Aesthetic Education

Schiller and the Deskilling of Aesthetic Education

TOM HUHN

Introduction

When we reflect on education, and especially on what it should aim to do, we often assume some lack or need that education will remedy. Friedrich Schiller, in his series of 27 letters published as *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, does indeed imagine a particular goal of education but without presupposing any distinct lack or human need.[1] He rather imagines that human beings should aim their education at a restoration of what we once had and once were, that is, self-possessed and replete, whole, and each of us composing a unity with, and within, ourselves.[2] Schiller here follows in the footsteps of that other renowned 18th-century theorist of education: Jean Jacques Rousseau, whose many writings on education also distilled the great variety of needs and desires that education might fulfil to the simple proclamation that human education might be complete in the lesson of how to be kind to one another.[3] So though Rousseau provides Schiller with the crucial backdrop according to which human beings might

[1] Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters*, ed. and trans. by Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), hereafter *AE*.
[2] An earlier attempt to contend with the notion of capacity in Schiller and how it impacts his ideas about freedom, can be found in my essay, 'Aesthetic Education, Human Capacity, Freedom,' in *The Aesthetic Ground of Critical Theory: New Readings of Benjamin and Adorno*, ed. by Nathan Ross (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), pp. 177-89.
[3] 'What wisdom can you find that is greater than kindness?' Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile*, trans. by Barbara Foxley (New York: Dutton, 1974), p. 43.

recover their original wholeness and unity, it was the dyad of Immanuel Kant and Johann Joachim Winckelmann that more directly inspired him to formulate by what means a return to the unity of human life might proceed. What unites Winckelmann and Kant's apparently very different aesthetic theories is that both formulate aesthetic experience or judgment as the expression of a very particular human capacity, even if Winckelmann explains aesthetic expression as a burgeoning forth, a flowering even, of the whole complex of a human culture embedded within its natural environment, while Kant shrinks that complex by locating it within the individual human breast. What the pair share in their aesthetic theories that becomes so fruitful for Schiller is the understanding of the aesthetic primarily as a capacity as well as, equally important, a very particular *relation* to that capacity.[4]

What I hope to explore here, and what I believe contains the ongoing value of Schiller's aesthetic as well as epistemological theorizing (he would of course also at once include its political and moral relevance), is how the great question of where to point human education is to be answered by a curriculum of unlearning.[5] We have, in sum, progressed too far, expanded our abilities beyond ourselves and in such a way that

[4] Here is how Josef Chytry explains this development: 'Through Winckelmann "one becomes something," Goethe later expressed the effect to Eckermann: the reader underwent a conversion. In Hegel's estimation one acquired a new "organ," a *capacity* to intuit the artwork through the concept [emphasis added].' See Chytry's exhaustive study, *The Aesthetic State; A Quest in Modern German Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p. 34.

[5] Jonathan M. Hess explains: 'Schiller constructs the aesthetic as a domain that in its explicit autonomy *from* the political is called on to perform precisely that essential political task – the production of political freedom – that politics cannot manage on its own. If Schiller's aesthetics represents a politics, the characteristic feature of this politics is that it is not political, properly speaking [....] Schiller represents the final goal of politics within the domain of the aesthetic, offering up aesthetic autonomy as a substitute for the political emancipation is was supposed to bring about.' *Reconstituting the Body Politic: Enlightenment, Public Culture and the Invention of Aesthetic Autonomy* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999), p. 81.

these very same abilities have turned about and taken aim back at us. Shades here of course of Marx's notion of alienation, of human activities that have been cleaved off from whatever it is that maintains the human as a whole, and as a holistic project. There is no content to the education proposed by Schiller, it is instead an education entirely in service of form, of the adjusting of human capacity to its objects, and still more importantly, adjusting — or let us call it regulating and maintaining — human capacity with itself, with its own proper shape and objects. Here too Schiller shares with Rousseau the conviction that human capacity begins as wholly undetermined and that each subsequent determination, each separate capacity developed, can't help but diminish the integrity of the whole human being.

Form and Disinterest

In his essay 'On the Sublime', Schiller returns once more to the question of form, and specifically how it comports itself in relation to human ability: 'A mind sufficiently refined as to be moved more by the form than the matter of things and, without any reference to possession, to experience disinterested pleasure in sheer reflection upon the mode of their appearance — such a mind contains within itself an inner irrepressible fullness of life, and since it does not need to appropriate to itself those objects in which it lives, neither is it in danger of being despoiled by them.'[6] First note how keen Schiller is to dismiss the value of property, of possession, in order to have the mind place itself in a non-acquisitive mode. So too the qualification of pleasure as disinterested, a term

[6] In Friedrich Schiller, *'Naïve and Sentimental Poetry' and 'On the Sublime,'* ed. and trans. by Julius A. Elias (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1966), hereafter OS, pp. 193-212 (p. 196).

that comes to Schiller from Shaftesbury by way of Winckelmann, as well still more forcefully through Kant's aesthetic theory.[7] Disinterest signals the suspension of the acquisitive orientation to objects, and by extension, through Kant, denotes the capacity to acknowledge and to take things in that are purposive but without any particular purpose. But note too in the passage that what Schiller identifies as form has less to do with any particular shape or structure in the thing perceived and more to do with the *manner* of its appearance. In other words, form is not a characteristic of an object but rather of its appearance. It's just here where Schiller takes up the key notion of representation (*Vorstellung*) in Kant's aesthetics and translates it, or better, displaces it, with the term semblance (*Schein*). This transition, from representation to semblance — and recall that the latter term will become absolutely central to the aesthetics of Nietzsche[8] — shifts the gravity away from a Kantian mental phenomenon (however subjectively universal, as he theorizes it in the *Critique of Judgment*) and toward an actual feature of human life. Semblance, regardless how ephemeral and fleeting within human experience, has a real analogue in the world: human beings make and experience semblances. We often call them works of art. Consider how this fact resonates in the

[7] Paul de Man reads Schiller's *Letters* as the model and preeminent example of regression, of the failure to come to terms with the critical potential of Kant's 'original' *Critique of Judgment*: 'There seems to be always a regression from the incisiveness and from the impact, of the original. … something very directly threatening is present there which one feels the need to bridge – the difficulties, the obstacles which Kant has opened up. So there is a regression, an attempt to account for, to domesticate the critical incisiveness of the original. …Out of a text like Schiller's *Letters*…has been born: a way of emphasizing, of revalorizing the aesthetic, a way of setting up the aesthetic as exemplary, as an exemplary category, as a unifying category, as a model for education, as a model even for the state.' See his 'Kant and Schiller' in *Aesthetic Ideology*, ed. by Andrzej Warminski (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 129-62 (p. 130). For a compelling analysis and critique of de Man having made 'Schiller' into a 'signifier of aesthetic ideology,' see Karen Feldman, 'De Man's Kant and Goebbel's Schiller: The Ideology of Reception', *MLN* 124 (2009), 1170-87.

