Schelling: art as the ‘organ of philosophy’

Nature and philosophy

One of the great issues which divides thinkers in modernity is the status of ‘nature’. If nature can no longer be said to have a theological basis, what determines how we are to understand what nature is? Kant’s ambivalence with regard to ‘nature’ suggest why this issue creates so much controversy. On the one hand, nature ‘in the formal sense’ is simply that which functions in terms of necessary laws, and is therefore the object of natural science; on the other, in the form of organisms and as an object of beauty, nature appears to have purposes which cannot be explained by what we can know. Similarly, we ourselves are to be understood deterministically as natural objects, but are supposed to be self-determining as free beings. The question therefore arises as to whether there is a link between ‘intelligible’ human freedom and the possible purposiveness of nature. The temptation is then to make a direct link between the fact that we can see nature as beautiful and the fact that we can produce art objects which possess a similar status to beautiful nature. However, the possibility of this link only adds to the ambivalences to which Kant gives rise. Kant himself is insistent that beauty is purely a matter of the subject’s feeling, which would seem to render any such link invalid, but at the same time, as we saw in his account of reflective judgement, he thinks that the very capacities which enable us to make judgements of beauty are also required for us to be able to communicate the results of apprehending nature objectively.

Where, though, do such capacities come from, given that we have developed as a part of the rest of nature? Fichte’s response to this problem is, as we saw, to make the very ground of nature ultimately ‘subjective’, because an explanation of how a merely mechanical nature could give rise to self-determining subjectivity otherwise appears impossible. The problem with his account of the ‘absolute I’ was that the I seemed to have to be unconscious, if it was not to be relative to its intentional object and thus dependent in a manner which contradicts its absolute status. Furthermore, Fichte leaves open the question whether we can understand the I directly, through the awareness of our own unconditioned mental action in ‘intellectual intuition’, or whether the idea of grasping the absolute I is merely regulative, generated by the need of practical reason to go

beyond the world of the understanding. Fichte also tends to regard nature merely as an undeveloped aspect of the highest principle, while at the same time suggesting that what drives the highest principle is itself not available to discursive philosophy. He consequently suggests that the conscious I has an unconscious basis, and it is this idea which will be crucial to Schelling's influential account of nature.

In parts of his philosophy before 1800 Schelling follows something like Fichte's position. Even in this period, though, he works on the idea that, because the activity of the I is in some sense 'natural', nature itself is not just dead objectivity which is to be given life by the I. A particularly acid comment by Schelling in a letter to Fichte (1801), not long before they broke off their correspondence, makes clear why he moves against Fichte's conception of the I's relationship to nature by this time:

I am thoroughly aware of how small an area of consciousness nature must fall into, according to your conception of it. For you nature has no speculative significance, only a teleological one. But are you really of the opinion, for example, that light is only there so that rational beings can also see each other when they talk to each other, and that air is there so that when they hear each other they can talk to each other? (ed. Schulz 1968 p. 140)

By 1806 he becomes even more critical of Fichte: 'in the last analysis what is the essence of [Fichte's] whole opinion of nature? It is this: that nature should be used . . . and that it is there for nothing more than to be used; his principle, according to which he looks at nature, is the economic-teleological principle' (Schelling I/7 p. 17).

It is not hard to see, even from these brief comments, how Schelling has claims to be one of the first serious ecological thinkers in modernity, and his ideas will be echoed by Heidegger, Horkheimer and Adorno, Ernst Bloch, Hans Jonas and many others, most of whom were influenced by him. His criticisms of Fichte suggest how philosophies of self-consciousness can come to be regarded, as Heidegger will regard them, as philosophies of 'subjectification' which reduce being solely to the measure of the human.¹ Schelling's counter to Fichte, which impressed the young Karl Marx, is that the forces of the I as he conceives it are forces which *depend* on nature. Nature cannot in this sense be seen as simply being there to be dominated, because such domination could, as Horkheimer and Adorno will claim, lead to domination of ourselves as part of nature. As we have seen, a conception of nature of this kind tends in this period, to be connected to aesthetics. The genius as conceived by Kant had the law of its production given to it by nature, and Kant saw beauty as 'purposiveness without purpose' because it involved a disinterested relationship to the object, thereby possibly revealing something fundamental about our place in a teleologically constituted nature. Schelling's suspicion of Fichte is connected to this side of Kant's third Critique, but his philosophical alternative to Fichte faces a revealing problem, which is the source of many of the ambiguities in his work.

For the philosophers who come after Kant and who regard Kant as having decisively changed the project of philosophy, a fall back into 'dogmatism', the assumption of an inherent pre-existing order of things which grounds philosophy, must be avoided. At the same time, Kant's separation of the knowable world of appearances from unknowable things in themselves left the notorious problem of how those things were supposed to cause representations, and was therefore seen as leading to an implausible dualism. During the 'Panththeism Controversy' initiated by Jacobi in 1783, the monist philosophy of Spinoza came to public attention and it seemed to many thinkers to offer a way of getting over Kantian dualisms because it claimed there could only be one substance, which was both extended and thinking. On the other hand, Spinoza's philosophy failed to answer vital questions regarding the emergence of the crucial anti-dogmatic notion of self-determining subjectivity.² Schelling's early work is therefore an attempt to square the circle by reconciling Kant, seen through the eyes of Fichte, with Spinoza, by finding a route between 'Criticism' and 'Dogmatism', a project he characterises in terms of a reconciliation of Idealism and Realism, or of transcendental philosophy and *Naturphilosophie*. The main problem this involves is the primacy of the two approaches in relation to each other. Prioritising transcendental philosophy avoids dogmatism, but at the expense of rendering nature secondary to the I, and thus giving rise to Fichte's problems. *Naturphilosophie* gives an account of the I's ground in material nature, but seems to have to rely on dogmatic premises to do so – if nature can only be known under the conditions inherent in the I, what right does one have to suggest we have access to nature in itself?

The essential idea of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* is that, in the same way as the I of self-consciousness is both active and yet can try to reflect upon itself as an object, nature is both actively 'productive' (in the sense of Spinoza's *natura naturans*) and is made up of objective 'products' (*natura naturata*). The understanding deals with transient 'products' and is consequently confined within the limits of determinate cognition; *Naturphilosophie* tries to theorise nature's 'productivity', without which there would be no products, and thus goes beyond what science can know, which is always particular and finite, to what is 'infinite'. This idea can be made to sound less implausible if one considers the fact that the material in which a living thing is instantiated is in one sense less significant than its 'idea', which constitutes what it is by combining matter into the particular kind of organism it is. The actual matter of the living thing is constantly being replaced, without the thing losing its identity – Schelling uses the metaphor of the eddies in a stream which are filled by different water but retain their shape. Science now tells us that once the 'idea' of an organism is in existence it is transmitted chemically in the form of DNA, but DNA does not explain the emergence of organisms in the first instance, and it is precisely the emergence and development of an articulated nature which then develops into living organisms that makes sense of the idea of nature as a 'productivity'. Schelling's idea is, then, to link the intelligibility of the matter in nature, which can become

part of self-regulating organisms, with the self-determining nature of thought which can carry out purposes in the world. Without such a link it is, Schelling thinks, unclear how we could truly know anything about what there is, or affect the relationships between the elements of what there is. He therefore talks of nature's reaching its highest goal of 'becoming completely objective to itself' in man . . . 'or more generally' in 'reason, through which nature first completely returns into itself, and through which it becomes manifest that nature is originally identical with what is known in us as intelligent and conscious' (I/3 p. 341).

Schelling attempts to address the identity of the processes of nature with the processes of thought in terms now more familiar from Freud. Nature is described as being 'unconsciously' productive, and 'mind' as being 'consciously' productive. Manfred Frank and Gerhard Kurz suggest that 'Freud and Schelling both presume that consciousness means becoming conscious, a fragile synthesis of voluntary and involuntary motivations, and that this consciousness, like existence in general, is only to be grasped as the memory of a dark, never fully recoverable basis' (ed. Frank and Kurz 1975 p. 41). This conception does not, however, make Schelling an irrationalist: 'Schelling's concept of reason is enlightened about itself. Reason is not the Other of nature, it is its – undeveloped – part' (p. 42). His essential argument can be interpreted as establishing a link between Fichte's notion of the 'thetic judgement', in which 'the place of the predicate is left empty to infinity for the possible determination of the I', and the notion of nature as subject, whose ever renewed and destroyed 'products' are the predicates of the productivity. Schelling attempts to envisage nature as subject via the following argument, which, as we shall see in Chapter 8, recurs in an unacknowledged way in Schopenhauer: 'As the object is never absolute [*unbedingt*] then something *per se* non-objective must be posited in nature; this absolutely non-objective postulate is precisely the original productivity of nature' (Schelling I/3 p. 284). The I of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* is seen as the highest principle of philosophy, and thus as the highest 'potential' (*Potenz*) of nature: without it nature would be 'blind'. However, the *Wissenschaftslehre* in Fichte's sense is only 'philosophy about philosophy' (I/4 p. 85). It is based upon the functioning of the I as *already* the highest principle, which attempts to 'intuit' itself.

Schelling comes to believe that the I in this sense presupposes a prior unconscious history in nature. In the essay 'On the True Concept of *Naturphilosophie* and the Correct Way to Solve its Problems' (1801), in which Schelling completes his move away from Fichte, he asserts that, in order to gain access to such a history, one needs to subtract the conscious attributes of the I. By abstracting from the conscious I one is then left with the '*purely objective*' (I/4 p. 86), which gives the 'concept of the pure subject-object (= nature), only from this do I raise myself up to the subject-object of consciousness (= I)' (I/4 p. 86). The conscious I, then, emerges from unconscious, but not inert, nature. This happens because '*That pure subject-object is already determined for action by its*

nature (the contradiction it has in itself)' (I/4 p. 90). The contradiction in question is the dynamic principle of living nature, which forces things beyond themselves, so that their identity as living things is dependent upon becoming what they are not. This principle then develops to its highest point, the conscious I, which is the light with which nature reveals its inner nature to itself, as light reveals external nature. There is, though, now no absolute difference between inner and outer, so a Kantian dualism is avoided. As Wolfram Hogrebe has suggested, the problem is how this claim is to be established:

However plausible it initially seems to be that the world which has produced a knowing being (*Wesen*) has to be thought in such a way that the producing forces are in the last analysis also capable of such a result, it is still problematic that these forces are supposed to be of the same kind as what they have produced. (Hogrebe 1989 p. 54)

Despite many valiant attempts throughout his career, Schelling will not succeed in carrying out his metaphysical programme, as can be suggested by his remark in his late philosophy that 'our self-consciousness is not at all the consciousness of that nature which has passed through everything, it is precisely just *our* consciousness [. . .] for the consciousness of man is not = the consciousness of nature [. . .] Far from man and his activity making the world comprehensible, man himself is that which is most incomprehensible' (Schelling II/3 pp. 5–7). Despite the philosophical failure to carry out the programme, his attempts in his early work to do so open up vital new perspectives on a post-theological nature.

For Schelling natural products are limitations of an infinite productivity, 'intuitions' of nature by itself: each thing is what it is via its limiting of other things and via their limiting of it. The ultimate ground of the finite product is therefore a 'Dionysian' reality: 'The . . . idea of something absolutely formless which cannot be represented anywhere as determinate material is nothing but the symbol of nature approaching the productivity. – The nearer it is to productivity the nearer it is to formlessness' (I/3 p. 298). The seeds of a Schopenhauerian or Nietzschean view of the foundation of nature are present here and the basic idea will be further developed by Schelling in his philosophy from 1809 onwards, which is the source of key ideas in Schopenhauer. Both Schopenhauer and Nietzsche associate the kind of view suggested by Schelling with the idea that the Will or Dionysus is the essential generative force in art. This force depends upon particular forms to be manifest, in a manner analogous to the way the productivity relates to its determinate products: like Freud's id the productivity cannot appear as itself. Unlike Schelling, though, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche tend to regard rational attempts to articulate the relationship between the ground of nature and its consequences as a form of self-deception, because reason is seen as always subverted by a ground which escapes it, rather than being a necessary, though perhaps finally unfulfillable, task.

