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Symphilosophizing as Transcendental Philosophy

Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis

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ABSTRACT

This paper maintains that romantic symphilosophizing for Novalis is a mode of artistic transcendental philosophy. The latter relies on a synthetic method in which opposites are united through the hovering of the productive imagination. In this regard I show that there is a fundamental difference between Novalis and Friedrich Schlegel. For the sceptic Schlegel philosophy itself remains a mystery. Symphilosophy therefore is about aiming at secrets or higher truths that only an exceptional mind can possess. This occurs via polemical and aporetic dialogue. For Novalis philosophy at its highest stage of development is about mastering “at will” the method of raising into consciousness the unity of opposing determinations. This is achieved by the artist or genius of anyone who philosophizes with *Geist*. In Schlegel symphilosophizing ultimately fails, for it doesn’t compensate for human finitude, whereas a fruitful symphilosophizing is possible in Novalis. Despite the differences in their philosophies, Schlegel and Novalis still sought to symphilosophize together. I analyse three interconnected forms of symphilosophizing in their work.

Keywords: symphilosophy, Schlegel, Novalis, productive imagination, hovering, transcendental philosophy

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article soutient que le « symphilosophe » romantique est pour Novalis une forme de philosophie transcendante artistique. Celle-ci repose sur une méthode synthétique dans laquelle les contraires sont unifiés grâce au flottement de l’imagination productrice. À cet égard, je montre qu’il existe une différence fondamentale entre Novalis et Friedrich Schlegel. Pour Schlegel, penseur sceptique, la philosophie elle-même est un mystère. Symphilosopher, c’est par conséquent viser des secrets ou des vérités suprêmes que seul un esprit exceptionnel peut détenir. Cela passe par une confrontation dialogique, qui demeure aporétique. Pour Novalis, la philosophie à son stade le plus élevé consiste à maîtriser « à volonté » la méthode permettant de faire émerger dans la conscience l’unité de déterminations opposées. Y parvient l’artiste ou le génie de qui philosophe avec esprit (*Geist*). Il résulte du concept schlegélien de symphilosophie que celle-ci échoue en définitive, au sens où elle ne compense pas la finitude humaine, tandis qu’une symphilosophie fructueuse est possible chez Novalis. En dépit des différences entre leurs philosophies respectives, Schlegel et Novalis ont néanmoins cherché à faire œuvre commune de symphilosophie. J’en analyse trois formes, qui s’entre-implicent.

Mots-clés : symphilosophie, Schlegel, Novalis, imagination productrice, flottement, transcendentalisme

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1. Old and New Symphilosophizing

The relationship between Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis was not just a literary one: it was primarily, from its very beginning, a philosophical relationship. This philosophical friendship underwent several periods or stages of development; its key stages can be listed under three headings. (1) First, Schlegel and Novalis talked about favourite authors they had in common – among others, Plato and Hemsterhuis – when they first met around early 1792 at the University of Leipzig. This first stage can be simply designated: *philosophizing together about philosophers*. (2) A second stage was when they engaged in a shared activity of reading Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* and having fruitful conversations about it during the winter of 1796 / 97, upon reuniting in Weißenfels and Jena. Since this second stage was jointly focused on one particular philosopher they coined the verb *fichtisieren*, “fichticizing.”¹ (3) In a third stage, around a year later in 1798, this philosophizing and fichticizing became much broader and the result of a communal thinking in writing. They called this third more literary stage of their philosophical relationship: *symphilosophieren*, or “symphilosophizing.”

As Denis Thouard has recalled, Schlegel and Novalis did not arbitrarily create this latter neologism: it is the Germanisation of the Greek verbal form *symphilosophein*, which is borrowed from the vocabulary of ancient Greek intellectual culture.² Aristotle was the first author to use the word in Book IX of his *Nicomachean Ethics*, as a case of a specific class of *philia*, or friendship, in human beings.³ Scholars have discerned “four essential components of *philia* in general” in Aristotle: “(C1) reciprocity, (C2) willingness and intention to cooperate, (C3) the involvement of at least one good that is reciprocated, (C4) and the awareness of the others’ *philia* for one. In those cases of genuine friendship, we can add (C5) living or spending time together.”⁴ Aristotle distinguished between three goods with their corresponding kinds of friendship: pleasure, utility, and virtue. Spending time together sharing philosophical discussions as a form of chosen reciprocal

¹ See Novalis, “Logologische Fragmente”, *Vorarbeiten zu verschiedenen Fragmentsammlungen* (1798), frag. n° 11, in Novalis, *Schriften. Die Werke Friedrich von Hardenbergs* (hereafter: HKA), ed. Paul Kluckhohn, Richard Samuel, Hans-Joachim Mähl, Gerhard Schulz *et al.* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1965), vol. 2, p. 524.

² See Denis Thouard, “Avant-Propos”, in *Symphilosophie: F. Schlegel à Iéna* (Paris: Vrin, 2002), p. 11. See too my editorial to *Symphilosophie: International Journal of Philosophical Romanticism* 5 (2023): 12.

³ See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, IX, 12, 1172a5.

⁴ Jorge Torres, “*Philia*: the Biological Foundations of Aristotle’s Ethics”, *History and Philosophy of the Life Sciences* 43 (2021): 5.

association between two friends for matters of the mind and inner contemplation is an instance of actual mutual “training in virtue”⁵, the highest level of friendship. Such virtue friendship is essential to complete our nature as rational and political animals. It is a means for cultivating human self-sufficiency and the good life, as “friends compensate for human finitude through communication – friendly mediation indirectly imitates divine autarchy.”⁶ Thus, in redefining philosophy as *symphilosophieren* – an inherently social activity of human life – Schlegel and Novalis carried the older Greek taxonomy of friendship into their new modern practice of philosophizing.

The three above stages of the romantic taxonomy – philosophizing together about philosophers, *fichtisieren*, and *symphilosophieren* – are all, of course, forms of philosophizing. And defining the essence of what Schlegel and Novalis called symphilosophizing presupposes being able to define the general concept of philosophy that it is based on. It is important to bear in mind the difference in the conception of philosophy between fourth-century BC Greece and the modern world of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The early German romantics’ philosophical activity took place against the background of the transcendental tradition of critical philosophy with its Copernican revolution. But at the same time, and however one interprets their stance on idealism, pure transcendental philosophy – or pure “fichticizing” – was not enough for them. Indeed, in 1798 Novalis and Friedrich Schlegel were not uncritical readers of Kant and Fichte. Novalis famously claimed in his *Logological Fragments* that one ought to “Fichticize better than Fichte himself.”⁷ However, this does not mean being a better transcendental philosopher than Fichte, but creating artistic philosophical forms: “If we begin to extend fichticizing in an artistic manner, it can result in wonderful works of art.”⁸

My aim in this paper is twofold. First, I inquire whether symphilosophizing is part of this process of extending artistically Fichte’s transcendental philosophy and has its own specific role compared to both philosophizing and fichticizing. In short: if it is a mode of artistic transcendental philosophy. The findings of this inquiry reveal that this is particularly true of

⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, IX, 9, 1170a11-12.

⁶ Pierre Aubenque, *Le problème de l'être chez Aristote : essai sur la problématique aristotélicienne* [1962] (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, reed. 1997), p. 289. Cf. P. Aubenque, « L'amitié chez Aristote », in *idem*, *La prudence chez Aristote* (Paris: PUF, 1963), pp. 179-183.

⁷ See Novalis, “Logologische Fragmente”, *Vorarbeiten zu verschiedenen Fragmentsammlungen*, frag. n° 11, HKA 2, p. 524.

⁸ *Ibid.*

Novalis's thought. Second, in order to argue that symphilosophizing belongs in this transcendental tradition, I will focus on how it might be viewed as a *method*. In this regard the faculty of the hovering creative imagination is my guiding thread. Admittedly, the topic of the hovering imagination has already been treated in the scholarship on romantic philosophy, for example by Lore Hühn⁹, Bernward Loheide¹⁰, or Christoph Asmuth.¹¹ However, the present text seeks to assess to what extent the hovering of the productive imagination amounts to a new transcendental model of symphilosophizing.