[8] See Timothy Stoll, 'Nietzsche and Schiller on Aesthetic Semblance', The Monist, 102 (2019), 331-48.

continuation of the passage from Schiller: 'But in the final analysis even semblance needs a physical substance in which it can be manifested; therefore so long as a need is present, if only for beautiful semblance, then, too, there remains a need for the *existence* of objects, and thus our satisfaction is still dependent upon nature as a power, for she rules over all existences [...]. That mental temperament which is indifferent whether the beautiful and the good and the perfect exist, is above all called great and sublime because it contains all the realities of the beautiful character without sharing any of its limitations.'[9] It's just these limitations which Hegel will take up in his aesthetics and thus declare that he will confine the scope of his investigations to a philosophy of art, which is to say, to a philosophy of the character of the existing things that happen to be beautiful rather than to the character of the judgments that denominate them so. Schiller will instead move past the limitations of beauty, and beautiful things, by way of his account of the sublime, whose key component includes the absence of any semblance or appearance.[10] Perhaps the best way to formulate this is to say that the sublime is free of appearances, for it is just the freedom from nature as a compelling force that most marks the sublime. We might also say that the freedom which Schiller finds himself most often arguing for is not the freedom from nature and its necessities and limitations but instead freedom from the ways in which we have reinstalled and reconstituted nature within ourselves as what he terms forces and capacities. Our final and most substantive liberation is thus to free ourselves from the constraints that we have

[9] Schiller, *OS*, p. 196.
[10] A compelling argument to the effect that beauty and the sublime, as outmoded modes of aesthetic experience, ought now to be replaced by the zany, cute, and interesting - our far more profound, or at least prolific categories of contemporary aesthetic experience – is deftly presented by Sianne Ngai in *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

mimetically reimposed upon ourselves as masters of nature. This explains why beauty remains for Schiller a problematic phenomenon, as well as an opportunity for demonstrating the dialectic within human development.

Sensuousness and Capacity

It is our creatureliness that makes us susceptible to beautiful things; it is a fault and blessing of our sensuousness that we have become eligible to being moved by — indeed taken up by — that which appears beautiful to us. And yet beauty also signals the possibility of the overcoming of our own determination as sensuous creatures. Beauty is the highest expression, indeed achievement, of sensuous life, and so too thereby also indicates the possibility of what might exist on the other side of our thralldom to beauty, to a sensuousness on the cusp of overcoming itself by having become totally suffused by what Kant calls the agreeable. It's important to note that Schiller follows Edmund Burke here in the latter's characterization of beauty as having a 'melting' effect.[11] Burke's formulation of the sublime, forty years prior to Schiller's, underlines the contrary enlivening effect of the sublime in response to those experiences of beauty which threaten to undo — not to mention unman — us. The agreeableness of nature is just that which presents the possibility that we might slip back into nature, an unforeseen return to what Freud terms the oceanic, the condition of existing without differentiation from all that otherwise surrounds and penetrates us. That nature and sensation might arrive in us as a state or condition of agreement (and hence pleasure)

[11] See Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. by James T. Boulton (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), pp. 91-118.

indicates our full accord with nature, or we might say even an excess of nature. When sensation becomes more than utility, when it suffices as well as exceeds what we need it to be for our mere survival, it then points to the possibility of nature becoming — in us — something more than what it merely provides. The pleasure of the senses is then already an early indicator that nature resides in us, and yet, that we might also be on the verge of ourselves becoming in excess of nature itself. And yet the agreeable state, a kind of equilibrium between us and nature that already points beyond the equilibrium, also shows the extent to which we might become still more in thrall to nature.

The agreeable state is then also a liability, a vulnerability within us of our very connectedness to nature. Nature becomes a threat to us when it appears within us as the power — Schiller calls it a force — to make us still more in thrall to it. The elevation of the agreeable to beauty is at once both a concentration of the force of nature's agreeableness as well as the potential overcoming of that same agreeableness — our very continuity with nature — by exaggerating and extending the range of the gravity of how nature provides us pleasure. This formulation returns us precisely to the role of disinterest. We might imagine beauty as an idea, an image of what a concentrated excess of sensuous pleasure would become in us. It's then easy to imagine that such an experience would in fact undo us, or more precisely: it would undo us as primarily sensuous creatures. And in undoing us as just such creatures beauty then presents the possibility of our becoming something other than primarily sensuous creatures. Our sensuousness, in being fulfilled and exceeded, transforms itself into another capacity. This is where Schiller's account of the relation between human capacity and nature becomes most consequential. Human action is for him separable from human capacity.

The former is what we do in response to our environment and to our perceived needs and desires. Capacity, on the other hand, is a kind of agency installed within the human creature as a standing ability to act and to respond. Each capacity exists for him as both instrument as well as source of power. As an instrument it has a limited scope of what it can act upon; as a force, however, it is a reservoir of energy and potentiality. Schiller thus formulates capacity as a re-inscription of nature within human existence. As a mimetic re-making of nature within the human, Schiller proposes that with what we might also call second nature, the human is at once both liberated from certain limitations of the natural as well as re-confined as a repetition, another instance and iteration of nature. The history of our making and becoming thereby sinks us back into nature insofar as the boundaries of what we have become are inscribed, and re-inscribed, as likewise those of nature. There is then no single capacity, however advanced we might become, that could lift us out of the cycle of scarifying ourselves as ever more elaborate, and powerful, instances of nature. Every capacity is then but the insistent return of nature.

