

“Making other people's feelings our own”: From Aesthetics to the Political in Schiller's Letters

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Reading Schiller in the 21st century cannot be the same as reading Schiller at any other time. As obvious as this may sound to anyone who is informed by the hermeneutical tradition, in the case of Schiller this is a statement that has to be taken as seriously and as carefully as possible. To read Schiller today – and not just to read him, but to make an attempt to understand his political thinking and his theories about our aesthetic being in the world – cannot be done without running the risk of appearing as either a *naive*, optimistic, and non-critical thinker, or as a very dangerous one — or I should probably say: *and therefore*, as a very dangerous one. In order to re-read Schiller today, one has to be aware that the question raised by a relationship between the aesthetic and the political is unavoidable.

Unavoidable as a very delicate question, since the connections suggested by this relationship have shown themselves to be not only extremely problematic, but dangerous, in light of twentieth century events. As Walter Benjamin already noted in early National Socialist Germany (I am referring here to a text written by Benjamin in 1930),¹ the risk of such a relationship is the temptation of an *aesthetization of politics* (“an uninhibited translation of the principles of *l’art pour l’art* to war itself”),² which has to be, according to Benjamin, radically and promptly (even violently, if necessary) destroyed. Otherwise — he predicts with an astonishing clarity — “if this corrective effort fails, millions of human bodies will indeed inevitably be chopped to pieces and chewed up by iron and gas”.³

This may be also the reason why many of the twentieth century thinkers who address Schiller in relationship to his philosophical political

thinking link him to a critical reading of his texts, either pointing to the risks and perils of his notion of the “aesthetic state,” or to his failure to give a realistic, non-“aestheticized” account of a practical political realm.⁴

In most cases such readings are supported by an ambiguity in Schiller’s own proposal, especially one found in the *Briefe über die Aesthetische Erziehung des Menschen* (1795, Aesthetic Letters): the way in which he poses — or even presupposes — the step from the aesthetic into the political realm. It is clear that from the beginning of the *Letters*, the political dimension is already explicitly present, and explicitly expressed in relationship to aesthetics. One has only to recall here the famous end of the Second Letter, in which Schiller writes:

I hope to convince you that the theme I have chosen is far less alien to the needs of our age than to its taste. More than this: 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.⁵

Even if the *Letters* as a whole are meant to be an explanation of this statement, it is a complicated task to reconstruct the argument that would support such an assertion. On the one hand, there are several places where the relationship between aesthetics and politics (or beauty and freedom), is stated without further explanation, as if Schiller were presupposing his readers’ understanding of where this relationship should come from or how and where it should be founded and supported. When, on the other hand, this relationship is addressed in detail, the results are at best ambiguous. Either one must resign to forgo any definite answer to the question (and propose, as some authors have done, dichotomies and contradictions within the *Letters* as a whole),⁶ or, as the majority of the authors tend to do, one resorts to the most self-evident — although very problematic — interpretation, supported by Schiller’s explicit quotes: that is, to the idea that Schiller (presup)poses an *analogical*

relationship between the individual and the State, and with it, between the aesthetic project and its political consequences.

This is a commonly suggested reading of one of Schiller's most concrete forays into politics, and — it must be said — it does not lack textual support. Indeed, one finds Schiller asserting this apparently analogical relationship over and over again.⁷ Indeed, it is stated clearly at the conclusion of the *Letters* where Schiller writes: “taste alone brings harmony to society, because it fosters harmony in the individual.”⁸ It seems that Schiller, following some kind of Platonic model — perhaps from the *Republic* — would be explaining the step from aesthetic education to political participation in the following terms: as long as the individual can reach an harmonious aesthetic relationship between his or her faculties and impulses, that is, within his or her nature (and we can understand this relationship as a beautiful one, or call it “beauty of character”), this will somehow be projected, either immediately or eventually, into an harmonious, i.e. aesthetic, political situation. This suggested shift towards our own internal “republic” is reinforced again at the very end of the *Letters*:

But does such a state of aesthetic semblance really exist? And if so, where is it to be found? As a need, it exists in every finely attuned soul; as a realized fact, we are likely to find it, like the pure church or the pure republic, only in some few chosen circles, where conduct is governed [...] by the aesthetic nature we have made our own.⁹

The relationship between singularity and community, which has as its background Schiller's notion of aesthetic education and, with it, the basic relationship between aesthetics and politics, seems to become a matter of reflection or analogy. As Katherine Schutjer puts it, it becomes more “a matter of *intrapersonal* dialogicity and harmony rather than an *interpersonal* exchange,”¹⁰ therefore making Schiller appear to be a naïve, and ultimately dangerous thinker. His proposal seems to fail to consider the limits of the analogy between the kind of oppositions one can describe as one's own personal concerns and those proper to a political realm. Hence, the result would be either a conception of the political as a unity that has to be

“harmonized,” in the same way as, and following the model of, the soul — even following the way in which the artist achieves this unity in the work of art —,¹¹ or an aesthetic proposal that no longer prepares the way for the political, but replaces it, becoming an escape away from real political concerns and difficulties and turning into a “parallel” and illusory and aesthetic — no longer practical — realm.¹² Either way, Schiller would be ignoring the pluralistic character of the political and the complexities proper to an interhuman account of a communal realm, thereby reducing political freedom and its relationships, in the best case scenario, to an extension of one’s relationship to oneself.¹³

As much as such an interpretation is not only possible, but can also be supported by a rigorous reading of the *Letters*, the interpretation loses its force and in particular its consistency when compared with other texts written by Schiller during the same years. This is most evident in Schiller’s writings on tragedy and the sublime, but also in his treatise *Über Anmut und Würde* (1793, On Grace and Dignity), and even in the dramas written before and after his so-called “philosophical” period.¹⁴ These texts allow us to re-read the *Letters* using a broader scope, from a different, more attentive and careful, perspective. Only then, less obvious passages come to the forefront, articulating important nuances in Schiller’s argument: nuances that help to introduce a different chain of arguments linking Schiller’s notion of aesthetic education and his idea of a political realm.

Showing in detail how this is the case would go beyond the scope of this paper. In the following pages, I would like to demonstrate how Schiller’s thesis that, “all improvement in the political sphere has to proceed from the ennobling of character”¹⁵ cannot be read exclusively from the point of view of an *analogical* relationship between the individual and the State, which would indeed inevitably lead to an aesthetization of politics. On the contrary, for Schiller, this ennoblement of character is necessarily already linked to a political dimension, and, with it, to a conception of aesthetic education in which one’s own freedom and beauty of character (that is, an internal aesthetic harmony) can only be achieved through, and nurtured from, an individual’s

relationship to others (that is, through and from an external aesthetic openness to contingency). This reading establishes the Schillerian relationship proper to the aesthetic character already imbued with all of the complexities and plurality proper to a more careful account of the political. Such an account not only does end in a mere reflection or extension of individuality, but rather, it changes and enriches the way Schiller's thought about the aesthetic is commonly read.

Throughout the *Letters*, one can see that Schiller himself is already aware of the risks of interpretation to be derived from a proposal regarding an aesthetic education *toward* the political. Recalling Rousseau's criticisms in his famous letter to D'Alambert, Schiller accepts that precisely "because taste is always concerned with form and never with content", it can actually "induce in the mind a *dangerous tendency* to neglect reality altogether, and to sacrifice truth and morality to the alluring dress in which they appear."¹⁶ In opposition to this idea, he emphasizes over and over again the complexities proper to any political proposal,¹⁷ and he distances himself explicitly from what Benjamin would call, two centuries later, an "aesthetization of politics". Schiller writes in the Fourth Letter:

When the artisan lays hands upon the formless mass in order to shape it to his ends, he has no scruple in doing it with violence; for the natural material he is working merits no respect for itself [...] When the artist lays hands upon the same mass, he has just as little scruple in doing it violence; but he avoids showing it. With the pedagogic or the political artist [Künstler]¹⁸ things are very different indeed [...] the statesman must approach his material with a quite different kind of respect from that which the maker of beauty feigns towards his. Not subjectively, aiming at creating an illusion for the senses [as is the case of the artist], but with an objective consideration, directed to its innermost being and to preserve its uniqueness and individuality.¹⁹

