

## Adorno and Schelling on the Art–Nature Relation

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### ABSTRACT

When it comes to the relationship between art and nature, research on Adorno's aesthetics usually centres on his discussion of Kant and Hegel. While this reflects Adorno's own position – his comprehension of this relationship is to a large extent developed through a critical re-reading of both the Kantian and the Hegelian position – I argue that we are able to gain important insights into Adorno's aesthetics and the central art–nature relation by reading his ideas in the light of Schelling's conception of this relationship. The article focuses on the similarities between Schelling's notion of nature's productivity and Adorno's understanding of natural beauty. It concludes with a discussion on Adorno's re-evaluation of the reconciliatory power of the exemplary unity of the artwork in conjunction with Schelling's comparison between artwork and organism, as well as his concept of the construction of nature.

**KEYWORDS:** aesthetics; natural beauty; Adorno; Schelling

### INTRODUCTION

Recent years have witnessed an increasing interest in Adorno's concept of nature (e.g. Bernstein, *Adorno*, 188–234; Stone, 'Adorno and the Disenchantment of Nature'; Cook, *Adorno on Nature*; Bowie, *Adorno and the Ends of Philosophy*, 75–95). There is also a growing awareness of how central the relationship between art and nature is for Adorno's aesthetics. But research on Adorno's aesthetics, and on his analysis of the art–nature relation, usually focuses on his discussion of Kant and Hegel (e.g. Paetzold, 'Adorno's Notion of Natural Beauty'; Gasché, 'The Theory of Natural Beauty and Its Evil Star'; Hammer, *Adorno's Modernism*, 45–71). While this reflects Adorno's own position – his comprehension of this relation is to a large extent developed through a critical re-reading of the Kantian and Hegelian position, respectively – I believe that we are able to gain important insights into Adorno's aesthetics and the crucial relationship between art and nature by comparing his ideas to Schelling's notion of this relation. When Adorno himself refers to Schelling, it is often in an appreciative manner, crediting him with conceptions that point beyond what Adorno conceives as problematic aspects of idealism. But Adorno does not elaborate on Schelling's thought, like he does with Kant and Hegel. The purpose of this article is to examine the influence of Schelling on Adorno's aesthetics, by drawing out the implications of his relatively brief remarks on Schelling, as well as to analyse interesting similarities between their ideas on the art–nature relation. These similarities are something that hitherto rarely has been emphasized in interpretations of Adorno's aesthetics.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Günter Figal's study *Theodor W. Adorno: Das Naturschöne als spekulative Gedankenfigur* compares Adorno's views with Kant's, Hegel's, and Schelling's, respectively. However, Figal focuses on the differences between Adorno's conception of natural beauty and Schelling's notion of nature and neglects to analyse the similarities. In

After a short background to the concept of nature in Schelling and Adorno, I discuss how they regard the role of art and the relationship between art and nature, and also art's privileged position vis-à-vis philosophy. I then juxtapose Adorno's reconsideration of the reconciliatory power of the exemplary unity of the artwork with Schelling's comparison between artwork and organism, and conclude by analysing Adorno's claim that there is a connection between Schelling's concept of philosophical construction and construction in art.

## THE CONCEPT OF NATURE IN SCHELLING AND ADORNO

An influential way of describing human progress, whether on the more individual plane or concerning humankind as a collective, is through the movement away from nature. On such a view, what sets us apart from other animals is our ability to free ourselves from the immediate dependence on nature enabling us to create a realm of our own. Modern human being's separation from nature has, however, to a large extent been coupled with the metaphysical idea of nature as a thing to be mastered and completely exhausted by scientific explanation. The rise of aesthetics as a distinct field of importance, emphasising a different kind of relation to sensuous objects and phenomena, can thus be seen as a counterforce to the increasing alienation from nature in the modern period.<sup>2</sup>

This does not mean that the aesthetic sphere 'preserves' nature in any straightforward manner. Indeed, Kant attempts to bridge the gap between nature and freedom with his description of the human subject's contemplative attitude in front of beautiful natural objects that appear as purposive in themselves instead of subjected to external laws. However, in Kant's theory of the sublime, where human reason exerts its superiority over unruly nature (at least in the sphere of ideas), Adorno sees a reintroduction of the separation from nature, and this is something he criticizes in *Aesthetic Theory* and other writings.<sup>3</sup> Adorno furthermore perceives a continuation and an intensification of this denial of nature in Hegel's dismissal of natural beauty from aesthetics (AT, 98–99/62).<sup>4</sup> Although one has to admit that Schelling is not very interested in natural beauty either, his effort to rethink the relationship between humanity and nature still shares a great deal with Adorno's own attempt to reach an anti-dualistic and non-reductive comprehension of nature.

In his *Naturphilosophie* Schelling tries to overcome the opposition between nature as the realm of necessity and the free moral agency characterising the sphere of humanity, by developing a theory of the common origin of self-consciousness and nature.<sup>5</sup> He regards human reason as the way in which nature reaches self-consciousness, but emphasizes that this does not imply the right to manipulate nature without restraint. Schelling is especially critical of Fichte's

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*The German Aesthetic Tradition*, Kai Hammermeister briefly discusses certain similarities between Adorno's and Schelling's thinking, see 208–11. Bowie considers Adorno's conception of natural beauty in relation to Schelling's notion of the unconscious in 'The Philosophical Significance of Schelling's Conception of the Unconscious', 82–86. Bowie also compares Schelling's and Adorno's views on the art–nature relation in 'Nature and Freedom in Schelling and Adorno', 196–99.

<sup>2</sup> Bowie also considers the development of aesthetics as a response to the increasing exploitation and domination of nature, see *Aesthetics and Subjectivity*, esp. 3–8.

<sup>3</sup> See Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, 410, trans. by Robert Hullot-Kentor as *Aesthetic Theory*, 276. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as AT. Page references, separated by a slash, will be first to the German original, then to the English translation. For Kant's account of the dynamic sublime, see Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 143–48.

<sup>4</sup> For Hegel's dismissal, see G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 1–2.