Capacity and Education

What might well lift us out of the vicious cycle of any and every capacity advancing us beyond a natural limit only to reimpose in us a still more powerful instance of nature, would be an education, and a life, that composes itself within the confines of the aesthetic rather than within the bounds of nature. What makes the boundaries that constitute the aesthetic the only ones from within which human freedom might occur is their existence as semblance rather than as nature, and secondly, the aesthetic refuses

to become a capacity by disavowing its own power, and thus forfeits any claim to truth. The aesthetic then in both these regards refuses to bind itself to human existence. It remains only in its tentative, ephemeral state. We might think of an analogue here to the condition of music as the ideal form of aesthetic appearance — already but semblance — and also transitory. Or perhaps also akin to Adorno's analogue of fireworks, a prototype or model of aesthetic appearance insofar as fireworks appear in the sky as a kind of writing, and yet not a writing that we can make any sense of, and thereby also an apt illustration of the Kantian purposiveness without a particular purpose.

This brings us to a key feature of Schiller's aesthetic education: the fact that it is endless and never to be completed. It's as if aesthetic education is the perpetual approach toward and withdrawal from the instituting of aesthetic responsiveness as a completed and whole event. We are always only on the way toward, or in retreat from, committing ourselves to the aesthetic, just as semblance, the material correlate to aesthetic experience, inexorably falls short of becoming actual. A ready illustration of this phenomenon is the distinction between a painting and a picture. The former is the physical material object, the latter is what Schiller would call the form of the painting, that is, the nature of its appearance as semblance. A picture might well depend upon the existence of the painting, as its support so to speak, but the picture hovers just above, or alongside, or perhaps orthogonally, to the painting.

A proper aesthetic education is an education in suspense, in learning how to be alive in the suspension of our capacities. Schiller's justly renowned play drive (*Spieltrieb*) is only in part a recommendation toward the light-heartedness, the lack of

seriousness, in play. Indeed, Schiller writes that the play drive is when human beings are most serious. Play is more central to his conception of human freedom because it instantiates the dynamism of being in the midst of an activity or game. The play drive, and the aesthetic education that would teach how to sustain oneself in it, is not human action without purpose — it is not simply the playful versus the goal-oriented — as it is rather the subordination of the goal of any event or action to the state of being actively on-the-way-toward something or other. And the priority of that state of being on-the-way, when it comes to take precedence over the end toward which it aims, is to allow oneself to be suspended in the activity of one's capacity, though without the capacity being harnessed to this or that end. Put differently: play is characterized by a refusal to be or become an image or instance of nature.

In the very first letter Schiller presents the dilemma regarding how the intellect as a capacity achieves its understanding of the world but at the same time thereby removes whatever is gained by knowledge from any further experience of the object: 'intellect must first destroy the object of inner sense if it would make it its own. Like the analytical chemist, the philosopher can only discover how things are combined by analysing them, only lay bare the workings of spontaneous nature by subjecting them to the torment of his own techniques. In order to lay hold of the fleeting phenomenon, he must first bind it in the fetters of rule, tear its fair body to pieces by reducing it to concepts, and preserve its living spirit in a sorry skeleton of words. Is it any wonder that natural feeling cannot find itself again in such an image, or that in the account of

the analytical thinker truth should appear as paradox?'[12] Philosophy, which stands here as the most consolidated form of intellect, operates as a double-edged sword. It truly penetrates its object to discover something about it, and yet in doing so it destroys the integrity of the same object. Schiller is less concerned about the violence done to the object of knowledge by the 'torment' of the techniques of mind and more interested in how the object of knowledge comes to be removed from the possibility of feeling, which is to say: some other kind of experience.[13] Mind, and especially the analytical understanding, has come to dominate the approach by human beings to their encounters with the world, and we have thereby greatly diminished our ability, or let us say our openness, to allowing the object of experience to make its impress on us in some way other than through the portals of analytical instrumentalization. This criticism of the power of mind, or rather the one-sidedness that it seems to insist upon, will in the 20th century be termed instrumental reason. The dilemma for Schiller can be put as follows: how might the mind become an instrument without mind thereby reducing itself to nothing but an instrument. Schiller's remedy for our having arrived at this juncture is of course an ongoing, endless aesthetic education, whose goal cannot be set by the arrival of some new capacity, even the capacity to moderate oneself. Aesthetic education has instead as its goal the constant reigning in of the dominance of any one capacity or another. It is then not intellect, or philosophy even, against which Schiller

[12] Schiller, *AE*, p.5.

[13] Paul de Man's early reading of Schiller struggled with just this question as to what kind of knowledge the aesthetic might consist of: 'in Schiller, the *aesthetic*, is not a separate category of articulation between various known faculties, and modes of cognition. What gives the aesthetic its power and hence its practical, political impact, is its intimate link with knowledge, the epistemological implications that are always in play when the aesthetic appears over the horizon of discourse.' 'Aesthetic Formalization: Kleist's *Über das Marionettentheater*,' in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), pp. 263-90 (pp. 264-5).

proposes his alternate education, but rather against the sweep and mastery that every capacity brings in its wake.

Second Nature

The second letter immediately enlarges the scope, as well as the character, of the limitation that human beings have imposed upon themselves by their very development. Recall that for Schiller the growth of human capacity is likewise the imposition upon ourselves of a kind of second nature. Second nature is then not merely the static artifacts, and built environment all about us, but is rather more deeply implanted in us as the *means* by which we imagine and conceive the environment we come to build and inhabit. Second nature, in other words, is a dynamic within us, a force that exercises itself not only in the products we make and the actions we take but still more so in the very orientation that we have toward what might be possible for each of us, as well as all of us together. Second nature, that force which we have implanted in ourselves, has, for Schiller, but one possible *telos*: 'that most perfect of all the works to be achieved by the art of man: the construction of true political freedom'.[14] Note that the political orientation here is not a programme trained on how we are to get along with one another. Such an education would fall on fallow ground if we have not first learned how to enact a non-adversarial relationship within ourselves. We cannot hope to make peace and find comity with others unless we are at peace with ourselves. The aesthetic state, the polis in which each is self-attuned, arises when we come to provide one another

[14] Schiller, *AE*, p. 7.