At this time Schelling himself tries to construct a philosophy which would

be 'One uninterrupted row which ascends from the most simple in nature to the highest and most complex, the work of art' (I/4 p. 89), though he will later develop a much more conflictual vision of how differentiation in nature functions (see Bowie 1993 Chapter 5). His investment in a view of nature which considers the best way of understanding our place in it not to be located in natural science but rather in art has again become important in the light of contemporary concerns about science's relationship to the ecological crisis, and of growing concerns about scientism. John McDowell sees the problem with scientism as follows: 'When we ask the metaphysical question whether reality is what science can find out about, we cannot, without begging the question, restrict the materials for an answer to those that science can countenance' (McDowell 1998 p. 72). Schelling is one of the first to take up this metaphysical question in a serious way in modernity, and he does so in a manner which, despite many now obsolete features and untenable arguments, still has resonances for contemporary thought.

The crucial question posed by the Schelling of the *STI* is how art relates to philosophy, a question which has recently reappeared in post-structuralism and in aspects of pragmatism. In the contemporary reflections on this question the relationship between art and philosophy is often linked to a wider criticism of traditional metaphysics, which is understood as the attempt either to establish the ground of subjectivity or to use subjectivity as the ground of philosophy. This link is not overtly made at the end of the eighteenth century, but the tension between Idealist and Romantic conceptions suggests both how reflections on aesthetics can come to be linked to certain criticisms of metaphysics, and how the failure of the attempt to ground subjectivity leads to ideas echoed in contemporary thought. In the *System Programme* it was claimed that art and beauty manifest the connection between the sensuous and the intelligible, thereby making into a metaphysical certainty what Kant had cautiously postulated in the *CJ*. This claim is the core of an Idealist view of aesthetics, contrasting with the Romantic view, in which, as we saw in Novalis, art only gives a negative sense of the absolute, thus putting a positive metaphysical account of the ground of subjectivity into question. Schelling's work is often uneasily located between Idealist and Romantic views, and this is particularly apparent in the *STI*. Despite all its failings, this text does provide important arguments as to why a modern conception of reason should include an adequate account of aesthetics. In doing so it offers an alternative to Hegel's contentions, to be considered in Chapter 5, that modern philosophy has gone beyond art and that philosophy's main task now lies elsewhere. Adorno says of the contrast between Schelling and Hegel: 'When Schelling declared art to be the organ of philosophy he unintentionally admitted what the great Idealist speculation otherwise kept silent or, in the interests of its self-preservation, denied; accordingly Schelling also, as one knows, did not carry through his own thesis of identity [of subject and object] as relentlessly as Hegel' (Adorno 1973 p. 511). This contrast will frequently concern us in the coming chapters.

The development of consciousness

The 1800 *STI* attempts something which is characteristic of Kant's successors, but which Kant did not countenance. Kant's restriction of the idea of transcendental idealism to the a priori forms of intuition, space and time, in the Transcendental Aesthetic prevents him from assuming that transcendental idealism could form a complete philosophical system. From Fichte onwards the problem of the relationship between the passive side of intuition and the active side of concepts leads to the attempt to extend the notion of transcendental idealism to the whole of a philosophical system by giving a genetic account of both spontaneous and receptive sides of thinking (see Zöller 1998). The *STI* has an ambiguous relationship to Fichte's philosophy, which is occasioned by Schelling's attempt to reconcile Spinozism with Idealism: 'philosophy must set out either to make an intelligence out of nature or a nature out of intelligence' (Schelling I/3 p. 342). By the time of the essay 'On the True Concept of *Naturphilosophie* and the Correct Way to Solve its Problems' Schelling is emphatic that the *Naturphilosophie* he sees as lacking in Fichte is the *prior* philosophy because it describes the ascent of nature to the highest potential, the thinking I, which can then be considered in the 'transcendental philosophy' in the manner of the *Wissenschaftslehre*. The *STI* tries, somewhat unsatisfactorily and not always consistently, to keep *Naturphilosophie* and 'transcendental philosophy' on an equal footing. In the *STI* the 'transcendental philosophy' tries to explain how it is that 'life', the infinite 'productivity' of the *Naturphilosophie*, comes to the point of being able to think about itself at all, in 'a continuous becoming-object-to-itself of the subjective' (I/3 p. 345). This entails an account of how it is able to find a medium – art – in which it can objectify itself, given that it cannot have access to itself as an object of knowledge, all knowledge being relative to other knowledge. The 'transcendental philosophy' wishes to write what Schelling terms the history of the 'transcendental past' of the I, thus introducing the dimension absent from Kant, which helps open the path for the historicisation of philosophy in the nineteenth century. The fact that the self-conscious I comes to the point of tracing its own past means that the I must be able to become aware, through an act of freedom which is essential to it, of the necessities it depends upon for its own existence. This awareness cannot be derived from a reflexive splitting of the I into knower and known. As Hölderlin and Novalis showed, the I would then be unable to recognise *itself* in the stages which precede self-conscious reflection. Any such split must be grounded in a unity of some kind, and the problem is how one could have access to such a unity. Schelling tries to trace the development of the I in the way that the development of organisms in nature from lower to higher forms can be traced, by showing how the present developed form must have resulted from a previous less developed form, from the objective world of nature as 'only the original, still unconscious poetry of spirit' (I/3 p. 349), to aesthetic production. The *STI* begins with lower forms of spirit, which function in the self-organising – but

not self-conscious – way that natural organisms do, and ascends to the higher forms, culminating in art, in which 'in the subjective, *in consciousness itself*, that at the same time conscious and unconscious activity can be shown' (I/3 p. 349).

The *STI* takes over the assumption, seen in Fichte, that the 'I' must be both subject and object, but questions exactly how this is the case. In his Munich lectures of (probably) 1833–34 (Schelling I/10; Schelling 1994), Schelling looks back at his own philosophical development in relation to Fichte and gives an account of the *STI* which sometimes makes more sense than the original text does – by this time Schelling is clearer about what he thinks is wrong in Fichte. Fichte had seen the 'imagination', in the Kantian sense of the faculty that produces schemata in the subject which are processed as objectivity by the understanding, as the source of our awareness of an 'external' world. His argument is strange but consistent. For Fichte the producer cannot see itself producing whilst in the act of production: 'Hence our firm conviction of the reality of the things outside us, and without any contribution on our part, because we do not become conscious of the capacity for their production' (Fichte 1971 I p. 234). Schelling is suspicious of the manner in which Fichte makes the act of the I into an absolute act which generates subject and object: 'With this self-positing: I am, the world begins for every individual, this act is in everyone the immediately eternal, timeless beginning both of themselves and of the world' (Schelling I/10 p. 90). For the later Schelling this act has a history because the world of hard external necessity produced by the I is produced by something in the I which is not dependent upon its '*will*', but rather upon its (therefore unconscious) '*nature*'.

The initial Fichtean move is, Schelling thinks, unquestionable as a way of getting beyond Spinozism, but is actually little more than an extension of Descartes: 'it is no doubt the case that the external world is only there for me in so far as I myself am there at the same time and am conscious of myself' (I/10 p. 93). The *existence* of the 'I think', however, does not warrant the assumption that everything else exists because I, as empirical, reflecting subject, exist: 'the *already conscious* I cannot in any way produce the world' (I/10 p. 93). The fact that my 'already conscious I' cannot produce the world does not mean that the pre-conscious 'I', the I of 'productivity' which has a history of 'unconscious' development leading to my particular conscious I, could not. For Schelling it is clear that one cannot use the reflexive I – the I that thinks about itself thinking – to get to the idea of the external world: 'Nothing, though, prevented one going back with this "I" which is *now* conscious within me to a moment where it was not yet conscious of itself, – nothing prevented one assuming a region beyond my *now present* consciousness and an activity which does not itself come but rather only comes via its result into consciousness' (I/10 p. 93). The result is what is seen by the individual I as the 'external' world, but it is not external in a Cartesian sense, because the very possibility of my thinking at all depends upon this activity, the self-contradicting, self-limiting aspect of nature: 'coming to consciousness and being limited is one and the same . . . the limiting activity

falls outside all consciousness . . . Limitation must appear as independent of me because I can only look at my being-limited, never the activity by which it is posited' (I/3 p. 390). This activity is what I depend on to be and to think at all, so it cannot finally be separate from me, even though I have no cognitive access to it.

The 'imagination' itself therefore has a history: the actions which lead to its development can be traced by reflection upon the actions it now performs. This history starts from the lowest form of sensation, in which there is a difference between one thing and its other, and rises to the highest point of being able to reflect philosophically upon the relationship of thinking to what exists. Philosophy, argues Schelling, in a view usually attributed to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, must be concerned with retracing the process that has led us to reflection upon this world that feels external to us, and yet of which we are a part. This makes philosophy into a history of what consciousness has *become*: 'this coming-to-itself that expresses itself in the I am presupposes a having-been-*outside* and -away from itself' (I/10 p. 94). Schelling stresses the fact that the I which is prior to my consciousness is not yet an individual, self-determining I; it only becomes this in each of us in the process of 'coming-to-itself'. Most importantly in the present context, he attributes a central role to art as the means of proposing his argument.

Schelling links natural 'activity', which he sees as 'unconscious', with what the human will does in acting in the world: 'the activity by which the objective world is produced' should be 'originally identical with that which expresses itself in willing, and vice versa' (I/3 p. 348). The difference is that the will involves conscious reflection upon what it produces – think of Marx's comment about the difference between a bee and even the most unskilled builder who builds a house. Schelling therefore seeks a medium in which the 'unconscious activity' of nature and the conscious activity of our thinking can be shown to have the same source. This medium cannot simply be located in conscious thinking about thinking, because the activity in question has to be connected to the unconscious activity of the rest of nature. The *STI* insists that the absolute must include both the development of nature and the process of reflection, hence the concern to unite *Naturphilosophie* and transcendental philosophy. Schelling's aim is to overcome the split between theoretical philosophy, in which nature is the apparently external world, and practical philosophy, in which the actions of the I in Fichte's sense are central.

Philosophy needs some form of 'intellectual intuition' to get beyond the difficulties in Kant's transcendental deduction, but this intuition cannot just consist in thought's immediate grasping of itself in the act of thinking. Philosophy has to include the activity of nature which leads to our being able to think at all. Schelling tries to show that consciousness itself involves both conscious, reflexive, *and* unconscious activity. This fact could not be revealed, as it is for Fichte, solely by reflection which relies on a 'direct inner intuition' (I/3 p. 350) of the activity of our thinking, because that can only be an intuition of

what is conscious. In Schelling the subject is 'decentred', and needs to 'remember' what has gone on in nature that is continued in its reflection, but on a different level. The following passage from the Munich lectures makes the idea clearer: 'having arrived, then, at the "*I am*", with which its individual life begins, [the I] no longer remembers the path which it has covered so far, for as it is only the end of this path which is consciousness, it (the now individual I) has covered the path unconsciously and without knowing it' (I/10 p. 94). Dieter Jähnig explains: 'As what is to be remembered is something that, before its being remembered, was never "in consciousness", then it obviously cannot be an act of memory that is *only* concerned with consciousness' (Jähnig 1966 p. 233).