The quotation is clear enough in rejecting the comparison between the political realm and the work of art. However, this in turn demonstrates the difficulty of the position Schiller is delineating and the explicitly latent risks already present in his attempt to distance his proposal from such a dangerous interpretation. So, even if one can show and insist that Schiller was already aware of the

perils lying behind his project, that is not yet enough to answer to his critics. His awareness does not exclude the tensions within the *Letters* and the fact that the notion of beauty and of an aesthetically formed character still seems too close to the risks Schiller is himself trying to avoid. One could even argue that Schiller does not see the relationship between his notion of internal beauty of character and the negative consequences it can have on his political purposes. Hence, the notion of beautiful character as an ideal for the actualization of humanity's own most possibilities still seems to condemn the whole idea of an aesthetic education to an inner process, devoid of interhuman content and, therefore, incapable of a plausible step into a political dimension beyond the analogy.

Indeed, beauty appears throughout the *Letters* to be almost exclusively related to the notion of an internal harmonious tension between the faculties.²⁰ As it is pointed out carefully in Letters Nineteen to Twenty-two, beauty or the aesthetic condition — mainly considered as a state of mind (*Gemüth*) — is a dimension that opens infinite possibilities for the human character, but does not bring with it any content other than the infinite play of all of those possibilities with each other. It is, as Schiller describes it, a “condition of real and active determinability” and not yet of determination.²¹ Schiller describes this condition as that of an “aesthetic”, and not a “moral”, freedom,²² since here man is being considered not only and exclusively as an intelligent being, but in his “mixed nature”.²³

Hence, Schiller's criticism of Kant's notion of freedom in previous texts — particularly in *On Grace and Dignity* — seems at first glance to be related in the *Letters* only to a concern for bringing together in a playful dialogue, reason and sensibility within oneself: “Exclusive domination by either of these two basic drives [thought and feeling] is for him [man] a state of constraint and violence, and freedom lies only in the cooperation of both his natures [...] beauty can become a means of putting an end to that twofold tension”.²⁴ This is what Schiller calls the “*Spieltrieb*” (drive to play), as he develops it in the Fifteenth Letter, and this to his affirmation in the famous

quotation from the *Letters*: “Man only plays when he is in the fullest sense of the word a human being, and he is only a fully human being when he plays”.²⁵ But — and here I want to demonstrate the nuances mentioned earlier — Schiller’s quote is not yet complete:

This proposition, which at the moment may sound like a paradox, will take on both weight and depth of meaning once we have got as far as applying it to the twofold *earnestness of duty and of destiny*. It will, I promise you, prove capable of bearing the whole edifice of the art of the beautiful and of the still more difficult art of living.²⁶

What is this *earnestness of destiny* that Schiller is alluding to here? Why is it that only contrasted with or supported by this “earnestness” the idea of beauty, of play, will gain its entire weight? And furthermore, how is it that only through this confrontation can there be a step from the “art of the beautiful” to that “difficult art of living”? All of these questions may remain unseen to a reader familiarized only with the *Letters*, since there is no further explicit development of these ideas either here or later in the *Letters* themselves. However, there is an unseen actor here, whose presence is evoked only through its absence: an absence that is all the more significant if one takes into account almost all of the other texts that Schiller wrote before and after the *Letters*; an absence reinforced by the image that follows this quotation and that reminds us immediately of Schiller’s *On Grace and Dignity*, written just two years before the *Letters*:

Inspired by this spirit, the Greeks effaced from the features of their ideal physiognomy, together with inclination, every trace of volition too; or rather they made both indiscernible, for they knew how to fuse them in the most intimate union. It is not grace, nor is it yet dignity, which speaks to us from the superb countenance of a *Juno Ludovisi*; it is neither the one, nor the other, because it is both at once [...] Irresistibly moved and drawn by those former qualities, kept at a distance by these latter, we find ourselves at one and the same time in a state of utter repose and supreme agitation, and there results that wondrous stirring of the heart for which mind has no concept nor speech any name.²⁷

