

# Symphilosophie

*International Journal of Philosophical Romanticism*

## The Matter of Freedom

### Schiller on Sacrificial Rationality and the Emancipatory Potential of Art

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#### ABSTRACT

This article examines Friedrich Schiller's view of freedom associated with artistic creation and practice. First, I show that when Schiller attempts to understand the violent outcome of the French Revolution, he finds that modern reason has performed a 'sacrifice of the natural,' i.e., it has sacrificed sensuous materiality, need, desire, feeling, and imagination for the sake of progress of civilization. I argue that Schiller's conception of freedom in artistic creation ought to be understood as a realm beyond the violent 'sacrifice of the natural,' since art is able to vindicate sensuous and material nature by making it appear dignified, and that paying attention to the language of sacrifice allows us to see how his conception of freedom is significantly different from that of Kant. Finally, I discuss how art can institute real political freedom if artistic creation produces nothing but semblance.

*Keywords:* Schiller, sacrifice, aesthetic semblance, freedom, nature

#### ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Dieser Aufsatz behandelt Friedrich Schillers Idee der Freiheit im Zusammenhang mit künstlerischer Schöpfung und Praxis. Es soll gezeigt werden, dass Schiller in seinem Versuch, die blutigen Errungenschaften der Französischen Revolution zu verstehen, zu der Erkenntnis kommt, dass die moderne Vernunft ein „Opfer des Natürlichen“ beigebracht habe, d. h. ein Opfer des Materiellen, des Bedarfs, des Gefühls und der Imagination, mit dem Ziel eines Fortschritts der Zivilisation. Dabei soll die These vertreten werden, dass Schillers Begriff der Freiheit der künstlerischen Schöpfung als eine Sphäre jenseits des gewalttätigen „Opfers des Natürlichen“ verstanden werden muss, weil die Kunst die sinnliche und materielle Natur zu rehabilitieren vermag, indem sie diese als erhaben darstellt. Weiter wird gezeigt, dass die Sprache des Opfers auf den bedeutsamen Unterschied zwischen dem Schillerschen und dem Kantischen Freiheitsbegriffes hinweist. Schließlich wird die Frage einer möglichen Verwirklichung der politischen Freiheit durch die Kunst erörtert, die insofern als problematisch erscheint, als dass die künstlerische Schöpfung nichts als Schein produziert.

*Stichwörter:* Schiller, Opfer, ästhetischer Schein, Freiheit, Natur

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## 1. Introduction: “sacrificing the natural”<sup>1</sup>

According to a widespread modern understanding of pre-historic sacrificial rituals, sacrifice consists in making an offering to the god(s) in the hope of receiving something in return—for instance, the offering of an ox for the sake of receiving a good harvest.<sup>2</sup> This type of sacrificial ritual has a *violent* element since it involves the destruction of a thing, the killing of an animal, or even the murder of a human being. It also has an *economic* element insofar as it amounts to an exchange of one value for something deemed to be of greater value. In their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, written in the 1940s in response to the threat of fascism, Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer offer a seminal critique of Enlightenment rationality. Part of this critique revolves around the structure of sacrifice. They argue that, despite the Enlightenment’s ethos of progress—which would imply that the world of myth, to which archaic sacrifice belongs, were a thing of the past—the structure of sacrificial ritual survives in the Enlightenment conception of reason and the self. The only difference is, Adorno and Horkheimer claim, that sacrifice and its violent economic logic has been internalized in the subject. According to Adorno and Horkheimer, the Enlightenment subject establishes itself as an independent and self-mastering unity through a sacrifice of its sensuous desires and inclinations. However, as they point out, since the sensuous or the natural is a constitutive part of the human being—indeed, it is the material condition of human life and flourishing—this self-formation is a contradictory endeavor.<sup>3</sup> When human natural need and desire are sacrificed, the basis of human flourishing is undermined. Adorno and Horkheimer go as far as to say that “the institution of sacrifice [*Institution des Opfers*] is itself

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<sup>1</sup> I want to thank Jay M. Bernstein, Veronica Padilla, Kelly Gawel, Mithra Lehn, Philip Schauss, and Joel De Lara for our discussions of Schiller’s aesthetics and politics, while we were teaching the Aesthetics course at the New School; these discussions inspired me to write this paper. I also want to extend my gratitude to Aaron Goldman for offering brilliant feedback on a draft of the paper.

<sup>2</sup> At least this is how sacrifice has commonly been interpreted in the West. As Jean-Luc Nancy mentions, we do not in fact know the meaning of prehistoric sacrifice. We have no knowledge of the forms of life to which these practices belonged, and whether sacrifice had one or many functions. Jean-Luc Nancy, “The Unsacrificeable,” *Yale French Studies* 79, Literature and the Ethical Question (1991), 25–26.

<sup>3</sup> “The identical, enduring self which springs from the conquest of sacrifice is itself the product of a hard, petrified sacrificial ritual in which the human being, by opposing its consciousness to its natural context, celebrates itself,” Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 42; see also 41–43.

the mark of an historical catastrophe, an act of violence [*Gewalt*] done equally to human beings and to nature.”<sup>4</sup>

The year 1794 was a turbulent one in Europe, as the French Revolution gave way to the barbarous ‘Reign of Terror.’ Far from bringing about the rational freedom it promised, the revolution had resulted in excessive violence. This prompted Friedrich Schiller to write 27 letters, originally addressed to his patron, the prince of Schleswig-Holstein-Augustenburg Frederick Christian II, in which he sought to grasp the significance of these events. In these *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1795), Schiller, searching for the causes of the failure of the revolution, looks back at the development of civilization as a process driven by modern reason.<sup>5</sup> He discovers that reason has effectuated a “sacrifice of the natural [*Aufopferung des Natürlichen*]” (L IV.3, translation modified), and he detects such a sacrifice in the formation of the modern rational subject. Claiming that “[w]e disown [*verleugnen*] nature in its rightful sphere,” Schiller goes on to describe the history of civilization as a history of the sacrifice of sensuous materiality (L V.5). And although he believes that such sacrifice had been necessary—indeed, he writes that “there was no other way in which the species as a whole could have progressed”—he agrees with Adorno and Horkheimer that civilization has undermined the possibility of realizing its own aims, namely human happiness and flourishing (L VI.11).<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, Schiller anticipates core elements of the analysis, developed by the two members of the Frankfurt School, of the sacrificial structure of Enlightenment reason and the formation of the rational subject. And much like Adorno and other members of the Frankfurt School will later do, Schiller proposes the radical idea that art conveys a vision of modern political freedom. He asserts, famously, that in order for modern subjects to be able to institute freedom, they would need to undergo an aesthetic education.