<sup>5</sup> For more detailed discussions of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* and its development, see e.g. Beiser, *German Idealism*, 483–576; Grant, *Philosophies of Nature after Schelling*; Nassar, *The Romantic Absolute*, 187–211.

view of nature as inert matter for the activity of reason to work upon as it pleases, perhaps most manifestly expressed in Fichte's lecture series *The Nature of the Scholar*.<sup>6</sup> In his 1806 *Darlegung des wahren Verhältnisses der Naturphilosophie zu der verbesserten Fichte'schen Lehre*,<sup>7</sup> Schelling writes with scathing sarcasm: 'When Mr Fichte lets six horses be put before his wagon and rides 'as if he had 24 legs', has *he* really animated these 24 legs through his rational purpose [vernünftigen Vorsatz], has he not rather in fact restricted their natural vitality [natürliche Lebendigkeit]?'<sup>8</sup> (SW I/7, 18)

There are interesting affinities between Schelling's attempt to overcome the dualism between human reason and nature, and Adorno's critique of the domination of nature (*Naturbeherrschung*) – a critique chiefly associated with the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, co-written with Max Horkheimer, but which nevertheless constitutes a central feature in Adorno's thinking from his *Habilitationsschrift* on Kierkegaard until his unfinished and posthumously published *Aesthetic Theory*. Adorno argues that comprehending human reason as the complete opposite of nature will only make reason regress into that denigrated version of nature – blind, unreflective instinct for self-preservation:

The prehistory of reason, that it is a moment of nature and yet something else, has become the immanent definition of reason. It is natural as the psychological force split off for purposes of self-preservation; once split off and contrasted with nature, it also becomes nature's otherness. But if that dialectics irrepressibly turns reason into the absolute antithesis to nature, if the nature in reason itself is forgotten, reason will be self-preservation run wild and will regress to nature. (Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, 285; *Negative Dialectics*, 320)

Both Adorno and Schelling thus emphasize the need for the human subject to acknowledge itself as part of nature, and they furthermore argue that art has a fundamental role in gaining insight into this relationship. Adorno argues that art, far from being the opposite of nature, is 'the self-recognition of spirit itself as natural (*Naturhaftes*)' (AT, 292/196). One should note that Adorno uses *Naturhaftes* as a critical term here, in other words, he is indicating the need for us humans to acknowledge ourselves as part of nature, because as we saw in the quote from *Negative Dialectics*, when this is denied, we merely sink deeper into the coercion of (our own distorted image of) nature.

Both Schelling and Adorno refer to Horace's dictum 'Naturam expelles furca, tamen usque recurret' ('You may drive out Nature with a pitchfork, yet she will ever hurry back').<sup>9</sup> We humans are inevitably a part of nature, even though we are a part of nature that can

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<sup>6</sup> Fichte, in his turn, had criticized *Naturphilosophie* in his lectures, which were held in 1805, see *The Nature of the Scholar*, 150.

<sup>7</sup> References to Schelling's *Sämtliche Werke* will be abbreviated *SW* followed by the division (*Abteilung*) number and then a slash followed by the volume number. The introduction to *Darlegung* is a review of Fichte's *The Nature of the Scholar* (*Ueber das Wesen des Gelehrten*) and was originally published in *Jena'schen Allg. Literatur-Zeitung*.

<sup>8</sup> Frank also comments on this quote in 'Schellings spekulative Umdeutung des Kantischen Organismus-Konzepts', 111. Schelling is here actually comparing Fichte to Mephistopheles, who in Goethe's *Faust* says: 'Suppose I keep six stallions, don't you see / The strength of each of them's a part of me? / What a fine fellow I have grown, / Trotting with twenty-four feet of my own!' Goethe, *Faust: Part One*, lines 1824–27. These lines, translated from the 1808 *Faust*, already appeared in the fragment published in 1790, which we can assume was the version read by Schelling. See Goethe, *Faust. Ein Fragment*, 22.

<sup>9</sup> See Schelling, *System des transscendentalen Idealismus*, 33, trans. by Peter Heath as *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 8. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as STI. Page references, separated by a slash, will be first

reflect over precisely this fact, a capacity that indeed also entails a certain detachment, but one that can never be complete.

#### NATURE AS PRODUCTIVITY VS. NATURAL BEAUTY

When it comes to Schelling's philosophy of art, most commentators focus on the *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800), where Schelling argues that the ultimate unity between nature and freedom is reflected in sensible form by the artwork. Devin Zane Shaw has recently questioned what he regards as the standard interpretation of Schelling's conception of art's importance, namely the claim that art was no longer central to Schelling's philosophy after the *System* of 1800. Zane Shaw has convincingly argued that art continues to have a central role for Schelling until 1807 and the lecture 'Ueber das Verhältniß der bildenden Künste zu der Natur' (Zane Shaw, *Freedom and Nature in Schelling's Philosophy of Art*). In this work, as well as in the lectures *Philosophy of Art* from 1802–04, Schelling still regards artistic activity as being able to produce for the senses what philosophy can only intimate in thought: That nature and freedom are ultimately one *qua* free productivity.

Like Kant, Schelling in the *System of Transcendental Idealism* regards the conception of nature's purposiveness as the way to unite theoretical philosophy's perspective on nature as the sphere of necessity with practical philosophy's focus on subjective free will. Schelling argues along the lines of the third *Critique* that there has to be a harmonious connection between the domain of the external (objective nature) and the domain of the internal (subjective willing and cognition). Without such a connection, it becomes impossible to see how human willing and action can have any influence on her surroundings, or indeed, how human cognition is related to the natural world.<sup>10</sup> And this concordance implies, so Schelling argues, that the productivity which gives rise to the objective world of nature is ultimately the same as the productivity expressing itself through subjective willing. He thus claims that nature is unconscious (in other words, unintentional) productivity while the human subject (spirit) is conscious (that is to say, intentional) productivity (STI, 29–40/1–12). In the *System of Transcendental Idealism*, Schelling continues to develop his understanding of nature as active and productive, which he presented in his 'Introduction to the Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature' (written after the actual *Outline*), where he distinguishes between the products of nature (*natura naturata*) and nature as productivity (*natura naturans*) (Schelling, 'Introduction to the Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature', 202).