Real beauty is only possible, as in this image of *Juno Ludovisi* or — to recall Schiller’s essay *Über das Pathetische* (1793, On the Pathetic) — in the sculpture of the *Laocoön*, because there is something else counterbalancing its presence that provides its “weight and depth”. It is not grace which makes Laocoön beautiful; rather, it is the fact that he is being graceful, *consciously, in the face of death*. It is, then, the *sublime* that supports and gives presence to beauty – it is the sublime which speaks in its eloquent silence throughout the *Letters*.²⁸ It is, therefore, the sublime, that makes the step into the political realm much more complicated and careful than it would seem at first glance. It is probably only through Schiller’s texts on the sublime that one can understand the scope of the aesthetic education and its requirement of an *exteriority* and a *common shared realm* in the process of opening that playful dimension called “aesthetic freedom”:

Without sublime things, beauty would make us forget our dignity [...] the sublime must come to the assistance of the beautiful in order to make the aesthetic education a complete whole and expand the human heart’s sensitivity to the entire scope of our calling.²⁹

I am quoting here from the essay “Über das Erhabene” (1801, Concerning the Sublime). It is mainly in reference to this essay, accompanied by other texts on the sublime and tragedy written before the *Letters*, that one can fully understand some of Schiller’s suggestions in the *Letters*, and, more importantly, those suggestions concerning the political and the *interdialogical* dimension of the aesthetic. It is only then that certain suggestions that seem to be added to, or juxtaposed with, the notion of beauty in the *Letters* — and hence with the notion of humanity — gain their reason for being and their importance within the whole scope of Schiller’s proposal. Let me recall just one of these suggestions in order to show how it is the eloquent silence of the sublime that is speaking to us here through the text. In a footnote to the Thirteenth Letter Schiller writes:

It would not be less difficult to determine which does more to impede the practice of philanthropy [Philantropie]: the violence of our passions,

which disturbs it, or the rigidity of our principles, which chills it. If we are to become compassionate [theilnehmenden], helpful, active [thätigen] human beings, feeling and character must unite [miteinander vereinigen] [...] How can we, however laudable our precepts, how can we be just, kindly, and human toward others, if we lack *the power of receiving into ourselves, faithfully and truly, natures unlike ours, of feeling our way into the situation of others, of making other people's feelings our own* [fremde Gefühle zu den unsrigen zu machen]?"³⁰

It is not clear how beauty — at least the notion developed in the *Letters* — can be related to such a level of commonality or interhumanity as is suggested here by Schiller. Beauty can, perhaps — following Kant's argument, which is important to Schiller — make manifest that when I judge I am already, tacitly expecting the presence of others who would agree to my assertion. According to Kant, beauty (or, to be more precise, judgments of taste) is already a step into sociality and even requires sociality in order to have any meaning at all. But to make room for an absolutely different other, to put ourselves truly into the situation of others and, furthermore, to make other people's feelings our own, that is something that beauty, and therefore, aesthetic education, does not seem to achieve ...

... Unless we think of it in relation to the sublime. Only then can we bear in mind how Schiller, since his first texts on "tragic pleasure", talks about a "sublime disposition," which is closely related to and instantiated by the experience proper to tragedy: "only such minds, who alone are capable of separating themselves from themselves, enjoy the privilege of taking part in themselves and feeling their own suffering in the gentle reflection of sympathy."³¹ This is the same notion of sympathy or compassion (Mitleid) — a kind of "feeling with others" — that will be carefully developed two years later in relation to the notion of the "pathetic sublime". Schiller will show then how it is only through our relationship to another human being's suffering... that is, how it is only in "making other people's feelings our own", that we first discover our own most possibility: our power to be free.³² It is finally in the essay "Concerning the sublime" that Schiller will introduce a definite and much clearer approach to such an open relationship to alterity as that pointed out in the above-mentioned quotation.³³