This article examines Schiller’s critique of the sacrificial structure of modern rationality, as well as the connection he draws between aesthetics and freedom. By articulating the kind of freedom associated with the aesthetic practice and experience, which Schiller imagines to be the antithesis of the sacrifice of the natural in modernity, I seek to read him as anticipating

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<sup>4</sup> Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 42.

<sup>5</sup> Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man: In a Series of Letters* (L), ed. and trans. by Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967). I refer to this work in brackets within the body text by citing paragraph numbers in roman numerals and section numbers in Arabic numerals.

<sup>6</sup> For a perceptive but incomplete account of the connection between sacrifice in Schiller and in Adorno and Horkheimer, see Robert Hullot-Kentor, *Things beyond Resemblance: Collected Essays on Theodor W. Adorno* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 33–34.

the critical impetus later found in the Frankfurt School.<sup>7</sup> To be sure, Schiller is usually perceived as a Kantian, and thus as a supporter of the rationalist Enlightenment project—and for good reasons: he is explicit about his allegiance to Kant, (e.g., L I.3).<sup>8</sup> Yet, while Schiller agrees with Kant that only actions determined by reason—in contrast to uneducated desire or inclination—are autonomous, he also proposes a historical thesis with political implications; namely, that the sacrificial-economic form that reason takes on in modernity is a source of oppression.<sup>9</sup> As I will discuss, despite his own proclamations of allegiance, Schiller develops a conception of freedom that differs significantly from Kant’s since it involves a reciprocal, rather than hierarchical, relation between reason and nature. The main claim I will defend in this article is that, to Schiller, freedom in artistic creation can be understood as overcoming the violent sacrifice of the natural in modernity, because art makes possible an experience of nature as something dignified. My focus will be on grounding this claim in a reading of the *Letters*, and thus, except for a few remarks, I will not explicitly address the connection between Schiller and Adorno & Horkheimer’s respective critiques of Enlightenment.

I am not the first one to draw attention to Schiller’s analysis of the violence of reason; yet I argue that to grasp the full scope of this analysis, we

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<sup>7</sup> The connection between Schiller and the Frankfurt School is well-established, but the literature often focuses on the relation between Schiller and Herbert Marcuse. For a recent account, see Claudia Brodsky, “Schiller and Critical Theory,” in *The Palgrave Handbook on the Philosophy of Friedrich Schiller*, Antonino Falduto and Tim Mehigan, eds. (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023).

<sup>8</sup> The *Letters* are often taken to be a response to Kant’s *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, published four years prior. Schiller is often conceived as being strongly influenced by the Enlightenment and as belonging to Weimar classicism; yet some newer scholarship places him within German idealism. See Henny Blomme, Laure Cahen-Maurel, and David W. Wood, “Introduction: Friedrich Schiller, a German Idealist?,” *Les Cahiers philosophiques de Strasbourg*, 52 (December 8, 2022): 7–25. The latter categorization would, as I do, group him together with other important precursors to 20<sup>th</sup> century critical theory, most prominently, GWF Hegel.

<sup>9</sup> My reading differs in emphasis from Frederic Beiser’s impressive *Schiller as Philosopher*, in which Beiser, controversially, argues that while Schiller follows Kant in many respects, his view on morality is superior to that of Kant. Frederick C. Beiser, *Schiller as Philosopher: A Re-Examination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 125; 129–34. My account is closer in spirit to María del Rosario Acosta López’ idea that Schiller is engaged in *historical-political*, rather than *transcendental*, critique of modernity. María del Rosario Acosta López, “On the Aesthetic Dimensions of Critique: The Time of the Beautiful in Schiller’s *Aesthetic Letters*,” in *Critique in German Philosophy: From Kant to Critical Theory*, María del Rosario Acosta López and J. Colin McQuillan, eds. (Albany: SUNY Press, 2020). In turn, I am sympathetic towards Acosta López’ project of establishing Schiller as “a philosophically relevant thinker.” María del Rosario Acosta López, “The Violence of Reason: Schiller and Hegel on the French Revolution,” in *Aesthetic Reason and Imaginative Freedom Friedrich Schiller and Philosophy*, María del Rosario Acosta López and Jeffrey L. Powell, eds. (Albany: SUNY Press, 2019), 59.

need to examine the sacrifice of the natural that Schiller attributes to modern rationality, along with the way such sacrifice constitutes the modern subject. This is a topic that has not received sufficient attention in prior scholarship.<sup>10</sup> Inspired by another prominent thinker associated with the Frankfurt School, Walter Benjamin, Maria del Rosario Acosta López has recently developed an interesting reading of Schiller's idea of the aesthetic as a form of critique, which "interrupts" or "suspends" the violence exerted by reason, while instituting a new form of pregnant time.<sup>11</sup> In this article, I point to a different way that the aesthetic realm can function as critique. It may initially seem perplexing that art should be able to overcome the sacrifice of the natural, since Schiller defines the product of artistic creation as aesthetic semblance (*ästhetischen Schein*) (L XXVI.5). Since art is semblance, it does not literally reconcile reason and nature in freedom, it merely makes an appearance of doing so. Yet I argue that it is precisely because art, and specifically art beauty (*Schönheit*), transcends reality, i.e., because it consists in semblance, that it has a critical function and an emancipatory potential.

The article is divided into three parts. I will, first, explain Schiller's view of modernity as an age characterized by a fragmentation that is expressed at both social and individual levels. The genesis of this fragmentation, we will see, derives from the violent logic of modern reason (or the "form drive," as Schiller calls it). Secondly, I will analyze Schiller's idea of artistic creation or practice, paying special attention to the triple analogy between an artisan, an artist, and a statesman from Letter 4. Finally, I will discuss the question of how art can institute freedom in the world if artistic creation produces nothing but semblance.

## 2. The Loss of Nature

In this first section, I will reconstruct what I take to be Schiller's claim, in the *Letters*, that the development of civilization is a history of the sacrifice of the natural. As mentioned, the most prominent goal of the *Letters*, Schiller writes, is nothing less than "the construction of true political freedom" (L II.1). Yet in all spheres of modern life, he finds thoroughgoing fragmentation and unfreedom.

On a social level, Schiller observes fragmentation between citizen and government, and between different classes (L VI.7; L V.4–5). Each class has

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<sup>10</sup> For a recent article that explores Schiller's critique of the violence of modern reason, yet without analyzing sacrifice and the formation of Enlightenment subjectivity explicitly, see Acosta López, "The Violence of Reason."

