

Antecedentem creavit consequens: Friedrich Schlegel's ontology of time and literary forms in Rede an die Mytologie

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Abstract: We attempt to offer a new interpretation of Schlegel's original solution for the problem of the new mythology. We claim that, while grasping the problem of the missing center as the structure of modern thought, Schlegel develops a theory of literature which implies an ontology of time. We advance that, by identifying myth with romantic literature, Schlegel's argumentative economy leads him to apply the metaphysical predicates of myth to romantic literature as such. We propose then to read the status of literary forms as constituting the substance which precedes them but, paradoxically, only exists through them.

Keywords: Early German Romanticism; Schlegel; Mythology; Ontology; Literary Theory.

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Introduction: The missing center and the problem of a new modern mythology as the intellectual situation of post-Kantian philosophy

One of the most interesting problems of Western modern metaphysics can be described as that of the New Mythology. This problem has its birthplace in the German post-Kantian tradition, in which it received its baptism name, and singles out the at once impossible and necessary articulation of the Highest Good through cognitive and sensitive forms, by which the direction and the meaning of historical and human action could be absolutely justified. The so called *Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus* (1998) furnishes the official document in which this problem is formulated with full consciousness and, as it were, made clear to the great German philosophers who were destined to lead German intellectual and cultural life thenceforth: Schelling and Hegel. According to Bowie (1997, 2003), Thibodeau (2011), Lacou-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy (1978), the document marks the decisive point at which post-Kantian philosophy sees itself as a necessary attempt to recover metaphysics as *proté philosophia*, a project which, in Kant's aftermath, seemed impossible. The great impact the three great Kantian *Critiques*

had on German intellectual life can be above all understood through this particular document, whose main thesis consists in underlining that modernity, defined by the principle of subjectivity and of freedom, should search for itself a new philosophical fundament, a center out of which, with systematic rigor, all fields of human life could be justified and explained - a center which was paradoxically destroyed by Kant himself, whose criticism showed the impossibility of pre-modern metaphysics. For Schelling, Hegel, Reinhold, Schlegel, Schleiermacher and the whole generation of post-Kantian thinkers, the three great objects of metaphysics - God, the World and the Soul - should be once more united, so that the branches of philosophy - epistemology, ontology and ethics - could be once more thought in their structural and necessary unity.¹

Thus, Manfred Frank (1982), in *Der kommende Gott: Vorlesungen über die Neue Mythologie*, points out that the problem of *Beglaubigung*, the belief in social norms with absolute binding claims, is the keystone of the problematic situation of modern post-Kantian metaphysics. To put this in synthetic and basic terms: if the conceptual articulation of the Highest Good is identical with the possibility of the ethical discourse, this means that metaphysics, in Greek terms as the research of Being as Being, comes forth as an existential enterprise, whose results define an existential space, in which the questions concerning the orientation of our lives are answered. As Pierre Hadot (1995) has argued, metaphysics is not only a discipline detached from the very tissue of life, but, instead, it is always already an existential choice. In the post-Kantian tradition, this means that the three great Kantian questions - *was kann ich wissen* (what can I know?), *was soll ich tun* (what should I do?), *was darf ich hoffen* (what may I hope for?) - describe the profile of modern metaphysics, as it has been structured in the German tradition. Suzuki (1998) and Seligmann-Silva (1997) have shown how this intense concern with the three Kantian questions is, for the German romantics and above all for Schlegel, translated into a movement of thought which is, at the same time, the articulation of an existential space - or, as Scheel (2009) formulates, as a “literatura vital ou existência literária” [as a vital literature or a literary existence], which never abandons the philosophical nature of the knowledge literature produces.² Literature³ is, therefore, at the same time a problem for speculative thought - that is, an object for philosophic reflection - and

1 One can also describe, following Heidegger's interpretation, that the condition of possibility of the so called *ontologia specialis* - that is, *theologia rationalis*, *psychologia* and *cosmologia* - depends on the description of the understanding of Being of beings, or, as Heidegger puts it, of the *Seinsbestimmung der Seienden* (Heidegger, 2010, p. 15)

2 Benedito Nunes (2010) shows how this intrinsic dialogue between Philosophy and Literature, born with the early German romantics, offer the very structure of what he calls a “transa” [an affair] between the two discourses.