It is, for instance, thanks to the experience of the sublime in nature,³⁴ Schiller writes, but also thanks to an approach to the sublimity in the history of mankind,³⁵ and especially thanks to a certain familiarity to the sublime brought to us by the art of tragedy,³⁶ that we acquire a certain aesthetic *tendency* (see OS: 72) or disposition to relate to the world in a different way. Only then, instead of trying to “employ the intellect’s faint torch to cast light in the immense household of nature [...] concerned with reducing its audacious disorder to some sort of harmony,”³⁷ we begin to find “satisfaction in a world where *erratic contingency* seems to rule more than some wise plan does.”³⁸

Is there anyone who would not rather linger amidst the inspiring disorder of a natural landscape than pass time in the insipid regularity of a French garden? ... No one will deny that people are physically better cared for in Batavia’s pastures than under Vesuvius’ treacherous crater ... People have, however, need of something more than merely to live and enjoy themselves.³⁹

Sublime experience introduces us to a different world, or better, to a very different attitude towards the foreign, inexplicable, contingent world outside us. “The capacity to feel the sublime,” Schiller writes, “is thus one of the most glorious dispositions in human nature.”⁴⁰

Through the sublime, we learn to “receive into ourselves, faithfully and truly,” those “natures unlike ours,” those Schiller speaks of in the quotation from the *Letters* above. A step from this aesthetic sublime disposition, into a political dimension, is perhaps then not so abrupt and contradictory anymore. Analogy no longer seems to be the only explanation of such a step. Or, at least, we now have some other more evident options. If the sublime prepares us to face and welcome the contradictions inherent in our natural and even in our moral world (“For a noble mind, freedom with all its moral contradictions [...] is an infinitely more interesting spectacle than prosperity and order without freedom.”),⁴¹ why wouldn’t it also prepare us to embrace the contradictions proper to the kind of difficult togetherness of a political, common world? Why wouldn’t it, therefore, educate us and open us to the kind of *alterity* that can

make us, according to Schiller himself, more “helpful, compassionate, active human beings”?

Schiller’s passage in Letter Thirteen continues precisely in the line with these suggestions:

But in the education we receive, no less than in that we give ourselves, this power [that of receiving into ourselves natures unlike ours and of making other people’s feelings our own] gets repressed in exactly the measure that we seek to break the force of passions and strengthen character by means of principles [...] And this, for the most part, is the operation that is meant when people speak of *forming character* [...] A man so formed will, without doubt, be immune from the danger of being crude nature or of appearing as such; but he will at the same time be armored by principle against all natural feeling, and be equally inaccessible to the claims of humanity *from without* as he is to those of humanity *from within*.⁴²

Aesthetic education in the *Letters*, through its notion of beauty and of aesthetic freedom, calls for the integration of sensibility into our character, for the permanent dialogue and balance between reason and passions, in order to bring into play all of the possibilities that human nature brings with it *from within*. But in calling for the role played by sensibility, Schiller is claiming at the same time necessarily, and tacitly, the role played by the experience of the sublime: beauty of character, as a response to Kant, is not just an interior process of harmonizing the faculties. To bring sensibility back into play does indeed have an inner effect on the way we consider ourselves in relation to ourselves and in relation to what we may call a freedom or opening, internally, to new possibilities. But it also means that we are necessarily opened to our exteriority, to our humanity *from without*. Sensibility reminds us permanently — as is the case, for instance, in Kant’s theoretical philosophy — that we exist together in a shared world, that we are that shared world of experience, and that only departing from this commonality, like those sublime spirits Schiller talks about in *On the art of tragedy*, can we “take part” in ourselves. That is why the sublime is — in Schiller’s broader system — beauty’s other face: its counterpart, its support and shadow. One cannot exist without the other, since only where our inner relationship to sensibility has been put into motion, will

there be a permanent claim for sublime exteriority and understanding of alterity. And only there where sublimity brings this disposition to open to, instead of dominating over alterity, will there be an inner disposition to play.