Despite many confusing shifts throughout his philosophical career, Schelling always sees a tension in consciousness, which is not fully present to itself – hence his concentration in the *STI* on art as a non-conceptual means of understanding it. Consider the following from the Munich lectures, which takes up matters relating to reflection theory in a manner reminiscent of Hölderlin and Novalis: 'But the subject can never grasp itself *as* what it Is, for precisely in attracting itself [*im sich Anziehen*, which has the sense of 'putting on' what one is] it *becomes* an other, this is the basic contradiction, we can say the misfortune in all being' (Schelling I/10 p. 101). As soon as one has related oneself to the Other there must be a tension between what one was before this relation and the fact that one has now irrevocably become something different, in the manner of the move in Lacan from the imaginary to the symbolic. The interrogations of the concept of the subject in Western philosophy characteristic of some recent philosophy, particularly in certain areas of post-structuralism, evidently ignore the complexity of the concept of the subject in Schelling and the thinkers considered in Chapter 3.³

In the *STI* the lack of transparency of the subject to itself is linked to the notion of unconscious productivity, which can never be directly accessible in philosophical thinking. The productivity of nature is, as we saw, 'originally identical' with that of our will, so the products of nature 'will have to appear as products of an activity that is both *conscious and unconscious*' (I/3 p. 249). Nature appears *both* as produced in a manner analogous to the conscious, willed production of an object – in organisms which 'give the law to themselves' as we do in practical reason – *and* as a blind mechanism – when its deterministic laws are the object of inquiry. Nature is '*purposeful without being explicable in terms of purposes*' (I/3 p. 249). The echo of Kant's third Critique, where *beauty* was '*purposiveness without a purpose*', suggests how Schelling is attempting to link natural teleology and aesthetics in a more substantial manner than Kant had done. For Schelling we can understand nature as both organism and blind mechanism via an activity which is both conscious and unconscious: aesthetic activity. Philosophy's reliance on 'intellectual intuition', in the sense of thinking about thinking, is itself an active process, but it is directed inwards, not towards an object, 'whereas the production in art is directed outwards, in order to reflect the unconscious through products' (I/3 p. 351). Art therefore becomes

the 'document' and 'organ' of philosophy, turning what otherwise must remain inaccessible to us into 'intuitable' objects.

The *STI* is a difficult work, not least because it tries to tell a story for which there can be no direct evidence. It extends the understanding of consciousness in ways which will never be reducible to an explanatory theory, thereby already pointing to a major strand of modern thought. The story is the story of consciousness, *including what happens before self-consciousness*. Odo Marquard has pointed out the analogies of this project to what Freud was to attempt one hundred years later in the *Interpretation of Dreams* (in eds Frank and Kurz 1975). Schelling and Freud share a model which entails both conscious and unconscious aspects. Both use the notion of 'drive' (what Schelling also calls 'activity') which is limited, 'repressed' (Schelling uses the term '*verdrängt*'). Repression makes possible the development of the conscious mind, which is thereby divided within itself, cannot directly satisfy itself, and cannot have direct access to its own history. It 'only finds in its consciousness as it were the monuments, the memorials of that path, not the path itself' (I/10 pp. 94–5). The task of 'science' is therefore an 'anamnesis' of what precedes our conscious reflections. In Freud this takes place in order to reveal the repressed aspects of the self which lead to the neuroses of the present. In Schelling what is required is a way of coming to terms with the apparent division in the I between nature and reflection, receptivity and spontaneity, which he thinks can be transcended in the work of art. Without the process Schelling describes we would not be able to arrive at the point of reflection from which the story of the 'progressive history of self-consciousness' (I/3 p. 331) is told. The difference between Schelling and Hegel will be that Schelling, even at this early stage of his work, does not think philosophy, 'science', can grasp the absolute in a fully articulated manner. For Hegel this will entail a failure to carry out the 'exertion of the concept', the totalising philosophical reflection necessary to reveal the *conceptual* truth about art.

Schelling does not sustain the emphatic view of art of the *STI* in his later writings. However, as Hartmut Scheible puts it, Schelling's 'determined emphasis on intuition over the concept . . . is historically necessary in order to counteract a process which Plessner has described as the "gradual separation of intuition and conceptualisation" in our dealing with nature' (Scheible 1984 p. 264). Schelling therefore plays an important role in establishing some of the bases for subsequent hermeneutic questioning of the scientistic claim that natural science represents the only kind of truth possible about nature. The separation of intuition from the conceptualisation of nature in modern natural science can also be seen in terms of the growing dominance of 'instrumental reason', which concentrates merely upon ways of manipulating nature for human purposes, without considering how this fits into a more holistic conception of our relationship to nature. In its extreme form the suspicion of the effects of natural science can go as far as the claim that there may be, as Wittgenstein will later maintain, 'nothing good or desirable about scientific knowledge' and

that, if this is the case, 'humankind which strives after it is running into a trap' (Wittgenstein 1980 p. 56). Schelling does not ever countenance this degree of suspicion of scientific knowledge, but he does help open up alternative perspectives on understanding just what that knowledge is, of the kind echoed in the work of Nietzsche and Heidegger. Seen in this light, Schelling's philosophy can be linked to Adorno's attempt to trace the pathologies of modernity via reflection upon the subject's relationship to internal and external nature, in which reflection upon art also plays a major role. Schelling's history of the development of consciousness, then, contains the seeds of a questioning of aspects of modern science that will be vital to subsequent aesthetic theory. Let us now look in more detail at the *STI*.

Intuition and concept

The main terminological difficulty in understanding the *STI* lies in its frequent use of words referring to self-consciousness, or the I, which have divergent meanings. The essential distinction, which we observed in Schelling's account of Fichte in the Munich lectures, is between the self-consciousness of ourselves as individuals, which is relative to the object world and tries to grasp itself by reflection, and the absolute 'I' which cannot be grasped with the means of reflection (I shall generally employ 'I' to designate this usage). Schelling's use of the term 'I' for the latter is a residue of his attachment to Fichte. As it does in Fichte, the confusion this generates results from Schelling's using 'I', which suggests the need for a 'not-I' for its determinacy, and thus relies upon a structure entailing a relationship between two terms, to designate the absolute. This leads him to talk also of the 'absolute identity' or 'absolute indifference' of subject and object, and later, when he realises that even this implies a relationship of mutual dependency and determination, of 'being' as the trans-reflexive ground of the subject-object relationship, in something like the sense we observed in Hölderlin's 'Judgement and Being'.

The *STI* goes through the stages required to explain how an 'intelligent', in the sense of differentiated and organised, nature leads to differentiated and organised thinking and free action. The 'I' is termed an 'infinite activity', and the question is how it can be described as such. The problem with any totality is that it cannot describe itself *as* a totality, because the description would have to be external to the totality, thus rendering the totality incomplete. Because any limitation upon it from outside itself would prevent it being absolute the activity must be limited by *itself*: 'If you think of an infinitely producing activity spreading out without resistance then it will produce with infinite speed, its product is a being [i.e. it will all happen at once and be wholly unarticulated], not a becoming. The condition of all becoming is therefore limitation or the barrier [*Schranke*]' (Schelling I/3 p. 383). This limitation enables the totality to become manifest to itself in finite products. It sets a process in motion which, as Manfred Frank puts it, 'fulfils the demand for the infinity of the I (every

barrier which is put up is crossed into infinity) and the demand for finitude (the process will never represent itself in what is not a finite product)' (Frank 1985 p. 90). This corresponds to the basic idea of the *Naturphilosophie*, where the productivity is essential, not the finite products, even though the two are inseparable.

Nature produces 'unconsciously'; our thinking about it, including about ourselves as part of nature, is conscious. The *STI*, as we saw, wishes to assert that art is the medium in which the unity of these two sides can be understood, giving us a sense of our place in the whole of the kind Kant hints at but leaves in the realm of the 'as if' in the *C7*. Philosophy can only postulate the unity in intellectual intuition. Schelling's argument is much the same as in Fichte: 'intellectual intuition presupposes a capacity simultaneously to produce and intuit certain actions of mind, so that the object and the intuition itself are absolutely one . . . But this intellectual intuition is itself an absolutely free act, this intuition cannot therefore be demonstrated it can only be demanded' (Schelling I/3 pp. 369–70). The apparently external 'object world' is seen as part of the process of the I's attempt to 'intuit itself' (*sich anschauen*). In our reflection it appears to us as the Other, but in fact derives from the Same of which we are a part. We cannot 'know' this in the way that we can conceptualise objects of nature in natural science, hence the need for the postulate of intellectual intuition, for a non-conceptual means of understanding our relation to the Other that does not just understand it as a world of conceptualisable objects ontologically separate from us. The further need, though, is for a means which would enable us as free human beings to understand this postulate in a non-cognitive manner. This is why the analysis of art forms the conclusion of the *STI*.

In order to get to the point where art is able to offer this kind of understanding the *STI* goes through various stages of 'intuition', which are the I's attempts to 'see' itself without knowing at the outset that this is what it is doing: 'the I cannot simultaneously intuit and intuit itself as intuiting, thus also not as limiting' (I/3 p. 403). Only at the end of the process is the telos of the process apparent. The argument is basically Fichte's, but the attitude towards nature and the conception of the history of the 'I' are particular to Schelling. The first stage is 'sensation', an initial division within the 'I', whereby difference arises at all within what was previously an undifferentiated One.⁴ After this comes 'productive intuition', in which the infinite activity produces finite products by further splitting itself, thus giving rise to the differentiated material world of nature. Following this comes the stage of 'organisms', living natural beings such as plants, which are 'symbols of the intelligence' (I/3 p. 490) because they are self-determining wholes whose life is their own self-production. The next stage, the act of 'absolute abstraction' (I/3 p. 524), takes one from the world of nature into the realm of consciousness and self-consciousness, and thus initiates a new sequence of development. This stage cannot take place in terms of the kind of necessity encountered in nature, the realm of 'theoretical philosophy', so that 'with regard to [the theoretical philosophy] only the absolute demand remains:

such an action in the intelligence [i.e. absolute abstraction] *should* take place' (I/3 p. 524). The moment of theoretical opacity present here in the emergence of the spontaneity of the will plays a vital role in subsequent philosophy. From Schelling's own later work on human freedom, which still tries to come to terms with the contingency and lack of ground of human freedom, to Schopenhauer, Feuerbach, Marx, Nietzsche and others who espouse what Herbert Schnädelbach has termed 'speculative naturalism', the German Idealist insistence on self-determining freedom is often subordinated to the idea that freedom is grounded in something else, thereby, of course, threatening philosophy with a return to dogmatism. Habermas suggests the resultant 'danger of hypostasising the prius of Nature, Society and History into an in-itself and thus of falling back into a covert pre-critical thinking' (Habermas 1988 p. 47), indicating one reason why concern with the nature of human freedom has remained a live metaphysical issue ever since.

Schelling's basic problem in the *STI* is a version of what concerned Kant: how do concepts relate to what they are concepts of, without the answer generating another implausible dualism or an inarticulable monism? For Schelling, if one asks in a Cartesian manner how concepts located in an isolated consciousness can correspond to objects one has already created an insoluble problem: 'a philosophy which starts with consciousness [in the sense of the separation of subject and object] will therefore never be able to explain that correspondence, neither is it to be explained without original identity, whose principle necessarily lies beyond consciousness' (Schelling I/3 p. 506). Although Schelling employs the problematic notion of correspondence (see the discussion of correspondence theories in Chapter 3), what he, albeit only partially, begins to see here has played a major role in recent moves in analytical philosophy, where the attempt to join a mind conceived of in Cartesian terms and a world conceived of in materialist terms via the intermediary of 'sense-data' is increasingly rejected (see e.g. Putnam 1999).

The problem with sense-data theories is part of what gave rise to Kant's notion of schematism: given that, in sense-data terms, the patterns of data we encounter at different times can never be exactly the same, it becomes impossible to explain how we can see numerically different cases of the same type of object as the same. The notion of schematisation was intended to overcome this problem by providing an intermediary between sensuous particularity and abstract concept, what Schleiermacher will term a 'shiftable' image that can, for example, accommodate both the bonsai and the giant redwood as trees. As we saw, Kant regarded schematism as a 'hidden art in the depths of the human soul' – prompting Novalis's question 'Can I look for a schema for myself, if I am that which schematises?' For Schelling 'The schema . . . is not an idea (*Vorstellung*) that is determined on all sides, but an intuition of the rule according to which a particular object can be produced' (I/3 p. 508). As 'intuition' – in the sense of immediate givenness – rather than as knowledge of a rule, the schema cannot itself be cognitively determined: for that, as Kant made clear, intuitions require

concepts, rules for identifying objects. Schelling also suggests that language's capacity for using a finite number of words to determine an infinite number of possible things depends precisely upon this 'intuition of a rule' – otherwise it becomes impossible to know how one would learn to use a word without getting into a regress of rules for using a word. The *activity* involved in schematism cannot, then, be determined in the way that an object of cognition is determined: it is itself required for the determination – hence Novalis's question. We therefore cannot give a conceptual account of it on the basis of rules which would identify what it is. The impetus towards other forms of access, of the kind offered in aesthetic production, is apparent here. A further area of theoretical opacity gives rise to the next part of the argument.