3 It is always important to stress that, by literature, we have in mind what Schlegel and Novalis used to call *Dichtung* and which, years later, Wolfgang Iser (2016) would call *Fiktion*.

the very act of speculating: literature raises the need of thinking both as a problem for philosophy and as a particular way of philosophizing. As Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean Luc Nancy (1978) have claimed, this is intrinsically related with the so-called destruction of Metaphysics to which Kant gave rise: the transcendental analysis of our *Erkenntnisvermögen*, which investigates the very conditions of possibility of knowledge, leads to a new philosophical landscape which is above all marked by its existential tones, for, as Kant himself acknowledges, his critique deals with those objects whose knowledge correspond to the innermost need of the human heart and thought. This is the reason why, as pointed out by several scholars such as Billings (2014), Krell (2005) and Schmidt (2001), Greek tragedy becomes a philosophical problem for the speculative post-Kantian metaphysics: the thinking which sets itself after Kant is nourished out of tragedy and, at the same time, has a tragic structure, since it needs to articulate, within the transcendental rigor established by Kant, a critical metaphysics capable of bridging the gaps between sensible and intelligible, thereby giving an immanent account of human freedom.⁴

Now, if Kant tried to destroy the possibility of metaphysical knowledge regarding the traditional objects of those three questions - The World, God and the Soul -, the generation which follows him will precisely return to those very concerns. It is within this state of affairs that the problem of the New Mythology arises. It comes up, first, as a problem regarding the status of literature in Modern World: for the ancients, literature was at the same time a grounding knowledge and an existential experience, for the myth, through its sensible and symbolic forms, created the very truth whose experience it enabled. In the Homeric epos, the Greek World was described and grounded, therein each Greek found his own sense of belonging, the role which should be played by him in the theater of existence and the place which should be occupied, as Lukács, inheriting Schlegel's concerns, described in his *Theorie des Romans* (2009). This dimension, however, exists not in modern literature: there is no collective *Geist* to which the mythical forms could provide an existential, epistemic and grounding experience. Modernity needs and cannot have a New Mythology, for it has lost the collective space which enabled it. It is, as the Kantian paradoxical metaphysics, at once an impossible and necessary task. This thesis can be traced back to Schellings *Philosophische Briefe über Kritizismus und Dogmatismus* (1982) and to Schiller's *Ästhetische Briefe zur Erziehung des Menschen* (1958), as well

⁴ About the problem of the immanent reflection as the ground tonality and style of German Idealism thinking, one can quote Žižek's (2007) reading of Schelling's *Freiheitschrift* and *Die Weltalter*. What Žižek calls the *Grundoperation des deutschen Idealismus* corresponds to this paradoxical conceptual articulation of human freedom, which, as intelligible, would elude all concepts. The *Grundoperation* consists, according to Žižek, in the fact that the non-conceptual nature of freedom exists only in its impossibility, that is, in the conceptual recognition of its non-conceptual nature. In Žižek's lacanian reading, this is glimpsed by Fichte and Schelling, only to be achieved finally by Hegel.

as to Hegel's famous interpretation of Greek tragedy in his *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (1986) and in *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik* (2018). Of course, each thinker comes up with a different solution for the problem, as we can notice from the single comparison among the philosophers we just quoted: whereas the young Schelling sees in Greek tragedy the very expression of the Absolute, as absolute identity of subject and object, necessity and freedom, Hegel will argue that in tragedy art attains its highest force, thereby ceasing to be an authentic mode of Absolute's self-knowledge. Greek tragedy marks, in Hegel's eyes, the very moment of the so-called death of art. In despite of the differences, those brief mentions serve to highlight that the speculations on art and on myth were structurally related with the possibility of a new metaphysics - the same way that art signified for the ancients their world, thus were the moderns, for whom there is no longer the beautiful naivety of a *schöne Sittlichkeit*, concerned with the ultimate meaning of their own historical world, which could be no longer simply justified by myth.

The *Discourse on Mythology* and Schlegel's ontology of time as an ontology of literary forms

It is in this intellectual context we have just described that Schlegel's *Discourse on Mythology* is written. The text deals with the necessity of a metaphysical dimension which is lost in modern literature. I will advance here my hypothesis and my interpretation of this complex and dense text. I claim that three important conceptual movements are advanced in Schlegel's essay. First, by beginning his text with the remark about the absent mythology of the Modern, Schlegel advances three key figures, *Liebe*, *höchste Heilige* and the *Ursprüngliche*, which he presents as common to ancient Myth as well as to Romantic Literature⁵, in order to, then, describe ancient mythology with the attributes proper to Romantic Literature as such, above all that of *Witz*, understood as synthesis of chaos and order or, as Schlegel puts it, an exciting symmetry of contrasts. Such an argumentative move, that begins by pointing out a *common source* for the ancient and modern literary tradition, to, on a second step, identify through the same attributes the ancient Myth with Romantic Literature, brings forth what I shall call the historicity of understanding - *Geschichtlichkeit des Verstehens*, as Gadamer (1996) would later name it. This implies that there is no such a thing as the ancient literature in itself, as though disengaged from the historical process within which it is always received and reshaped anew.