In the *System of Transcendental Idealism*, Schelling argues that the proof of the ultimate identity of nature's unconscious activity and human being's conscious activity is the aesthetic activity through which art is created, and which can also be experienced by the recipients of the created artwork. Art is thus the medium joining the conscious and the unconscious activities, and the artwork as manifest object is able to reflect something that otherwise remains inaccessible.<sup>11</sup> This is why philosophy needs art, according to Schelling. Discursive understanding is not able to overcome the division between subject and object, between conscious mind and unconscious nature. Schelling argues that Fichtean intellectual intuition, that is, the subject's observation of the act of self-positing, ultimately fails to reach the

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to the German original, then to the English translation. For Adorno's references to Horace's dictum, see Adorno, *Ästhetik*, 55 and 59–60. See also Adorno, *Kierkegaard*, 122. For the original phrase, see Horace, *Epistularum*, Liber Primus, X, 24.

<sup>10</sup> See Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 72.

<sup>11</sup> Schelling argues in a similar manner in *The Philosophy of Art* (30): 'Necessity and freedom are related as the unconscious and the conscious. Art, therefore, is based on the identity of conscious and unconscious activity.'

identity between mind and nature because it only takes place in the subjective mind. Art, however, offers aesthetic intuition, which is intellectual intuition that has been externalized through the production of an object, namely the artwork (STI, 312–329/219–233).<sup>12</sup> In the aesthetic experience we thus feel convinced of the unity of the conscious activity of the subject (mind) and the unconscious activity of the object (nature); although this unity is ultimately ‘ungraspable [*unbegreiflich*]’, it ‘cannot be denied’ – which is why Schelling claims that even if the ‘marvel [*das Wunder*]’ of art had ‘existed but once only, [it] would necessary have convinced us of the absolute reality of that supreme event [i.e. the identity of conscious and unconscious activity]’ (STI, 318/223 [translation modified]).<sup>13</sup>

Schelling’s insistence on art’s ability to show the ultimate identity between the sphere of objectivity (nature) and subjectivity (freedom) may at first glance make for an uneasy comparison with Adorno’s aesthetics with its insistence on art’s ability to reveal the present condition between objectivity and subjectivity as unreconciled. And the differences between the two thinkers may seem to outweigh the similarities. For example, natural beauty, a central category in Adorno’s aesthetics, is dismissed by Schelling on the grounds of its contingency (see STI 322/227) – that is to say, precisely for the reasons that makes it so important for Adorno.<sup>14</sup> And yet, Adorno brings up Schelling’s thought at crucial points in his arguments, and often, as we will see, in contrast to Hegel’s position. Paradoxical as it may seem, this is because, as Peter Dews observes, Adorno detects ‘dualistic traits in Schelling’s thinking’ – traits that are most obvious when it comes to the relationship between art and philosophy (Dews, ‘Dialectics and the Transcendence of Dialectics’, 1186). In Schelling’s thought, despite its outspoken attempt to overcome dualisms (like the one between nature and freedom), this does not result in a complete merging between the subjective and the objective sphere. There is an acknowledgement of thought’s indebtedness to what is thought, and this is most evident in Schelling’s repeated insistence on philosophy’s need of art. Thus, even in his lectures on Hegel, where Adorno repeatedly criticizes Schelling’s concept of intellectual intuition for its problematic appeal to immediacy, he nevertheless recognizes that since Schelling continued to have the idea of art as the prototype for his philosophy – and thus as something separated from it – he is in fact more truthful to the historical situation than Hegel’s philosophy, which creates the illusion of reconciliation and tolerates nothing ‘alien or external to its own law’ (Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies*, 137; see also Dews, ‘Dialectics and the Transcendence of Dialectics’, 1186).

From Adorno’s point of view, giving prominence to intuition in aesthetic experience is, however, problematic. Adorno is critical of the idea of aesthetic intuition, because according to him, a one-sided emphasis on art’s intuitive side risks hypostasizing art as sensuous immediacy, ignoring that art is separated from empirical reality and thus always mediated by its

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<sup>12</sup> When Fichte upon Schelling’s repeated insistence finally read the *System* of 1800, and in a letter expressed his reservations of the work, it was the beginning of the end of both their private and professional relationship, see Beiser, *German Idealism*, 494. The correspondence between Fichte and Schelling during this critical period is compiled and translated in Fichte and Schelling, *The Philosophical Rupture between Fichte and Schelling*.

<sup>13</sup> For an elaborate account of Schelling’s notion of aesthetic intuition and art’s mediating role in the *System of Transcendental Idealism*, see Zane Shaw, *Freedom and Nature in Schelling’s Philosophy of Art*, esp. 63–87. For a lucid account of the methodology of the *System* of 1800 and its relation to Schelling’s previous writings as well as to the later identity philosophy, see Nassar, *The Romantic Absolute*, 212–24.

<sup>14</sup> Schelling will in his later writings have a much more nuanced conception of contingency and its connection to nature, see e.g. *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, 62–63, where he writes about ‘the veil of dejection that is spread over all nature’ because of the finitude of everything particular. See also Bowie, ‘The Philosophical Significance of Schelling’s Conception of the Unconscious’, 80. I am unable to expand on this subject here.

fictional character. The intuitive element in art cannot exist without its opposite, the conceptual element – which is not the same, Adorno carefully points out, as ‘asserting the conceptuality of art; art is no more concept than it is pure intuition, and it is precisely thereby that art protests against their separation’ (AT, 148/96). Nevertheless, Adorno recognizes that what he calls ‘the doctrine of intuitability’ contains something true, namely ‘that it emphasizes the incommensurable, that which in art is not exhausted by discursive logic, the sine qua non of all manifestations of art.’ (AT, 148/96)

This character of incommensurability with discursive logic is furthermore something that according to Adorno connects art with natural beauty. That natural beauty and art are incommensurable with discursive logic is a result of their mode of expression being one of principally sensuous and qualitative relations, and not of judgment. Yet they are compelling. Natural beauty is perceived as both ‘authoritatively binding’ and ‘incomprehensible’, a double character taken over by art, according to Adorno (AT, 111/71). Art is according to him the imitation, or mimesis, of natural beauty, and not of nature (AT, 111/71). In the rest of the article I will attempt to show how Adorno’s conception of art as a mimesis of natural beauty benefits from comparison to Schelling’s conception of nature as productivity.