<sup>11</sup> Acosta López, "On the Aesthetic Dimensions of Critique, 89–93.

proved unable to act politically so as to institute freedom. The “lower classes” struggle to fulfill even their most basic needs, while the “cultivated classes” are sedated by decadence (L V.4–5). Schiller explains this class divide with reference to a twofold subjection. The lower classes are subjected to their own instincts since their members have to compete with one another for satisfying their fundamental needs and often resort to physical violence. The upper classes live in an overly artificial culture divorced from the natural condition of humans. They are subjected by culturally created artificial desires.<sup>12</sup> Hence, in this class division, nature and culture are severed from one another, and both manifest excessive forms.

At first glance, Schiller seems to be stating that the problem of fragmentation is symmetrical, i.e., that reason and nature are harmed equally by fragmentation. Yet if we read carefully, we see that, according to at least one dominant line of thought in the *Letters*, the cause of fragmentation is reason, which is also the motor of civilization. For instance, Schiller emphasizes that the decadence of the upper classes is an “even more repugnant spectacle” than the brutality of the lower classes, since “here culture itself is the source” (L V.5). While the lower classes are constrained by nature, and the upper classes are constrained by culture, it is ultimately culture itself that has instituted the harsh split between the two groups: “It was civilization itself which inflicted this wound upon modern man” (L VI.6). In a later letter, we see that, although Schiller is fully aware of the “pernicious effects [of] an undue surrender to our sensual nature,” he emphasizes that the “nefarious influence exerted upon our knowledge and upon our conduct by a preponderance of rationality” is the true problem that the modern world is facing (L XIII.4n). The modern age has “become a stranger to the world of sense, and [lost] sight of matter for the sake of form” (L VI.10). Nature (the senses, feeling, and imagination) has yielded to rationality that dominates all spheres of life.

We can get a better understanding of this by looking to the fragmentation of the human soul and its cognitive faculties. Schiller conceives of the sensuous and the rational parts of human nature as drives.<sup>13</sup> The

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<sup>12</sup> Schiller writes that “[c]ivilization, far from setting us free, in fact creates some new need with every power it develops in us” (L V.5). He thus anticipates the critique of culturally produced unnecessary, and false desires that we find in Hegel, Freud, and the Frankfurt School. See Adorno and Horkheimer, “Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception,” in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 94–136.

<sup>13</sup> The idea of a form drive (*Formtrieb*) and a sensuous or material drive (*Stofftrieb*) is one that Schiller adopts from K. L. Reinhold. See Beiser, *Schiller as Philosopher*, 130n39, and Sabine Roehr, “Freedom and Autonomy in Schiller,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 64, 1 (2003), 121–22; 128–129.

*sensuous drive* compels us to satisfy bodily desire, to change, to perceive, and to materialize our abstract ideas (L XII.4). The *formal drive* compels us to bring unity into the manifold of sensations, to form a consistent self as a unifying pole of representations, and to give form to matter (L XII.4). Parallel to the fragmentation at the social level, Schiller claims, modern civilization has caused a split between the form drive and the sense drive such that modern individuals are internally at odds with themselves:

the inner unity of human nature was severed too, and a disastrous conflict set its harmonious powers at variance. The intuitive and the speculative understanding now withdrew in hostility to take up positions in their respective fields, whose frontiers they now began to guard with jealous mistrust; and with the confining of our activity to a particular sphere we have given ourselves a master within, who not infrequently ends by suppressing the rest of our potentialities. (L VI.6)

In modernity, the form drive and the sense drive have been divorced and positioned as opposites, and this results in internal subjection, a “master within.” This subjection, which results from the sacrifice of the natural at the individual level, is also twofold. To understand this, let us first consider theoretical understanding, which, Schiller argues, exerts a form of violence. He writes that in the process of theoretical understanding the “intellect must first destroy the object of the inner sense,” it must “torment” nature, and “bind” the sensuous phenomenon in the “fetters of rule” (L I.4). Developing a chilling mutilation metaphor, he continues, writing that reason must “tear the fair body [of nature] to pieces” and preserve only a skeleton (L I.4). Yet in tearing sensuous material apart in this way, “natural feeling cannot find itself again in such an image” (L I.4). Schiller claims that modern reason dominates sensuous matter to such a degree that it can only find its own structure in it (L XIII.4n). That is, the form drive reduces multifarious sensuous experience to a one-sided abstraction.

Leaving the issue of theoretical reason, we see that, in the sphere of moral or practical life of modern individuals, Schiller detects the same kind of symbolic violence that reason (the form drive) exerts upon the senses. Here, one difference between Kant and Schiller’s views on the role of reason in moral life becomes clear. For Kant, we act freely insofar as we subject our will to the moral law. This means that I act morally, and thus autonomously, if my action is motivated by duty (practical reason) instead of inclination.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant writes that “[f]reedom in the practical sense is the independence of the power of choice from necessitation by impulses of sensibility.” Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge,

Moral rational action is therefore a mode of self-expression, according to Kant.<sup>15</sup> By contrast, for Schiller, the demands placed on the individual by moral reason appear as an oppressive force, because morality requires that the subject sacrifices its own inner nature.<sup>16</sup> As mentioned, much like Adorno and Horkheimer, he believes that modern reason's overcoming of the violence of the brute instincts results in a new form of violence enacted by reason itself. This has political consequences, Schiller shows. In the sphere of knowledge, the violence that reason inflicts on nature will result in a neglect of the sensuous multiplicity given in experience. In a similar way, if we follow reason rigidly in the moral sphere without consulting our emotions, we will neglect the other person, since, Schiller argues, emotion enables our "feeling our way into the situation of others, of *making other people's feelings our own*" (L XIII.4n, emphasis added). Schiller is convinced that we can only develop generosity and empathy through the cultivation of our sensibility. Because modernity's sacrifice of nature blocks our empathy for the sufferings of others, it ultimately forecloses true political acts of solidarity, as the 'Reign of Terror' evidenced.

We have now seen that Schiller detects fragmentation both at a social and at an individual level, and that, in both spheres, he observes a sacrifice of the natural performed by reason. As I read Schiller's critique, the problem is not rational activity in itself, i.e., that theoretical reason subsumes sensuous particulars under universal categories, and that practical reason issues universal action-guiding imperatives. Rather, Schiller's real concern is that this kind of abstract rational activity has become the *dominant cultural force* in

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UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), A534/B562. Commenting on a philanthropist who chooses to be generous to others, despite his cold and callous temperament, Kant claims that it "is just then that the worth of character comes out, which is moral and incomparably the highest, namely that he is beneficent not from inclination but from duty." Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 12 (4:398–99). In the *Metaphysics of Morals*, we find the following formulation: "to perform [an] action only from duty without inclination—then for the first time action has genuine moral worth." Immanuel Kant, *Philosophical Writings*, ed. Ernst Behler (New York: Continuum, 1986), 66. See also Roehr, "Freedom and Autonomy in Schiller," 123.