⁵ Myth and Romantic Literature will be henceforth capitalized, so as to underline their particular importance in the argumentative economy of Schlegel's text. Their synonymous, namely mythology and modern literature, will be written normally, and will appear in the text for stylistic reasons only. They have, strictly speaking, the same meaning attributed to their capitalized corresponding synonymous.

Finally, such reasoning leads us to reconsider the beautiful relation between the *Unnachahmliches*, inimitable, and the historical poetical forms that express it as the very structure of an ontology of time and literary forms, in which the antecedent receives always anew its meaning from the consequent, according to the structure of a dialogue, for the forms receive their meaning from the Originary which, as such, remains in the ground, inimitable as such but, precisely because of this, open for unending further articulations.

It is quite important to bear in mind that Schlegel wrote his first essays under the intellectual influence of Winckelmann, whom he wished to emulate and whose works on Greek art led Schlegel to write texts in which he sought to articulate the difference between the healthy ancient literature in contrast to modernity's lack of center, as we learn from Medeiros (2018) informed reconstruction of Schlegel's intellectual development. The interesting turning point in *Discourse on mythology* lies in the fact that, no longer considering a Winckelamannian return to the Greeks by the sheer imitation of Greek simplicity, Schlegel tries to deal with the philosophical meaning of Romantic Literature as such, in its difference as well as in its *common ground* with ancient Myth. This mature position enables him to understand how, although different in their historical conditions of possibility, ancient mythology and modern literature spring, as it were, from the same source. Their forms are to be understood, therefore, as a synthesis of difference and sameness, since, while the Greeks draw from their myths the center of their life, the moderns formalize, in their works, the very absence of such a center - and still, ancient as well as modern, literature conveys, lending it a form, the truth of a historical *Dasein*. Let us now consult Schlegel himself:

I will go right to the point. Our poetry lacks, I claim, a middle point, as mythologie was for the ancients, and the all the essential difference between the modern and old Poetry can thus be summarized: we have no Mythology. (Schlegel, 2016, p. 82)

The missing center of mythology for us - the moderns - can only be understood in contrast with that possessed by the ancients. But this points out, of course, that the ancient Myth is already seen through the lens of the modern poet and thinker. This means, therefore, that, despite the difference between modern and ancient historical worlds, there is a common denominator to both, namely the fact that the set of forms which constitute their tradition expresses a historical condition, an essence, a *Wesen*. While the Myth has as its *Wesen* the presence of a center, expressing it in its very forms, Romantic Literature has as its essence the lack of centralized essences: "all the essential difference between the modern and old Poetry can thus be summarized: we have no Mythology". Coexisting with the difference of forms and of the spiritual world they materialize, the fact that Myth and Romantic Literature

must formalize something otherwise wordless remain as their common ground. Even though different in the way they formalize their respective essences, common to them is the fact that both Myth and Romantic Literature have essences, to which they lend a voice through their forms, thus drawing the air they breathe and the meaning they embody. This relation between the forms and their *Wesen*, essences, is intensified when Schlegel introduces the figure of the *höchste Heilige* [the highest Holy]. An apparently mere mystical expression, this figure contains, however, a quite complex and intricate metaphysical reasoning, for it embodies what I am calling here the *common ground* and the *source* of both ancient mythology and modern literature - let us consult the text one more:

Should the Highest remain forever nameless and formless, as though left in the darkness? Is Love actually insurmountable and is there an art, worthy of the name, if it has not the power to apprehend with its magical words the spirit of Love, so that this spirit may inspire its images? (idem, ibidem).