When Adorno considers the relationship between art and nature, natural beauty has an important role. This is not the case in Schelling, as Adorno notes in the beginning of the section on natural beauty in *Aesthetic Theory*: ‘Since Schelling, whose aesthetics is entitled the *Philosophy of Art*, aesthetic interest has centred on artworks.’ (97/61)

In his lecture course on aesthetics from 1958–59 Adorno accuses Hegel of ‘philosophical anthropocentrism’ (Adorno, *Ästhetik*, 41), because of Hegel’s dismissal of natural beauty in his own lectures on aesthetics. Even though Schelling is not very interested in natural beauty, this accusation cannot be directed against him, because nature plays such a central role in Schelling’s aesthetics, and furthermore, Adorno’s conception of natural beauty has obvious affinities with the way Schelling understands nature. In Schelling’s writings, the relationship between spirit (including art produced by spirit) and nature is generally more dialectically conceived than it is in Hegel’s philosophy, which tends to regard nature as spirit’s other (see Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, 13–16).<sup>15</sup> The result of regarding nature as merely the other of spirit, is according to Adorno ‘unfreedom for the other’ (AT, 98/62), and he furthermore argues (in a similar manner as in the passage from *Negative Dialectics* quoted above) that this ultimately results in unfreedom for spirit or the human subject: ‘The spell that the subject casts over nature imprisons the subject as well: Freedom awakens in the consciousness of its affinity with nature.’ (AT, 410/276) Since we humans cannot transcend the fact that we are part of the natural world, the domination and simultaneous denial of nature becomes severely problematic, and we have, according to Adorno, actually ended up being mastered by our own creation. In other words, modern, late capitalist, nature-dominating society (which according to Adorno has petrified into

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<sup>15</sup> For a reconstructive reading of Hegel’s philosophy of nature that argues for his understanding of natural objects as intrinsically rational (and therefore meaningful in themselves), see Stone, *Petrified Intelligence*. Adorno’s critique of Hegel’s approach to nature may certainly be exaggerated at times, but even Stone has to consent that Hegel shares the (essentially Fichtean) approach to nature as something to be transformed by humans anyway they please, regardless of any possible intrinsic value, see Stone, *Petrified Intelligence*, 153–58. For a critical discussion of how Hegel perceives nature as completely malleable to human purposes in his discussion of private property in the *Philosophy of Right*, see Hailwood, *Alienation and Nature in Environmental Philosophy*, 169–77.

second nature) has in fact become detrimental for the flourishing of humanity and nature.<sup>16</sup> As has become increasingly palpable through the present environmental crisis, the economic order has indeed become a threat to the very thing it was supposed to secure: human survival.

Even though Schelling's effort to think nature and freedom together through art does not take the route via natural beauty, his ideas on the art–nature relationship in 'Ueber das Verhältnis der bildenden Künste zu der Natur' (also known as the *Münchener Rede*), have a lot in common with Adorno's description of natural beauty. Adorno claims that art imitates 'natural beauty as such' and not beautiful natural objects or phenomena (AT, 113/72). What is at stake here is that art imitates what is essential in natural beauty. And that is natural beauty's more. A beautiful natural object is according to Adorno an 'image' (*Bild*) in the sense that it brings forth something else: 'What is beautiful in nature is what appears to be more than what is literally there.' (AT, 111/70–71) It is natural beauty's ability to point beyond the existing order of things, to promise 'that which surpasses all human immanence' (AT, 114/73).

In the *Münchener Rede* Schelling discusses the theory that art is an imitator of nature (*Nachahmerin der Natur*). He argues that the ambiguity of the concept of nature makes such a general principle quite unhelpful to the artist. If you merely regard nature as the sum total of individual natural objects, or as a place for all these objects, or as a source from which to exploit raw materials, then you do not comprehend nature correctly. Nature is 'eternally productive primal force/power (*ewig schaffende Urkraft*)' (SW 1/7, 293). In her article on the *Münchener Rede*, Lucia Sziborsky addresses Schelling's views in the Spinozist terminology Schelling uses in other works. Sziborsky clarifies that the artist according to Schelling is supposed to imitate nature as productivity/creativity (*natura naturans*) and not nature as product/object (*natura naturata*) (Sziborsky, 'Schelling und die Münchener Akademie der Künste', 41).<sup>17</sup> While Adorno is critical of any attempt to give positive ontological statements about nature's essence,<sup>18</sup> he is nevertheless in complete agreement with Schelling that nature is more than an object to be slavishly imitated.<sup>19</sup> Adorno in fact claims that 'all naturalistic art is only deceptively close to nature because, analogous to industry, it relegates nature to raw material' (AT, 104/66). He furthermore argues, in a very similar way to Schelling in the *Münchener Rede*, that '[n]ature, as appearing beauty (*Natur als erscheinendes Schönes*),' is more than an object of action (*Aktionsobjekt*), more than means for the reproduction of life and more than 'the substratum of science' (AT, 103/65). Natural beauty shows that there is more to nature than being a determinable and exploitable object.

Indeed, this is also in line with the Kantian conception: the experience of natural beauty indicates a different approach to nature than the scientific one. However, despite the many advantages of Kant's aesthetics – the discussion of natural beauty, the emphasis of the separation between the aesthetic sphere and empirical reality and so forth, all of which Adorno discusses at some length in both *Aesthetic Theory* and in his lectures on aesthetics – Adorno still regards it as 'subjective', and not able to account properly for the objective aspect of aesthetic experience (see

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<sup>16</sup> As Fabian Freyenhagen recently has emphasized, this does not mean that Adorno holds the view that pre-modern, pre-capitalist societies were not coercive, in fact this is something Adorno frequently comes back to, see Freyenhagen, *Adorno's Practical Philosophy*, 68.

<sup>17</sup> See also Zane Shaw, *Freedom and Nature in Schelling's Philosophy of Art*, 159 n22. For Spinoza's explanation of the terms, see Spinoza, *Ethics*, 434.

<sup>18</sup> In his lectures on Hegel he even speaks of 'the dogmatic moment in Schelling's philosophy of nature', which he claims Hegel resisted. See Adorno, *Hegel*, 252–53.