Schelling links the self-determination of a natural organism to our capacity for self-determination. However, there is a major difference: 'Every plant is completely what it should be, what is free in it is necessary and what is necessary is free. Man is eternally a fragment' (I/3 p. 608). We are determined by inner division: consciousness cannot ground what motivates consciousness, because the motivation derives from the absolute 'I'. In our conscious reflection this 'I' is to become aware of itself as producing unconsciously. This is impossible and only for this reason does the world appear to it as . . . present without its action' (I/3 p. 537), as the 'thing in itself'. We are, though, able to change aspects of the object world and ourselves by actions based on our will, and Schelling links the 'absolute will' of the 'I' with our freedom. There can, however, be no intersubjectively available *proof* of our possession of self-determination: 'What that self-determination is, nobody can explain who does not know it via their own intuition' (I/3 p. 533). The argument is derived from Fichte's attempt to achieve what Kant had not, but now has a different basis and different implications. The implications are central to Schelling's thought and to understanding its difference from that of Hegel, and they point to a fundamental divide in modern philosophy.

Unlike Hegel, Schelling leaves the problem of how to understand freedom open. A dialectic of recognition, of the kind Hegel employs in the *Phenomenology*, that enables me to apprehend my own freedom by acknowledging the other as free subject, cannot, despite Hegel's claims, tell me what my freedom is. If another person demands that I *should* do something, they give me the choice of fulfilling the demand or not. This way the 'action is *explained* if it happens [as a product of my free-will], without its *having* to take place' (I/3 p. 542). Whilst our *consciousness* of having a will does require the other as its object, in order for it to have some means of self-manifestation, this does not explain how we are aware of our will as self-determining. The problem is a version of the problem of reflection that Fichte discovered. I must *already* be pre-reflexively aware of what it is to exercise my freedom, otherwise there would be no way of *understanding* another person's demand that I exercise my freedom in relation to their appeal to my capacity for decision. How would I grasp what they are asking, given that freedom is not something that can appear in the world

that I can learn to understand by observing the behaviour of other beings? Freedom therefore seems to involve an inherent resistance to intersubjectively agreed articulation of the kind required for theoretical knowledge, but this, for Schelling, is precisely its price. Hegel sees the truth of freedom as established by its reflection in the other, which constitutes what it is intersubjectively; even at this early stage in his career Schelling wonders whether the ultimate ground of what we are is really accessible to philosophy in this manner. The implication is that the being of the subject is not something that philosophy can exhaustively describe. The differences over aesthetics between Schelling and Hegel derive from this fundamental contrast.

The 'organ of philosophy'

How, then, does Schelling make art the culmination of the system? The *STI* aims at a view of nature in which our free actions can be in accordance with what happens in both external and internal nature. As we saw, Schelling used the model of the plant in order to suggest a unity of subject and object, freedom and necessity. Human knowledge, on the other hand, can never be completely unified: its very essence lies in its difference from, and simultaneous dependence on its object, which it tries to transcend by grasping the object in the concept. Concepts cannot, though, grasp the totality of an object: the development of science keeps on showing that there is another way of describing any object of inquiry. Furthermore, in the case of organic life, scientific analysis will tend to destroy what is analysed (think of the limits on what is ethically acceptable in certain forms of biological research). The basis of Idealist philosophy is inherent in these aspects of the metaphor of the plant: one can differentiate the reality of the organism into an indeterminate number of different moments, but those moments are also identical as parts of the organism. The identical whole cannot be without the different parts, and the parts cannot be what they are without the whole. The single moment is therefore dependent upon all the others for its ultimate identity. As we saw in the *Naturphilosophie*, 'productivity' takes precedence over the particular product. In the Fichte-influenced terms of the *STI* the question is therefore how the 'last foundation of the harmony of subjective and objective can become objective to the *I itself*' (I/3 p. 610). Schelling seeks a way of recognising, beyond the self-determination to be observed in natural organisms, how our individual productivity and our will can be revealed as being part of the same totality as these organisms, without our surrendering the capacity for self-determination.

The work of art in the *STI* is the 'organ' via which the unity of the theoretical and the practical can be *shown*. Philosophy alone is not able to demonstrate this unity because 'the striving of intelligence to become conscious of its action as such continually fails', which is why 'the world becomes really objective for it' (I/3 pp. 536–7) and requires the endless task of scientific explanation. Art also cannot provide an articulated 'proof' of such unity, but the point of the

argument is precisely to suggest the importance of what art can show that cannot be said by philosophy. The reasons for the significance of music in Romantic thought already begin to become apparent here, though Schelling does not make anything of this in the *STI*. Nature as blind purposiveness, the plant growing into its particular form, constitutes, in the terms of the *STI*, one form of the unity of conscious and unconscious activity. The 'productivity' involved in the growth of the plant does not lead to a random product but to something articulated and organised. At the same time there is nothing in the plant or our cognitive accounts of what the plant is that would explain why the plant takes that particular form.⁵ If we are to get beyond this limitation on what we can know: 'One must therefore be able to show an intuition in the intelligence via which in *one and the same* appearance the I is at the same time conscious and unconscious *for itself*' (I/3 p. 610). In the actions of my will I have awareness for myself of free activity, but this awareness cannot be demonstrated as an event in the appearing objective world. The medium in which philosophy is able to gain access to what otherwise would not be available to it has to include both the cognitive level of our consciousness of objects in the appearing world and the basis of that consciousness in what can never appear as itself.

Natural science for Schelling is an infinite task because each determination of what something is gives rise to new determinations, without there being any way of knowing that the task of determination could finally be completed. Art, in contrast, *already* shows how the two productivities coincide: the conscious intention of the artist to produce an object in the world coincides with the unconscious compulsion of the artist's genius. Art therefore need have no further purpose, because the finite human product embodies a purpose which cannot be cognitively grasped, but only intuited. This product involves something like the purposiveness of the organism. In contrast to the organism, though, the product involves the further aspect that its real purpose is *manifest* to those who understand the object as a work of art, thus as a combination of the subjective and the objective which overcomes the split between them.

Although Schelling clearly attributes a hyperbolic role to art in the *STI*, his reasons for doing so remain significant for philosophy and aesthetic theory at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The question for Schelling is how one is to make any *sense* of the unity of subject and object from our perspective as finite, striving, divided individuals. Theoretical philosophy cannot articulate a way of overcoming our sense of division, because division, as we have seen, is inherent in the necessary incompleteness of cognition. Previous philosophy had, of course, answered such questions in terms of dogmatic theology. In certain respects Schelling's answer does involve a covert piece of theology: the work of art combines the apparent contingency of the particular object with the sense of the purposiveness of that object, and can therefore be construed as a metaphor for the world as a whole. What happens to exist may appear contingent in cognitive terms, because overcoming its contingency is an endless task, but it can be taken beyond contingency when apprehended teleologically.

Schelling actually wishes to avoid a theological position, which is why art is burdened with such a vital role in our self-understanding and why the *STI*, even though we may now only be able to employ its resources metaphorically, is a vital document of modern aesthetic theory. Schelling's aim at this stage of his career is akin to what we observed in the 'System Programme', namely to make ideas sensuous. In order that the higher purposes of existence be comprehensible within society as a whole they must be manifest in a concrete, perceptible form. Art is, then, 'the generally acknowledged and undeniable objectivity of intellectual intuition. For aesthetic intuition is intellectual intuition which has become objective' (I/3 p. 626). Consequently, art 'always and continually documents anew what philosophy cannot represent externally, namely the unconscious in action and production and its original identity with the conscious' (I/3 pp. 627–8). What is separate in nature (unconscious) and history (conscious) is united in art.

The process of nature in the *STI* begins unconsciously, but develops towards our conscious reflection. Art, on the other hand, begins with the artist's conscious reflections about what is to be produced, but it ends unconsciously because what is produced is not identical with the techniques and rules which were required to produce it: if it were, it would, as Kant suggested, be mere mechanically reproduced craft. The artwork can therefore represent the absolute, as the 'sole true and eternal organ and at the same time document of philosophy' (I/3 p. 627). This final move is clearly the one which is most troubling: the account of artistic creation as involving both conceptual thought and elements which are not reducible to the way they can be conceptualised is not at all implausible, but the elevation of this conception into the highest philosophical insight is harder to swallow. This can be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, it can be seen as an Idealist claim to have directly overcome the lack brought about by the necessarily incomplete nature of scientific knowledge, but then the problem arises as to which works can be said to achieve this and why those works, and not others, achieve it. On the other hand, it can be interpreted as a Romantic reminder, of the kind suggested by Novalis, that we can only ever gain a sense of the absolute by our failure to grasp it, a fact manifest in our inability to give definitive accounts of the meanings of works of art, even as they may seem to embody a completion lacking elsewhere in life. Music offers a model for this latter interpretation: the meaningfulness of music relies precisely on the way in which it demands a level of conceptual thought to be explicitly understood, but it can at the same time always provoke new ways of being grasped. In this view the problem for the Idealist position in establishing which works of art can be said to fulfil the aim of philosophy is circumvented by the idea that it is precisely the works which continue to give new insight – and, of course, to give a necessary sense that each insight is only ever partial – which are philosophically significant.

The Idealist aspect of the *STP*'s investment in the aesthetic becomes apparent when the development of history is seen in the same terms as the work of

art. The results of conscious actions are rarely exactly what is intended, yet Schelling conceives of the overall process of history teleologically. History is, he claims, not merely haphazard, because its ground is 'productivity', the attempt of the 'I' to grasp itself which is manifest in the ever greater insight generated by the development of human thought and action. At the same time, it is clear from our experience of history that conscious reflection cannot reliably tell us where the history is leading. In a characteristic move, Schelling links the notion of genius to the notion of destiny: 'the power, which, via our free activity without our knowledge and even against our will, realises purposes which have not been imagined is called destiny' (I/3 p. 616); in turn, the inexplicable side of apparently free, self-determining aesthetic production, which adds an 'objective' (in the sense of unconscious and unintentional) aspect to the product, is 'genius'. The claim is evidently an attempt to skirt the consequences of removing divine Providence from history. If one can find a domain of human existence where the apparently inexplicable effects of our activity make sense, then the possibility of history being more than contingency remains open. The significance of an attenuated version of this sort of idea for Feuerbach and the early Marx should not be underestimated. If history is to be the fulfilment of our 'species being', then the goal will have to be achieved with powers given to us by our nature. Marx insists that we cannot as yet fully grasp these powers because their potential has been blocked by existing circumstances. In this respect the notion of genius can be seen as a mystified version of the attempts of post-Providential philosophies of history to make history intelligible. The most important of these attempts will, of course, be that of Hegel.

Problematic as the connection of destiny and genius is, the notion of genius itself does raise a series of significant issues. As we have seen, genius relates to the level of aesthetic production which can never be reduced to the results of technique. Ideas of this kind can be and evidently are ideologically abused. The argument should, though, first be understood historically: such views of art only became possible in the philosophical climate with which we are concerned here. This climate is influenced by two factors in modernity which are highlighted by aesthetic theory. Liberation from theological constraints releases many hitherto unknown or inaccessible capacities in the subject, and these often seem to give rise to a sense of endless potential. At the same time, this sense of the subject's potential is combined with the awareness of the subject's inability to be wholly transparent to itself. Schelling's idea of the genius combines these two factors. He insists that art manifests the *unity* of conscious and unconscious activity as part of the attempt to give access to aspects of self-consciousness which Kant could only remove to a realm to which philosophy has no access. Schelling is convinced that these aspects are accessible, albeit not with solely theoretical means, and faces the consequences of showing how this is the case.