The Highest and the Divine must be expressed by forms which can convey the force of Love - that binding force by which we could all be absolute brothers and sisters, members of the same spiritual community, which Hegel called *absolute Sittlichkeit*, an ethical world which exists through the very individuals to whom it lends their spiritual substance - their world - and by whom it is constituted and formed. This means, therefore, that Schlegel sees *Liebe*, love, and *höchste Heilige* as structurally linked, and this in its turn implies that the poetic forms, by which love and divinity are articulated, are the only pathways we have to access this ethical community in which a shared and common world could be unveiled to us. There is, therefore, a *common source* for both ancient mythology and modern literature, which lend those two quite different historical worlds an interesting coexistence of difference *and* identity, since, although at this moment of the text still rather different in their forms, ancient literature being harmonic and romantic being chaotic, they both articulate the *höchste Heilige*. Finally, this unexpected synthesis of difference and identity is expressed textually in the image of the *höchste Ordnung* which springs out of *Chaos*:

You all may as well laugh at this mystical poem and at the disorder which might come out of the crowd and fullness of poems. However, the highest beauty, in fact the highest order is precessily that of chaos, namely of that chaos which only awaits for the touch of love to become a harmonious world, as the one the old mythology and poetry once were (idem, ibidem).

It is important to understand this argumentative step, for our further conclusions depend on it. The greatest beauty, *höchste Schönheit*, which organizes aesthetically the greatest ethical order, *höchste Ordnung*, has in the chaos, which is one of the main features of modern and centerless literature, its source, so that the *alte Mythologie*

itself, whose main feature is the beautiful simplicity of its order and binding powers, comes forth as a delicate synthesis of *Chaos* and *Liebe*. Despite their difference, modern literature and Greek mythology have the same metaphysical ground, which, in order to shine forth and exist, consists in chaos being touched by love, that is, on its being articulated by forms. Whereas the lack of center seemed to suggest a strong difference between ancient Myth and Romantic Literature, the attention paid to their common underlying ground stresses a strong and ever-growing identification between those two great sets of historical forms. The second argumentative step we made reference to at the beginning of this section starts to take place, and the image of the chaos being touched by love expresses the urge to articulate the *höchste Heilige* through forms. If we were to translate this in less figurative and metaphorical terms, we could say that the norms and values by which we categorize our spiritual world depend on the forms through which they become manifest, so that the forms have a metaphysical status, by which the ethical concerns are identified with the epistemic force that grounds a historical world in absolute terms and, thus, binds all subjects in a common metaphysical spiritual space. Now, let us not forget that this description of Myth and its forms, with those particular tones, is only possible for someone who does not live in the ancient mythical environment: that is, only for the modern thinker, who feels the missing center, can the Myth present itself as an object of thought which embodies a set of attributes - *Geist der Liebe* and *Höchste Heilige* - longed for and, thus, thematized in philosophical reflection. We mean thereby that, although Greek mythology was an object of philosophical inquiry since Plato and late antiquity⁶, the particular attributes with which Schlegel describes the old and absent Myth models it from within the very modern perspective - this being precisely the reason why Greek mythology, crystalized and transmitted in forms throughout time, receives its face each time anew, its attributes being modelled by the eyes which, from within this *now*, face it as its *before*. When the Myth is thus described by the very attributes which belong to Romantic Literature, it emerges remodeled, and not by virtue of some arbitrary process, rather because, as a set of forms conveying the experience of an historical past world, it rebirths in each *now* in which it is read - such a process, if we were to write in German, would be named *Geschichtlichkeit des Verstehens*.

Thus, we come to the third conceptual move, whereby the description of the *common ground*, entailing as it does the ascription of the attributes of Romantic Literature to Myth, leads us to think the historicity of understanding as a dialogue between past and present, whose terms are reshaped one by the other according to an interesting and paradoxical temporal logic: the consequent receives the antecedent,

⁶ One needs only to remember how neo platonic exegetic processes offered a intense moment of philosophical inquiry on mythology.

lending it a face, without thereby randomly choosing its meaning and ontological essence. In textual and argumentative terms, our third step can be noticed when Schlegel identifies the Myth with Romantic Literature as such by applying to both the same relation with the *Ursprüngliches*, so that what is ontologically prior - the *Myth* - becomes thinkable and conceivable only through the terms and predicates of what comes after - in Romantic Literature:

Mythology is such an artwork of nature. In its web the highest is truly built, everything is relation and transformation, exposed and shown, and this exposing and this metamorphosis is precisely her most proper way, her inner life, her method, if I may speak thus. Therein I do find a great resemblance with that great *Witz* of romantic poetry [...] Indeed, this artificially organized confusion, this exciting symmetry of contrasts, this wonderful eternal exchange of enthusiasm and irony, which inhabits even the smallest chains of the whole - all of this seem to me to be an indirect mythology. The organization is the same and certainly the arabesque is the oldest and most original form of human fantasy. Neither this wit nor the mythology can exist without a first originary and inimitable, which as such is infinite, and which after all articulations still shines forth its old nature and force (idem, p.88).