This paper examines three interrelated forms of symphilosophizing between Schlegel and Novalis. First, what I call the transcendental level: here section 2 raises the question if their conceptions of symphilosophizing should be placed in the philosophical tradition of Kant and Fichte. Doesn't philosophical romanticism break with the idealist tradition? This point has been extensively debated.¹² I argue that particularly Novalis's view of symphilosophy remains in continuity with transcendental philosophy. Section 3 analyses a more aesthetic form of symphilosophizing between Schlegel and Novalis with regard to the concept of hovering as a philosophical method. For Novalis, the concept of hovering relates to the inner dynamics of the imagination in its own creative process, whereas in Schlegel hovering as method pertains to dialectics and irony. Third, an actual empirical or interpersonal form of symphilosophizing between Schlegel and Novalis: section 4 concludes by putting forward the fragment collection *Pollen* as a concrete example of a published collaborative writing project between these two romantic thinkers.

For the purpose of analysis, I will separate out these three forms of symphilosophizing – the empirical, the aesthetic, and the transcendental. However, when examining a collaborative product like the fragment collection *Pollen* we will see that all three forms of symphilosophizing are closely interrelated and merge into one another. To put it another way, there is a *scale of symphilosophizing*. The intellectual bonds in human beings can ascend

⁹ See Lore Hühn, "Das Schweben der Einbildungskraft. Eine frühromantische Metapher in Rücksicht auf Fichte", *Fichte-Studien* 12 (1997): 127–151.

¹⁰ See Bernward Loheide, *Fichte und Novalis. Transzendentalphilosophisches Denken im romanisierenden Diskurs* (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

¹¹ See Christoph Asmuth, "'Das Schweben ist der Quell aller Realität': Platner, Fichte, Schlegel und Novalis über die produktive Einbildungskraft", *e-Journal Philosophie der Psychologie* 2 (2005).

¹² On the debate whether romantic philosophy is to be placed inside or outside transcendental philosophy, see Laure Cahen-Maurel, "Novalis's Magical Idealism: A Threefold Philosophy of the Imagination, Love and Medicine," *Symphilosophie: International Journal of Philosophical Romanticism* 1 (2019): 129–165.

higher than the mere biographical and empirical level of two individuals who spend time together discussing philosophy, exchanging ideas in letters, or collaborating on a writing project. These bonds can rise to the highest level of an ideal or metaphysical community. This process is especially visible at the intermediate aesthetic level, since there one has the power to transcend the empirical, ascending up to the level of the transcendental; or *vice versa*, to descend from the transcendental, down to the empirical level.

2. Romantic Symphilosophizing: Is it in the Transcendental Tradition?

a) Schlegel: An Interpersonal and Privileged Practice of Philosophy

Schlegel started to elaborate his ideas about symphilosophizing at least as early as the year 1797. In a letter to Novalis dated 26 September 1797 he calls “symphilosophy” the *true* designation for his intellectual interaction with him while suggesting an extension of their oral exchange to some kind of writing:

I am impatiently looking forward to your philosophical communications. Even though *symphilosophy* is the true name for our association, don't be parsimonious and only restrict it to this field. – It would be wonderful if I could also render you *diaskeuastēs* services in philosophy.¹³

Here Schlegel introduces a particular form of friendly reciprocation that is usually specific to the intellectual technique of philology. He offers to play for Novalis the role of a *diaskeuastēs* in a spirit that rests in his philological studies and his “belief in textual *Potenzierung*”¹⁴, or potentiation. – I will return to this point in section 4 below.

Such a broader written practice of communal philosophizing than *fichtisiren* began soon after. Schlegel writes again to Novalis 28 May 1798:

Doesn't the epistolary form suit you more for your philosophical essays and other pieces? If you like the idea of an epistolary symphilosophy, I'll put together a plan; of course, in order to promote freedom and not to restrict it.¹⁵

¹³ See Friedrich Schlegel, letter to Novalis, 26 September 1797, in Novalis, HKA 4, p. 491.

¹⁴ On this topic, see Peter Svare Valeur, “Compilation as ‘heutige *Bildung*’: Philological and Philosophical Perspectives on Compilation in Friedrich Schlegel's *Lessings Gedanken und Meinungen*”, *Neophilologus* 104 (2020): 371.

¹⁵ See Friedrich Schlegel, letter to Novalis, 28 May 1798, in Novalis, HKA 4, p. 496.

The correspondence would become the proper place of their symphilosophy. During the following summer, Schlegel jots down this passage in his notebooks:

Symphilosophy with Hardenberg. In letters. He's a magician, I'm just a prophet. – Irony about experimenting with fantasy.¹⁶

This brief statement could be considered as straightforward and not saying much, but it actually sums up his symphilosophical relationship with Novalis very well. First, one must understand the unusual dimension in the statement. This is not only due to the rarity of genuine friendship, i.e. that exclusive friendship – as opposed to *polyphilia*¹⁷ – between two *individuals* who feel love for each other for the sake of their respective characters. This is the strongest relationship that human beings can experience and that the wise must practice. This is also because Schlegel had at times a rather aristocratic and elitist conception of symphilosophizing. For example, in fragment 264 of the *Athenaeum Fragments*, he writes:

You should not try to symphilosophize with everyone, but only with those who are *à la hauteur*.¹⁸

In other words, even though other passages show his openness to a more universal conception of symphilosophizing, if we base our reading on this specific quote, not every person has for Schlegel the ability to symphilosophize. But Schlegel saw in Hardenberg-Novalis someone worthy of philosophizing together with, so he obviously believed that Novalis was capable of reaching this superior level of communal thinking. They indeed symphilosophized about specific topics and programmatic ideas in their letters, including the possibility of a new Bible, a “symphysics”, or an encyclopedia project. What matters for us here is that when Friedrich Schlegel seeks to clarify their approach, the nature of their shared spiritual activity, he uses a language reminiscent of the religious vocabulary of ancient sects and brotherhoods – Schlegel and Novalis are ‘chosen’ ones who benefit from divine grace.

Moreover, as we can see from the above quote of summer 1798, they have different roles in their philosophical relationship on account of their

¹⁶ See Friedrich Schlegel, *Philosophische Lehrjahre*, in *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe* (hereafter: KFSA), ed. Ernst Behler (Munich: Schöningh, 1958 sq.), vol. 18, p. 142, n° 236: “Symphilosophie mit Hardenberg. In Briefen. Er Zauberer, ich nur Prophet. – Ironie über das Experimentieren mit der Fantasie”. Cf. Novalis, HKA 4, p. 621.

¹⁷ See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, IX, 10.

¹⁸ See Friedrich Schlegel, *Athenaeums-Fragmente* (1798), frag. n° 264, KFSA 2, p. 210.

different traits of character. Friedrich Schlegel allotted Novalis the role of a magician or *Zauberer*, no doubt due to his philosophy of ‘magical idealism’, while giving himself the role of “just a prophet.”¹⁹ This may be meant somewhat ironically perhaps, but it confirms Schlegel’s view that the bond in symphilosophy ought to be outstanding and rather unique. Once again Schlegel alludes to ancient origins, this time to the origins of the philosopher herself as a type of human character. The philosopher has its precursor in “semi-legendary figures, belonging to the class of ecstatic seers and purifying magi”, and embodying “the most ancient model of the ‘sage’” who “is originally defined as the exceptional being who has the power to see and make others see the invisible.”²⁰ The prophet is a person who traditionally foretells by clairvoyance a future event from which he is separated in space and time, or who announces the Messiah, the Saviour who will establish the Kingdom of God. Whereas in Schlegel, we know that the prophet tends to specialise more in exploring things from the past, as he writes in one of his most famous statements: “The historian is a backwards-looking prophet.”²¹ In portraying himself as a prophet, Schlegel stresses his philosophical interest in the philosophy of religion and the philosophy of history while mentioning at the end of the fragment both irony and fantasy. – I will say more about this in sections 3 and 4 below.