In *Aesthetic Theory* Adorno suggests that the emergence of the term genius in philosophy at this time relates to what we have seen as the tension between the 'new mythology' and aesthetic autonomy, the tension between art being a

new synthesis, which includes philosophy, of the different means of articulation of a community, and art saying what other means of articulation cannot say. Adorno maintains that the concept of genius becomes important at the moment when 'the character of the authentic and the obligatory, and the freedom of the emancipated individual move apart from each other. The concept of genius is the attempt to bring the two together by a piece of magic' (Adorno 1973 p. 254). Genius is, then, a false reconciliation of the universal and the individual. The 'authentic and the obligatory' corresponds at this moment in history to the new mythology: it implies that the products of the genius manifest a collectively binding sense of value in the work of art, of the kind seen in a theological culture. The 'emancipated individual' is, for Adorno, following Marx, in fact an illusion occasioned by the failure to see how emancipation in modern capitalism relies upon the destruction of freedom elsewhere in society. For Adorno the attempt to reconcile individual and universal in modernity almost invariably ends in the suppression of the individual, because the reconciliation always happens in terms of the universal. This is one of the reasons why he favours Schelling's ambivalences against Hegel's 'thesis of identity', which he thinks is actually a manifestation of the growing dominance of the commodity structure that destroys individuality in modern societies. Art for Adorno retreats into autonomy in order both to resist a false reconciliation of individual and universal, and to prevent what has been repressed in this enforced reconciliation being forgotten. The 'genius is supposed to be the individual whose spontaneity coincides with the deed of the absolute subject' (p. 255), thereby, as it does in one interpretation of the *STI*, playing the role of fulfilling the Idealist project in a proto-theological direction. However, this means that: 'In the concept of genius the idea of the creator is ceded with Idealistic hubris from the transcendental subject to the empirical subject, to the productive artist' (p. 255).

The 'untruth' of the notion of genius also lies for Adorno in the way that it obscures the fact that works of art are not real living organisms. Art is *Schein*, 'appearance', and neither a creation of the kind attributable to God, nor a reconciliation of self and nature of the kind which he believes would require a wholesale transformation of social relations and of the relations of society to nature that the present state of society renders almost unthinkable. Furthermore, the technical side of aesthetic production depends upon the preceding *social* labour of others, who established the forms within which the supposedly authentic, individual and autonomous artist works. However, Adorno actually retains vestiges of a conception of the reconciliation of nature and consciousness, of spontaneity and reflection from an Idealist position. The ambiguity in his position comes out in the following passage, which questions the use of the term genius by insisting upon the prior material and technical basis of artistic production: 'The whole Appassionata lies in the keyboard of every piano, the composer only has to get it out, and for that one admittedly needs Beethoven' (p. 403). Adorno's failure to give an even barely adequate account of what he means by the 'Beethoven' required to get the Appassionata out of the

piano suggests why the notion of genius cannot be dismissed too lightly. It may not deserve the dignity Schelling affords it, but it does point, as Adorno also seems aware, to dimensions of subjectivity whose articulation is not reducible to the already available technical means in a particular society. Bach may adopt the Chaconne form from tradition, but what he does with it opens new musical horizons which are also horizons of the modern subject's possibilities for self-articulation.

A more serious problem in the *STI* is that it characterises the work of art produced by the genius in terms of organic unity and self-containment, as an image of the realisation of Idealist philosophy's aim of overcoming contingency. From our contemporary perspective it seems clear that the Idealist version of aesthetics is less convincing than some of the ideas of Novalis and Schlegel. The Romantic conception of the unrepresentability of the absolute led to the idea that the work of art always points to its own incompleteness, while at the same time adverting to what is beyond it. This conception prefigures the characteristic sense in modernist art of a continual striving for something which is never really achieved, but which is the apparently inexhaustible motor of new aesthetic production. There are evident problems with the description in the *STI* of an art in which 'Every drive to produce stops with the completion of the product, all contradictions are negated, all puzzles solved' (I/3 p. 615). The description sounds exactly like a description of ideology, the reconciliation of real contradictions in an illusory form, or like the 'imaginary', in the sense seen in Hölderlin, where the I regressively ignores the necessity really to engage with the otherness of the object.

However, the issue is more complex than this. Hölderlin himself saw a way out of the imaginary in art, and this is clearly a vital dimension in serious consideration of art in modernity, including art which still, like that of Beethoven, works in terms of the resolution of contradiction. In considering the organic view of the work of art it is also important to remember that Schelling does not attribute a functional role to art. Like Kant, who insisted art be without 'interest', Schelling regards the demand that art be useful as 'only possible in an age which locates the highest efforts of the human spirit in economic discoveries' (I/3 p. 622). As Kant did in the *CJ*, Schelling also shows a prophetic awareness of the dangers of modern rationalisation. Rationalisation will become, as we have seen, a central concern of Marx- and Weber-influenced theorists, like Adorno, who regard Marx's critique of commodity exchange, of the valuation of everything in terms of its equivalence to something else, as a vital issue in aesthetic theory. Schelling is already concerned to preserve a sphere of meaning that cannot be subsumed into the demands of scientific or economic rationality. In the *STI* the work of art's self-contained organic status means that its purpose lies within it and need not be sought elsewhere. This autotelic status of the aesthetic object will repeatedly, and in many contexts justifiably, be invoked from this period onwards as a means of countering the tendency of the modern world towards instrumental rationality and the devaluation of activities which are self-

legitimizing and not reducible to the instrumental purposes to which they can be put. Significantly, in this period, it is once again the music of Beethoven, particularly the late Beethoven, which seems most able to exemplify a self-legitimation which resists wholesale functionalisation.

The misuse of organic conceptions of art to legitimate reactionary political views has been a constant factor in political life since this period, and music is not exempt from such misuse. The reactionary notion of organicism subordinates urgent political and social conflicts which are directly or indirectly apparent in aesthetic works to the demand that we should contemplate the unity the human spirit is capable of achieving in artistic production. Critical and analytical approaches to art come in this view to be seen as infringing upon the integrity of the artistic totality, which takes on the status of a sacred object. In the twentieth century Brecht and others, with some justification, questioned the organic view of the work of art. However, there is, once again, another dimension to the argument, that can be illustrated by considering a passage from a letter by Hölderlin to his brother (1799), not long before the appearance of the *STI*. In this he points to a view of aesthetics that is often underestimated in reflections on aesthetics and politics, particularly in the light of views of art which see it merely as ideology. The tension between the desire for a 'new mythology' and the emergence of aesthetic autonomy appears here once more.

Hölderlin's letter is a critique of German society, pointing to its narrow-mindedness and lack of awareness of the need for a creative community if individuals are to flourish. Hölderlin sees some hope in the liberation suggested in Kantian philosophy, and in the growth of interest at the time in the political concerns of the community. This is, however, not enough. He goes on to attack the way the importance of art in public life is underestimated, which he sees as evident in the view of art as play or game (*Spiel*):

one took [art] as a game because it appears in the modest form of the game, and so also, reasonably enough, no other effect could result from it than that of the game, i.e. diversion [*Zerstreuung*, which also has the sense of dispersal], almost the exact opposite of its effect when it is present in its true nature. For then people compose themselves in it and it gives them peace, not empty but living peace, where all powers are alert and are only not recognised as active because of their inner harmony. It draws people closer and brings them together, not in the manner of the game, where they are only unified by the fact that they forget themselves and nobody's living particularity is able to appear. (Hölderlin 1963 p. 755)

Whereas philosophico-political education (it seems clear he is referring to Kant and Schiller) may unify people in the recognition of duty and the law, far more is needed if a real community is to be established. A sense of what he means is manifested in the organic unity of the work of art. One should, as this passage makes clear, think of this in terms of something like Beethoven's music, whose unity is achieved by facing the challenge of integrating the greatest diversity and contradiction, not by ideologically conjuring away contradictions.⁶ Hölderlin concludes his letter with a passionate political exclamation, which clearly relates

to the nature of his own poetry, and is echoed by Beethoven, of the need to 'bring everything human in us and others into ever freer and profounder connection [*Zusammenhang*], be it in aesthetic [*bildlich*] representation or in the real world, and if the realm of darkness should break in with *violence*, then we will throw the pen under the table and go in God's name to where the need is greatest, and where we are most needed' (p. 757).

It seems to me mistaken to think that we have outgrown such a vision of aesthetics and politics because we are aware of the dangers of misusing the power of art to allow us to bring things 'into ever freer and profounder connection'. The political potential of the semantic resources which Hölderlin sees in art's manifestation of organic cohesion are those which Ernst Bloch, himself profoundly influenced by Schelling, will see as lacking in the Left's political armoury in the fight against fascism. It is, therefore, not clear that the organic implications of the aesthetic theory present in the *STI* are *per se* reactionary. Bloch's argument is that if the Nazis, however temporarily and deceptively, fulfilled real needs, there is no point in trying to ignore these needs. Modernity, as we saw in Chapter 2, results in a need to unify the results of the random proliferation of new knowledge with the contexts of meaning of everyday life and the unfulfilled hopes and desires of that life. Is this, then, merely a retreat into the imaginary? The stringency of Adorno's questioning of notions like genius and organic integration is based upon his claim, in the light of his experience of historical catastrophe, that such a unification is always a deception because it promises in art what is denied to people in reality. This leads him to the insistence upon aesthetic autonomy, in order to preserve a sphere of meaning which cannot be subsumed into the reified ways of making sense within modern societies. Within the sphere of autonomous art it is, though, noticeable that even he employs attenuated notions of organic coherence: without some sense of reconciliation of the antagonisms in a work the very possibility of meaning disappears for Adorno. It is, then, important to remember that in the Germany of the time of the *STI* organic notions had more the character of utopian hope than of self-deception. Bloch's arguments in the 1930s are essentially concerned with how mythical thinking functions within modern societies. It is therefore vital to consider the *STP*'s account of mythology in relation to the broader development of modernity.

Mythology, art and modernity

The final part of the *STI* examines the idea of the 'new mythology'. Philosophy, argues Schelling, is born originally of 'poetry' (*Poesie*), in the sense of creativity, *poiesis*. The 'completion' of philosophy would be its return to the 'general ocean of poetry'. Art brings our conscious reflection into harmony with what is given to us unconsciously by nature, by making ideas sensuous. It thereby performs an analogous role to that played by mythology in pre-modern cultures, which explained the otherwise inexplicable origin of a people in terms of a con-

crete story. The return of 'science' – in the broadest sense of 'philosophy', which would include natural science – to 'poetry' would have to take place in terms of the kind of integrated world picture present in mythology. Such a mythology would reconcile the conflicting cognitive, ethical and aesthetic demands characteristic of modernity. As we saw in Chapter 2 and in the remarks at the end of the last section, any vision of this kind raises controversial questions. On the one hand, the achievements of modernity depend precisely upon analysis and specialisation, on the other hand, without some guiding sense of the aim of the proliferation of specialised practices and the technology-generated social changes which affect their lives, members of modern societies will tend to seek guidance in irrational forms.