with the opportunity and occasion for self-moderation. In this light, the artwork exists in effect as a fellow-citizen, a member of a free society in which each individual is likewise a model to others of playful engagement. Imagine a traditional Hobbesian-style state, in which each citizen is naturally aligned against every other citizen, and then transplant this war-of-each-against-all scenario into the interior of each citizen, and we have arrived at Schiller's conception of where political strife is truly located: in the conflict of the faculties with one another. Schiller's solution to this strife is not to install as sovereign over all human faculties one or another faculty, reason say, or the understanding, or even feeling, but rather to imagine a regime (an aesthetic regime) in which no faculty might ever become sovereign. One key goal of aesthetic education is to teach how not to allow any one faculty to become dominant. However noble it might be for reason to reign supreme, one unfortunate and unavoidable corollary lesson is in the efficacy of dominance. Schiller would have us instead learn the aesthetic pleasure of non-dominance.[15] Our neighbours, near or far, are not what impede us from a more free expression of our lives; our enemy is rather utility: 'Utility is the great idol of our age, to which all powers are in thrall and to which all talent must pay homage.'[16] We find ourselves here not so very far removed from Rousseau's contention that convenience is the first great yoke that we place on ourselves. Utility functions as a premier example of ideology, of a set of beliefs and an orientation that by seeming

[15] 'Schiller took the side of reason against reason, intending to counter the dialectic of enlightenment by way of aesthetics. Aesthetic semblance, which he conceived in terms of Kant's free play of reason, is to recuperate reason. [...] Adorno's writings follow Schiller in the specific sense of conceiving the solution to the dialectic of enlightenment, the realization of reason, as dependent on aesthetic semblance. Just as for Schiller the aesthetic is the play of reason, so Adorno conceives of reason as inextricable from art.' Robert Hullot-Kentor, *Things Beyond Resemblance: Collected Essays on Theodor W. Adorno* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), pp. 34-5.

[16] Schiller, *AE*, p. 7.

obvious come to be taken for granted. But Schiller would have the work of aesthetic education disorient us, or better put: disorient our dominant capacities, and put back into play just those actions previously harnessed only for the sake of their usefulness.

Schiller concludes his second letter as follows: 'if man is ever to solve that problem of politics in practice he will have to approach it through the problem of the aesthetic, because it is only through beauty that man makes his way to freedom. But this cannot be demonstrated without my first reminding you of the principles by which reason is in any case guided in matters of political legislation.'[17] Famously, for Schiller, beauty serves at once as both a guide toward — as well as an image of — freedom. It's as if unaided we cannot simply enter the condition of true human freedom.[18] We are impeded from entry into a free state by our very capacities and faculties, whose nature it is to be useful and pragmatic. This is what Schiller understands as the compulsion of nature, that nature impels us just as it impels every other organic and inorganic substance.

Everything exists under the rule, the dominance, of nature. And reason, as Kant led Schiller to see it, is a faculty of desire, a faculty of choosing apart from the dictates of nature. Reason is then a kind of agency, or potential agency within us that asserts itself as the contrary of the demands of nature. It comes to be, we might say, as the adversary, the other to nature, even if it also begins in a mimesis of nature: 'But what

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[17] Schiller, *AE*, p. 9.

[18] In the context of freedom and political liberty we might well pose Schiller as offering a more radical version of Shaftesbury's notion of liberty, as explained by Jonathan I. Israel: 'In his post-aristocratic philosophy, "liberty" is the basis for a new and more enlightened culture — "liberty" not just in the constitutional sense defined by the Glorious Revolution, but liberty as a political and social condition, liberty defined by debate, criticism, and cultural exchange.' *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 67.

makes him man is precisely this: that he does not stop short at what nature herself made of him, but has the power of retracing by means of reason the steps she took on his behalf, of transforming the work of blind compulsion into a work of free choice, and of elevating physical necessity into moral necessity.'[19] It may be of some help here in understanding more about the role of beauty by locating it in Schiller's schema of nature and reason, with the latter acting as a retracing of the actions of the former. We might then well substitute beauty for nature and thus understand beauty as the model upon which freedom is to arise.[20] Beauty is of course but the *image* of freedom — and one can't help but recall here Stendhal's famous definition of beauty as the promise of happiness - just as nature provides and supports human life without the latter becoming free.

Beauty and Semblance

Important to acknowledge here is that beauty appears under constraint. And the constraint is that of sensuousness, for beauty — however much it comes to be as semblance — nonetheless appears, if only momentarily, in the apparitions of deliquescing musical sounds. Semblance itself is thus a dialectical indicator of the need to overcome in the first place the constraint of appearance, so that even if semblance merely undoes the actuality of appearance, it nevertheless shows the motion toward freedom. But note that the force of nature's 'blind compulsion' is not entirely undone

[19] Schiller, *AE*, p. 11.

[20] Jürgen Habermas acknowledges the *Letters* as the 'first programmatic work toward an aesthetic critique of modernity,' whose aim is political freedom: 'The formulation of the question [how to achieve political freedom] already suggests the answer: art itself is the medium for the education (*Bildung*) of the human race to true political freedom.' 'Excursus on Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*,' in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity; Twelve Lectures*, trans. by Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1987), pp. 45-50 (p. 45).

by reason, for the latter mimetically installs the 'necessity' of moral life in place of nature. Compulsion, in other words, merely loses its blinders while the echo of its force continues in free moral life. This is akin to Kant's notion of duty.