But at the same time of 1798 Schlegel is working with another concept of symphilosophy. Here symphilosophy appears as not just interpersonal but more as an inner dialogue of the thinking subject with itself. In Novalis’s fragment collection *Pollen*, Friedrich Schlegel now speaks about an “inner symphilosophy”:

And isn’t the life of every thinking person nothing else but a constant inner symphilosophy?²²

This leaves room for a further interpretative strand: symphilosophy can also be considered as a virtue of character present in the soul of the *individual*, relating to the structure of the human spirit and our capacity for *logos*, through which our moral sense emerges. I will return to this inner form of symphilosophy as well in section 4 below.

¹⁹ See above, footnote 16.

²⁰ Jean-Pierre Vernant, « Du mythe à la raison. La formation de la pensée positive dans la Grèce archaïque », in J.-P. Vernant, *Mythe et pensée chez les Grecs* (Paris: François Maspero, 1974), vol. II, pp. 107-108.

²¹ See Friedrich Schlegel, *Athenaeums-Fragmente*, frag. n° 80, KFSa 2, p. 176.

²² See *Blüthenstaub*, frag. n° 20, in Novalis, HKA 2, p. 419.

On the basis of these quotes, we could already try to briefly summarize Friedrich Schlegel's concept of symphilosophy. On the one hand, symphilosophy for him is an interpersonal practice of philosophizing viewed as the privilege of exceptional personalities, and restricted to two individuals. It relates to history and religion as well as to irony and experimenting with fantasy. On the other hand, it becomes confined to an inner cognitive dialogue of the subject.

But on account of the above quotes, it is hard to answer the question whether this concept of symphilosophizing belongs in the transcendental tradition, for Schlegel is not explicit on this point. In fact, for some Schlegel scholars the answer is more *no* than *yes* while for others it remains an open question. For example, Kurt Röttgers sees symphilosophy in Schlegel as a program of a comprehensive "polemical totality" conceived as an alternative to Kant's "transcendental architectonic of pure reason."²³ That is to say, Röttgers places Schlegel's concept of symphilosophizing against or outside the transcendental tradition. This is because Schlegel himself considered pure transcendental philosophy to be a form of mysticism. According to him, it expands human knowledge to a mystical level of arbitrarily positing the unconditioned as its starting point, as transcendental philosophy rests on foundations that cannot be determined empirically but can only be discovered *a priori* through pure thought.²⁴

However, as commentators have shown, Schlegel does not imbue the word *mysticism* with a negative meaning, even in the modern era.²⁵ Rather, in his eyes it positively points to the value of religious revelation that the power of the ancient seer and poet had. The progress of modern philosophy, i.e. transcendental philosophy, still retains as much mysticism as the nascent philosophy of antiquity. For the absolute, for which philosophy is the quest, is cognitively unattainable, at least directly. It retains a mysterious and transcendent character while nevertheless serving as an indispensable ideal of philosophical knowledge and artistic creation. As Bärbel Frischmann puts it: "It keeps thinking in motion because it is inexhaustible. The mystical itself

²³ Kurt Röttgers, "Symphilosophieren," *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* 88 (1981): 98.

²⁴ There is a wealth of literature on Schlegel's anti-foundationalism. For further reading on this subject, see among others Manfred Frank, *Unendliche Annäherung: Die Anfänge der philosophischen Frühromantik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997) and *Auswege aus dem Deutschen Idealismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2007); Elizabeth Millán Brusslan, *Friedrich Schlegel and the Emergence of Romantic Philosophy* (Albany N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2007); or Violetta Waibel, "'Wechselvernichtung' und 'freywilliges Entsagen des Absoluten'". Friedrich Schlegel und Friedrich von Hardenberg im Dialog," *Internationales Jahrbuch des Deutschen Idealismus* 6 (2008): 183-210.

²⁵ See for example Bärbel Frischmann, *Vom transzendentalen zum frühromantischen Idealismus: J.G. Fichte und Fr. Schlegel* (Paderborn / München et al.: Schöningh, 2005), p. 166 sq.

has an orienting and synthesising function.”²⁶ In other words, philosophy for Schlegel is itself a mystery. – This is expressly stated in the 1804 ‘characteristic’ of Lessing’s dialogue *Ernst und Falk*, i.e. up until the end of Schlegel’s romantic phase: “Thus philosophy is a beautiful mystery.”²⁷ In addition, the 1804 essay on Lessing argues that the dialogical form or dialectical argumentation is the form most closely associated with the mystical nature of philosophy. For philosophy has constituted itself as a specific intellectual discipline through the discussion of supreme divine matters. The latter have become open questions subject to contradictory debates between two parties.

The above is just a first *aperçu* of Schlegel’s thought on symphilosophy. Now let me move on to Novalis’s own characterization of symphilosophizing and ask the same question: is it to be placed inside or outside of the transcendental tradition?

b) Novalis: The Transcendental Condition for the Possibility of Philosophy

The noun *symphilosophy* does not appear to feature in the historical-critical edition of Novalis’s writings, and there only seem to be two occurrences of the process of *symphilosophizing* in his work.²⁸ That doesn’t mean, however, that Novalis didn’t reciprocate some *philia* for Schlegel. On the contrary. If while symphilosophizing in writing Schlegel gave Novalis the role of a *Zauberer* and himself the role of a prophet, Novalis himself gave the nickname “Julius” to Schlegel, testifying of the affinity and friendship he felt for him.²⁹ This nickname is both a reference to the protagonist of Schlegel’s 1799 love novel *Lucinde*, and to Friedrich Schiller, Novalis’s mentor. More precisely, it refers to the text “Theosophy of Julius” (1786), written by Schiller as a profession of faith embodied in selfless love.³⁰ Thus, Novalis was not only willing to cooperate with Schlegel out of his admiration for his character and

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

²⁷ See Friedrich Schlegel, “*Ernst und Falk*. Bruchstücke eines dritten Gesprächs über Freimaurerei”, *Lessings Gedanken und Meinungen*, in Friedrich Schlegel, *Schriften zur Kritischen Philosophie. 1795-1805*, ed. Andreas Arndt and Jure Zovko (Hamburg: Meiner, 2007), p. 197: “Ein schönes Geheimnis also ist die Philosophie”.

²⁸ This is based on the index of the historical-critical edition of Novalis’s works where the only point of entry is the verbal form *symphilosophieren*. See HKA 5, p. 743.

²⁹ See for example Novalis, “Randbemerkungen zu Friedrich Schlegels *Ideen*” (1799), HKA 3, p. 493.

³⁰ See Friedrich Schiller, “Theosophy of Julius”, in *Philosophische Briefe* (1786), *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Wolfgang Riedel (Munich: dtv, 2004), vol. 5, pp. 344-358. Schiller’s *Philosophische Briefe* as a whole consist of a dialogue between two characters named Raphael and Julius.

a strong emotional attachment to him. But he also agreed to symphilosophize together with Schlegel out of his conception of philosophy itself.

The notions of friend, friendship, and love are ubiquitous in Novalis's work. In fact (as I have argued elsewhere), Novalis found in Schiller's "Theosophy of Julius" one strand (among others) of magic in a positive philosophical sense in the form of sympathy, love and theosophy, a strand that ultimately leads back to the philosophical stream of Neoplatonism.³¹ If Schlegel's conception of philosophy rests on a more dialectical or polemical conflict of views about metaphysical issues, Novalis's idea of a chosen philosophical relationship with Schlegel can be understood in terms of the ancient Platonic conception of love (*Eros*) as attraction and union of opposites. Novalis believed in 1796 this conception was missing from Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, although the latter seemed to be on the verge of entering its "magic circle."³² After the death of his fiancée Sophie von Kühn, Novalis began engaging in the practice of symphilosophizing with Friedrich Schlegel. Sophie had prematurely died in the summer of 1797 and Novalis famously turned her into a symbol of philosophy itself. He thought of a rare true friendship in the same way as he thought of a couple: both true friendship and romantic love share the same attributes of intimacy, mutual admiration of character, and strong emotional attachment. – According to Aristotle, these are all ingredients of virtue friendship that symphilosophizing instantiates.