<sup>19</sup> In his lectures on aesthetics from 1802, Schelling also argues against a direct copying of nature, claiming that such copying does not yet constitute beauty in art, see *The Philosophy of Art*, 31.

e.g. AT, 24/11). Thus, even in the third *Critique* – considered by Schelling (*On the History of Modern Philosophy*, 173) as ‘Kant’s deepest work’ and by Adorno (*Ästhetik*, 12) as one of the most important theoretical works in aesthetics – the problematic aspects of Kant’s critical philosophy, arising chiefly from the dualistic conception of nature and reason, resurface. Despite the fact that Schelling focuses on artworks rather than natural beauty, there is in his philosophy, and above all in his conception of nature, as Adorno notes in *Negative Dialectics*, a ‘materialistic moment’ that enables Schelling’s philosophy to point beyond idealism (as subjectivism) (*Negative Dialektik*, 184; *Negative Dialectics*, 182). The materialistic moment has to do with Schelling ‘credit[ing] matter as such with something like a driving force’, according to Adorno, who also values Schelling’s comprehension of urge (*Drang*) as ‘the predecessor of Spirit [*die Vorform von Geist*]’ in *The Ages of the World* (*Negative Dialektik*, 202; *Negative Dialectics*, 202 [translation modified]).<sup>20</sup> In Schelling’s understanding of nature’s capacity to become conscious, Adorno recognizes an effort to reach a thoroughly non-dualistic and non-reductive conception of the mind–body relation, in line with his own: ‘All mental things are modified physical impulses, and such modification is their qualitative recoil into what not merely “is”.’ (*Negative Dialektik*, 202; *Negative Dialectics*, 202) I agree with Peter Dews, that the best way to understand Adorno here is ‘by assuming that a spiritual potential is already latent in the natural’ (Dews, ‘Dialectics and the Transcendence of Dialectics’, 1189). Adorno draws on Schelling’s thought at this juncture, because he detects in Schelling an effort to think matter and spirit as dialectically mediated, while still acknowledging spirit’s dependence on matter without reducing the former to the latter. Whereas Hegel claims that ‘the goal of the Philosophy of Nature [is] that Spirit finds in Nature its own essence’ and describes nature as ‘the Idea in the form of *otherness*’ (Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, 13) and ‘the *self-degradation of the Idea*’ (Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, 17), Adorno sees in Schelling’s description in the *Weltalter* an attempt to understand spirit from the ground up, so to speak: ‘And thus we see nature – from the lowest level upward, in its very innermost principles and most profound concealment, voraciously rising up and striding forth in its quest [*Sucht*] until it has finally taken the highest essentiality, the purely spiritual itself, has drawn it into itself and made it its own’ (Schelling, *Ages of the World*, 140; cf. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, 202; *Negative Dialectics*, 202). Adorno’s conception of materialism, and the materialist moment he detects in Schelling, is not the position that holds matter to be the ultimate principle of reality. Such a totalizing claim would be nothing but the mirror image of idealism’s opposite claim that mind constitutes the absolute *prius*. The assertion that discursive thought can grasp everything there is and reduce it to an unchanging universal principle remains stuck within an idealist commitment even if tries to assert this principle as the most concrete of all.

Another aspect of Schelling’s philosophy that Adorno regards as pointing beyond idealism is the claim in the *System of Transcendental Idealism* that art is able to express insights into the relationship between humanity and nature of which philosophy, as paradigmatic discursive thinking, is not capable. In contrast to Hegel, who argues that philosophy has transcended art in modernity, Schelling in the *System* of 1800 famously claims art as ‘the only true and eternal organ and document of philosophy, which ever and again continues to speak to us of what philosophy cannot depict in external form, namely the unconscious element in acting and producing, and its original identity with the conscious’ (STI, 328/231). For this reason, Adorno regards Schelling’s expression of art’s advantage over philosophy as a corrective to the Hegelian conception:

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<sup>20</sup> Adorno quotes from the second draft, from 1813, of the *Ages of the World* (*Die Weltalter*) in the footnote. For a more elaborate analysis of this passage, see Dews, ‘Dialectics and the Transcendence of Dialectics’, 1189–95.

When Schelling declared art as the organon of philosophy he involuntarily admitted what great idealistic speculation either passed over in silence or denied in the interest of self-preservation. Correspondingly, Schelling did not, as is well known, carry through the thesis of identity as relentlessly as did Hegel. (AT, 511/344)

From Adorno's standpoint, the thesis of identity, that is to say, the identity of identity and non-identity, amounts to the complete usurpation of the particular by the universal if thought forgets to acknowledge its dependence on its object. In Hegel's aesthetics, the identity thesis is most prominent in the way he regards art as the lowest form of absolute spirit, to be made completely intelligible by the supreme form of absolute spirit: philosophy. While this registers a historical truth for Adorno – the increasing marginalization of sensuous particularity in the process of rationalization, something which has led to devastating consequences – Schelling's insistence on philosophy's need of art is an acknowledgment of the inescapable truth of spirit's dependence on its (asserted) other – an acknowledgment that could also be claimed as belonging to the materialistic moment of Schelling's philosophy. Even in the *Philosophy of Art*, which stems from the period of the *Identitätssystem*, Schelling argues that 'philosophy is inconceivable without art and an acquaintance with beauty' (*Philosophy of Art*, 30).<sup>21</sup> In Schelling's thought and its acknowledgment of dependence on that which it thinks, Adorno detects the effort to hold on to the utopian potential of the concept of identity, something that he himself strives to do: 'Identity does not disappear through its critique; it transforms itself qualitatively. Elements of affinity of the object to its thought continue to live in it.' (Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, 152)

For Adorno, philosophy's need of art is structurally similar and related to art's need of nature: both needs demonstrate spirit's reliance on its claimed other. In his efforts to rethink the art–nature relation and arguing for an objective truth content in art related to natural beauty – and criticizing the undialectical disappearance of natural beauty in Hegel's aesthetics (see e.g. AT, 99–100/63) – Adorno also approaches Schelling's conception of nature. Adorno claims that the more of natural beauty is an 'objective expression'. The more of natural beauty is certainly dependent on a recipient subject, 'but it is not reducible to the subject; natural beauty points to the primacy of the object in subjective experience' (AT, 111/71). In the *System of Transcendental Idealism* Schelling argues, in a more direct manner, that 'Nature would exist even if there was no intelligence that was aware of it' (STI, 30/7).