'Every individual human being, one may say, carries within him, potentially and prescriptively, an ideal man, the archetype of a human being, and it is his life's task to be, through all his changing manifestations, in harmony with the unchanging unity of this ideal.'[21] We are already well aware that harmony is central to Schiller's image of the person reconciled with herself. What is perhaps just as important to note here is the role of unity in his conception of a human life in congruence with the state. The content of the image of the ideal person, of the archetype human being, is of little interest to Schiller, just as the direction of any particular capacity or talent holds no real purchase for him. It is rather, with unity as it is with form, that the character and shape of the whole is what is paramount in aesthetic life and education. Unity as the central feature of artworks as well as of aesthetic experience harks back most prominently to Aristotle who in his *Poetics* gives so much force to the techniques and means by which unity comes to be created. In the *Poetics* the emphasis on plot, but so too on action over character, as well as the vaunted — and seemingly obvious — insistence on the value of staging beginning, middle, and end, are all expressions of how the work of art comes into being by means of its appearing as a unity. We need not pause to consider whether unified things, or indeed images of unity, are thereby more effective and attractive, but instead ask what it is for Schiller that unity alone is capable of providing. A key to

[21] Schiller, *AE*, p. 17.

answering this is provided by his own characterization of reason as a force that 'demands unity.'[22] Nature, on the other hand, insists upon multiplicity. Reason, in its quest for unity, demands singularity, a distilling of variety into a composed whole. This question regarding unity supplies us with an opportunity to highlight a key feature of semblance while at the same time coming to understand why Schiller also emphasizes it as the goal of aesthetic education. Semblance is not merely illusion or fantasy, a made-up picture of things. Far more important to the character of semblance is that it take place as an image, that is, as a *unity* of composed parts. Unity is in fact that which makes an image into a whole out of a jumble of marks and colours, shadows and lights. Semblance, like all aesthetic phenomena, has its grounding in the unity that is the necessary condition for any and all images. Every semblance thus holds a two-tiered lesson: it liberates one from the condition of actuality, by modelling just that, and likewise modelling the second lesson, that of the wholeness achieved by dint of the process of becoming a unity.[23]

A still more telling reminder of the value of semblance is to consider in contrast what comes in the wake of the development of each new power. Here Schiller proceeds to summarize this tendency as one belonging to civilization in general: 'Civilization, far from setting us free, in fact creates some new need with every new power it develops

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[22] Schiller, *AE*, p. 19.

[23] For an intriguing and compelling account of how the meaning and scope of freedom – precisely that which a unified being is capable of – shifts over the course of the *Letters*, see Martha Woodmansee's chapter 'Aesthetic Autonomy as a Weapon in Cultural Politics: Rereading Schiller's *Aesthetic Letters*', where she writes, 'by the end of the *Letters* what had been designated the indisputable instrument of emancipation seems to have become identical with it: the experience of beauty in art has thus become a terminal value. For at the end of the *Letters* aesthetic experience is portrayed as itself the locus of freedom.' In *The Author, Art, and the Market: Rereading the History of Aesthetics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 57-86 (p. 59).

in us.'[24] So, in addition to the limitation carried in the development of each new capacity, that capacity is accompanied by the appearance of a new need.[25] Each of our powers limits us — by condensing what we are capable of to the boundaries of that power — and so too each power likewise limits us by producing its own special need. If we think of a power or capacity as akin to a tool, and we take up the example of the hammer as a premier tool, then we soon arrive at the oft-repeated adage to the effect that to the person who has a hammer, everything looks like a nail. But now we might add, given Schiller's claim that each new power brings a new need, that the existence of the hammer brings as its companion the need for things to be struck by the hammer. The hammer works well as a tool and an ability, and yet we cannot fail to acknowledge that in a world stocked with hammers, many more things have come to appear to be in need of hammering. Schiller continues in the following letter (the sixth) to sharpen his attack on civilization: 'It was civilization itself which inflicted this wound upon modern man. Once the increase in empirical knowledge, and more exact modes of thought, made sharper divisions between the sciences inevitable [...] then the inner unity of human nature was severed too, and a disastrous conflict set its harmonious powers at variance.'[26] Schiller employs here the Winckelmann-infused image of the ancient Greeks as living not only amidst beautiful nature, which they reproduced in beautiful

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[24] Schiller, *AE*, p. 27.

[25] These new modern needs drive the fragmentation of the self. And Terry Eagleton credits Schiller as the primary inspiration for 'the whole radical aesthetic tradition from Coleridge to Herbert Marcuse, lamenting the inorganic, mechanistic nature of industrial capitalism, [which] draws sustenance from this prophetic denunciation.' Eagleton continues with his own lament for the affirmative side of Schiller's aesthetics: 'What must then be emphasized is the contradictory nature of an aesthetic which on the one hand offers a fruitful ideological model of the human subject for bourgeois society, and on the other hand holds out a vision of human capacities by which that society can be measured and found gravely wanting.' *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p. 118.

[26] Schiller, *AE*, p. 33.

art, but so too that natural and artistic beauty were expressions of the harmonies within each person.[27] This individual harmony likewise resonated with the harmony of the Greek polis and the natural environment. And in that classical ideal state, 'At that first fair awakening of the powers of the mind, sense and intellect did not yet rule over strictly separate domains; for no dissension had as yet provoked them into hostile partition and mutual demarcation of their frontiers.'[28] These passages require us to refine our earlier characterization of the development of human capacities as necessarily leading to a fragmentation of the unity of the human being, of the loss of integrity solely through the empowerment of one ability or another. But now we can conclude that human development need not be adversarial or fragmenting; it is rather, for Schiller, that the demands of the political state nudge the development of capacities into a fragmenting force. It is the needs of the state that put human abilities at odds with one another. And since for Schiller the state means the whole of the civil environment that human beings inhabit, we can readily appreciate that his discussion here of fragmentation will find a direct parallel in Marx's notion of alienation. The concern for both thinkers is to determine how the organization of human capacities brings discord, fragmentation, and an adversariness within and among human beings.

For both Schiller and Marx the root problem lay in just those demands made on human capacities that turn those same capacities against the human beings in which

[27] A fruitful path along which to view the growth of this model is according to the notion of the beautiful soul, and although the *Letters* 'does not contain the phrase "beautiful soul," does assume, as its title suggests, its reality. The *Letters* amounts to an attempt to move from the exclusive concentration on the "beautiful" individual to the level of the whole social sphere. Such a consideration of the social dimension of moral beauty had always been an essential element of the ideal, for morality can of course only make sense within the context of a larger civil order.' Robert E. Norton, *The Beautiful Soul; Aesthetic Morality in the Eighteenth Century* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 244.
[28] Schiller, *AE*, p. 31.

they reside. How then might a human capacity come to develop itself in opposition to the very host of the capacity? For Schiller the answer has to do with a certain degree of coercion imposed upon the capacity. Alienation occurs when human development happens at the expense of the human being. We note here an interesting parallel with the problem of ideology, which is thinking put in service against the real interests of the thinker, we might then see that the crux of the problem with both alienation and ideology lies in the curtailment of human freedom, in one case the freedom of a capacity to develop according to its own lights, and in the case of ideology it is the curtailment of the freedom of thinking in the act of constraining thought to overly restrictive measures. This formulation then neatly returns to the problem of freedom, absolutely central to Schiller's formulation of aesthetic education as the most fruitful path to return to a former but now lost freedom.