It is also interesting to note that of the two occurrences of the phrase "symphilosophize" in the historical-critical edition of the *Schriften*, one concerns Schelling, and not Schlegel as one would perhaps expect. It is as though Novalis (compared to Schlegel) placed more emphasis on a plurality of friendships than on the exclusivity of symphilosophy. Novalis writes the following to August Wilhelm Schlegel in December 1797: "I have become very much friends with Schelling. We have spent some delightful hours symphilosophizing together."³³

More decisive is the other occurrence of the term "symphilosophize" in Novalis. It appears in a fragment of the collection *Poeticisms* from 1798, the same time as the above key Friedrich Schlegel quotes. This fragment deals with the possibility of philosophy in relation to the rules or *method* of thought:

³¹ See Laure Cahen-Maurel, "Novalis's Magical Idealism: A Threefold Philosophy of the Imagination, Love and Medicine".

³² See Novalis, HKA 4, p. 188.

³³ See Novalis, letter from 25 December 1797, HKA 4, p. 240: "Mit Schelling bin ich sehr freund geworden. Wir haben einige köstliche Stunden symphilosophiert."

147. The possibility of philosophy rests on the possibility of producing thoughts *according to rules* – of thinking in a truly communal fashion. / Art of symphilosophizing (*Kunst zu symphilosophiren*) / If communal thinking is possible, then communal willing, the realization of great and new ideas, is also possible.³⁴

This passage most encapsulates Novalis' thinking on symphilosophy. At least three observations can be made about this fragment.

First observation: Novalis relates the condition for the possibility of philosophy to the principle of symphilosophizing; this means symphilosophizing for Novalis can indeed be expressed in transcendental language and concepts. In this respect, fragment 147 of the *Poeticisms* directly echoes Kant's definition of the transcendental in the Introduction to the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781-1787), where it designates the condition for the possibility of *a priori* knowledge.³⁵

The *a priori* condition for the possibility of philosophy itself requires that "thinking in a truly communal fashion" is possible. What does Novalis consider truly communal, *wahrhaft gemeinschaftlich*? Looking at the other occurrences of the noun *Gemeinschaft* in Novalis's works, like in Kant it is understood both as empirical or cultural community in the Latin sense of *communio*, and in the modern transcendental sense of the category of *commercium*, *Wechselwirkung* (reciprocity, interaction). Reciprocity was also an attribute of friendship for Aristotle and therefore belongs to the old mode of symphilosophizing. I maintain that a more telling word in fragment 147 of the *Poeticisms* is the adverb *wahrhaft* (truly). And since genuine communality is described here by Novalis as an "art", an art that has to be practiced and developed, it is worth mentioning that genuine *Gemeinschaft* designates in Kant *communio* at a transcendental level too. This is in accordance with a new mode of the thematisation of culture developed in the *Critique of the Power of Judgement* as part of the Copernican revolution in thinking that reverses our perspective on the world by describing objectivity based on the knowing, perceiving, and feeling subject, rather than the other way around. Kant argues in the third Critique that the pretention to universality in judgments of taste is based on the assumption of an aesthetic sense of community (*sensus communis*); e.g., on the assumption that everyone is in principle entitled, albeit to varying degrees, to participate in a cultural experience in which they share the feelings of others.³⁶ This intersubjective communicability of aesthetic

³⁴ See Novalis, *Poëticismen* (1798), HKA 2, pp. 558-59.

³⁵ See Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Einleitung VII.

³⁶ See Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, § 40.

pleasure as a subjectively universal, non-cognitive sense of community is a mere ideal, an indeterminate norm, but it can be postulated in every single person, and it grounds all logical thought and philosophy as well. In other words, if thinking in common is possible, then we have a common sense, we can share our thoughts, and the communicability of our judgment can serve as a universal rule.

This truly communal thinking underscores in my view one further difference between how Novalis and Friedrich Schlegel respectively understand symphilosophizing. As mentioned, Schlegel holds at times an almost elitist view of symphilosophizing and posits Novalis as someone who belongs to the elite minority; this is in line with the ancient Greek origin of the philosopher as emerging from the Magus and the sacred aristocratic tradition of mystery cults prior to the advent of the *polis*. In contrast, Novalis accounts for symphilosophizing in a much more universal and egalitarian manner, for his view of it is based on the *a priori*, transcendental structure of the human spirit; not only on intellectual capacities but on human sensibility as well.

Second observation: symphilosophizing for Novalis is related not just to thinking but to willing, not just to theoretical philosophy, but to practical philosophy. When Novalis speaks of the possible “realization of great and new ideas”, he seems to be sketching out a future programme that combines both theory and practice. In other words, we find here again the constitutive ingredient of practical reason in the Aristotelian ethical account of true and virtuous friendship as a superior kind of friendship that is opposed to a friendship of utility. The latter is a friendship based on difference and complementarity of differences, which in certain cases may involve some pleasure, but is not a moral friendship. In Novalis the practical account of symphilosophizing is conceived from the modern transcendental perspective, where the goal of raising thought beyond one’s particular point of view and interests should be directed at the common good and the process should involve universalization.

Thirdly, Novalis furthermore emphasizes a radically new element compared to the Aristotelian tradition of symphilosophy – the element of art in the phrase “art of symphilosophizing” (*Kunst zu symphilosophiren*). I would argue that symphilosophizing is literally for Novalis a fine art, or, more precisely, a transcendental art. It is something that requires the faculty of the productive imagination, and is therefore related to aesthetics and even to genius. For genuine *Gemeinschaft* does not just have to do with the possibility of communicating a subjective judgement between people. It is linked to expression in art, which is called *Geist* in Kant’s third Critique. *Geist* or spirit is a special component of genius, that of finding the most effective, stimu-

lating ‘letter’ (be it with words, colors, or stone etc.) for the communication of one’s aesthetic ideas.³⁷

This last point deserves a separate treatment. So let us now turn to the topic of the hovering imagination to better reveal this creative and artistic aspect. I will again compare and contrast Schlegel’s and Novalis’s respective treatments of this topic.

3. Hovering as Philosophical Method

No doubt the motif of hovering (*Schweben*) is related to the ancient image of the imagination as a winged being, similar to a bird. However, hovering is more than just a poetical trope in early German romanticism. It is a notion that the romantics particularly drew from transcendental philosophy, especially from Kant’s and Fichte’s transcendental idealism. The transcendental philosopher directs her mind’s eye to that “hidden art” of the imagination “in the depth of the human soul”, according to a well-known passage in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.³⁸ Here Kant goes beyond the figure of speech, the external image of hovering as a metaphor, back to the inner acts and activity of the productive power of our own mind. In this respect, it is worth noting that in addition to Kant’s primary definition of the transcendental as the condition for the possibility of *a priori* knowledge, Fichte uses the term in §§ 3 and 5 of the *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* (1794 / 95) to designate any explanation that is *immanent* to human consciousness. That is, transcendental idealism can be traced back to an operation in the human mind – as opposed to a transcendent or dogmatic explanation, which goes beyond consciousness.³⁹

a) Kant and Fichte: The Transcendental Art of Philosophizing

Schweben has in the common language the double dimension of movement and of (quasi) absence of movement. In both Kant and Fichte hovering describes the inner dynamics of the imagination in its own creative process. To put it another way, it is a power that is not merely a reproductive power (the inner recollection of the appearances of absent or possible objects), but a power of creative *synthesis* of something new. This productive power is linked on the one hand to epistemology (to the topic of schematism), and on the other hand to the aesthetic ideal of the artistic imagination. For Kant,

³⁷ See Kant, *Kritik der Urteilkraft*, § 49.

³⁸ See Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, B 180.