“The more facets our receptivity develops, the more labile it is [...] so much that more world does man *apprehend*.”⁴³ This generous receptivity, through which “a world becomes manifested to man, because he has ceased to identify himself with it [mit derselben Eins auszumachen],”⁴⁴ is, in Schiller’s proposal, the receptivity proper to and necessary for the aesthetic. It widens up necessarily to human political relationships (understanding the political here, as it has been understood throughout the paper, in a broad sense, as I also think Schiller does: as a common dimension of interhuman relationships, which is the prerequisite of any other even more narrow possibility of the political or of politics). Only aesthetic experience changes our usual almost solipsist perspective of the world and makes humankind, according to Schiller, “see others in himself,” rather than only being able to project himself into others, to “only [see] himself in others.”⁴⁵

Only the aesthetic dimension in human life allows “communal life” to “enlarge him toward the species [ihn zur Gattung auszudehnen],” instead of “confining him ever more narrowly within his own individuality.”⁴⁶ That is why Schiller in his *Kallias* letters to Körner, already sought to prevent his friend from interpreting him the way the 20th century has done: “this aesthetic world,” he writes, “is a very different one from the most perfect of Plato’s republics.”⁴⁷ Wherever there is aesthetic education, there will also be a political dimension. But not by mere analogy, but rather, by the necessary commonality proper to the sublime, as the unavoidable “other face” of beauty ... or, one could even say, as the unavoidable face of the other that is made part of us in Schiller’s notion of the sublime.⁴⁸

Notes

¹ Benjamin, Walter (1979) "Theories of German Fascism: On the Collection of Essays *War and Warrior*, edited by Ernst Jünger" in *New German Critique* 17, pp. 120-128; originally published in *Die Gesellschaft* (1930), vol. 2, pp. 32-41.

² See *Ibid*, 122.

³ *Ibid*, 128.

⁴ Just to mention a few, see De Man, Paul (1996) "Kant and Schiller" in *The Aesthetic Ideology*. University of Minneapolis Press: Minneapolis; Eagleton, Terry (2002) "Aesthetics and Politics" in *Between Ethics and Aesthetics*. State University of New York Press: New York; Gadamer, H.G (1979) *Truth and Method*. Continuum: London, pp. 70ff.

⁵ I will quote here from Wilkinson and Willoughby's classic translation into English of the *Aesthetic Letters*, reprinted in: Schiller, Friedrich. (2001) *Essays*. Walter Hinderer and Daniel Dahlstrom (ed.). Continuum: New York, pp. 86-178. Here p. 90. Subsequent citations as LAE, followed by the letter's number and the page number(s). Only when necessary, variations will be introduced, accompanied by the German original phrase in [].

⁶ This is already a very well known interpretation of the *Letters*, which started as a proposal by Hans Lutz in 1928 (see Lutz, Hans. "Schillers Anschauungen von Kultur und Natur" in *Germanische Studien* 60), and was continued by classic commentaries to Schiller's philosophical works like Kerry's (see Kerry, S.S. (1961) *Schiller's Writings on Aesthetics*. Manchester U.P: Manchester). Both argue that Schiller does not show the need for a systematic, unitary view because of his poetic and literary tendencies. As attractive as this alternative may be, I do think that there are certain elements in Schiller's works that can be traced all along his writings and that can give a more unitary explanation to some of the apparent contradictions. More than a dichotomy, one can see a development that is slowly taking place and that will open a very interesting account of that relationship that always obsessed him: the relationship between human (political) freedom and our aesthetic (artistic) experience of the world. For a longer and much more careful analysis of these continuities, see my book Acosta, María del Rosario (2008) *La tragedia como conjuro: el problema de lo sublime en Friedrich Schiller* (Universidad Nacional de Colombia y Universidad de los Andes: Bogotá).

⁷ See for instance in the Fourth Letter: "Once man is inwardly at one with himself, he will be able to preserve his individuality however much he may universalize his conduct, and the state will be merely the interpreter of his own finest instinct". (LAE IV: 94-95)

⁸ LAE XXVII: 176.