Indeed, Adorno claims that the idea of nature as meaningful in itself, which he attributes to Goethe and Schelling, is no longer possible (AT, 112/71–72).<sup>22</sup> This does not, however, imply that nature is meaningful merely because of what we humans value in it. Juxtaposing the conception of nature as productivity with Adorno's view of the more of natural beauty, and understanding it along the lines of an inherent potential in nature, enables us to think of this potential as something the realization of which cannot be taken for granted. Such a potential cannot, according to Adorno, be positively stated in our historical situation of extreme domination of nature. Thus, for Adorno, nature's potential can from our contemporary standpoint

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<sup>21</sup> Schelling's translator, Douglas W. Stott, points out the influence from Hölderlin for this conception of art and beauty as essential for philosophy, see *The Philosophy of Art*, 293–94n3.

<sup>22</sup> In *Lectures on Negative Dialectics* Adorno also argues that the conception of another kind of meaningfulness than the one conceived by the nature-dominating principle 'has become quite impossible' (*Lectures on Negative Dialectics*, 35).

only become known as thwarted.<sup>23</sup> And according to him this is better achieved through artworks than by experiencing natural beauty ‘directly’ in external nature (AT, 106/68). What Adorno wishes to highlight is that, in current society, claims for immediate access to nature and its meaning risk becoming ideological. The tourist industry has turned even so called ‘pristine nature’ into a marketable product. However, this does not entail that natural beauty has become an obsolete aesthetic category, instead it survives in its claimed opposite: art.

According to Adorno it is art’s imitation of the more of natural beauty that is able to determine this more as semblance (*Schein*). This implies that art is able to capture the more of natural beauty and incorporate it as a moment of something durable: the artwork. At the same time, however, the artwork is also able to show that nature’s more is but a semblance, in other words, that the more of natural beauty is not real. From the point of view of nature-dominating society, nature is scientifically explainable and commercially exploitable, nothing more (AT, 122/78). Artworks operate in this roundabout manner in order to rescue the more of natural beauty. Directly claiming nature as productivity and natural beauty as an expression of this productivity runs the risk of conveying the illusion that nature *already* exists in its own right, in other words, that nature is accurately acknowledged in current society, when in fact it hinders nature from realizing its potential. From Adorno’s perspective, Schelling’s conception of nature as productivity is thus in need of reinterpretation. According to Adorno, art’s mimesis of the more of natural beauty manages to point beyond the immanence of nature-dominating society. But this beyond is always conveyed by immanence; it is the possibility of transcending the existing condition, the hint of transcendence inherent in current praxis:

The image of nature survives because its complete negation in the artifact – negation that rescues this image – is necessarily blind to what exists beyond bourgeois society, its labor, and its commodities. Natural beauty remains the allegory of this beyond in spite of its mediation through social immanence. If, however, this allegory were substituted as the achieved state of reconciliation, it would be degraded as an aid for cloaking and legitimating the unreconciled world as one in which – as the claim goes – beauty is indeed possible. (AT, 108/69)

Adorno claims that art wants ‘to keep nature’s promise’ (AT, 103/65), that is to say the promise of reconciliation between nature and humanity. But this reconciliation cannot be depicted as if it already were achieved because in that case art’s rescue of the critical element in natural beauty would fail, and art would succumb to the current predicament. What Adorno is critical towards is first and foremost manifest depictions of reconciliation – ‘The green forest of German impressionism is of no higher dignity than those views of the Königssee painted for hotel lobbies’ (AT, 105/67) – and the view of integrative harmony as closure (*Geschlossenheit*) in traditional aesthetics, which turns aesthetic unity into a ‘triumph over the heterogeneous’ (AT, 236/157). But as we will see, Adorno still finds truth content in the idea of the reconciliatory unity (*Einheit*) of artworks, and in his elaboration of what deserves to be rescued in this old idea, he once again approaches Schelling’s conception of nature.

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. Stone, ‘Adorno and the Disenchantment of Nature’, 245–46. See also Flodin, ‘Of Mice and Men’, esp. 147–48. Freyenhagen develops a somewhat similar understanding with regard to human potential, understanding Adorno’s position as a negative Aristotelianism, see *Adorno’s Practical Philosophy*, 232–54.

## ORGANISM, UNITY, RECONCILIATION

The comparison between the creativity of nature (or God *qua* first creator) and that of humanity is an old idea in the history of aesthetics that Schelling reinterprets in his notion of art's imitation of nature as productivity and not as an object. In other words, by creating artworks in a similar manner to nature's creation of natural objects – or more specifically: of organisms – art becomes the domain that is able to show the common ground of humanity and nature. Schelling argues that 'nature begins as unconscious and ends as conscious; the process of production is not purposeful, but the product certainly is so' (STI, 313/219). It is the other way around when it comes to the artistic production of artworks: 'the self is conscious in respect of production, unconscious in regard of the product' (STI, 313/219). Even though the artist makes conscious decisions about the production of the artwork, the final product always exceeds the artist's intention and any attempt at reaching an ultimate definition of it. The artwork is more than the sum of the elements of which it is constituted, just like the organism is more than the sum of its parts. The peculiar unity and self-sufficiency of the artwork, its inner purposiveness, makes it structurally similar to the organism.<sup>24</sup>

Adorno is, as would be expected, critical towards this idealist-classicist comparison of the artwork to a self-sufficient organic unity (see e.g. AT, 255/170). Instead he emphasizes the fractured quality of the artwork and the artwork's expression of its own unnaturalness, of it being something human-made and historical. Dissonance, according to Adorno, characterizes all modern artworks in a broad sense (*Ästhetik*, 54). This is the case, as we saw above, because artworks that appear to be closed harmonic unities risk deceiving us to believe that the universal and the particular (subject and object) have been reconciled, or that there is at least a sphere in our unreconciled society where the universal and particular are reconciled, and in that case art becomes merely an alibi for status quo.<sup>25</sup>