³⁹ See Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* (hereafter: *GWL*), ed. Wilhelm G. Jacobs (Hamburg: Meiner, 1997, reprint 2022), pp. 40, 197.

however, the importance of hovering in the conception of imaging consciousness remains marginal. Its importance only becomes apparent when it comes to distinguishing the imaginative schema as process and method from the image as a fixed or static product. What is only a peripheral motif in Kant becomes a central element of Fichte's philosophy of the imagination. Fichte also turns the verbal form *hovering* into a noun – *das Schweben* – to designate the imagination in its capacity for movement:

The power of imagination oscillates or hovers (*schwebt*) in the middle between determination and non-determination, between the finite and the infinite ... This hovering (*Schweben*) designates the imagination through its product; in the course of its oscillation or hovering and by means of the same, the power of imagination, as it were, produces this product.⁴⁰

If Fichte systematises movement in this way, it is because the imagination in general, *die Einbildungskraft*, is first and foremost a *Kraft*, i.e. a living force, the life of the mind – a life that it shares with reason. For, according to Fichte, reason is pure, infinite activity. It is only through the hovering of the imagination that pure reason, that is, the timeless dimension of the rational, appears in time, the element of inner sense.

Furthermore, as can be seen from the above quote, the activity of the imagination as an act of inner contemplation (*das Anschauen*) is not simply for Fichte a floating *above* empirical realities or, as in Kant, *amid* a multiplicity of experiences; it is first a pendulum movement, an oscillation or alternation (*Wechsel*) *between* opposite directions, between the poles of a *duality*, such as the duality of determination and non-determination, the finite and the infinite, the object and the subject. In other words, Fichte does not merely systematise movement in his conception of the imagination: he systematises the idea of polarity, of a dialectical tension between opposites, or of a contradiction between widely divergent terms. Once again, this matches the antinomic structure of reason itself.⁴¹

Unlike Kant, Fichte does not understand the synthesis merely as bringing together diverse elements, but rather as resolving apparent contradictions. Indeed, Fichte calls for an “experiment” by asking: “How can A

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 136; *Foundation of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre*, ed. and trans. by Daniel Breazeale (Oxford: OUP, 2021), p. 298 (trans. slightly modified).

⁴¹ On this subject, see Andreas Schmidt, “Fichtes Begriff der ‘Einbildungskraft’ und seine Maimonschen Ursprünge”, in *Idealismus und Romantik in Jena. Figuren und Konzepte zwischen 1794 und 1807*, eds. Michael Forster, Johannes Korngiebel and Klaus Vieweg (München: Fink, 2018), 11–23.

and –A, being and non-being, reality and negation, be thought together in a manner that does not annihilate and annul them?”⁴² The answer is: through the work of “a *special* law of our mind”⁴³, that of the synthetic power of the productive imagination whose function it is to bring extremes together and unite them without destroying either pole. Analysed by the understanding at the level of logic, opposites are absolutely mutually exclusive. But they exclude each other insofar as these terms are purely formal, that is, considered abstractly. Imagination, on the other hand, can unite what the understanding – reason in its logical use – separates by bringing pure and full reason, the subjective-objective unity of the I (Fichte’s absolute I), back to the deeper level of living intuition, where form is endowed with content.

Nevertheless, with the oscillation or hovering between opposites we are dealing with one term after another in rapid alternation: the imagination constantly shifts from one opposite to the other. However, Fichte maintains that this initial *Wechsel*, which is a sign of the agility of the living force within us, must eventually cease. In a second stage, the alternation must be brought together into a unity. It should be contained in a point where intuition fixes itself, at least temporarily, in order to become a representation for consciousness. In doing so, imagination is a “marvelous”⁴⁴ power that not only successively moves from one pole to the other, but also simultaneously retains in time and connects what is always threatening to disappear from the mind. At this point of equilibrium, where the dynamics of the imagination can and must be centred, we are no longer dealing with one term after another, but with the correlation that unites them: a third term, which is the unity or synthesis combining the two opposing poles. This third term is at once finite and infinite, or real and ideal, sensible and intellectual, natural and spiritual etc.

This capacity to intuit the harmony between logical opposites is, for Fichte, the genius of the philosopher. Or rather, the genius of those who philosophise with *Geist*, or spirit, as not all philosophers necessarily possess genius. To put it another way: it is from this capacity that true philosophy derives its originality, that it becomes truly creative – that it becomes an art. This capacity, common to art and philosophy, is the capacity to capture “at some fortunate moment” (*in einer glücklichen Minute*)⁴⁵ the rarest point of this movement of the imagination: the image (vision or intuition) as the fulguration of a unity – Fichte himself speaks of a “flash of lightning” (*Blitz-*

⁴² Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *GWL*, p. 28; English trans., p. 212.

⁴³ *Idem; ibid.*, p. 213.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 128; English trans., p. 290.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 201; English trans., p. 345.

strahl)⁴⁶ – obtained by overcoming the continuous oscillation between two poles in a field of tension between opposites.

b) Schlegel: Hovering as Scission, or the Negativity of Dialectics

Even though Schlegel is not explicit as to whether his concept of symphilosophizing belongs to the transcendental tradition, we abundantly find the motif of *schweben* in his writings. Hovering is therefore a key ingredient in Schlegel too. – Among others, it is stated as the essential characteristics of both philosophy and irony. The interrogative nature of philosophy as dialectics and its dialogical form mentioned earlier derive directly from hovering. Indeed, Schlegel's 1804 essay on Lessing's dialogue *Ernst und Falk* defines philosophy as follows:

Its essence, however, consists precisely in the hovering alternation (*schwebenden Wechsel*), in the eternal seeking (*ewigen Suchen*) and the never fully finding (*nie ganz finden können*); ... in every good philosophical conversation there must be at least one person desiring knowledge (*wißgebierig*), who strives to uncover the secrets of the highest research, and another person in possession of these secrets. The latter happily reveals more and more, but just when you believe that he will now do what he should not, nor cannot do, i.e. express it completely, the conversation suddenly breaks off, and through an indeterminate view this infinitely arouses our longing anew.⁴⁷

Four elements can be pointed out here:

- (1) Like in Fichte, hovering (*Schweben*) is understood as alternation (*Wechsel*). The passage is built on a binary rhythm and structure, with the aim of creating two antinomic poles. The alternation it describes is an alternation between searching and finding, and a perpetual movement between an *ewig* and a *nie*, between the “eternal seeking” and the “never fully finding”. Here we can see the link between hovering and Schlegel's own definition of philosophy in general as *infinite striving* and longing for truth or the absolute.⁴⁸
- (2) In this quote specifically philosophy is portrayed as an alternating dialogue between a learner desiring knowledge and a master in possession of the secrets, and therefore it has to do with a philo-

⁴⁶ *Idem.*

⁴⁷ See Friedrich Schlegel, “*Ernst und Falk*”, p. 197.

⁴⁸ See Friedrich Schlegel, *Vorlesungen über Transzendentalphilosophie* (1800-1801), KFSa 12, pp. 1-106.

sophizing in common between two individuals. That is to say, it is a form of symphilosophizing through which a philosopher fully plays the role that has been assigned to him since antiquity. The role of the philosopher in ancient Greece was to teach, to establish a school, to divulge the secret he had the privilege of holding to a body of disciples who asked to enter his brotherhood.⁴⁹ But this form of symphilosophizing again does not seem to be strictly egalitarian because there is a master and a learner, that is, an asymmetrical relationship between the two parties.

- (3) Thirdly, the passage is characterised by negative phrases that express what one cannot find. In other words, with Schlegel's concept of hovering there is no common middle point and no stable ground, i.e. no synthesis between the two individuals symphilosophizing together. On the contrary, there is a sudden interruption, a sudden *breaking off*, and starting anew. Here we have a rupture with Fichte's conception of the hovering imagination that can ultimately intuit a unity.
- (4) Finally, in Schlegel hovering is no longer explicitly a product of the imagination.