<sup>15</sup> For an expressivist reading of Kantian autonomy, see Christoph Menke, "Autonomy and Liberation: The Historicity of Freedom." In *Hegel on Philosophy in History*, James Kreines and Rachel Zuckert, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 159–76, esp. 161.

<sup>16</sup> Beiser argues that the dispute between Schiller and Kant does not concern whether a specific moral action ought to be motivated by inclination or duty. The difference between them is rather that Schiller's theory involves the development of the *whole person*, which requires a non-hierarchical relation between reason and sensibility, whereas Kant is concerned, more narrowly, with *moral character*, which has the moral law as its overarching telos. Beiser, *Schiller as Philosopher*, 175–79, 184–87.



modernity. The dominance of reason in the modern era has brought about enormous social and scientific progress, but this has happened at the expense of nature, feeling, and passion. This is a problem, Schiller argues, since the triumph of the form drive has led to a sacrifice of individual happiness for the sake of the progress of the species. Referring to the fragmentation of the sensory and rational faculties in modern individuals, he writes that “however much the world as a whole may benefit through this fragmentary specialization of human powers, it cannot be denied that the individuals affected by it suffer under the curse of this cosmic purpose” (L VI.14).

Considering the history of (Western) civilization, Schiller finds the narrative of progress that the Enlightenment purports to be dubious. From an inter-generational perspective, there is a current of regress in the midst of progress:

And in what kind of relation would we stand to either past or future ages, if the development of human nature were to make such a sacrifice [*Opfer*] necessary? [I.e., a sacrifice of happiness for individuals of the present.] We would have been the serfs of mankind; for several millennia we would have done slaves’ work for them, and our mutilated nature would bear impressed upon it the shameful marks of this servitude. And all this in order that a future generation might in blissful indolence attend to the care of its moral health, and foster free growth of its humanity. (L VI.14)

The happiness of previous and current generations is being sacrificed—as a utilitarian pawn—to the generations of the future. Here, Schiller anticipates Adorno and Horkheimer’s diagnosis that the instrumental or economic aspect of archaic sacrifice, which Enlightenment modernity claims to have left behind, is still at work in the logic of civilization. Schiller’s verdict is that insofar as civilization progresses by advancing the form drive at the expense of the sense drive, it *simultaneously regresses* by destroying the conditions for the realization of its own ambitions of freedom and happiness. He insists that as long as fragmentation endures, we cannot be fully human: “the antagonism of the faculties and functions is the great instrument of civilization—but it is only an instrument; for as long as it persists, *we are only on the way to becoming civilized*” (L VI.12, emphasis added). Without a connection to their senses, feelings, imagination, and poetic nature, Schiller writes, individuals fall short of being “happy and complete human beings” (L VI.14).

Modern human beings are thus faced with a task: just as they have freed themselves from the violence of nature, they need to free themselves from the violence of reason. According to the reading I have articulated in this section,

this would require a vindication of the sense drive so as to integrate sense and reason. The political ideal of true civilization, which Schiller stipulates, is one of wholeness: the overcoming of the sacrificial relationship within class society, between reason and sense, individual and community, and the present and the future. The term that he uses to describe this ideal of self- and world-integration is “reconciliation.”<sup>17</sup> But what will such a reconciliation look like? In the next section, I argue that, for Schiller, the process of artistic creation is able to vindicate the sense drive and convey a vision of freedom in which nature is not sacrificed.

### 3. Faking Freedom in Artistic Creation

We have seen that Schiller views modernity as an age marked by fragmentation, and that he searches for a model of unification of both the rational and the sensuous faculties, and of individual and society. As the Jena Romantics, such as Friedrich Schlegel, will also do, he looks to Ancient Greece for a radical antithesis to modernity. While Schiller does not believe that a return to the Greeks is possible or desirable, he does view the Greek polis as a paradigmatic example of unity and harmony.<sup>18</sup>

In the *Letters*, Schiller expresses this contrast between Greeks and moderns with a metaphorical juxtaposition between an organic lifeform and a machine. He likens the modern state to a mechanical unity. Individual citizens are like replaceable machine parts (the word Schiller uses is *Bruchstück*, i.e., a fragment broken off of a whole) connected through external relations (L VI.7). Modern society is governed by a utilitarian economy insofar as “means [have been separated] from end” so the individual citizen is reduced to an instrument of the state (L VI.7). Indeed, “utility is the great idol of our age,” Schiller writes (L II.3). Hence, the sacrificial logic of reason is also at work in the relationship between citizen and state. By contrast, Schiller characterizes the Greek polis as a living organism held together by

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<sup>17</sup> At times, Schiller uses the Christian term *versöhnen* (L XIV.6; XXVII.7), but elsewhere he uses *vermitteln* (L XIII.1), *vereinigen* (L XXIV.3), and *vereinbaren* (L XIV.3). It might be the case that the term *Versöhnung* has come to be associated with Schiller’s *Letters* to such a high degree because it is the term that Hegel uses to emphasize the achievement and shortcomings of Schiller in his *Lectures on Aesthetics*. GWF Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, Vol. 1, trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford & New York: Clarendon Press, 1998), 62.

<sup>18</sup> Despite his strong interest in the Greek polis as an ideal, Schiller comes to have reservations about what he views as Schlegel’s uncritical obsession with the Greeks, his “Graecomania,” and he eventually has a fallout with both Schlegel and his brother A. W. Schlegel, thus parting ways with two of the most central figures of the Jena Romanticism. Ernst Behler, *German Romantic Literary Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 39.

internal relations between part and whole. The Greek citizen had a relative degree of independence but was an essential part of the community as a whole (L VI.7). Moreover, on an individual level, the intellect and the senses worked together in harmony, and thus Greek individuals were not internally fractured (L VI.3). In sum, in pre-modern Greek society, there is no sacrifice of individual sensuous faculties.