⁹ LAE XXVII: 178. After I gave this paper at the conference in Long Beach, Professor Walter Hinderer asked again about this quote, and he mentioned how disappointing it is to find Schiller asserting such an indeterminate future for the aesthetic project. On the one hand, one could probably accept this as a very clear sign of an already pessimistic Schiller, who will find his optimistic voice again in the latest dramas. On the other hand, however, there is something about this radical openness to a very uncertain future that brings into mind Schiller's criticisms of the French Revolution. Could it be possible that this apparently disappointed Schiller at the end of the *Letters* is nothing else but the final expression of a profoundly careful philosopher who does not want to fall back in the revolutionary logic he was criticizing at the beginning of the *Letters*? Could it be, then, a recognition of history and reality's own contingency and, with it, the avoidance of the kind of violence that results when thinking and ideals are imposed on an unwilling given reality?

¹⁰ Schutjer, Katherine (2001) *Narrating Community after Kant*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, p. 114. For a similar assertion see Eagleton, Terry, *op. cit*, 189.

¹¹ See De Man's criticism of Schiller in *The Aesthetic Ideology* (*op. cit*). There are explicit quotes by Schiller that could also serve as support for such an interpretation. The most quoted is the famous one in the Second Letter: "... that most perfect of all the works of art achieved by man: the construction of true political freedom". Wilkinson and Willoughby are more careful here and translate: "that most perfect of all the works to be achieved by the art of man". (LAE II: 88) The word in German is, however, *Kunstwerke* and one can either lightly translate it as I proposed first in order to re-enforce the impression of the analogy between work of art and political realm, or carefully show, as in Wilkinson and Willoughby's translation, that Schiller is working here with the word *Kunst* in the broader sense of "techné", "the art of man".

¹² See Gadamer's reading of Schiller in *Truth and Method*, *op. cit*, pp. 70 ff.

¹³ It should be said that not all the philosophical tradition in the 20th century falls in this kind of critical reading of Schiller's political proposal. A good example is, of course, Herbert Marcuse who, on the

contrary, wants to rescue those political and revolutionary potentialities present in Schiller's aesthetical realm. The problem with Marcuse, however, is that his analysis of Schiller's step from aesthetics to the political seems to fall again in the above mentioned analogical relationship.

¹⁴ Indeed, that is the way this period between 1793-1796 is usually classified, but as Frederick Beiser has insisted all along his book on Schiller, Schiller was a philosopher from the beginning until the end, and the encounter with Kantian philosophy only reinforced the philosophical questions that Schiller had already formulated since the beginning of his inquiries, from his writings on medicine, passing through his first dramas and his texts on theatre (see Beiser, Friedrich (2005) *Schiller as Philosopher*. Oxford University Press: New York).

¹⁵ LAE IX: 108.

¹⁶ LAE X: 113.

¹⁷ "A political constitution will still be very imperfect if it is able to achieve unity only by suppressing variety. The state should not only respect the objective and generic character in its individual subjects; it should also honor their subjective and specific character". (LAE IV: 94)

¹⁸ The word here should be understood again in the sense of a "techné", a practical knowledge (see footnote xi).

¹⁹ LAE IV: 94. I have changed here the translation considerably, comparing it to the original German version. One could, of course, use this quotation to support the evident risk of an aesthetization of politics in Schiller: the fact that he is still using the metaphor of matter and form, and of a political artist, can be also understood as a latent peril of confusing the political with the work of art. This is De Man's point when he tacitly compares such a position in Schiller with Goebbels' quote in his novel and the idea of the "political work of art". See De Man, op. cit. I just wanted to point here to the fact that Schiller himself is aware of the risks (risks that only become visible and evident in the XXth century) and he wants to distance himself from them.

²⁰ See for instance: "There is an education to health, an education to understanding, an education to morality, and an education to taste and beauty. This last has as its aim the development of the whole complex of our sensual and spiritual powers in the greatest possible harmony". (LAE: 146)

²¹ The aesthetic state of man is described as "free of all determination whatsoever ... a state of pure determinability". (LAE XX: 145) And further: "This middle disposition, in which the state of mind [Gemüth] is subject neither to physical nor to moral constraint, and yet is active on both this ways, preeminently deserves to be called a free disposition; ... we must call this condition of real and active determinability the *aesthetic*". (LAE XX: 145)

²² See LAE XX: 146.