These characteristics of hovering in Schlegel are confirmed in his conception of irony that goes hand in hand with dialectics or philosophy, and whose paradigm is the Socratic practice of dialogue. Irony is famously defined in *Athenaeum* fragment 51 by its processuality and antinomic, paradoxical structure: it is a "constant alternation (*steter Wechsel*) between self-creation and self-destruction."⁵⁰ As Andreas Arndt and Jure Zovko have underscored, the ironic alternation between opposites is not just the preserve of literary or artistic creativity, but "the expression of the irrevocable difference between dialectical oppositions in thought and in the world."⁵¹ As a method of thinking, it is an alternation between enthusiasm and scepticism when thought is confronted with the "irresolvable conflict between the unconditioned and the conditioned."⁵² Just like with the concept of philosophy, Schlegel's concept of irony has no stable singular ground and common middle point. Irony is in essence aporetic, it does not achieve any resolution of philosophical problems. As for its role in art, irony is linked to the "chaos" and "confusion of fantasy" in the 1800 *Rede über die Mythologie* (*Address on*

⁴⁹ See Jean-Pierre Vernant, "Du mythe à la raison...", p. 111.

⁵⁰ See Friedrich Schlegel, *Athenaeums-Fragmente*, frag. n° 51, KFSa 2, p. 172.

⁵¹ See Andreas Arndt, Jure Zovko, *Einleitung*, in Friedrich Schlegel, *Schriften zur Kritischen Philosophie. 1795-1805*, p. xx.

⁵² See Friedrich Schlegel, *Lyceum* fragment n° 108, KFSa 2, p. 160.

Mythology): it is an ingredient of “the origin of all poetry”, which is “to suspend the notions and the laws of rational thought, placing us back within a beautiful confusion of fantasy in the original chaos of human nature.”⁵³ Finally, even though it has an existential as well as an artistic dimension, irony for Schlegel becomes a universal principle that lies beyond lived subjectivity.⁵⁴

In summary: by calling on the elements of movement, questioning and dialogue, teaching, irony, and negativity (or aporia), Schlegel forms part of a long tradition of dialecticians. For him, the memory of Socrates and Aristotle is not far away. Schlegel’s romantic symphilosophizing belongs in this dialectical tradition. In contrast with Fichte’s *Grundsatzphilosophie*, it is a form of symphilosophizing using the hovering irony that never reaches a synthesis and is therefore incapable of any deductive completion. So much so that hovering forms in Schlegel the basis of what he calls *Wechselerweis* or *Wechselgrundsatz* – it is opposed to a Fichtean type of foundationalist philosophy resting on a single first principle.⁵⁵

However, Schlegel’s philosophical position is not identical with the whole of romantic symphilosophy: for we find in Novalis another conception of hovering as (sym-)philosophical method.

c) Novalis: Hovering and Unity, or the “Art of Symphilosophizing”

There is a clear legacy of Fichte’s hovering imagination in Novalis. For example, in fragment 555 of his *Fichte Studies* (1795 / 96), Novalis uses the same terminology as Fichte to describe the real inner movement of the productive or creative imagination as a hovering power between opposites:

555. ... I-ness or productive power of imagination, the *hovering* (*das Schweben*) – determine, produce the extreme between which hovering occurs – This is a deception, but only in the realm of ordinary understanding. Otherwise it is something thoroughly real, because the hovering, its cause, is the source, the mother of all reality, [is] reality itself.

On the nature of this hovering.⁵⁶

⁵³ Friedrich Schlegel, “Rede über die Mythologie”, *Gespräch über die Poesie*, KFSa 2, p. 319.

⁵⁴ On this, see Andreas Arndt, Jure Zovko, *Einleitung*, in Friedrich Schlegel, *Schriften zur Kritischen Philosophie. 1795-1805*, pp. xx-xxi.

⁵⁵ See a.o. Friedrich Schlegel, KFSa 2, p. 72.

⁵⁶ Novalis, *Fichte-Studien* (1795 / 96), HKA 2, p. 266; *Fichte Studies*, ed. and trans. by Jane Kneller (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), pp. 164-165.

Among many other fragments, later ones such as fragment number 13 of the *Logological Fragments*, dating from 1798, a few years after the *Fichte Studies*, continue to positively treat the Fichtean legacy of the hovering imagination. This long fragment is much more original. Before I quote the end of it, let me summarize its main ideas. Once again, it is about the origins and history of philosophy in general. Philosophy not only concerns the timeless activity of reason. In Novalis's view, philosophy undergoes three distinct stages of development in the history of culture. The birth of philosophy, in the earliest stage of culture, appears to be linked to the tension between two opposing and separate mental attitudes: the attitude of the purely discursive thinker or scholastic, and that of the purely intuitive poet or alchemist. The former "destroys all living nature in order to replace it with a mental construct"⁵⁷ while for the latter everything is life, movement and change, and one must surrender to the arbitrariness of a lawless nature. Torn between these two contradictory demands, rational thought engages, from system to system, in an eclecticism whose movement gives rise to the history of the second stage of culture. For the two original tendencies shed their absolutism, draw closer together and come into contact from the outside. In doing so, they take on a diversity of more limited empirical and pragmatic forms. At last, the final transformation of philosophy is carried out by the artist, and this is where the hovering of the creative imagination comes into play:

13. ... The third level is reached by the artist, who is at once instrument and genius. He finds that this initial division of absolute philosophical activities is due to a deeper division of his own being ... He finds ... a power within himself to move from one to the other, to change this polarity at will. Thus he discovers in them the necessary links of his spirit – he perceives that both must be united in a communal principle. He concludes from this that eclecticism is nothing but the result of the incomplete, deficient use of this power [the productive imagination] which at the moment of transition from one element to the other could not remain hovering (*schwebend*) and intuiting (*anzuschauen*). The complete presentation (*Darstellung*) of true spiritual life, raised to consciousness through this action, is *philosophy kat exochen*. ...⁵⁸

Here too the process of *schweben* is understood as one of alternation, a *Wechsel* between two opposing poles like in Fichte and Schlegel. But this time it is specifically an alternation between opposing activities of the faculties of our mind, as philosophy is not characterized here like in Schlegel as an external,

⁵⁷ See Novalis, "Logologische Fragmente", frag. n° 13, HKA 2, p. 524.

⁵⁸ See *ibid.*, p. 525.

polemical dialogue. Rather, this fragment relates the divergent currents in the history of philosophy to an internal state of division of the individual human being. That is, to the transcendental standpoint of a conflict between our lower cognitive faculties – the senses, the inner sense, imagination, or memory – and our higher cognitive powers, the understanding, the power of judgment, and reason. Yet Novalis thinks there is a possible reconciliation of the two poles by means of the power of the imagination to intuit the common principle, and therefore he posits genius as the overcoming of philosophical eclecticism. For genius in Kant is precisely that inner state, which in the artist is the effect of the harmonious and free play of our cognitive powers as a whole rather than an additional faculty. And genius also characterizes in Fichte the person who best possesses the power of fixing the hovering imagination into an intuition.

To be sure, there is a difference between artistic and philosophical genius. The artist merely feels her spirit (*Geist*), whereas the philosopher as a transcendental artist knows her spirit and does not merely feel it; she shows reflexivity, she consciously looks back within herself at the processes of her spirit, whereas the artist produces her creations without being aware of herself, of what she is doing when she creates something new. But that particular internal state of genius, the effect of inner unity, completeness, harmony, and freedom, is still a constitutive element of philosophy once it has been raised into consciousness. Here Novalis follows Fichte not Kant.

Accordingly, when mastered, the hovering imagination becomes for Novalis a transcendental art and method. It is not about possessing secrets or higher truths like in Schlegel. It is about mastering “at will” the method of raising into consciousness the unity of opposing determinations. In agreement with Fichte, the hovering imagination similarly forms in Novalis the basis for a synthetic method.