Hegel sees it as the task of *philosophy* to achieve this integration of the spheres of modernity. The limitations of thinking in which 'intuition' still plays a central role, such as mythology and art, mean that mythology and art are incapable of offering an adequate response to the complexities of modern forms of knowledge and action. However, Hegel's vision for philosophy will depend upon his ability to integrate 'intuition' into his system, a problem most obviously manifest in his need to suggest that philosophy can articulate the essential truth about art because, unlike art, it is not tied to the particular. More recently, Habermas's accounts of modernity see the separation of the cognitive, moral and aesthetic spheres as precisely what enables the scientific, legal and artistic advances characteristic of modernity. Conflating validity claims from the different spheres leads in his view to the kind of irrationality characteristic of feudalism, which the Enlightenment justifiably sought to overcome. The spheres are also conflated in fascism, where criteria of public accountability become randomly decisionistic and aesthetic means are used in political manipulation. At the same time, as we saw in Chapter 2, Habermas is aware of a need to establish a more productive interplay between the spheres than is evident in the continuing tendency of modern technological and bureaucratic systems to colonise the life-world of ordinary people.

Not all of Schelling's position is rendered invalid by such objections. In the face of the disasters that have been produced by some forms of modern science, of the potential for future disaster created by new forms of technology, as well as of the coercive forms of integration characteristic of modern capitalism, the kind of re-examination of how we think about the relationship of cognitive, ethical and aesthetic spheres suggested by Habermas is an urgent task. If the aesthetic is the realm in modernity where any sense of the harmony of our reflexive and of our natural being might be sustained, it may yet offer resources that the growing separation of the spheres has tended to obscure. In the light of the history since Schelling it is clear why Habermas is wary of the idea of a new mythology: its effect in politics is rarely anything but catastrophic. However, Habermas tends to overplay the extent to which the spheres are inherently separate forms of communicative action. Much more scientific practice than he supposes is, for example, reliant on the characteristics of judgement seen in

aesthetic judgement, as Kant's account in the *CJ* suggested. Habermas's aim is to find new forms of orientation which would re-integrate these differing spheres of modernity, rather than allowing means–ends rationality to dominate. But this aim leads towards ideas that *contradict* the notion that they constitute separate spheres in the first place. These problems will clearly not go away, and it is important to attend to some more of the detail of how they become manifest in Schelling's work.

The crucial fact about Schelling's new mythology is that it has to be made, and it is the task of *reason* to make it. The mythology cannot be re-established from the past, and has nothing to do with later reactionary nationalist conceptions of mythology as a return to lost origins. The problem is that it would have to be produced collectively, and Schelling has no illusions about the difficulty of doing this in modern societies. He attaches great importance to the collective reception of art, frequently citing the links between the genesis of Greek tragedy and the fact that Athenian society was based on 'public freedom', not on the 'slavery of private life'. The holy, he argues, is constituted at the level of the community, not in the individual: 'A nation which has nothing holy . . . cannot have true tragedy' (I/6 p. 573), thereby establishing the terms of the debate over the possibility of tragedy in the modern world. The problem for modern art is that the collectively binding status of Greek tragedy as a norm for the community could not be achieved by an individual artist:

But how a new mythology, which cannot be the invention of the individual poet, but of a new people [*Geschlecht* – it should be remembered, in order to counter the apparent hint of racism, that the *STI* also argues for a cosmopolitan constitution to guarantee human freedom], which as it were represents One poet, can arise, is a problem whose solution can only be expected from the future fate of the world and the further course of history. (I/3 p. 629)

How could the individuality of a non-theologically based art ever gain collective public significance? In modern capitalism collective significance is increasingly the preserve of the mass media, which constitute a public sphere with little essential ethical content. If art is to retain ethical force it must have this collective significance: if it does not, any link between the aesthetic and the ethical is threatened. As we saw, the notion that the ethical and the aesthetic should be separated starts to emerge at the time Schelling writes the *STI*, in the work of Friedrich Schlegel, and the increasing autonomy of art in the nineteenth century takes it away from a predominantly ethical vision of the kind encountered in Kant or Schiller.

What, then, does the artist who sees his or her task in terms of the need for a new mythology do in the meanwhile, in a society which seems to be moving further and further away from the integration sought in that mythology? This was precisely Hölderlin's problem, which suggests how intense the problem can become for the modern artist. Widely divergent responses are possible to this dilemma. The artist may have to give up art altogether, as Hölderlin suggested,

in the name of political praxis, or, as Brecht and others will later do, try to make art itself into a form of political praxis. In the case of Wagner, art really is supposed to become the mythology of the present. Wagner attempts this, however, in an often regressive way. At the same time as taking on the challenge of the new aesthetic freedom more emphatically than virtually any other composer, he tries to resuscitate old national mythologies, ignoring the need for a new, cosmopolitan mythology. Those aspects of his music which were later to be effortlessly assimilated into the culture industry point to other dimensions of his regression. The complex but more than tenuous links between Wagner's music-drama and the use of aesthetic modes in Nazi political praxis suggest the dangers in his response, though the case of Wagner is clearly not exhausted by this dimension of his art.⁷ The avant-garde artist, on the other hand, can produce an art which tries to remind a society of all it has repressed, by refusing to communicate in the terms of the dominant society, with the danger that he or she will either not be understood, or will simply be ignored. The fact is, as Schelling makes clear, that there is no individual solution to these dilemmas, though it would at the same time be a mistake to underestimate the extent to which aesthetic modernism does have substantial political and social effects.

Mythology, language and being

Schelling develops some of the *STP*'s ideas on art and mythology in the slightly later – 1802–3 – *Philosophy of Art (PA)*, a text which is, however, much more obviously linked to Idealism than to Romanticism. The *PA* argues that something vital is lost when the modern world ceases to be able to articulate meaning in the manner of mythology: 'The modern world begins when man tears himself away from nature, but as he has no other home he feels himself alone' (Schelling I/5 p. 427). Schelling tells a story that will recur in a similar form in Lukács's *Theory of the Novel* and in Benjamin's *The Origins of the German Play of Mourning*, and, implicitly, in certain aspects of Heidegger's philosophy. In this story myth-based cultures do not reach the level of reflection at which the images used to interpret reality are separated from other, abstract, articulations of reality. This separation is therefore seen as part of the loss of 'home' characteristic of modernity. Re-reading this aspect of Schelling's theory in the light of contemporary debates offers some interesting perspectives on questions of aesthetics, language and modernity.

The *PA* argues that Greek mythology recounts the origins of the world in 'concrete' terms, in terms of stories and images. The stages expressed abstractly in the *STP*'s account of the I's attempt to 'intuit itself' are articulated in stories of the Gods, much in the same way as the work of art objectified intellectual intuition: 'all the possibilities located in that realm of ideas which is constructed in philosophy are exhausted [*erschöpft*] in Greek mythology' (I/5 p. 400). The crucial difference is that these stories are concrete and self-sufficient. Our modern interpretation of the figure of Jupiter in such stories as, in Schelling's

terms, the linking of absolute power and absolute wisdom, has little to do with how the story functions within its own culture. It is not that the figure of the God 'means' something else which is more abstract: the Gods '*do not mean it, they are it*' (I/5 p. 401). A gap between concrete image and what it represents does not exist in such a culture. (The concern here is not, one should add, with the historical or philosophical validity of this view, but rather with its implications for conceptions of language in the early modern period in Germany.) According to the *PA* there is no need, with regard to this sort of myth, for philosophical reflection, because what we have come to see in terms of the idea and its objective embodiment are already united. The stories are 'of' the Gods in the 'subjective' and the 'objective' genitive: they come from the Gods and they are about the Gods. Schelling links this conception of myth to his notion of 'absolute identity'. Absolute identity does not divide sensuous and intelligible, because they only differ from each other in degree, as part of the same absolute continuum. Modernity, as we have seen, entails the growing divorce of individuals' subjective experience of the world from the way the objective world is explained in science. Schelling's questioning of this divorce becomes most significant for contemporary philosophy when language is introduced as part of the argument.

The beginnings of a characteristically modern conception of language were apparent in Novalis: the signifier, itself constituted in opposition to other signifiers, is a condition of the reduction of my particular intuition to a general meaning. In modernity, once the old philosophical division between particular and general becomes a concern in a new way because of the emancipation of subjectivity, language itself can begin to be experienced both as a constraint upon the individual subject and as essentially arbitrary. Using the general signifier for individual experience can therefore become a problem, as it clearly is for many modern artists. At the same time, however, poetic language must attain at least a minimal level of comprehensibility for others, if it is to be understood at all. In the *PA* Schelling argues that 'In language we always only use general designations, even for the designation of the particular' (I/5 p. 408). He suggests that the *universality* implicit in Greek mythology's ability to 'imagine' (in the sense of making into an image) is therefore only available in modern art to those artists who by their *individuality* are able to create a 'closed circle of poetry [*Poesie*]' (I/5 p. 444), an individual mythology, from their limitation. As Peter Szondi points out, Proust, Kafka, Joyce (or, one might add, composers such as Mahler or Schoenberg) *do* achieve a canonical status by establishing an aesthetic world which has a coherence not derived from the dominant languages of their society. Schelling thus already indicates one of the grounds of autonomous art's refusal to communicate in the language of the rest of modern society, and, like Adorno after him, he points to the paradox that it is precisely this kind of art which will attain the most general significance. The idea is that articulations of true individuality can convey the possibility of non-coercive social integration. They can do so because they resist the ways in which modern

rationalisation tends to restrict individuality, even as it in other respects creates conditions which would seem favourable to the development of individuality. In Chapter 3 we saw how Novalis speculated on music as a language which might communicate a sense of the freedom of the subject by escaping the generalising tendency of representational verbal language. It seems no coincidence that in early-modern German culture, where the political public sphere offers less space for real individuality than does much of the rest of Europe, the non-representational form of music should therefore flourish more than elsewhere.

In the *PA* the special status of 'classical' art, particularly Greek sculpture, is grounded in the fact that it embodies a unity of form and content which modern art cannot have for us. This unity is echoed in Schelling's account of myth, in which the form and content of Jupiter are the same. Schelling argues that 'Beauty is posited where the particular (the real) [in the sense of the sensuous particular object] is so appropriate to its concept that the concept, as infinite, enters into the finite and is contemplated *in concreto*' (I/5 p. 382). This links art to the unification of image and idea which is supposedly always already present in mythology: in art 'eternal ideas of reason' become 'objective as the souls of organic bodies' (I/5 p. 383). The sensuous object is able to communicate the absolute when the object does not require that which would explain it in other terms, scientific explanation leading into an endless chain of determinations of determinations. The same description could, of course, apply to a theological view of language, in which the 'eternal idea' is manifested in the concrete word, rather than the word being dependent on its relations to other words for its signification.⁸ Schelling demands that in art each thing should have a 'particular and free life. Only the understanding subordinates, in reason and in imagination [*Einbildungskraft*] all is free and moves in the same ether . . . each for itself is also the whole' (I/5 p. 393). Art thus becomes a kind of language in which idea, word and thing are inseparably bound up with each other, rather than arbitrarily attached. The significance of the particular intuition is sustained, not for its particularity, but for its potential to show the totality in itself. This is the classic definition of the symbol, as opposed to allegory's arbitrary link between signifier and signified, and it highlights a crucial difference between Idealist and Romantic conceptions of art.

The insistence upon the function of art in conveying the general by the particular is characteristic of Schelling's argument in the *PA*. In modern science the effects of the separation of intuition and thought cannot be subtracted from our relation to the object. The object is constituted as an object by its separation from us, which we try to overcome in the general concept, thereby eliminating its particular way of appearing in intuition. One can here already begin to see the roots of Schelling's divergence from Hegel. Although he accepts Schelling's view of 'classical art' as vital in an earlier phase of the development of culture, Hegel sees the break-up, via reflection, of the unity between the particular object of intuition and the totality as part of the process of the absolute's becoming articulable in philosophy. Without this break-up thinking would

remain tied to particularity and be unable to reach the level of universalisation which is the foundation of modern science and law, and, more generally, of philosophy's ability to grasp the truth of modernity.