²³ See LAE XIX: 143-144.

²⁴ LAE XVII: 136.

²⁵ LAE XV: 131.

²⁶ LAE XV: 131, my emphasis.

²⁷ LAE XV: 132.

²⁸ As Wolfgang Riedel pointed out to me in Long Beach, it is probably already very risky to propose this "silent presence" of the sublime in the *Letters* themselves. As much as Schiller was forever thinking about the sublime, the *Letters* should be understood mainly as a confirmation of a dichotomy between beauty and the sublime. I would like to insist, then, that the reading I am suggesting here is just a possible reading, or better, a suggestion that would have to show much more carefully how and why the sublime is already present throughout the *Letters*, precisely in quotes such as the above.

²⁹ CS: 84. Quotes of this text are taken from Daniel Dahlstrom's translation into English: Schiller, Friedrich. "Concerning the sublime", in Schiller, Friedrich. *Essays*. Op. cit., pp. 70-85. Subsequent citations as "CS" with page number(s).

³⁰ LAE XIII: 123-124, my emphasis.

³¹ Quotes of this text are taken from Daniel Dahlstrom's translation into English: Schiller, Friedrich. "On the Art of Tragedy", in Schiller, Friedrich. *Essays*. Op. cit., pp. 1-21. Here p. 5. Subsequent citations as "OT" page number(s).

³² This, of course, is already the result of an elaborated interpretation of Schiller's "On the Pathetic", written in 1793 – parallel to *On Grace and Dignity* – which I cannot reproduce here on detail. See my book, Acosta, *La tragedia como conjuro*, op. cit, pp. 154ff.

³³ See also Walter Riedel's reading of this essay on the light of death as a "Grenzphänomene" in Riedel, Walter (2007) "Die Freiheit und der Tod. Grenzphänomene idealistischer Theoriebildung beim späten Schiller", in Bollenbeck, Georg and Ehrlich, Lothar (2007) *Friedrich Schiller: der unterschätzte Theoretiker*. Böhlau Verlag: Köln Weimar Wien, pp. 59-71. The idea of reading „Über das Erhabene" as the break point where one could find the beginning of a "postmetaphysic" German tradition "über menschliches Dasein als 'Sein zum Tode'" (Ibid, 69), is very close to the idea, which I am about to

develop in this paper, of reading this later essay as the place where Schiller displays a philosophical thinking radically opened to contingency and alterity.

³⁴ “A more frequent intercourse with the devastating character of nature ... the terrifying and magnificent spectacle of change destroying everything and recreating it and then destroying it once again, a spectacle of ruin at times eating slowly away at things, other times suddenly assaulting them.” (CS: 83)

³⁵ “History provides ample examples of the pathetic picture of humanity wrestling with fate, a picture of the incessant flight of fortune, of confidence betrayed, injustice triumphant, and innocence violated.” (CS: 83) This could as well be a description of Schiller’s dramas.

³⁶ “Imitating these images, the art of tragedy places them before our eyes” (CS: 83).

³⁷ CS: 79.

³⁸ CS: 79, my emphasis.

³⁹ CS: 79.

⁴⁰ CS: 83.

⁴¹ CS: 80.

⁴² LAE XIII: 124.

⁴³ LAE XIII: 122.

⁴⁴ LAE XXV: 162.

⁴⁵ LAE XXIV: 157.

⁴⁶ LAE XXIV: 157-158.

⁴⁷ “dieser ästhetischen Welt, die eine ganz andere ist als die vollkommenste platonische Republik.” For the *Kallias Briefe*, I quote a bilingual translation into Spanish: Schiller, Friedrich (1990) *Kallias. Cartas sobre la educación estética del hombre*. Tr. Jaime Feijoo. Anthropos: Madrid. In this case p. 74. The translation into English is mine.

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