From the point of view of Novalis, the mystical dimension that Schlegel attaches to the very essence of philosophy, including in its progress and its specifically modern form of transcendental philosophy, is, on the contrary, the distinctive feature of only the first stage in the history of philosophy. In this fragment Novalis calls the scholastic a “mystic in subtleties”, and the intuitive poet or alchemist a “mystical macrolog.”⁵⁹ Both attitudes are forms of *Schwärmerei*⁶⁰ or fantasy. In Kant, Fichte, and Novalis, fantasy is a lower form of the productive imagination: although it creates new images that go beyond what already exists, it does so involuntarily and in a lawless or wild

⁵⁹ See *ibid.*, p. 524.

⁶⁰ See *ibid.*, p. 525.

manner, as well as producing mental illusions that have no connection to real experience. This mystical fantasy or *Schwärmerei* that is at play in the old nascent philosophy should not to be confused in Novalis's work with the other higher form of the productive imagination. This latter kind of imagination is intentionally or voluntarily creative, lawful, and remains linked to reality instead of generating illusions. For example, this positive form of the imagination that creates products via a controlled lawful power of intuition can be found in the work of the artist.

To conclude this section: symphilosophizing and hovering are *prima facie* merely indirectly linked. It is because both Schlegel and Novalis thematise the motif of *Schweben* that it can be argued that there is a further strand of symphilosophizing in Schlegel and Novalis, this time with regard to the hovering of the imagination. However, their reflections on hovering result in divergent conclusions. In their dialogue, they both adopt hovering from Fichte's philosophy, and both talk about polarities or two extremes. But in Schlegel the method of hovering is different: it is a *Wechsel* of opposites without an explicit synthesis. Here Schlegel dissociates hovering from the faculty that produces it, namely the creative imagination of the I. And what is more: the principle of hovering becomes in Friedrich Schlegel's hands a weapon against Fichte himself, insofar as hovering forms the basis of Schlegel's concepts of *Wechselerweis* and *Wechselgrundsatz* that contrasts with a Fichtean first grounding principle. Moreover, hovering in Schlegel becomes related to irony, which is a kind of experimenting with fantasy against the backdrop of a conception of philosophy as aporetic dialectics and mystery. Whereas in Novalis, hovering continues to be associated with the I's power of the productive imagination and should lead to a real synthesis. It is related to art, in which the genius is the person who has the synthetic method of hovering the most under their control, which again places Novalis's thought in the transcendental current.

But symphilosophizing and hovering are more directly linked. It all comes back to the *Kunst zu symphilosophieren* mentioned in fragment 147 of Novalis's *Poeticisms*. The hovering of the imagination is needed for the "art of symphilosophizing." – In fact, it is the condition of the possibility of genius and art, which is itself closely linked to the aesthetic common sense and "enlarged mode of thinking", which according to Kant allows individuals to transcend their private, subjective conditions and to communicate or symphilosophize with others. This transcendental model of symphilosophizing is the highest, ideal level of communal thinking. – It is the life of the spirit in its immanent wholeness and the harmonious, non-violent interplay of our

various cognitive faculties. And this is the good that is reciprocated between the creator of the artwork and its spectator, listener or reader.

To conclude this paper I will now take a concrete example of symphilosophizing in its empirical form from the published 1798 fragment collection *Pollen*. – This is, as it were, a third form of symphilosophizing. – This will underscore Novalis's conception of symphilosophizing as a combination of an actual philosophical collaborative undertaking in which the individuals in question do not put themselves forward as individuals and a more artistic or creative way of philosophizing in the transcendental tradition.

4. Collaborative Writing – *Pollen*

It was Friedrich Schlegel's merit to create with his brother a modern journal for synergetic intellectual life. Published between 1798 and 1800, they called it *Athenaeum*. This name recalls the ancient Greek *polis* of Athens, a centre for the arts, learning, and philosophy, the home of Plato's Academy and Aristotle's Lyceum. But the goal of their journal was to open up original ways of thinking. Reframing the ancient great social movement away from exclusive and narrow religious groups towards a broadened public *agora* appropriate for a new century and a new society – 19th century bourgeois Christian society. The preamble of the *Athenaeum*'s first issue speaks of it as a “fraternization of knowledge and skills” (*Verbrüderung der Kenntnisse und Fertigkeiten*).⁶¹ This journal is clearly one of the main actual symphilosophical undertakings of Jena romanticism – a collaborative project involving many of the early romantic thinkers, such as the Schlegel brothers, Novalis, and Schleiermacher.

Within the entire scope of this journal, *Pollen* was the first written and published collaborative work between Novalis and Friedrich Schlegel and it appeared in the very first issue of the *Athenaeum*. It was also the first time that Hardenberg signed a work under his pen name “Novalis”. To be sure, *Pollen* as a text was mostly written by Novalis – one hundred and ten of the hundred and fourteen fragments are from his hand. Nevertheless, it still remains a concrete case of a published collaborative piece of writing between Novalis and Friedrich Schlegel – as opposed to their unpublished correspondence. Novalis wrote this collection of fragments in the spirit of a philosophical dialogue with Schlegel's own philosophical notebooks, while Schlegel wished to integrate *Pollen* in the first issue of the *Athenaeum* journal in such a way as

⁶¹ *Athenaeum: Eine Zeitschrift*, eds. August Wilhelm and Friedrich Schlegel (Berlin: Vieweg, 1798), vol. 1,1, “Vorerinnerung”: III.

to form a kind of “symphony”⁶² with his own texts and those of his brother. In this regard, Schlegel edited *Pollen*, partly giving it a new form and sometimes even a new content by introducing in several different places in the text four new fragments that he had written himself but left unsigned.⁶³ Thus, upon the publication of *Pollen* in 1798 because Schlegel’s fragments were not originally signed or indicated it looked like the entire text was by Novalis. The fact that *Pollen* was actually in part a collaborative work would not become known to readers until much later through critical editions. Hence, this collaboration between Novalis and Schlegel was not only an empirical form of symphilosophizing but also a hidden form of it.

This echoes Schlegel’s above-mentioned letter to Novalis from September 1797, where he offered to play for Novalis the role of the ancient *diaskeuastēs*. A *diaskeuastēs* is not meant to just be a helper in compiling, editing, and revising the material written by one original person. But like the Homeridae, who became the authors of some of the first versions of Homeric poetry, such as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, a *diaskeuastēs* is for Friedrich Schlegel the ‘authoritative’ unifying force capable of bringing rhapsodic thoughts into a whole, and in doing so ‘potentializing’ or raising the initial text to a higher power – i.e. precisely romanticizing it in Novalis’s sense.

a) Schlegel: *Pollen* 20

To justify his additions of new fragments to *Pollen*, Schlegel claimed he did it in the name of a “fraternal reciprocity” (*Wechselwirkung*).⁶⁴ More specifically, he seems to leave room for some ambiguity that combines two levels, an empirical and a transcendental level of symphilosophizing. This is confirmed by the end of Schlegel’s famous fragment that he placed as number 20 in *Pollen*, which I mentioned earlier and where we find the motif of an “inner symphilosophy.” He writes:

⁶² Friedrich Schlegel, letter to his brother August Wilhelm, sent from Berlin to Jena in March 1798, in Novalis, HKA 4, p. 614. Here Schlegel suggests to his brother that *Pollen* be placed in the middle of the issue, between a first movement comprising A.W. Schlegel’s study on language in Klopstock’s works and a third movement, Friedrich Schlegel’s own critique of Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister*.

⁶³ Conversely, he extracted thirteen fragments from Novalis’s *Pollen* for his own collection of the so-called *Athenaeum Fragments*, which he reserved for the second issue of the journal. See *idem*.