Freedom and Sublime Incapacity

A little odd perhaps to phrase it this way but it might be put that the greatest impediment to our freedom is not other people but the potential for incapacity that lies at the heart of our existence as beings with ever-expanding capacities: 'It must, therefore, be wrong if the cultivation of individual powers involves the sacrifice of wholeness. Or rather, however much the law of nature tends in that direction, it must be open to us to restore by means of a higher art the totality of our nature which the arts themselves have destroyed.'[29] We shall return to the topic of sacrifice when we consider Schiller's

[29] Schiller, *AE*, p. 43.

formulation of the sublime and therein encounter Kant's own formulation of the sublime in which sacrifice plays a key role. But for now it will suffice to provide an illustration, by means of an image of the human body, of how the exercise, or better: control, of human activity results in quite different effects. I have in mind Schiller's brilliant illustration of the difference between athletic bodies and beautiful bodies. Both types of bodies — we leave aside the question of whether athletic bodies can be beautiful — exercise the same capacity, the active engagement of as many parts of the body as possible. And yet, for Schiller, athletic bodies are created by the opposition of parts of the body to one another, think of isometric exercise here — whereas beautiful bodies come to be out of the harmonious engagement of the parts of the body with one another.

This dynamic that brings about beautiful rather than merely athletic bodies can also be glimpsed in Schiller's account of the sublime: 'nothing is so unworthy of man than to suffer violence, for violence undoes him.'[30] To phrase this in the terms of Schiller's discussion in *Aesthetic Education*, we might say that violence is a force or power directed against the human individual that results in suffering, and that the primary force of that suffering is directed against the integrity of the individual.[31]

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[30] Schiller, *OS*, p. 193.

[31] A more contemporary, though quite similar treatment of force is found in the well-known analysis of it by Simone Weil in her essay 'The Iliad, Poem of Force:' 'From the power to transform him into a thing by killing him there proceeds another power and much more prodigious, that which makes a thing of him while he still lives. He is living, he has a soul, yet he is a thing. […] The soul was not made to dwell in a thing; and when forced to it, there is no part of that soul but suffers violence.' Schiller's term translated as force is *die Kraft*, Weil's is *la force*. Both thinkers share the insight that the primary direction of force is toward reification, and that the most treacherous feature of force is its attempt to reify that which remains most alive in the human being. In *The Simone Weil Reader*, ed. by George A. Panichas (Mt. Kisco, New York: Moyer Bell Limited, 1977), pp. 153-83 (p. 155).

The specific character of the sublime is that it contains both suffering and relief. Recall that for Kant the sublime is a two-stage phenomenon that begins with an initial experience of a threat to the integrity of the person. It thereby becomes a model for how to maintain a life within the aesthetic that also points beyond it. 'The feeling of the sublime is a mixed feeling. It is a composition of melancholy which at its utmost is manifested in a shudder, and of joyousness which can mount to rapture and, even if it is not actually pleasure, is far preferred by refined souls to all pleasure. This combination of two contradictory perceptions in a single feeling demonstrates our moral independence in an irrefutable manner.'[32] We might think of the sublime for Schiller as a properly post-aesthetic phenomenon. The limitations of the aesthetic have for him everything to do with the power and proximity of the experience of beauty to our sensuousness: 'Through beauty alone, then, we should never discover that we are destined and able to manifest ourselves as pure intelligences. But in the sublime, however, reason and sensuousness do *not* accord, and precisely in this contradiction between the two lies the magic with which it captures our minds.'[33] The very thing in beauty that recommends it to us as a genuine expansion of our capacity to move beyond sensuousness, that is, *disinterest* toward sensuousness, nevertheless becomes an obstacle to our further growth toward freedom insofar as the proper aesthetic disinterest toward beauty remains one-sided. However noble our cultivated disinterest in regard to sensuousness, the scope of the disinterest remains limited to sensuousness. The sublime provides the occasion to expand our disinterest beyond sensuousness to the greatest

[32] Schiller, *OS*, p. 198.
[33] Schiller, *OS*, pp. 199-200.

possible realm of self-interest, that of self-preservation: 'Thus the sublime affords us an egress from the sensuous world in which the beautiful would gladly hold us forever captive.'[34] The most consequential freedom that we might win for ourselves is the freedom from our thralldom to the sensuous world. Beauty is at once both an intensification of that thralldom as well as a dialectical overcoming of it.

Art and Aesthetic Capacity

Beauty recapitulates our bond with sensuousness, elevates it and thereby provides a glimpse, via disinterest, of what freedom from it might look like; or we might more properly say that beauty not only signals how to be free of sensuousness but is also in itself an image of that freedom insofar as it is attractive in such a way that we need not be in thrall to it.[35] Here is where semblance plays such a key role insofar as it provides an image rather than the actuality of sensuous fulfilment. We should thus not lament that beauty is only a promise of happiness, for in being but a promise beauty thereby indicates how we might free ourselves from the spell of nature: 'The sublime, like the beautiful, is prodigally diffused throughout the whole of nature and the capacity to apprehend both is implanted in all men; but the potentiality to do so is unequally

[34] Schiller, *OS*, p. 201.