We should notice here how the predicates of mythology are drew, as it were, from the very concept of Romantic Literature, this being the reason why the concepts of *Ursprüngliches*, *Originary*, and *Unnachahmliches*, *Inimitable*, are here used to describe the Myth as the very medium by whose forms the *Originary* is articulated. The image of an order born out of disorder as a synthesis of conceptuality and unconceptuality is typical of the Schlegelian *Witz*, defined as *reizende Symmetrie von Widersprüchen* [exciting symmetry of contrasts] and which seems to him already an indirect mythology. The same goes for the *Arabeske*, at once the typical form of Romantic Literature, used in *Brief über den Roman* to define Diderot's *Jacques le Fataliste* and Cervante's *Don Quijote*, and the original form of human fantasy, *Fantasie* - that is, Myth. By reading this and other texts written by Schlegel⁷, we notice that those are the very terms with which he understands Romantic Literature, so that here we may speak of a structural identification of Myth and Romantic Literature. Neither *Witz*, metonymy of Romantic Literature, nor mythology can exist without some sort of original force which, as such, remains the inarticulable source of forms. Modern literature and Myth only exist as forms, as verbal configurations which shine forth. Their force, however, depends on the *Originary*, on that *Inimitable* which remains in the darkness. Precisely here can we see, arising in its fullest complexity, the ontological paradox of time formulated by Schlegel to understand the problem of the New Mythology and which is the outcome of a theory of literature understood as

⁷ It would be interesting, for example, to compare the *Discourse on Mythology* with the *Letter on the Novel*, which I am here rapidly quoting and where Schlegel comes back, in more detail, to the profile of romantic and modern literature. In this text, the concepts of the *Fantasie*, of the *Arabesk*, *Witz*, among others, are developed, thus making possible to see how the very notion of the Myth was already being thought from within a tacit identification of Greek mythology and romantic literature.

a post-Kantian metaphysics⁸. The Originary, out of which forms receive their force, is ontologically prior, from the standpoint of time it needs to come before, otherwise it wouldn't be Originary. However, it only exists within the very forms in which it is articulated, so that, although it gives the forms their meaning, it depends on them to come to light. It is because of this that it can also remain - paradoxically - as something forever not yet fully articulated, for it depends on the continuity and imprevisibility of its After to be constituted - that is, it depends on the very historicity of the understanding of the subjects for whom it exists as the unconcealment of a world and on whose subjectivities it depends to exist at all.

Furthermore, this interesting dialogical structure is materialized by Schlegel's very description of the Myth through Romantic Literature's most intimate terms: *Witz* and Chaos but also *Fantasie* and *Allegorie*, if we read *Discourse on Mythology* side by side with *Brief über den Roman*. It is as if the Myth's essence, the Originary it contains in itself, could only be articulated by the forms that realizes it as the expression of a past spiritual world, while the meaning of this world is reshaped, thus constituted, by the *now* where it is received and read. This suggests that neither human time is a simple progressing line, in which the antecedent simply causes and thereby determines the consequent moments as its simple effects, nor literary forms have a stable, one-sided meaning, for they arise anew at every single meeting point at which a historical past world, crystalized in forms, revives in the eyes of a present on whose historicity it depends, so as to live once more. This complex reasoning is materialized, first, in Schlegel's identification of Myth with Romantic Literature, made possible by *Witz* and *Arabesque* as their common attributes, and, second, by the suggestion that their common ground consists in being articulations of the *höchste Heilige*, of the *Unnachahmliches*. Finally, the historicity of understanding comes out of this equation Myth = Romantic Literature, only to suggest that, in order to think an ontology of literary forms, one must take into consideration an ontology of time where the relations between the antecedent and the consequent are always shaped by an increasing degree of complexity and by reciprocal dynamical causation.