⁶⁴ Commentating on the fact that he extracted from *Pollen* some of Novalis’s fragments to put them at the center of his collection *Athenaeums-Fragmente*, Schlegel uses again a transcendental language: “Ich möchte doch gar zu gerne einen *esprit de Hardenberg* in diesem *esprit de l’esprit* haben.” (*id.*)

20. When communicating thoughts, if you alternate (*abwechseln*) between absolute comprehension and absolute incomprehension, then this could already be called a philosophical friendship. Isn't it the same with ourselves? And isn't the life of every thinking person nothing else but a constant inner symphilosophy? [Friedrich Schlegel]⁶⁵

Firstly, fragment 20 implicitly begins with a topic that we have already seen. We find an alternating dialectical communication between “absolute comprehension” and “absolute incomprehension.” We earlier saw almost exactly the same alternation and designation between eternal seeking and never finding, self-creation and self-destruction, or enthusiasm and scepticism, which Schlegel called “hovering alternation.” Hovering irony as a method of philosophy is therefore implicitly present in fragment 20 of *Pollen* too. In addition, in the middle of this fragment we explicitly find the classical Aristotelian meaning of symphilosophizing. This is because the community in thinking described here as a special relation between two human beings is termed a “philosophical friendship”, that is to say, a philosophically beneficial disposition of reciprocity, which is at the basis of mutual respect and love. However, in the second part of the fragment, Schlegel broadens the classical Aristotelian meaning to now speak of an “inner symphilosophy.” With this expression, Schlegel transfers the outer social or interpersonal friendship that is for him symphilosophy among human beings back to the interior life or spirit of a single individual. This transposition of symphilosophy to the inner life remains intentionally ambivalent, since it can be interpreted in two ways, either in the traditional Platonic mode of thought as an inner dialogue of the soul with itself or in a modern transcendental way.

b) Novalis: *Pollen* 16

Let us now turn to Novalis, especially to a fragment of *Pollen* that has become one of most famous romantic fragments, namely fragment 16, which contains the motif of the “mysterious path within”:

16. Fantasy places the future world either in the heights, or the depths, or in a metempsychosis to ourselves. We dream of travelling through the universe – but is not the universe within ourselves? The depths of our spirit are unknown to us – the mysterious path leads within. Eternity with its worlds – the past and the future – is in ourselves or nowhere. The external world is the world of shadows – it casts its shadows into the kingdom of light. At present this kingdom certainly seems to us so inwardly dark, lonely, and shapeless. But how entirely different it will

⁶⁵ See *Blüthenstaub*, frag. n° 20, in Novalis, HKA 2, p. 419.

appear to us when this darkening is over, and the body of shadows has fled.⁶⁶

Let me first look at this fragment externally and editorially, especially the beginning of it concerning fantasy. It is a fragment that reveals a trace of the collaborative work with Schlegel. For Schlegel intervened in the text, changing the spelling of the word “fantasy” to an ‘F’ instead of Novalis’s initial “Ph”, like in the original Greek etymology of *Phantasia*. We know from a letter to his brother that here Schlegel wanted to stress what is typically modern in the romantic notion of fantasy. For the modern conception of fantasy is different from the ancient Greek one in at least two respects. 1). The ancient Greek *Phantasia* was understood as the bringing to light of a content, i.e. of an *objective* apparition, whereas the modern tradition stresses the *subjective* activity of the human mind during the process of this apparition. For we do not already have a formed intuition, but we have to produce the intuition – it is an act and not something given. In other words, the mental configuration of the imagination has a “made” quality: it isn’t blindly and passively given, it is created, produced, synthesised into something coherent, so that a higher aesthetic-artistic value can be attached to it. 2). In the ancient conception of *Phantasia* the mind only forms images in a reproductive way. There *Phantasia* is a faculty of recollecting the appearances of absent or possible objects. In contrast, modern fantasy is a productive power of the imagination.

However, fantasy in the modern sense is – as already noted – an erratic and wild hovering between extremes and an illusory projection from merely mental images into the outside. This is surely why Novalis initially chose the word fantasy at the beginning of fragment 16. For Novalis, we need more than fantasy – we need the transcendental and voluntarily productive imagination, where the imagination not only forms images in a self-active and inventive way but also in a controlled and lawful manner. Hence, when Novalis writes “The depths of our spirit are unknown to us – the mysterious path leads within”, he means: many people don’t know this voluntary power of the transcendental productive imagination that is not only able to hover between these polarities, such as the heights and the depths, the inner and the outer, past and future etc., but it is also able to synthesize them.

However, it could be objected that there is no specific mention of the creative imagination or *produktive Einbildungskraft* here. This is because like in Kant and Fichte it is a *verborgene Kunst*, a “hidden art”, or a “mysterious path.” Another objection could be that the unity of the synthesis of the

⁶⁶ See *ibid.*, pp. 417-419.

polarities is not explicitly given in fragment 16. That is correct. That is why we have to read more of *Pollen*. The mysterious path that leads within is only half of the path. This is explicitly stated in Novalis's fragment 24 of *Pollen*, which is interlinked with fragment 16:

24. ... The first step will be an inward gaze – an isolating contemplation of ourselves. Whoever stops here has come only halfway. The second step must be an active outward gaze – autonomous, constant observation of the external world.⁶⁷

In other words, the reciprocal realistic movement towards the outer empirical world is necessary for Novalis. And if we move further along the progression of fragments in *Pollen*, we come to fragment 45:

45. To return into ourselves, signifies for us, to abstract from the external world. ... Conversely, the spiritual life in this world arises by breaking through that primary reflection. ... Here we see how going outside ourselves and going into ourselves are merely relative. What we call 'going in' is actually 'going out', a re-establishment of the original form.⁶⁸

Fragment 45 no longer simply states the *Wechsel*, the alternation and hovering between the two opposite movements of going in and going out, but points to the synthesis of the two. The end of the fragment is explicit on to this point: "What we call 'going in' is actually 'going out', a re-establishment of the original form." That is to say, fragment 45 posits an identity or unity between the two movements. And this unity or synthesis *is the path itself*. The path goes within and the path goes out; it is one and the same path, only the directionality is different. In other words, the hovering of the imagination between the two movements of going in and going out becomes fixed when the I intuits that the implicit unity is the path itself.

5. Conclusion

Let me now conclude. I have distinguished three different but interrelated forms of symphilosophizing in Schlegel and Novalis. First, the *concept* of symphilosophizing itself in both of them, which depends on their respective general concept of philosophy. As we saw, for the sceptic Schlegel philosophy itself remains a mystery. Symphilosophy therefore is about aiming at secrets or higher truths that only an exceptional mind can possess.

⁶⁷ See *ibid.*, p. 423.

⁶⁸ See *ibid.*, p. 431.

This essentially occurs via polemical and aporetic philosophical conversations between friends, and this is why it is essentially a renewal of the Aristotelian notion of *sympphilosophiein*. For Novalis, symphilosophizing as a truly communal thinking and willing is the transcendental condition of possibility for philosophy itself. The latter (at its highest stage of development) is about mastering “at will” the method of raising into consciousness the unity of opposing determinations.

Second, there is another form of symphilosophizing between Schlegel and Novalis in so far as they both philosophically take up the topic of hovering. In Schlegel, hovering is the movement of irony in which no synthesis is reached. In Novalis, however, hovering is the transcendental movement of the creative imagination, which is an integral part of the synthesis as a living, dynamic intuiting. This unity is achieved by the artist or genius of anyone who philosophizes with *Geist*.

And finally, with *Pollen* we have a third more empirical form of symphilosophizing, where they collaborated in writing. Of course, there is a lot more to say about this third form of symphilosophizing because *Pollen* was just the start of their collaborative writing, and the first piece published in the *Athenaeum*. In *Pollen*, Schlegel seems to evoke again both the ancient Aristotelian and Socratic tradition as well as a modern form of inner symphilosophy. Whereas Novalis puts into poetical practice the art of symphilosophizing that is entailed in his transcendental concept of philosophy as such as a synthetic unity. An example is the synthesis in *Pollen* of the outer and inner paths of knowledge.

In Schlegel symphilosophizing ultimately fails, for it doesn't compensate for human finitude, whereas a fruitful symphilosophizing is possible in Novalis. The virtuous good that is reciprocated through creating artistic philosophical works like the *Athenaeum* journal is the life of the spirit in its immanent wholeness and the harmonious, non-violent interplay of our various cognitive faculties, and therefore belongs in the transcendental tradition of Kant and Fichte.