, a single historical narrative, and a single visual economy" (183).

In his brief essay "The Sovereignty of the Artist," Ernst Kantorowicz explicitly ties the imperial model of sovereignty to the cult of the painter as a God-like figure, the origins of which he locates with the emergence of Renaissance humanism in Italy. Pointing to the close interaction between the domains of law and the arts in the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance, Kantorowicz suggests that the analogy between painter and God finds its origin in medieval notions of sovereignty (352–53). Showing that late medieval legal texts imbued the sovereign with the God-like quality to create new laws *ex nihilo* out of divine inspiration, he traces how this model eventually spread to poets such as Dante and Petrarch, before it eventually found its way to the painterly discourse of the Renaissance, from where it became a common trope which also infused Schlegel's earliest writings on painting and poetry, as we have seen (359–60). If we follow Kantorowicz's interpretation to its logical conclusion, it immediately follows that Schlegel's emphasis on creation, the artist, and invention all participate in the same discourse of sovereign power as Napoleon's ascent to imperial absolutism. That is to say that the sovereignty of art in Schlegel's first contributions finds its mirror-image in Ingres's art of sovereignty, and the imperial cult of the emperor, making it perhaps all the more understandable why his increased opposition to Napoleon's politics was accompanied by a radical departure from his early Romantic theory of art.

Finding himself in French territory at the moment of the Cologne lectures, Schlegel was well aware of the risks that public criticism on Napoleon entailed. This explains why his Cologne writings contain only a few direct references to Napoleon, which is not to say that criticism is altogether absent. When Schlegel targets Napoleon, he often does so in tacit and concealed terms, and without directly mentioning his name (Anstett, "Intro to KA XIV" XII). In his commentary to these lectures, Anstett points to a few of these moments, referring specifically to Schlegel's negative allusions to despotism and absolute rule in his discussion on politics in the Cologne lectures on philosophy. As Anstett explains, these allusions point to what was Schlegel's most fundamental criticism of Napoleon around this time, namely the absolute division between secular and spiritual power that he recognized in Napoleon's absolutism, the surrendering of all ties between the Empire and the Roman Church (KA XIII 459). In fact, one of the most critical distinctions between Charlemagne and Napoleon consisted for Schlegel in the fact that the former's empire was legitimated by the Roman Church, whereas, as Ingres's painting clearly shows, Napoleon sought his legitimation directly in God. For Schlegel, Napoleon thus stood for a model of sovereignty that had discarded the constitutive role of the Church altogether, thereby coming to depend on alternative forms of representation for the legitimation of power. It is in this respect that art came to fulfill an important role in Napoleon's politics on a both a profane and spiritual level (Boime 52). Whereas the Musée Napoleon under Vivant-Denon underscored France hegemony as Europe's foremost cultural and political power, the art of painting also offered him the opportunity to legitimate his reign on the basis of divine right.

For Schlegel, the confrontation with Napoleon and France was not merely a political, but a spiritual and religious battle. What his intellectual output in the period between 1804 and 1812 suggests is the idea of counter-revolution by means of the image. By reconceiving painting in such a way that it no longer merely offers a legitimation of power, but is actually able to diffuse it, Schlegel's iconic

turn is nothing but a call for another iconoclastic controversy with strong Byzantine overtones, placing the emperor against the church, politics against economy, painting against the icon once again. It is perhaps in this light that we should understand Schlegel's comments on Byzantine iconoclasm in the notebooks from 1811, maintaining that "the question of image worship is one of the most important issues for all mankind" (Die Frage d[er] Bilderverehrung ist eine der wichtigsten für die ganze Menschheit"; KA XX 327 #529).

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