[35] John Dewey formulates a remarkably similar path to human happiness, as Martin Jay explains: 'Aesthetic experience was in fact for Dewey the teleological goal of authentic experience *tout court*, in which it attains its "consummatory" character. Here means and ends come together in one organic unity. Or as he put it in *Art as Experience*, "experience in the degree in which it *is* experience is heightened vitality [...]. Because experience is the fulfillment of an organism in its struggles and achievements in a world of things, it is art in germ. Even in its rudimentary forms, it contains the promise of that delightful perception which is aesthetic experience."' *Songs of Experience: Modern American and European Variations on a Universal Theme* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), p. 164.

developed and must be aided by art.'[36] So although the capacity is implanted in all of us, it is art that is necessary in order to develop it. This also means that art is a peculiar kind of tool, one that serves not only as an instrument to leverage our potential capacities for apprehending beauty and the sublime, but so too is art itself perhaps a kind of capacity and not merely an aid to wholly inward human capacities. In this light art comes to appear as a quasi-capacity, as an agency with the ability not only to aid but to inaugurate the coming into existence of a capacity. It's no mere projection on our part to perceive works of art as doing things like addressing viewers, or making propositions, or even containing truth claims. These and many other activities — likewise a residue of art's origins in magic — are evidence of art being no mere adjunct to social life but a vibrant participant in it. It's as if we have off-loaded, onto a sort of art subcontractor, the development of a capacity which we cannot on our own quite fully fashion. How else might we account for the experience of art as being at once in such proximity - its pleasure suffusing us - while at the same time so utterly foreign, marked by our complete ignorance as to the meaning of the beautiful. This formulation helps explain Kant's preference for natural beauty over artistic beauty; the latter places in the artifact a capacity that ought better remain wholly within the human. The sublime then becomes the logical extension of this bias against the artifact as the seat of a human capacity. Or, put differently, we might well understand the sublime, and in particular Kant's formulation of it, as the return of capacity away from the work of art, or even bit of nature in the case of natural beauty, and toward its proper home exclusively within

[36] Schiller, *OS*, p. 202.

the human being. Recall here the Longinian formulation of the sublime as the echo of a noble soul.[37] Leave aside the question regarding the emptiness, which allows the noble soul to have an echo, and attend instead to the echo as wholly interior to the human being as well as in need of an external device or artifact, however hollow.

Freedom and Determinacy

What we are encountering here in Schiller's insistence upon the moral character of aesthetic experience is his affirmation that the true goal of human development is an ever-expanding capacity for freedom.[38] One of his clearest expressions of this conviction appears early on in his 1795 essay on 'Naïve and Sentimental Poetry,' where he explicitly cites Kant's illustration of the person who perfectly impersonates the song of the nightingale.[39] In Kant's telling, an innkeeper hires a nightingale impersonator to hide in the bushes and sing in order to entertain the guests at the inn.[40] Kant avers that the deception, in other words the unrevealed imitation of nature, is perfectly acceptable unless and until the deception is revealed to the guests. Kant argues that the pleasure of

[37] See Longinus, *On Great Writing (On the Sublime)*, trans. by G. M. A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett Press, 1991), p. 12.

[38] Anthony Savile addresses directly this question as to whether for Schiller the 'full aestheticization of experience is an *ideal* that we might set ourselves.' Savile instead suggests, 'An alternative conception of Schiller's strategy [...] which still retains a tinge of Kantian colour, is this. While it is no longer advanced as a constitutive truth about human experience that it is imbued with the aesthetic, it may still be regulative of experience that it be so.' See Savile's *Aesthetic Reconstructions: The Seminal Writings of Lessing, Kant and Schiller* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), pp. 202-03.

[39] In Friedrich Schiller, '*Naïve and Sentimental Poetry' and 'On the Sublime,'* ed. and trans. by Julius A. Elias (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1966), hereafter *NS*, pp. 83-190.

[40] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, translated by Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), §42, 302, p. 169.

the nightingale's song is then destroyed.[41] Schiller seemingly agrees with this line of argumentation but he places a still greater gravity on the situation: 'From this it is clear that this kind of satisfaction in nature is not aesthetic but moral, for it is mediated by an idea, not produced immediately by observation; nor is it in any way dependent upon beauty of form.'[42] Schiller argues that it is not merely the natural form of the flower, or the humming of bees, or the chirping of birds that makes them beautiful, it is rather that all these natural phenomena represent an idea to us, and further, that it is this idea which is the thing we love in these beautiful natural phenomena. And yet, fittingly, it is as if the idea has no genuine content but only form, for Schiller declares the aspects of the idea as inner necessity and eternal unity. We find ourselves again quite close to Winckelmann here and thus it is no surprise that Schiller's account next moves to a description of what we once were. We love beautiful natural objects because '*They are what we were; they are what we should once again become.* We were nature just as they, and our culture, by means of reason and freedom, should lead us back to nature. They are, therefore, not only the representation of our lost childhood, which eternally remains most dear to us, but fill us with a certain melancholy.' And what truly separates us from the idea represented to us by beautiful natural things is that 'We are free, they are necessary; we change, they remain a unity.'[43] Childhood represents an era of integrity and wholeness, and Schiller is happy to deploy it in both its literal sense as well as apply it the Greeks, whose culture and way of life were often likened to be the

[41] Kant's anecdote of the innkeeper and the song of the nightingale might well be considered an early formulation of what later comes to be called the culture industry, if we understand the focus of that industry as the strategic attempt to create the effects of art, rather than the thing itself.
[42] Schiller, *NS*, p. 84.
[43] Schiller, *NS*, p. 85.

childhood of the species. What our presumed maturity has brought us is not freedom but the potential for it; and what we have lost is the unity of our existence. The aesthetic is the semblance of the moral insofar as the former functions as the model and deployment of the harmony of the faculties, and the latter, the moral realm, is something we cannot directly aspire to without the aid of both imagery and practice, which is to say: semblance and play. Thus for Schiller our true life would consist of reattaining our lost unity while thereby fully embodying our potential freedom. 'We are touched not because we look down upon the child from the height of our strength and perfection, but rather because we *look upward* from the *limitation* of our condition, which is inseparable from the *determination* which we have attained, to the unlimited *determinacy.*'[44] It is then not the limitation of the child that lends its charm to us but rather the expanse glimpsed of our possible future determinability as we witness the combination in the child of the freedom from compulsion alongside its burgeoning capacity. We perceive at once in the idea or form of the child an image of our not yet being fully determined: 'The child is therefore a lively representation to us of the ideal, not indeed as it is fulfilled, but as it is enjoined: hence we are in no sense moved by the notion of its poverty and limitation, but rather by the opposite: the notion of its pure and free strength, its integrity, its eternality.'[45] What we see in the child is the standing-ready of capacity, and still more importantly, we see the wholeness and integrity — Schiller might in another context call this dignity — of that condition of indeterminacy. But this is to put it just the opposite as Schiller has it, for it is not the lack of determinacy

[44] Schiller, *NS*, p. 87.
[45] Schiller, *NS*, p. 87.