We have, therefore, the ontological problem that we mentioned at the beginning of this paper, arising out of the argumentative move we have called the identification of the attributes of Myth and of Romantic Literature: *Witz*, *Fantasie*, *Arabesque*. The Antecedent, although thought as such, only shines forth in the Consequent which articulates it - and that is why Schlegel, as a modern thinker, reads the Greek Epos as the Greek Epos and, at the same time, submits its meanings to the historical process to which he belongs: that of a modernity in search of a missing center. The historicity of understanding, here already articulated long before Gadamer (1996), demands an

⁸ On the notion of early German romantic theory of literature as metaphysics, one can consult Manfred Frank (1989, 1997), as well as Andrew Bowie (1997, 2003).

ontology of time which is also an ontology of literary forms, because, if Myth now has been identified with Romantic Literature, it conveys a metaphysical experience which has the very structure of post-Kantian thought: the Highest Good, *höchste Heilige*, must and cannot be fully articulated, but this impossibility leads neither to nihilism nor to relativism - on the contrary, it is the key of a modern metaphysics, for, if we are reading Schlegel right, it is constantly in the After that the Before is conceived and reshaped, only in the ontologically Posterior that the Original can come to light, without being arbitrary taken and, as it were, made a random product of the reader's will, for, as Gadamer himself described so well, our relation with the tradition of forms has, above all, the structure of a dialogue, both poles of which must remain in their autonomy and, yet, be constantly changed by each other. This is, by the way, the very structure of what Schlegel called irony: the necessity and impossibility of thinking the Absolute.

Conclusion

By choosing one argumentative aspect of the *Rede an die Mythologie*, we have tried to articulate Schlegel's position on one of the most important and complex intellectual problems which have marked post-Kantian thought: that of the New Mythology. In Kant's aftermath, the search for a mythology of reason had its paradigm in the Greek spiritual world, symbolized above all by Greek literature, be it the Homeric epos or attic tragedy. Because they saw in those literary works of antiquity the very metaphysical center necessary for a human ethical world, those thinkers understood the deep and urgent necessity to recover such a center for modernity, so as to answer the three great philosophical questions by which we moderns could live along the lines of Truth: *was kann ich wissen? was soll ich tun? was darf ich hoffen?* Without being able to ignore Kantian criticism, the thinkers who would later be called idealists, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, understood that only philosophy could articulate those answers, since literature was no longer a possible path in which the missing center could be found. It is precisely here that Schlegel's position finds its originality.

In *Rede an die Mythologie*, Schlegel develops his own stance towards the problem, and does so, as we have attempted to show, by developing a theory of literature whose keystones lie in the concepts of Myth and Romantic Literature and in the identification of their common source. Because Myth has, as its condition of possibility, an inimitable core, which Schlegel called *Unnachahmliches*, it needs the very forms through which it can be articulated: those forms, however, do not exhaust the origin whence they spring, the *Ursprüngliches*, for this is the very eternal substance whose existence depends upon historical time: hence the paradox we have

made the very center of our hermeneutical efforts and which we have baptized Schlegel's ontology of time and literary forms. It is, indeed, an ontology of time, for the existence of a historical world, of a *geistige Welt*, supposes the eternal substance from which it springs. Because this eternal substance exists not without the very forms by which it is articulated, it needs the historicity which seems, at first sight, to be its opposite but, instead, reveals itself as its condition of possibility: in our formula, the Consequent brings forth the Antecedent, the former, as it were, creates the latter, although, ontologically speaking, the Antecedent remains the Antecedent and the Consequent, the Consequent. This paradoxical logic reveals itself as necessary, if we are to avoid argumentative contradictions and if we are to find interesting speculative motives in Schlegel's text. After all, the dialogue with the philosophical tradition should be inspired by Louis Lavelle's beautiful words: "the historical or psychological interest we have towards a doctrine is always surpassed by the interest we have towards the truth: each doctrine is for us an excitingment, an example and a test" (Lavelle, 2015, p. 8). The post-Kantians had a name for this ethical and intellectual posture: they called it *Synphilosophie*, the act of thinking together and, thereby, thinking through love - for the Absolute, above all, is the unexpected emergence of a phenomenon which, in its unique coming-forth, must be grasped by a form whose structure maintains the paradoxical coexistence of the finitude of its intelligibility pattern (for one must understand that to which one relates oneself) and the infinitude of the Originary which gives the form its standing and never exhausted power of fascination.⁹

The importance and attention reflections such as that of Hartmut Rosa (2022) and Volker Gerhardt (2022) receive show that, in late modern capitalist societies, the problem of the search for experiences, in which absolute binding claims are glimpsed and longed for, became central to understand the structural condition of modern philosophical discourse, whose touchstones were laid down by the generation of post-Kantians thinkers normally brought under the label of German idealism. It