In his 1795–96 *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry*, Schiller compares the Greek and the modern artist. Aligning with the narrative of decay from the *Letters*, he draws a distinction between nature and culture, which he maps onto a distinction between the ancient Greek world and modernity. Modern culture has lost the natural unity of the Greek world. Consequently, the artistic processes of the Greek artist and the modern artist diverge.<sup>19</sup> Schiller writes that “[f]or [the Greeks,] culture had not degenerated to such a degree that nature was left behind” (NSP 195). For that reason, the Greek artist imitates nature in an immediate way with an attitude of naivety. By contrast, “nature has disappeared from [modern] humanity” (NSP 194). Moderns long for the completeness and happiness that belonged to nature (NSP 192). Schiller argues that, save for a few exceptions, modern poets have an attitude toward nature that is sentimental rather than naïve. This means that “as nature eventually begins to disappear from human life as an *experience* and as the (acting and feeling) *subject*, we see it ascend in the world of poets as an *idea* and *object*” (NSP 196). That is, the artist of the modern world, for whom natural unity is lost, has to assume a mediated or reflective attitude toward nature and approach it as an ‘object,’ i.e., as something distinct and at a distance from the subject. Because of the fragmentation between subject and object, the modern artist will have to rediscover nature through the artistic process, whereas the Greek artist is immediately in touch with nature (NSP 195). Yet if artists are as alienated from nature as the rest of the moderns, how can they vindicate sensuous materiality?

We can begin to think about Schiller’s response to this challenge by considering the three-term analogy he draws in Letter IV between 1) the artisan (*mechanische Künstler*), 2) the artist (*schöne Künstler*), and 3) an imagined pedagogue or “statesman-artist” (*pädagogischen und politische Künstler / Staatskünstler*, who is to construct a state through a program of aesthetic education (L IV.4). The analogy compares three kinds of creative processes, and three relationships between form and matter. Schiller first considers the artisan. When creating a product, the artisan

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<sup>19</sup> Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller, “On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry,” in *Essays*, trans. Daniel Dahlstrom. Walter Hinderer and Daniel Dahlstrom, eds., The German Library, 17 (New York: Continuum, 1993). I refer to this text in the body text as NSP.

lays hands upon the formless mass in order to shape it to his ends, he has no scruple in doing it violence [*Gewalt*]; for the natural material he is working on merits no respect for itself, and his concern is not with the whole for the sake of the parts, but with the parts for the sake of the whole. (L IV.4)

Hence, in the creative process, the artisan treats matter in much the same way as reason treats nature in modern civilization: violently. To the artisan, matter has no intrinsic dignity. It is a non-essential means that must be sacrificed for the sake of the end product. As in the machine-like state described above, the parts of the product are subordinated to the whole.

The artist is a more complex figure than the artisan. Like the artisan, the artist does violence to matter: “for the material he is handling he has not a whit more respect” (L IV.4). However, the artist creates *aesthetic semblance of non-violence*. This is still a subjection of matter to aesthetic form, i.e., it is still a sacrifice of the natural. Yet it appears otherwise. Schiller writes that “the eye which would seek to protect the freedom of the material [*die Freiheit dieses Stoffes*] he will endeavour to deceive by a show of yielding to this latter” (L IV.4). In a work of art, matter is shaped according to the artist’s concepts or ideas, resulting in aesthetic form, but the material appears to be free and not subjected to form.<sup>20</sup> This appearance of a reciprocal relation between form and matter, part and whole, in art is what Schiller calls beauty (*Schönheit*) (L XVI.1). Art beauty is, for Schiller, the contemporary correlate of the harmony and unity of the Greek polis. As mentioned above, he views the Greek polis as an organic unity between individual and community (L VI.2). There is a structural affinity between Greek society and a beautiful work of art insofar as, in the work of art, each material part is an indispensable part of the whole. We could not remove a piece of the work of art without the work and its meaning changing in an essential way. Hence, here there is no instrumental relationship where a part could be sacrificed for the sake of the whole, as there is in modern reason’s subsumption of the particular to the universal. In short, in the work of art, the material is essential and indispensable, and it appears to be released from form.

This ideal relationship between whole / part and form / matter is also accentuated in the third moment in the analogy, the statesman-artist. This figure differs from the artist in the sense that the kind of reciprocity between

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<sup>20</sup> In the so-called *Kallias Letters*, Schiller defines art as “freedom in appearance.” Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller, “Kallias or Concerning Beauty: Letters to Gottfried Körner,” in Jay M. Bernstein, *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics*, trans. Stefan Bird Pollan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 151.

part and whole that we find in art beauty must be *made actual*. Schiller writes that the “consideration he [the statesman-artist] must accord to [*the material’s*] *uniqueness and individuality* is not merely subjective, and aimed at creating an illusion for the senses, but objective and directed to its innermost being” (L IV.4, emphasis added). The reciprocity that beauty displays is only actualized when “the whole serves the parts [and] the parts are in any way bound to submit to the whole” (L IV.4). In the case of the statesman, the material is of course not letters, stone, or clay, but an actual human individual, and the statesman-artist must pay attention to the “material’s” uniqueness and individuality. Schiller’s suggestion for how the statesman is to cultivate each individual is an aesthetic education in which the individual is confronted with art beauty.

Through the tripartite analogy, we learn that, although art is only semblance, it can convey an experience of matter as having intrinsic value, integrity, and authority, since matter is essential to the significance of the work. Art shows nature as a form of non-violent and, seemingly, free materiality. For an example, let us look at Schiller’s description of the sculpture *Juno Ludovisi*:

It is not grace, nor is it yet dignity, which speaks to us from the superb countenance of a *Juno Ludovisi*; it is neither one nor the other because it is both at once. While the woman-god demands our veneration, the god-like woman kindles our love [...] The whole figure reposes and dwells in itself, a creation completely self-contained, and, as if existing beyond space, neither yielding nor resisting; here is no force to contend with force [...] we find ourselves at one and the same time in a state of utter repose and supreme agitation, and there results that wondrous stirring of the heart for which the mind has no concept, nor speech any name. (L XV.9)

In this quotation, Schiller describes both a work of art, *Juno Ludovisi*, and the aesthetic experience of this sculpture. He uses a metaphor of a communication between human and divine, which refers to an experience of a reciprocal relationship between matter and form in the work of art. Here, there is no violent subjection of matter to form (there is “no force [*Kraft*] to contend with force”). Because of this, the sculpture allows the viewer to experience the ‘divinization’ of matter, i.e., matter as a realm of freedom. In this experience of art beauty, materiality has “grace” and “dignity,” and we find that, in appreciating these features, our sensuous faculties are more competent than our reason (“the mind [*der Verstand*] has no concept, nor speech any name”). The aesthetic experience, which is the outcome of the

artist's creative process, is not an intellectual experience; it is an intense and satisfactory sensuous experience ("a wondrous stirring of the heart"). A sensuous experience of what? I would claim that the work of art offers the viewer a sensuous experience of what a world without a sacrifice of the natural would feel like.<sup>21</sup> On my reading, then, Schiller claims that the beauty of the work of art can vindicate the natural.