Still, Adorno holds that it is 'with good reason' that 'the power of artworks to reconcile is sought in their unity' (AT, 202/134). It is reason, *Vernunft*, that 'effects unity' in artworks (AT, 202/134). And although this unity-forming principle echoes the violence inflicted upon the sensuous manifold by nature-dominating theory and practice, Adorno claims that '[t]he aesthetic unity of the multiplicitous [*Einheit des Mannigfaltigen*] appears as though it had done no violence but had been chosen by the multiplicitous itself. It is thus that unity [...] crosses over into reconciliation' (AT, 202/134). That is why he can claim that:

In artworks, spirit is no longer the old enemy of nature. Assuaged, spirit reconciles. Art is not reconciliation in the classicistic sense: Reconciliation is the comportment of artworks by which they become conscious of the nonidentical. Spirit does not identify the nonidentical: It identifies with it. By pursuing its own identity with itself, art assimilates itself with the nonidentical: This is the contemporary stage of development of art's mimetic essence. (AT, 202/134)

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<sup>24</sup> Schelling still holds this view in *The Philosophy of Art*: 'The organic work of nature represents the same indifference [between freedom and necessity] in an unseparated state that the work of art represents after separation yet as indifference.' (*The Philosophy of Art*, 30) The work of art is ideal, it is a product of spirit (and thus separated from the real), while the organism is real, a product of nature, but both artwork and organism exhibit the same indifference between freedom and necessity. This indifference between freedom and necessity is tantamount to 'the absolute harmony and reconciliation of both', and for Schelling this equals beauty (*The Philosophy of Art*, 31).

<sup>25</sup> See also Adorno's discussion of dissonance and harmony in AT, 167–68/109–10.

In other words, art's form of reason, its spirit, is *qualitatively different* from spirit operating outside art (both because it works primarily with *qualities* such as sound, colour, the hardness of the stone, the materiality and sonority of words and so forth, *and* because it is separated from empirical reality and thus is able to preserve the mimetic comportment that pays attention to qualitative uniqueness): spirit is, outside art, predominantly reduced to nature-dominating reason, which identifies objects according to unifying laws dictated by the cognizing subject. Increasingly throughout history, the quantifying aspect of reason has been emphasized on the behalf of the qualitative, which has been pushed aside, deemed as fictitious and unscientific. But Adorno argues that without the ability of distinction the synthetic functioning of thinking (abstract unification under a concept) would not even be possible. Gathering what is similar demands separating it from what is not similar. And that involves the qualitative aspect of thinking.<sup>26</sup> The preservation of mimetic comportment is vital for Adorno because it contains an acknowledgment of the affinity between subject and object. Thinking that forgets to acknowledge its affinity with and dependence on what is thought turns into ideology. When mimetic comportment, which hangs on sensuous, embodied connection between the relational parts, is mediated by artistic form, we are given a model for how a true unity could be constituted, one that does not suppress qualitative individuality, but still is *formed* and not just a piecemeal assembly. In *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno argues that '[a]esthetic unity gains its dignity through the multiplicitous itself. It does justice to the heterogeneous.' (AT, 284–85/191)

Adorno regards the formative reason of artworks as more rational than the reason that dominates outside art, since the domain of art, being the preserver of mimetic comportment, gives room to the qualitative moment that is necessary for genuine thinking. Thus, in artworks, unity is not forced on the sensuous manifold, but it rather appears as if the unity grew out of the manifold itself, which means that the manifold is allowed to determine itself, and thus to be meaningful (purposive) in itself ('pursuing its own identity with itself'). This is in fact highly reminiscent of Schelling's dynamic view of nature expressed in his *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*, where he investigates how matter is produced and puts forward the conception of nature as a whole as self-inhibiting activity, and each natural product as constituted of a multiplicity of natural qualities, *actants*, that are unified into the product through 'having reciprocal receptivity for one another' (*First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*, 24). The individuality of the actant must be preserved, lest 'the multiplicity be annihilated. The unity should not be achieved at the cost of multiplicity [*Mannigfaltigkeit*]. The multiplicity should remain, and yet a collective product result, which holds that infinite multiplicity together.' (Schelling, *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*, 24) This kind of organization is, according to Schelling, characteristic to all levels of natural construction from matter to organisms.

Schelling's notion of natural construction or organization is an effort to conceive of nature as self-determining and purposive.<sup>27</sup> But as he makes clear in *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, even though the idea of nature as purposive is indeed subjectively mediated through thinking, it is objective reality that compels thinking to move in this direction. In other words,

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<sup>26</sup> Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, 53–54, *Negative Dialectics*, 43–44. The qualitative moment of reason is, according to Adorno, recognized by Plato in the discussion in *Phaedrus*, where Plato emphasizes the need of both the qualitative element of *diairesis* (division) and the quantitative moment of *synagoge* (bringing together), see Plato, *Phaedrus*, 266b. See also Cook, *Adorno on Nature*, 71.

<sup>27</sup> I am aware that Schelling's concept of construction in his philosophy of nature is different from his earlier Fichtean conception (where construction merely concerned the self and its production). For an account of this development, see Nassar, *The Romantic Absolute*, 202–13.

Schelling conceives nature's purposiveness neither as a pre-determined notion impressed on nature by mind, nor as an idea immediately given in nature, but rather as a notion that mind reaches in its encounter with nature, and which forces mind to move in this direction (*Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, 32).<sup>28</sup> Even though it is admittedly more indirect, Adorno's conception of natural beauty as pointing to the primacy of the object in subjective experience bears a strong resemblance to Schelling's effort to explain nature's purposiveness as a concept emerging from interaction with external nature, so that 'construction of nature' implies both my construction of it *and* nature's construction of itself. Adorno's comprehension of natural beauty and Schelling's concept of the purposiveness of nature both attempt to acknowledge the indebtedness of subjective mediation (like thinking, aesthetic experience, and artistic production) to objective reality, without thereby evoking some kind of naïve realism which mistakes what is mediated for the immediately given.