Hegel's attitude to sensuous particularity exemplifies the dominant pattern of modernity. In each realm of science new developments are increasingly the result of the elimination of residual mythical elements. The ever greater abstraction from the particular to the general constitutes the world more and more as the object of a subject which has transcended sensuous particularity by subordinating it to general concepts whose value is established via their relation to other concepts within a system. An analogous process takes place with regard to the object considered as an exchange-value in the commodity market. Furthermore, the idea of exchange value as constituted by the object's relation to other commodities, rather than by its intrinsic value, is analogous to the conception that language consists of arbitrary signifiers which only gain their identity via their relations to other signifiers within a linguistic system, rather than by an essential relation to their referent.⁹ Worries about these forms of abstraction, which are linked to questions about the dominance by the subject of the Other, recur in varying ways in modern philosophy.¹⁰ Most recently it has been those thinkers who, like Heidegger, Foucault and Derrida, question the nature of the subject in 'Western metaphysics', which is seen as being manifested precisely in philosophical systems, the commodity system and in language as a system, who have revived interest in the questions first raised by the tradition at issue in the present book. A central concern for these thinkers is the language of poetry, conceived as a counter to the objectifying language associated with the idea that 'the Cartesian basic attitude knows in advance, or thinks it knows, that everything can be proven and grounded in an absolutely strict and pure manner' (Heidegger 1983 p. 30).

The later Heidegger's account of modern philosophy as the 'subjectification of being' leads to his attempts to find a different language for philosophy, which would circumvent the metaphysical tradition. Despite his reference to the ancient Greek past as a source of his project, this attention to language cannot be separated, either from the desire of modernist poets, such as Mallarmé, to 'purify the words of the tribe', or, indeed, from Romantic ideas about music current in the nineteenth century. The modern need to seek a language beyond objectifying representation and instrumentality relates to the kind of view of mythology at issue here. The crucial question is how this need is understood. It is now a commonplace that understanding subjectivity depends upon understanding the subject's relationship to language, but as I have tried to show, many accounts of the subject which rely on this view to criticise 'Western metaphysics' too often ignore the fact that thinkers like Novalis and Schelling do not necessarily see the subject as transparent to itself and thus as being in a position of Cartesian mastery.

In the *PA* Schelling suggests the problem with language is that it is 'nothing but a continual schematisation' (Schelling I/5 p. 408), which points to the need

for a 'higher language', of the kind present in Greek mythology, which is what is also demanded in 'absolute artistic representation' (I/5 p. 411). The conception of language suggested here can be formulated in the terms of the *STI*. Because words are collectively constituted and not the result of individual intention they are, on the one hand, 'products', results of 'unconscious productivity' that are manifest as real objects (sound waves, marks, etc.). On the other hand, they can only *be* words if they involve 'conscious productivity' that endows them with meaning in particular use – computers do not *mean* anything by the sentences they produce. Schelling claims nature is 'a poem which lies locked away in secret miraculous writing', so that 'through the sensuous world [of nature] meaning only shows as it does through words' (I/3 p. 628). On this view, the literal, established meanings of words can be seen as the result of making language into an objectified 'product', and metaphors make apparent the resistance of language to wholesale literalisation. To the artist, nature is 'only the ideal world appearing under continual limitations' (I/3 p. 628). In order to get beyond the limitations of the sensuous world, which are what give rise to science and philosophy's endless task, the artist has to reveal the unlimited in a limited product, and this connects metaphor's resistance to literalisation with the work of art's manifestation of productivity. To this extent Heidegger's extreme notion of a 'language of metaphysics' which supposedly dominates Western thought becomes otiose, because the possibility of escaping reified language is perennial, although it may become more difficult in particular societies, as more and more metaphors lose their disclosive power.

In *Philosophy of Mythology* (1842) Schelling returns to the question of why, in mythology, image and idea are not separate, claiming that this must be considered in relation to language. His awareness of the dependence of subjectivity upon a ground which is not accessible to reflection, apparent in the *STP*'s conception of genius, is here directly linked to language:

But what treasures of poetry lie hidden in language in itself, which the poet does not put into language, which he, so to speak, only lifts out of it as out of a treasure chamber, which he only persuades language to reveal. But is not every attribution of a name a personification, and if all languages think or expressly designate things which admit an *opposition* with differences of gender; if the German says *der Himmel* [sky], *die Erde* [earth]; *der Raum* [space], *die Zeit* [time]: how far is it from there to the expression of spiritual [*geistig*] concepts by male and female divinities. One is almost tempted to say: language itself is only faded mythology, in it is preserved in only abstract and formal differences what mythology preserves in still living and concrete differences. (II/1 p. 52)

The conception is not so far from Heidegger calling language the 'house of being' and from the contention that 'We do not only speak *the* language [which implies language is an object], we speak *out* of language' (Heidegger 1986 p. 254). Given Schelling's arguments about the lack of ultimate transparency of the subject to itself, it is clear, as it is elsewhere in his work (see Bowie 1993), that he does not fit into the Cartesian paradigm.

The passage suggests, in a manner later echoed by Gadamer, that there is a metaphoric process at the very heart of language, which we cannot ever circumscribe by drawing a definitive line around what is literal and what is metaphorical. The traces of the sources of language that can never be reached in their original form are always necessarily part of the language we are using. The link to the aesthetic of conceptions of language in the Romantic traditions to which Schelling belongs also informs the genesis of the modern hermeneutic conception of language as constitutive of what we understand, rather than as a representation of a ready-made reality. In the hermeneutic conception there can be no position from which language could be definitively explained by philosophy or science. In order to understand the explanation itself we would still be reliant on the natural languages into which we have already been socialised and which are a horizon of our understanding that we can never definitively step beyond. This points to another way of seeing Schelling's awareness of the role of both conscious and unconscious 'production' in our self-understanding. The words we speak are not produced consciously, but we can still consciously intend to say something with them, even though what we say may escape our intentions or may go beyond what has been meant with these words before. Schelling is, of course, a major influence on Schleiermacher, the founder of modern hermeneutics (see Chapter 6).

Near the beginning of the *PA* Schelling makes the apparently unmotivated statement, perhaps derived from Hamann's work, that 'Very few people reflect upon the fact that even the language in which they express themselves is the most complete work of art' (Schelling I/5 p. 358). The immediate reason for this is that language is 'the direct expression of an ideal – of knowledge, thought, feeling, will etc. – in something real, and, as such, a work of art' (I/5 p. 482). Language must exist as objective sensory phenomena, but it must also be intelligible. It is in this sense a manifestation of 'absolute identity'. As Hamann argued, language is not explicable in terms of a division of sensuous and intelligible: how would the sensuous be able to communicate thoughts if it belonged to a wholly different realm? In consequence: 'sensuous and non-sensuous are one here, what is most graspable becomes a sign for the most spiritual (*Geistigste*). Everything becomes an image of everything else and language itself becomes thereby a symbol of the identity of all things' (I/5 p. 484). Language is the necessary 'real' articulation of the 'ideal', but 'absolute identity' means that this difference is only ever relative: the ideal's dependence on the real is mirrored by the real's dependence on the ideal. This view of language moves in two divergent directions. On the one hand, as we saw, in the direction of a metaphysical, Idealist view of language, which, like the Classical conception of art, sees it as a symbol of the infinite in the sensuous; on the other, in the direction of the differential view already seen in Novalis, in which the elements of language gain their value via their shifting network of relations to other elements. In an echo of Gadamer's dictum that 'being that can be understood is language', Schelling, then, regards *all* intelligible reality as a 'primary speaking', because

it is both knowable via 'ideal' conceptual discrimination and empirically manifested as differentiated 'real' matter.

The extension of the idea of language to include all forms of art becomes most fruitful when Schelling talks about music.¹¹ In Schelling's account of the ascending continuum of the arts in the *PA*, which he sets out in terms of the relative roles of the ideal and the real within each art, music comes first, being the 'most closed of all arts' because it only articulates the movements of things and does not determine the things conceptually (I/5 p. 504). Music's status as the form of art most dependent upon time means it is 'the living which has entered death – the word *spoken* into finitude – which still becomes audible as sound' (I/5 p. 484). This is because, like all sound, music ceases to be, even as it becomes manifest. Music's essential relation to time – elsewhere Schelling says 'time is itself nothing but the *totality appearing in opposition to the particular life of things*' (I/6 p. 220) – is based on the fact that music's form is 'succession'. This necessarily connects music to self-consciousness, which makes possible the unity between successive moments of time: music's essence is rhythm, the 'imprinting of unity into multiplicity' (I/5 p. 492), 'the transformation of a succession which is in itself meaningless into a significant one' (I/5 p. 493). Schelling terms rhythm 'the music in music' (I/5 p. 494), because the structure of identity in difference is repeated both in melody's unifying different pitches into intelligible forms and in the unification in harmony of different pitches, from the overtones in a single note to the notes in a chord. The idea of 'the transformation of a succession which is in itself meaningless into a significant one' can, of course, be interpreted much more widely than just in relation to music: the same idea applies to the sequence of noises in a sentence, or the initially random flow of events in experience. In some respects the idea is actually definitive of what metaphysics is intended to explain.

Heidegger claims that the 'difference of a sensuous and a supersensuous world' is the basis of 'Western metaphysics' (Heidegger 1986 p. 101). It should by now be clear that there is no absolute distinction of this kind for Schelling, and that many assertions like those of Heidegger rely on a too restricted account of the history of modern philosophy. In the most extensive statement of the identity philosophy, the 'Würzburg System' (1804), Schelling, developing ideas from Spinoza, makes it clear why there cannot be any cognitive foundation for knowledge, in a way which can be related both to music and to differential views of language, in which each signifier relies for its identity upon its relations to other signifiers. Schelling says: 'No single being has the ground of its existence in itself' (Schelling I/6 p. 193): it must be relative to all other beings and thus within 'absolute identity', otherwise it could have no way of being itself. He claims that 'Every single being is determined by another single being, which in the same way is determined by another single being etc. into infinity' (I/6 p. 194). The aim is, once again, to unite the difference of the moments into a higher identity, in order to prevent a regress. There can, though, be no *cognitive* access

to this higher identity, because knowing entails following the chain of determination.¹² The problem here points to a major reason for the emergence of German Idealism.

Kant thought he could avoid this problem by restricting knowledge to what can come under the conditions of the subject's ability to synthesise, rather than attempting the impossible task of establishing the chains of determination of things in themselves. Kant's conception of the subject resulted in the need for the transcendental deduction, which is precisely the attempt to explain, in terms of the 'I that can accompany all my experiences', how meaningless succession becomes meaningful. The problems in the transcendental deduction led Fichte to absolutise the spontaneity of the subject in order to ensure its autonomy from the regress of determinations. At this stage of his thought Schelling relies upon a version of 'intellectual intuition' to overcome the Kantian separation between subject and things in themselves which goes much further than Fichte's notion:

The sameness of subject and object is not limited to the consciousness of myself; it is *universal*. The object of an intellectual intuition cannot therefore be an external sensuous object, but just as little can it be the empirical subject. For all objects of the same are just as limited and transitory as those of the external sense. Therefore only what is infinite, completely unlimited, what is affirmed by itself can be object of an intellectual intuition. (I/6 p. 154)

Both the *STI* and the *PA* argued that the art object could unite the sensuous and the intelligible, the determined and the free, in specific objects, thus objectifying intellectual intuition, and making the artwork into a symbol of the absolute. In this sense, as the *PA* puts it, 'beauty is the absolute intuited in the *real* [*das real angeschaute Absolute*]' (I/5 p. 398).¹³

The positive account of the presence of the absolute in the symbol now seems implausible, compared with the Romantic position, but the logic of what leads Schelling to advance it reveals an important issue that still haunts contemporary philosophy. Put simply, what is in question is precisely how 'successions' can become meaningful, which can be seen in terms of Schelling's prefiguration of Gadamer's idea that 'being that can be understood is language'. The obvious way to make successions meaningful is to integrate them into a totality, and this is what Schelling intends with the extended notion of intellectual intuition just cited. Without some manner in which unification takes place, each particular thing can only be grounded in something else, and each moment of the subject's reflection upon itself leads to Fichte's question, 'Do I really think or do I just think a thinking of thinking?' Both lead to a regress, unless there is a ground within which the elements or moments are linked. Access to this ground has to be in some form of a direct 'intuition', as otherwise all the problems of regress will recur.