#### 4. Freedom Without Sacrifice

My contention is that, on Schiller's account, art provides an experience of matter as essential. His radical idea is that this aesthetic experience affects the human soul. The interaction with art beauty elicits a relation between the form drive and the sense drive in which the latter is not sacrificed. This is a form of freedom.

Despite Schiller's own declared agreement with Kant—and despite the fact that he, at times, refers to a more Kantian conception of autonomy—we find a distinct concept of freedom in the *Letters* that cannot be reduced to autonomy understood as rational self-determination, which, as mentioned, Schiller takes to involve the possibility of a violence enacted by reason itself.<sup>22</sup> Bearing on his idealized view of the Greek polis, Schiller's conception of freedom revolves around an idea of wholeness. Freedom consists in an equilibrium between the form drive and the sense drive:

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<sup>21</sup> On Jacques Rancière's Schiller-inspired account of aesthetic politics, the aesthetic experience is able to shift what he calls the current "distribution of the sensible" (this is the structure, in any community, that determines what can be perceived, said, and thought, and what is invisible, unsayable etc.); just as Schiller believes that the aesthetic is able to challenge the fragmented hierarchical order of the modern world. Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2010), 40; see also 23. Rancière also makes the more general point that the "politics of aesthetics comprises a new sphere of visibility, where the products of art are the objects of a specific experience that annuls the hierarchy of human activities as well as the hierarchy of subjects and forms of representation." Jacques Rancière, "The Aesthetic Heterotopia," *Philosophy Today* 54, SPEP Supplement (2010), 20.

<sup>22</sup> Several scholars agree that there is more than one concept of freedom in the *Letters* (and that these are not necessarily mutually compatible). Schiller seems to claim at once that the *form drive* is the locus of freedom (i.e., that freedom is a property of reason), just as Kant sees it, and that freedom is a property of human nature as a whole. See Roehr, "Freedom and Autonomy in Schiller," 129, Beiser, *Schiller as Philosopher*, 152–53. Roehr identifies two concepts of freedom in Schiller: 1) the Kantian concept of autonomy, and a further concept than those already mentioned, namely, 2) the concept of "neutral free will" (the will is 'neutral' in the sense that it is neither part of reason, nor of sensibility, but comprises a distinct genus). Roehr, 121. Beiser further identifies what he calls "aesthetic freedom" or "active determinability," which are his terms for the freedom that arises from the reconciliation of the form and the sense drives. Beiser, 232–34.

[Freedom] arises only when man is a complete being, when both his fundamental drives are fully developed; it will, therefore, be lacking as long as he is incomplete, as long as one of the two drives is excluded, and it should be capable of being restored by anything which gives him back his completeness. (L XX.1)

This implies that freedom requires a *reconciliation* of the two aspects of the human soul, sense drive and form drive. Famously, Schiller terms the transformative process, in which the form drive and sense drive mutually constrain and set each other free, the play drive (*Spieltrieb*) (L XIV.3).<sup>23</sup> He writes that the “[e]xclusive domination by either of his two basic drives is for him [i.e., the human being] a state of constraint and violence, and freedom lies only in the co-operation of both natures” (L XVII.4). Indeed, “as soon as the two opposing fundamental drives are active, within [the individual], both lose their compulsion [*Nötigung*], and the opposition of two necessities gives rise to freedom” (L XIX.12). Hence, when a reciprocal relation (*Wechselwirkung*) between the two drives is brought about through the experience of art beauty—such as in the example of *Juno Ludovisi*—the two “work in concert” (L XIV.3).

Schiller makes the strong claim that play is the essence of humanity: “man only plays when he is in the fullest sense of the word a human being, and he is only fully a human being [*ganz Mensch*] when he plays” (L XV.9). Hence, despite Schiller’s thoroughgoing critique of Enlightenment as being itself the cause of fragmentation, he is still inspired by the Enlightenment’s own idea of the “whole human being” (*den ganzen Menschen*).<sup>24</sup> Consequently,

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<sup>23</sup> The concept of play likely has roots both in Kant’s *Critique of the Power of Judgment* and Lessing’s *Laocoon*. (Beiser also mentions F. W. Ramdohr as a possible source. Beiser, *Schiller as Philosopher*, 142–43.) It is somewhat ambiguous whether Schiller thinks the play drive is a third drive or rather the harmony between the two drives. Schiller does, for instance in L XV.7, talk about “satisfying the play drive,” which perhaps indicates that it is a separate drive. Gregg Horowitz argues that the play drive, in being a *drive*, is a distinct source of claim-making that “expresses demands on the world.” Gregg M. Horowitz, “The Residue of History. Dark Play in Schiller and Hegel,” *International Yearbook of German Idealism*, 4, (2006), 190–91. For my reading, this ambiguity is not crucial, since I assume that ‘play,’ whatever else it is, is also a term that designates the unique conception of non-sacrificial freedom, which Schiller is struggling to conceive.

<sup>24</sup> Walter Hinderer argues that Schiller’s understanding of the trope of the whole human being derives from the Enlightenment physician’s philosophy, which Schiller picked up as a medical student in his youth. The conception of the human being as a psychophysical unity, in which the body is not passive, but makes an active contribution to the actions of the soul, is, Hinderer claims, the foundation of Schiller’s distinct anthropology. This emphasis on the active body further supports my reading that Schiller is interested in making his age reappraise the natural as not just a passive component of human nature. Walter Hinderer, “Schiller’s Philosophical Aesthetics in Anthropological Perspective,” in *A Companion to the*

as we have seen, he rejects the Romantic idea that fragmentation is an ineradicable feature of the modern world and maintains a hope for a reconciliation of reason and nature, and self and world.<sup>25</sup> But why did he choose the term “play” to designate this experience of reconciliation, and how more exactly does play overcome the sacrificial rationality of modernity?