Adorno furthermore explicitly refers to Schelling's concept of construction when discussing construction in art:

Construction is the form of works that is no longer imposed on them ready-made yet does not arise directly out of them either, but rather originates in its reflection through subjective reason. Historically, the concept of construction originated in mathematics; it was applied to substantive concerns for the first time in Schelling's speculative philosophy, where it was to serve as the common denominator of the diffusely contingent and the need for form. The concept of construction in art comes close to this. (AT, 330/222)

What connects Schelling's concept of construction with construction in art is, for Adorno, the way they both give form to what otherwise would be scattered and random: not through abstract classification, but instead through incorporating what Adorno comprehends as the mimetic relationship, which is, I would like to argue, what Schelling terms the 'reciprocal receptivity' between the qualities. In his comprehension of what is essential in artistic form, Adorno is clearly influenced by Schelling's characterisation of natural construction's ability to achieve synthesis from the ground up, so to speak. As mentioned above, this way of achieving unity while preserving individuality can be regarded as an ideal model for processes of synthesizing, like knowledge production. What both Adorno and Schelling emphasize is the importance of the moment of 'reciprocal receptivity' in the subject's approach to the object as well, that is to say, the importance of remaining open to the object and its way of affecting you.<sup>29</sup> In an earlier section, Adorno argues that spirit has become the 'principle of construction' in artworks, but that 'it fulfils its telos only when it emerges from what is to be constructed' (AT, 180/118).<sup>30</sup>

As we saw above, Adorno argues that spirit behaves mimetically in art, which means that it does not try to identify and determine the nonidentical, but instead identifies with it, as a subject identifies and empathizes with another subject. The 'mimetic stance' that 'has been

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<sup>28</sup> See also Peterson, 'Translator's Introduction', in Schelling, *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*, xxv.

<sup>29</sup> See also Adorno, *Lectures on Negative Dialectics* (92) where he says that the relationship between art and philosophy consists in their telos, 'which does not remain satisfied with the classification of facts'.

<sup>30</sup> When Adorno discusses construction in the section on 'The Ugly, The Beautiful, and Technique', he emphasizes its violent aspects, see AT, 90–92/56–58. This may seem to contradict what he writes later, but his earlier discussion concerns what happens if construction is pushed too much, creating a unity that 'destroy[s] what it integrates' (AT, 92/58).

inherited by art' is characterized by Adorno as 'that element of identification *with* the thing itself – as opposed to the identification *of* the thing itself' (*Lectures on Negative Dialectics*, 92). This is another way of framing the importance of acknowledging the subject's dependence on the thing it stands in front of or thinks about. *Identifying with* includes being open to the thing's or object's way of affecting you, and not remaining content with determining it by abstract classification which neglects qualitative uniqueness. The characterization of the artwork as not trying to imitate any existing object, but rather becoming similar to itself, growing *self-like*, is also reminiscent of the natural organization, self-determination, and self-limitation – that is, purposiveness – that Schelling argues for in the *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*. As we saw, Adorno claims that this pursuit of the artwork of becoming itself, of determining its own identity, is 'the contemporary stage of development of art's mimetic essence'. And Adorno's point is that it is precisely in this way that art is able to (subjectively) mediate natural beauty. Not by imitating natural objects or beautiful natural phenomena, but by imitating *natural beauty itself*: expressing nature's more by identifying *with* the nonidentical other, instead of identifying it as fitting a pre-formed category; allowing a unity to unfold out of the manifold parts and their interrelations, instead of imposing an external abstract form. In this way, it is possible to argue that, according to Adorno, art in its mimesis of natural beauty is able to intimate (at least the idea or possibility of) the self-inhibiting, self-determining and purposive character of nature that Schelling analysed in his *Naturphilosophie*.

What, then, would an artwork that approached such a non-violent, mimetic construction be like? In 'Vers une musique informelle', Adorno sketches an alternative way for music, beyond the total domination of material by serial composition (Karlheinz Stockhausen, Pierre Boulez) and the deceptive freedom of aleatoric music (John Cage). When giving this lecture in Darmstadt in 1961 he had not yet heard György Ligeti's *Atmosphères* from the same year, but when he later had the occasion to listen to Ligeti's work he admitted that this was the kind of music he had imagined in his lecture (Burde, *György Ligeti*, 144).<sup>31</sup> In *Aesthetic Theory* he also writes that 'Absolute determination – which stipulates that everything is important to an equal degree and that nothing may remain external to the inner nexus of the work – converges, as György Ligeti perceived, with absolute arbitrariness' (AT, 234/156).<sup>32</sup> 'Informal' music like Ligeti's, however, manages to strike a balance between the extremes: the construction is neither total nor arbitrary, but characterized by an openness of form where the whole grows out of the interconnections between the parts and is not imputed from above (see Adorno, 'Vers une musique informelle', 272–73). Such an open or informal unity bears strong resemblances to Schelling's description of organization and construction in nature developed in for example the *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*.

Thus, despite Adorno's scepticism towards the ability of artworks to present reconciliation directly (see e.g. AT, 55/33), and towards the idea of artworks as organic wholes, he nonetheless seems to find a certain truth content in the old analogy between the artwork and the organism, at least if it is interpreted along Schellingian lines.

## CONCLUSION

As we have seen there are important affinities between Adorno's and Schelling's efforts to rethink the relationship between reason and nature. Despite the lack of detailed discussion of

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<sup>31</sup> See also Williams, *New Music and the Claims of Modernity*, 82.

<sup>32</sup> See also Adorno, *Einleitung in die Musiksoziologie*, in *GS* vol. 14, 379. For a more elaborate account of Adorno's relationship to Ligeti's music, see Williams, *New Music and the Claims of Modernity*, 81–92.

Schelling's philosophy in Adorno's works, he nevertheless comes back to Schelling and Schellingian conceptions at crucial points, for example concerning the conception of reason as part of nature and also when discussing art's ability to give expression to what points beyond the seemingly closed confines of nature-dominating reason and ditto society. One could say that what Schelling claims for nature as dynamic construction, Adorno claims for the artwork as mediator of natural beauty. But through this subjective mediation, the objectivity of what nature and natural beauty stands for is preserved, and this is achieved in quite a different way than in Kant's attempt to save the objectivity of aesthetic experience through the subjective judgment. For Adorno – and here he is in agreement with the Schelling of the *System of Transcendental Idealism* – it is in the object, in other words in the individual artwork that we can trace the movement that allows us to glimpse the possibility of reconciliation between humanity and nature.

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