One of the reasons this pattern of thought has remained significant becomes apparent if it is seen in linguistic terms. In the same way as things are deter-

mined by their relations to other things, the Saussurean signifier gains its determinacy by its relations to other signifiers in the *langue*. The problem with the notion of the *langue*, as with the notion of the ontological ground, is that it is either assumed somehow to exist without one being able to give a description of it, because it is not an entity like the entities of which it consists, or the attempt to grasp it leads into a regress. Furthermore, as Derrida has argued, if there are no ideas without their articulation in language, one can only have access to what is signified via the signifier's negative relationship to other signifiers, not by reference to a pre-existing signified. How do we say what a word means without just using other words to do so, given that we cannot just point to what we mean and be understood? We can, in these terms, therefore only work with chains of signifiers which are mutually dependent upon each other. Each element of language bears the trace of the other elements of the language, in a manner analogous to Schelling's remark that 'No single being has the ground of its existence in itself. For Derrida, the consequence is that full signification, the 'presence' of meaning is inherently deferred.

As I have argued in more detail elsewhere (see Bowie 1993 Chapter 4, and also Frank 1984, Dews 1987), the Derridean position conceives of meaning, as Ricoeur has contended, in purely differential, semiotic terms, which leads to a regress, on the basis of the unavailability of the totality of the *langue*. Derrida's 'disseminal' conception fails to give even a minimal account of semantics that would account for the what Gadamer intends with the claim that 'being that can be understood is language'. The basic point is that Derrida makes extravagant demands on the notions of truth and meaning, by understanding them as entailing the impossible 'presence' of signifier to signified. He offers no plausible way of accounting for the functioning of everyday communication, let alone of our ability to understand – albeit never with absolute certainty – highly complex new uses of language. In consequence Derrida seems in one respect as much a prisoner of the Cartesian heritage he wishes to deconstruct as Husserl. Schelling's conception of identity philosophy may be untenable as a positive claim about philosophy's access to the absolute (though in such negative formulations as 'the totality posits or intuits *itself*, by not-positing, not-intuiting the particular' (Schelling I/6 p. 198) we do gain some sense of how one might understand being's transcendence of what we can say about it). What Schelling does succeed in showing is that without *some*, perhaps inarticulable, grounding identity, of the kind that enables us to understand the connection of singular and general term in a judgement, even the idea of the dependence of the different signifiers on each other is unintelligible: *apprehending* difference as difference requires identity. In the arguments seen so far this has been seen in terms of a non-reflexive self-consciousness for which difference can be difference, and this is connected to the idea of the trans-reflexive status of being we considered in Hölderlin and Novalis.

Thinkers as diverse as Heidegger and Donald Davidson argue that the understanding of truth and meaning is prior to any attempt to analyse it (and is

necessary for any such analysis anyway). Truth requires an intuitive understanding, which in the earlier Heidegger's case is a prior practical understanding of being that always subtends all our linguistic articulations of what there is. Davidson talks of our 'general and pre-analytic notion of truth' (Davidson 1984 p. 223) and of an 'intuitive grasp we have of the concept' (p. 267) in order to avoid a regressing definition of the definition of something which we have already to understand in order to understand the very idea of defining in the first place. Given the ineluctability of this intuitive grasp, which Derrida seems not to countenance, it becomes unclear how language in Derrida's view can ever really mean anything at all.¹⁴ Peter Dews maintains that this question involves similar difficulties to those Fichte showed to be present in the reflection theory of consciousness. Dews claims: 'Just as the regress of reflection renders the phenomenon of consciousness inexplicable, so – on Derrida's account – there could never be an emergence of meaning: there would be nothing but an unstoppable mediation of signs by other signs' (Dews 1987 p. 30). It is not enough, to regard signification, as Derrida does, as always deferred because, as Schleiermacher, for example, argues, the possibility of misunderstanding is omnipresent. If something is indefinitely deferred it cannot be said to happen at all, and, as such, cannot even be considered to be deferred. We would have no understanding *that* deferral takes place if we did not already have a pre-theoretical, pre-reflexive sense of what meaning is. This does not therefore mean that we have to assume there are 'meanings' in a Fregean sense, and is simply a demand that a theory which may convincingly show why such meanings are implausible entities also show how it is we make ourselves understood a lot of the time.

Derrida's contentions are mainly directed against *philosophical* attempts to ground truth and meaning in an absolute Cartesian manner: hence the notion of the presence of meaning that is undermined by the nature of the differential constitution of the sign. The idea of the deconstruction of presence is then, of course, extended by Derrida to the metaphysical tradition from Descartes to Hegel and to Husserl. He characterises this tradition as relying on the 'absolute desire to hear oneself speaking' (Derrida 1967 p. 115). This account of metaphysics presupposes precisely the reflexive model which Fichte revealed as flawed, and Derrida is justified in rejecting it as a possible absolute foundation. Hearing oneself speaking, however, only makes sense on the assumption that, in order to hear oneself *as* oneself, rather than hearing something objective which is, even though one may not know it, oneself, there must be a kind of self-awareness which is outside the reflexive subject–object relationship (cf. the arguments about reflection in Chapter 3). Derrida, as Frank has shown, never addresses this issue. Even Schelling's invocation of 'intellectual intuition', as what would transcend the reflexive split between subject and object, and would therefore overcome the problem of the regress of reflection, itself clearly fails to overcome a reflexive split between intuer and intuited, as the very duality in the term suggests. In this sense Schelling does not succeed in solving the metaphysical problems he addresses with this version of 'self-

presence'. In his negative characterisation of the absolute, in which 'the totality posits or intuit *itself*, by not-positing, not-intuiting the particular', he actually employs a structure of thought which is hardly different from Derrida's in his characterisation of *différance*. In neither case does the conception permit a systematic account of the ground of philosophy, though Schelling is aware of the need for more than the merely regressing position that results in Derrida, and this will lead him later to ontological reflections which have echoes in the ideas of Heidegger (see Bowie 1993).

In his later philosophy Schelling eventually abandons the Idealist attempt to transcend the contingency of being in a systematic philosophy, precisely because being cannot be understood in reflexive terms. In Chapter 5 I will look at Hegel's claim to have obviated the problems associated with intuition via an Idealist philosophy which relies wholly upon the structure of reflection. In such a philosophy there is therefore no 'question of being' and no difference between 'ontic' access to particular beings and the 'ontological' fact that all such access is secondary to the 'intuitive', immediate fact that being is disclosed at all, which can never be explained in ontic terms. The contrast between Hegel's attempt to absolutise reflection and Schelling's insights during his career into the resistance of the intuitive ground of thought to reflection offers an instructive model for investigating modern philosophy, in which aesthetic questions play an important role. Philosophers like Heidegger, Adorno and Derrida can, for example, also be seen as concerned with the consequences of the failure of reflection to articulate a complete system of philosophy. Philosophy for these thinkers, as it was for the early Schelling, is regarded as needing to enlist the services of art in order not to exclude dimensions of our being which cannot be reduced to cognitive terms. In the later Heidegger this involves an attention to poetic language which has similarities to the way Schelling understands art, language and mythology.¹⁵ Adorno, as we have seen, regards Hegel's view of art with deep suspicion, precisely because of its tendency to eliminate, as the process of modern rationalisation does, all that is particular and resistant to conceptual determination in the object. He therefore invokes works of radical aesthetic modernism in the name of a philosophy of 'non-identity', in which the irreducibility of objects to concepts plays a major role.

The later Schelling's criticisms of Hegel's dissolution of being into thinking, in which self-consciousness is able to give a complete conceptual account of itself via its relations to the world, can be seen as deriving from the same sources as his earlier attention to art. Schelling insists that human reason cannot explain its *own* existence, and therefore cannot encompass itself and its other within a system of philosophy. We cannot, he maintains, make sense of the manifest world by beginning with reason, but must begin with the contingency of being and try to make sense of it with our reason, which is only one aspect of being. The difference between Schelling and Hegel is in some respects paradigmatic. In the modern world there seem to be two dominant opposed tendencies in philosophy: on the one hand, because systematic scientific thought is able to give an

explanatory account of more and more aspects of being, systematic philosophy increasingly dissolves into the sciences; on the other hand, the meaningfulness of our existence seems to depend upon forms of activity and thinking which reveal aspects of being, particularly those to do with self-consciousness, that cannot be dealt with in purely explanatory terms and which take philosophy in the direction of the 'world-disclosure' characteristic of art. Schelling himself attempts unsuccessfully to formulate a philosophy of theological revelation which would comprehend the contingency of being and make sense of our place within it. Interestingly, many subsequent thinkers, like Heidegger and Adorno, come back, in the light of the decline of theology, to the idea that art is the locus of kinds of self-understanding which are not accessible to the sciences. In this respect one of the vital aspects of modern thought is precisely the way in which needs previously catered for by theology can be catered for by forms like the aesthetic. The fraught history of aesthetics and politics since Schelling's time makes evident just what is at stake here, and the tension between Schelling's and Hegel's responses to the relationship between philosophy and art offers many resources for understanding that history.

Notes

- 1 Heidegger includes Schelling among the philosophers of subjectification, which is, given such utterances as the one just cited, even inappropriate for aspects of the younger Schelling, and is certainly inappropriate for the later Schelling (see Bowie 1993).
- 2 It is worth remembering here just how much the understanding of Spinoza's principle of determination as negation is echoed in contemporary thinking about the mind as a digital computer, and how much the objections in the philosophy of mind to this reductionist model echo the Idealist and Romantic response to Spinoza (see Bowie 1993).
- 3 When I asked Derrida about this tradition, in response to some remarks of his about the 'whole history of subjectivity', as exemplified by Descartes, Kant, Husserl, etc., his reply was that we 'would have to read Schelling together'. Slavoj Žižek has realised the extent to which Schelling prefigures Lacan in his recent work (see Žižek 1996).
- 4 Why this takes place will later become a major focus of Schelling's philosophy, and he never arrives at a satisfactory answer (see Bowie 1993).
- 5 As suggested above, DNA is not the modern scientific answer to such metaphysical questions, because the transmission of the form is not the same as the fact that forms emerge at all, instead of nature remaining a mere chaotic flux.
- 6 On Adorno's claims that Beethoven also moves in the direction of ideology, see Bowie 1999.
- 7 Seeing Wagner merely in these terms hands him over to precisely the people who ensure that the revelatory and progressive dimension of his work gets forgotten. This is an all too common failing of Left cultural politics.
- 8 On this issue in some detail see Bowie 1997, particularly with regard to Walter Benjamin.
- 9 Saussure often uses the analogy of language to money.
- 10 It is important to remember that without these processes much of what we cannot do without in the modern world becomes impossible. A wholesale rejection of them is not an option, though a critical awareness of how they can distort our relations to ourselves

and the rest of the world is still a vital task. As I have already suggested above, the rise of digital technology is another of these processes.

- 11 The conclusion of the *PA* suggests the power of the connections Schelling makes between the different languages of art: in an anticipation of Wagner's theory of music-drama, he reflects on the 'most complete combination of all arts . . . which was the drama of antiquity' and wonders if opera, which is at present merely a 'caricature' of ancient drama, may become able to lead back to 'ancient drama combined with music and song' (Schelling I/5 p. 736).
- 12 The source of Schelling's awareness of this problem is Jacobi's account of Spinoza, where the answer to this regress is theological.
- 13 The *PA* talks of 'fantasy', which is manifested in particular images but which also involves the freedom of the subject, as 'intellectual intuition in art' (I/5 p. 395).
- 14 See Wheeler 2000 for a more charitable view, which brings Derrida closer to Davidson.
- 15 As I show in Bowie 1997, Heidegger's essay on the origin of the work of art derives key conceptual structures from Schelling's philosophy of the 'Ages of the World', which Heidegger was studying around the time his essay is written.