Schiller defines aesthetic play as that which is neither arbitrary nor necessary (L XV.5). A possible way of reading this seemingly paradoxical statement is to think of play as *non-arbitrary* insofar as it is an activity structured by its own internal norms. Although these are often tacit, children’s play is governed by its own rules and norms. Hence, play has a structure or lawfulness and is not arbitrary. On the other hand, play is *non-necessary* in the sense that it can only begin once our physical needs are satisfied. Play is an excess beyond need. We can see this even in animals, Schiller insists. When animals are not strained by outer compulsion, the birds sing and the lion roars (L XXVII.3). “An animal [...] may be said to be at play when the stimulus is sheer plenitude of vitality, when superabundance of life is its own incentive to action” (L XXVII.3). Schiller is of course aware that animal play is caused by instinct (and is thus, strictly speaking, necessary). Yet, he claims, the overabundant “physical play” in nature anticipates human “aesthetic play.” Aesthetic play is an excess not only beyond physical need, but also beyond moral demands. It “imposes no kind of constraint either from within or from without” (L XV.5). Play is a fully free activity in the sense that even if play has its own *internal* rules and ends, it has no *external* ends. Hence, in play, means are not sacrificed to external ends since it is “at once its own end and its own means” (L XXVII.3). Here the economic or utilitarian logic of modern life is suspended in an aesthetic experience.

Yet Schiller not only claims that art can heal the fragmented human soul; he also argues that art has a potential for moral and political emancipation, i.e., that it can possibly heal the fracture between individual and world. The reconciliation of form drive and sense drive through play,

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*Works of Friedrich Schiller*, ed. Steven D. Martinson (Rochester, N.Y: Camden House, 2005), 29 and 33.

<sup>25</sup> On the differences between Schiller and the Jena Romantics, specifically Friedrich Schlegel, with respect to the question of whether fragmentation is a permanent feature of the modern world, see Daniel Dahlstrom, “Play and Irony: Schiller and Schlegel on the Liberating Prospects of Aesthetics” in *The History of Continental Philosophy*, ed. Alan D. Schrift (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 128–29. Dahlstrom highlights the contrast between Schiller’s harmonizing play and Schlegel’s irony, and the latter’s idea that aesthetic semblance reproduces “the *endless* play of the world” (italics added).



Schiller claims, possesses the marvelous “pledge in the sensible world of a morality as yet unseen” (L III.5). We saw above that a resurrection of the sense drive was necessary for “making other people’s feelings our own” (L XIII.4n). At the end of the *Letters*, Schiller connects this thought with his concept of play. He describes how ornamentation, adornment, and play develop in complex early civilizations. His thesis is that it is precisely in this desire for beautiful and ‘useless’ ornamentation that culture erupts from brute nature (L XXVI.3). It is when humans begin to produce ornamentation, art, and adorn their own bodies, and in this way deal with natural materials playfully—without any external end—that we can talk about genuine human culture. In such civilizations, there is no need to care about one’s physical appearance, except for the reason that one “wants to please” the other. From the aesthetic needless desire to please the other, non-instrumental solidarity develops (L XXVII.5).<sup>26</sup> That is, human empathy springs from aesthetic play brought about by beauty.<sup>27</sup> It takes the form of spontaneous desire to appear pleasing to the other. Schiller argues that reciprocal human relationships develop in previous civilizations when the individual is “willing to concede freedom, because it is freedom [i.e., another free human being] he wishes to please” (L XXVII.7). Play thus transcends instrumental relationships. The play drive brings about the harmony between the form and the sense drive and makes the individual aware that her sensuous nature ought not to be sacrificed. Once sensibility can be imagined as a legitimate need to be satisfied, political passion for duty toward the other will be ignited.

Michael Hardimon has suggested that we read Schiller’s conception of freedom as being at home both in oneself and in the world.<sup>28</sup> To be at home

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<sup>26</sup> Jay M. Bernstein also emphasizes this point. Jay M. Bernstein, “Significant Stone: Medium and Sense in Schiller,” in *International Yearbook of German Idealism* (2008) (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 175.

<sup>27</sup> I thus disagree with Acosta López that it is unclear “how beauty—at least the notion of beauty developed in the *Aesthetic Letters*—can be related to [...] commonality or inter-humanity.” She argues that we need Schiller’s notion of the sublime, which he develops in other texts, most notably *Grace and Dignity*, in order to account for this relation. María del Rosario Acosta López, “‘Making Other People’s Feelings Our Own’: From the Aesthetic to the Political in Schiller’s Aesthetic Letters” in *Who Is This Schiller Now? Essays on His Reception and Significance*, Jeffrey High, Nicolas Martin, and N. Oellers, eds. (London: Boydell & Brewer, 2011), 193. The sublime in Schiller, she claims, is closely related to the idea of *Mitleid* (sympathy or identification), which the spectator feels while experiencing a tragedy. Thus, sublime tragedy bridges the gap between art and social feeling (i.e., between aesthetics and morality).

<sup>28</sup> Being-at-home in the world is of course most commonly associated with Hegel’s conception of reconciliation, but Hardimon argues that this concept has roots in Schiller.

in the world means not to be separated from the world, not to feel divorced from its institutions, one's own work, one's peers, and one's community. Considering Schiller's work in the context of the aftermath of the French Revolution, we should, I think, agree with Hardimon, that Schiller has a wide-reaching idea of freedom in mind. What is at stake, as I have suggested, is freedom from the violence and domination of modern reason, a freedom from sacrifice of the natural. This freedom, were it to be actualized, is not only the unity of individual human nature; it is also the realization of a social world in which human needs are met. However, this world is, as Schiller states, "*yet unseen.*" How can it be realized? How can we proceed from aesthetic education to political freedom?

### 5. Semblance as Critique

As mentioned, Schiller believes that the semblance of reciprocity in the work of art can in fact bring about a reconciliation in the soul by eliciting the play drive. Once the play drive is elicited and the subject is transformed by art, moral and political work can begin. Frederick Beiser locates Schiller's political project within the republican tradition descending from Machiavelli and Montesquieu through Rousseau and Ferguson, because of what he views as Schiller's focus on moral virtue, and the idea that a good state cannot arise before citizens have developed a virtuous character.<sup>29</sup> Yet we could perhaps also view Schiller's focus on the reform of the soul as a precursor to the neo-Marxist idea that taking oneself as a political agent and a collective subject (which is what modern subjects cannot because of fragmentation) is a precondition for being able to institute radical political change. Yet it is not wholly clear what the step from the aesthetic education of the soul to the realization of true political freedom in the world is supposed to look like. If play produces a new subject—a subject in which the division of sense and reason are, at least temporarily, interrupted—how will this subject change the world?

Notoriously, in Letter XXVII, Schiller outlines the blueprint of an *aesthetic state*. How this letter should be interpreted is debated, and the notion of the aesthetic state has been met with much skepticism. A common worry is whether the aesthetic state leaves enough room for difference, disharmony, and non-identity. Consulting the text will not aid us much: the final sections of the *Letters*, in which Schiller sketches the virtues of the aesthetic state, is

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Michael O. Hardimon, *Hegel's Social Philosophy: The Project of Reconciliation* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 105–6.