in the child that lends it its ideal character for us but rather its very determinacy, though without yet any very evolved determinations.[46]

Return to Sensuousness

Childhood holds for Schiller still another analogy, in addition to that of the ancient Greeks, which is sensuousness. If the Greeks are the childhood equivalent of the historical and social development of the human being, then sensuousness might be considered the childhood in the development of the species. And for Schiller the historical and species development of the human being coincides, or overlaps, in the period of the ancient Greeks. This follows directly the lead from Winckelmann who imagined the Greeks as capable of attaining an aesthetic ideal only by dint of the deep correspondence between the existence of the individual and the natural environment in which it found itself. An aesthetic garden of paradise, if you will. Harmony all around, inside and out, which naturally leads to the Fall, the fragmentation of the unity and integrity of the person, the introduction of disharmony and discord. A key strategy of Schiller's agenda is to tell the story of the Fall in such a way that the seeds of a recovery might already be planted in the very dynamic that inaugurates the Fall. We have already witnessed this dynamic in his account of the advance of the sublime beyond that of

[46] Another way to understand Schiller's strategy here is to consider that he wants to avoid the Kantian move whereby reason – as a premier developed capacity – comes to have authority over other human inclinations. As Frederick Beiser well explains, 'While he [the human being] is free as a rational being, he is not free as a whole being, for the simple reason that part of his self is under the *domination* of his reason. It is this thesis – the very idea that reason can dominate or create a lack of freedom – that is completely alien to Kant's moral philosophy, and that plays a fundamental role in Schiller's thinking about freedom.' See Beiser's comprehensive study, *Schiller as Philosopher: A Re-Examination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 217.

beauty, with the latter having its limitations in its sunkenness in nature. Now we might turn to yet another illustration of *aufheben* in Schiller's account of naïve and sentimental poetry, where we'll find a ready kinship between the two modes of poetry with the relation between beauty and the sublime. What characterizes naïve poetry is precisely its unselfconscious affinity with nature; such poetry is an expression of the continuity with nature, very much in keeping with Winckelmann's account of ancient Greek art. Naïve poetry, to be sure, is for Schiller an expression from childlikeness. Sentimental poetry, on the other hand, positions itself as being in relation to nature; it cannot help then but be self-conscious of itself as art, and as artifact. Schiller's division of poetry into two camps maps neatly onto the present-day distinction between fine art and what's called folk or outsider art. At the heart of the latter is the coming into being of the work of art without it knowing itself as art: 'Our childhood is the only undisfigured nature that we still encounter in civilized mankind, hence it is no wonder if every trace of the nature outside us leads us back to our childhood.'[47] We might then think of sentimental poetry as an attempt — beginning with the acknowledgment that we are no longer in nature — to return to childhood, to the condition in which nature still appeared to be present in us. Poets thus, 'will either *be* nature, or they will *seek* lost nature.'[48] And yet, strictly speaking, it is not the return of an *appearance* of nature in us that Schiller truly seeks. It is rather the *feeling* of nature in us that we wish to recover; any image will always remain — regardless how beautiful — only a likeness of nature. We might best appreciate the importance of this distinction in the light of Schiller's

[47] Schiller, *NS*, p. 103.
[48] Schiller, *NS*, p. 106.

notion of dignity: 'Humanity has lost its dignity; but art has rescued it and preserved it in significant stone. Truth lives on in the illusion (*Täuschung*) of art, and it is from this copy, or after-image (*Nachbilde*), that the original image (*Urbild*) will once again be restored.'[49] The first point to note is the curiosity, the irony, of truth living on in illusion. And next, we might acknowledge that the restoration of the original image will not signal our return to nature. There is no single image of us, or for us, that will restore our dignity and integrity, for we are dynamic, evolving creatures. The purpose of play, and semblance, is to help us learn to withdraw from our thralldom to the image, the spell of its unity, which is but a mere projection of our own lost unity. Our relation to the image, as a category of phenomena, is not unlike how we comport ourselves in relation to each of our capacities. The stasis of the image supports our longing after unity, just as we corral our potentiality into individuated capacities, each seemingly with its own integrity.

Conclusion

We exist, and indeed thrive, in the in-between. This is the state that aesthetic education hopes to restore. The role of semblance and play, again, is to aid us whenever we fall prey to one affirmation or another of what we are: 'Man, as we know, is neither exclusively matter nor exclusively mind. Beauty, as the consummation of his humanity, can therefore be neither exclusively life nor exclusively form.'[50] We contain — we are — if not multitudes then at least multiplicities. We lose just that feeling and mode of

[49] Schiller, *AE*, p. 57.
[50] Schiller, *AE*, p. 103.

existing, of life, when we retreat into one image, or one capacity, or another. If our potentiality is not to be diminished, if we are to remain who we are as beings in freedom and suspension, then we must learn, via aesthetic education, how not to fall prey to our own affirmations. The role of the image in aesthetic education, or more precisely, that of the beautiful image, is twofold: it works first to conjure up the allure of the image — indeed we might say the beautiful image is in fact the image in its most beautiful, and thus realized, manifestation, the ideal image — and then, second, to puncture the very affirmation of the status of the image, disavowing its own actuality, in other words: as semblance. The notion of the sublime thus enters here with the secondary action of the beautiful image. We might say the beautiful image prepares us for the still more sweeping disavowal of the sublime, in which all imagery, and indeed the imagination itself, is surpassed. The sublime is the dialectical advance upon the beautiful by its undoing of any and all remaining ties to sensuousness.

There is a passage in Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* where he acknowledges the kinship between Schiller's aesthetic education and how modernist art takes up the role of the sublime: 'This is touched on by Schiller's dictum that the human being is only fully human when at play; with the consummation of his sovereignty he leaves behind the spell of sovereignty's aim. The more empirical reality hermetically excludes this event, the more art contracts into the element of the sublime; in a subtle way, after the fall of formal beauty, the sublime was the only aesthetic idea left to modernism.'[51] In Adorno's telling it is not as if the sublime simply triumphs over the limitations of beauty

[51] Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. by Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 197.

and the image; it is rather that the dominance of the sublime is a by-product of the historical event of empirical reality shrinking in such a way that it could no longer sustain the illusions of beautiful imagery.