⁹ I would like here to point out the resemblances my reflection has to Rosa's recent theoretical speculations on what he calls *Resonanz*. In his latest book, *Unverfügbarkeit* (2022), Rosa, interested in understanding how the late capitalist desire to make the world absolute accessible and within our reach by technological development, stresses that experiences of *Resonanz* suppose a minimum of *Verfügbarkeit*, so that we may at least understand that which, as it were, interpellates us. The capacity to answer and show responsiveness towards the experience of *Resonanz* is thereby supposed as a condition of the possibility of *Resonanz*. In order to give theoretical coherence to his proposal, Rosa advances the concept of *Erreichbarkeit*, which, in this sense, is quite related to Costa Lima's (2000) concept of *mimesis* as a process which introduces difference but supposes, in order to do so, a vector of resemblance. Finally, I would also stress that Rosa's *Resonanz* is deeply related with Gumbrecht's (2016) latests concerns with *Gelassenheit* and *Präsenz*. Gumbrecht's recent interest on mystical experiences are related, as he points out again and again, with late modern *burn out* by which modern subjects, overwhelmed by the almost endless *Verfügbarkeit* technology makes more and more possible, are affected, and whose symptoms Gumbrecht finds in the American expression *have something to hold on* (Gumbrecht, 2022, private communication)

seems to me that, as Gumbrecht's (2014) latest theoretical developments reveal, the urge to find experiences of absolute binding claims, such as that of the participation on what he names *mystical bodies*, are connected to the very anguish the absolute *Verfügbarkeit* (Rosa, 2022) of life gives rise to. Even though the sociological conditions of late modern capitalist societies are not to be fully identified with those of early modernity, the contemporary philosophical landscape, never an exclusive by-product of historical and sociological processes, is however still deeply marked by the very same problems out of which post-Kantian philosophy developed itself. If one follows Franks (1999) and Larthomas (1994) readings of the *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (1791), it is possible to argue, with Eagleton (1998), that idealist and romantic metaphysics is the attempt to ground and describe the philosophical existential space in which the fragmented parts of philosophy - epistemology, ethics and aesthetics - could once more be reunited in an immanent ontological reflection capable of grounding itself by articulating the concept of radical freedom. This, as we stressed on the introduction, was precisely the project of the so-called *Älteste System Programm des deutschen Idealismus*, according to whose author(s) philosophy should present its ideas in aesthetic forms, such as to attain absolute binding claims, without however ceasing to be free. Schlegel's singularity consists in stressing the metaphysical significance of literary forms in the articulation of the Absolute - the magical word of German post-Kantian philosophy.

If our reading has some coherence, it is possible to conclude that, considering the recent theoretical debate which occupy contemporary German *Geisteswissenschaften*, early romantic reflection is not only relevant, in historical terms, for the genealogy of late modern philosophy, but in fact offers a sophisticated perspective from which to draw new ontological proposals. Schlegel's ontology of time and literary forms, as we have tried to articulate here, is central to understand recent debates on human freedom and the so-called posthumanism ethical debate (Wolfe, 2009). If time is to be conceived, when it comes to literary experience, in a different key from that of Enlightenment's linear and progressive conception (Koselleck, 1988), since literary forms only articulate a meaning in the always *nachträglich* encounter of a present and a past, the originariness of that which comes before must be guaranteed by the afterness of an always different present, whose hermeneutical decision creates, in a free nevertheless not random act, the past as past and thereby respects its constitutive infinitude, which exists because of the freedom of the present. If human freedom - *the greatest metaphysical problem of modern philosophy* - is so closely related to thinking (Gabriel, 2017, 2018), namely to that capacity which marks us as a species and whose main attribute is its spontaneity, literary experience seems to bring forth, in a radical fashion, the very core of *Denken*: in it, the infinitude articulated by the forms correspond to time's ontological infinitude, made possible

by the dialectical relation of the *antecedens* and the *consequens*, past and present. This tensed dialectics, which shows no final conciliation, reveals itself in Schlegel's strategic identification of Myth with the forms of Romantic Literature, by him then identified with those of Literature as such. Fictional experience, as Wolfgang Iser (2016) would stress almost two centuries after Schlegel, transforms human finitude into the very form of the subject's and the world's infinitude.

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