<sup>29</sup> Beiser, *Schiller as Philosopher*, 125.

marked by ambiguity. It is unclear whether the aesthetic state is meant to be an institutional blueprint of a mode of government, and, consequently, if Schiller in fact thinks that reality *itself* must become aesthetic. This idea seems to stand in contrast to Schiller's claim that the work of art itself is semblance. The work of art is an object in the world consisting of form and matter. Yet, Schiller is adamant that form and matter are not literally reconciled in art, but merely appear to be so.<sup>30</sup> In the very last paragraph, however, Schiller asks, "does such State of Aesthetic Semblance really exist? And if so, where can it be found?" He answers that it only exists as a *need* in "every finely attuned soul," and perhaps is only realized in a few circles of intellectuals (L XXVII.12). This evidences that aesthetic reconciliation is an internal reconciliation, or a metaphor for a state of harmony in the individual soul, though one which contains a need or a drive for outer institutional reconciliation. I will not be able to offer a convincing solution to these vexed tensions in Schiller's text here. Rather, as a conclusion of my article, I want to make a few remarks indicating the emancipatory potential of the artistic creation of semblance.

To Schiller, it is exactly the human capacity to produce—and derive sensuous pleasure from—the phenomenon of semblance that Schiller finds to be such an astonishing and unique feature of human beings as a species (L XXVI.7). Semblance is remarkable, first of all, because it transcends the real. Aesthetic semblance (*ästhetischen Schein*) is like an illusion, but in contrast to logical semblance (illusion proper), it does not deceive us (L XXVI.5). Rather for something to count as aesthetic semblance, it must be "honest," when it "expressly [renounce] all claims to reality [*Realität*]" (L XXVI.11).<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Anne Pollok writes that, according to Schiller, "[t]he moment we forget about the ideality of our form-giving (i.e. the fact that we do not create a thing itself but only its semblance) is the moment we succumb to logical semblance. In other words: the moment the artist aims to establish an aesthetic state in reality, she forgets about her limits and creates a dictatorship of mere ideas." Anne Pollok, "A Further Mediation and the Setting of Limits: The Concept of Aesthetic Semblance and the Aesthetic State" in *Friedrich Schiller: Über die Ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen in einer Reihe von Briefen*, ed. Gideon Stiening (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2019), 225. György Lukács' criticizes Schiller's solution insofar as he thinks it implies either a form of apolitical rationalism or a dangerous mythologizing of politics: "either the world must be aestheticized [which] is just another way of making the subject purely contemplative and to annihilate 'action,'" or "the aesthetic principle must be elevated into the principle by which objective reality is shaped." György Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2013), 139–40.

<sup>31</sup> Pollok points out that there is a tension in the *Letters* since Schiller speaks negatively about semblance in Letter X, whereas, as I am emphasizing here, he speaks favorably about semblance in Letter XXVI. It was nevertheless a common view among the Romantics that aesthetic semblance "gives birth to truth and untruth simultaneously," she argues. Anne Pollok, "A Further Mediation and the Setting of Limits," 223–24.

Works of art do not pretend to be any more than imitation or fiction. This unrealness of semblance, rather than making us conflate appearance and reality, allows us to distinguish appearance from reality (L XXVI 4).

Semblance is also “autonomous,” Schiller claims, in a sense that other things in empirical reality are not (L XXVI.11). As we saw above, human beings in early civilization produced appearances out of sheer overabundance of resources—only to please the eyes of one another (L XXVII.5). In accordance with this account, Schiller writes that the aesthetic semblance of the work of art is constrained neither by physical laws nor by moral laws (L XXVI.4). As mentioned above, the work of art has an internal lawfulness, yet is not subjected to an external purpose, neither physical nor moral.

It is in this in-between status of semblance—its simultaneous reality-transcending quality (or fakeness, if you will) and autonomy—that the political potential of aesthetic semblance lies.

[I]ndifference to reality and interest in semblance [*Schein*] may be regarded as a genuine enlargement of humanity [*Erweiterung der Menschheit*] and a decisive step towards culture. [...] The reality of things is the work of things themselves; the semblance [*Schein*] of things is the work of man (L XXVI.4).

Hence, our ability to abstract from reality is “a genuine enlargement of humanity.” To bring out the full implication of this, we could say that our capacity for producing and appreciating semblance is our most political capacity—indeed, it is what makes us political beings—since it allows us to free ourselves from the given and conceive of a different future. Aesthetic semblance allows us to develop the “unlimited potential” of the imagination, i.e., to *play with possibilities* (L XXVI.4). Through our exploration of semblance, we are able to imagine things otherwise. We could even say that the play drive is a drive toward making things otherwise. If we follow this line of thought, we can view aesthetic semblance as a form of *critique*. Because aesthetic semblance makes us able to distinguish appearance from reality, it can make us aware of the antagonisms in the modern world and inspire us to change reality.<sup>32</sup> Yet in distancing us from reality, art does not convey an

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<sup>32</sup> Although he does not frame Schiller’s project in terms of critique, I think Horowitz argues something along these lines as well. Horowitz believes that the play drive is indeed a distinct third drive, which moves the human being to strive to fulfill the gap between the real and the ideal. That play is a *drive* indicates that something is yet to be achieved, and that there is a disharmony between status quo of political reality and human demands. Hence, he thinks, Schiller’s project is essentially future-directed. The play drive incessantly compels us to strive for a regulative ideal of reconciliation that is different than the *status quo* and never reached. Gregg M. Horowitz, “The Residue of History,” 190–92.

abstract experience or idea, but a sensuously satisfying experience of human sensuous materiality as essential and indispensable.

The sensuous experience we get from aesthetic semblance is intense and forceful, yet it is temporary: “beauty, or aesthetic unity [...] *momentarily* takes place” (L XXV.6, emphasis added). For this reason, I think we read Schiller most sympathetically by emphasizing that the work of art can function (only) as a stand-in for a kind of political reality in which the individual is reconciled with the social world. Art beauty serves as a temporary experience of political freedom. It offers a glimpse of a world in which the sacrificial tendency in modern reason has been overcome, yet it does not instantiate this freedom itself in concrete social or political institutions. The beautiful semblance of the artwork functions as a form of critique of the status quo, but the promise of a society in which the material condition of human life has been re-authorized is still to be fulfilled. It is exactly because it is semblance that art can convey a political vision of a freedom which does not involve a sacrifice of nature. In this way, Schiller offers us a unique and radical account of artistic creation as a critique of the subjugation of the natural world and the sensuous aspect of the human being. I believe that this critique of the sacrifice of nature resonates strongly with challenges in our present.

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