The Imagination in Schelling’s Philosophy of Art

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The Context of the Imagination and the Philosophy of Art

The German word *Einbildungskraft* stems from the Latin *imaginatio* and generally signifies the ability to generate mental images. In tracing the history of philosophy, we discover that Aristotle applied the Greek φαντασία to denote the faculty to bridge the gap between perception and thought. Immanuel Kant redefined this concept in modern terms as *Einbildungskraft* or the human mental capacity of cognition along with the ability to make aesthetic judgments. Numerous philosophers have adopted this notion since Kant’s re-envisioning. Among them, German Idealist\(^1\) philosopher F. W. J. Schelling (1775–1854), accorded a more important role to the concept, contending that the productivity of artists is analogous to the creativity of God and that the imagination (*Einbildungskraft*) corresponds to the notion of potency in his philosophy of nature. Schelling’s philosophy primarily contemplated art between 1800 and 1807,\(^2\) postulating that the aesthetic imagination unites conflicting aspects such as unconsciousness and consciousness and nature and freedom to produce artworks that represent synthesized symbols of beauty. Most of Schelling’s texts on the philosophy of art are grounded in the philosophy of identity in which the Absolute or the unconditioned (*das Absolute/das Unbedingte*) that Kant considered the unknowable becomes an ultimate identity. According to this philosophy, nature is fundamentally identifiable with freedom even though the ideas are represented in terms of difference. The imagination denotes the human power to reunify nature.

\(^1\) The term of German Idealism encompasses certain complex difficulties. Due to limitations of space, a detailed discussion of this problem. This paper delves into German Idealism was a philosophical movement of eighteenth-century Germany, which was initiated after the elucidation of Kantian critical philosophy. This movement predominantly includes Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel.

and freedom and to represent beauty through art; it is thus pivotal not just in Schelling’s philosophy of art but also in his earlier philosophies of nature and identity. In the philosophy of identity, the imagination ("die Einbildungskraft") is considered the power of “to-one-forming” ("In-Eins-Bildung") that is, the capacity to integrate nature and freedom. Besides, Schelling distinguishes the imagination from its narrower sense of fantasy ("die Phantasie") in the philosophy of art (SWV 395).³ Instead of imagination, fantasy is pitched against reason ("Vernunft") in his late Philosophy of Mythology.

Kant’s critical philosophy can also be discerned in the background of Schelling’s conception of imagination in the philosophy of art. In particular, Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* explicates the conditions for the possibility of human recognition, and the *Critique of Judgement* illuminates the power of judgment to discern beauty ("Schöne") and the sublime ("Erhabene") based on the feeling of pleasure ("Lust") and pain ("Unlust"). Although Schelling was deeply impressed by Kantian critical philosophy, he did not accept it in its entirety. In fact, Schelling was of the view that Kant’s critical philosophy did not construct a holistic system of philosophy.⁴ Kant argued the existence of two separated realms of nature and freedom; the former is discussed in *Critique of Pure Reason* and the latter in *Critique of Practical Reason*. Kant’s third critical philosophy, *Critique of Judgement*, mediates between nature and freedom. Beauty, organism, and the power of judgment play key roles in the power of judgment, in which the imagination functions to unify conflicting opposites. It is thus clear that the imagination is a necessary concept for Kantian aesthetics as well as for Kant’s entire critical philosophy.

Conversely, in *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800), Schelling accords the arts the function of synthesizing nature and freedom, concepts that are distinguished by Kant. For


Schelling, works of art are fundamentally identical in one respect. He regards art as “the organon of philosophy” and positions it at the pinnacle of varied disciplines. He considers the world to be an appearance of the Absolute on the basis of the philosophical system labeled aesthetic idealism and then he constructs the system of the philosophy of identity to synthesize the ideas of nature and freedom. During the period of the exposition of his philosophy of identity, Schelling delivered a lecture titled the *Philosophy of Art* (1802–1803, 1804–1805). He defines the Absolute represented in the form of art as “The Philosophy of Art” in this lecture. In the Philosophy of Art, the creativity of God and the productivity of artists are discussed analogously and both potencies are defined as the imagination. Schelling attends more to the imagination’s function of integrating opposites than Kant; it therefore becomes an indispensable concept for any discussion of Schelling’s Philosophy of Art. Given the abovementioned context of the history of philosophy, it is imperative to compare Schelling’s conception of the imagination against Kant’s to demonstrate the differences between the theories of beauty and art posited by the two philosophers, to further explore how Schelling’s Philosophy of Art can surmount Kant’s ideas, and to contemplate how Schelling can consequently construct his own system of philosophy.

**Previous Research on Schelling’s Philosophy of Art**

We will now turn to the history of previous scholarly examinations of Schelling’s Philosophy of Art. First, most of Schelling’s work on the Philosophy of Art discussed from 1800 to 1807\(^6\) is considered to belong to the same period and to adopt the same philosophical

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5 Manfred Frank indicates some problems of Kantian Philosophy for Schelling: the Unconditioned, the intellectual intuition and the system. I understand the power of imagination to relate to representation, function, and construction.

6 The following texts conceived between 1800 and 1807 are related to Schelling’s philosophy of art: the book, *The System of transcendental Idealism* (1800); the lecture titled *Philosophy of Art* (1802–1803, 1804–1805), his dialogue *Bruno* (1802), and his Munich lecture labeled *On the Relationship of the Plastic Arts to Nature* (1807). Further, we may include *The Oldest Systematic Program of German Idealism* (1796/97) written jointly by three authors, Hegel, Hölderlin, and Schelling. It is,
position as the philosophy of identity. The \textit{System of Transcendental Idealism} does not belong to the philosophy of identity because the philosophical tether of \textit{system} is clearly the framework of transcendental idealism: the philosophy of identity begins from \textit{Presentation of my System of Philosophy} (\textit{Darstellung meines Systems der Philosophie}) (1801). The consistency of Schelling’s philosophical stances has always been suspect because he often changed his philosophical positions. Most of Schelling’s theories of art were published only during the aforementioned period, and he did not address the issue in any detail later. Thus, from the perspective of the overall development of Schelling’s thought, his Philosophy of Art has largely been accepted as an “ingenious makeshift solution” (\textit{geniale Verlegenheitslösung}) to cite Walter Schulz words. Conversely, Dieter Jähnig highlights that Schelling’s consciousness of the arts and their significance can also be discovered in his late oeuvre, for instance, the \textit{Philosophy of Mythology}. As these divergent positions demonstrate, the fundamental clarification of the Philosophy of Art has not yet been achieved. Nevertheless, some meaningful attempts have been made in recent years to interpret Schelling’s Philosophy of Art from a slightly different direction. For example, Arne Zerbst has demonstratively illuminated that Schelling’s Philosophy of Art, especially his theory of plastic arts, was constructed from his own tangible experience of works of art.

\footnotetext[7]{He\textsuperscript{g}e\textsuperscript{l} criticizes Schelling’s philosophy of identity sharply in the \textit{Phenomenology}, especially his notion of the Absolute, asserting that the Absolute is the “night, in which all cows are black.”}

\footnotetext[8]{Schelling is, therefore, often described as “Proteus” or “Janus.” The issue of the continuity of Schelling’s philosophy has been addressed by many scholars. For example, Walther E. Ehrhardt, Horst Fuhrmans, and Barbara Loer. Also, Ehrhardt overviews the state of research today and Hans Jörg Sandkühler describes Schelling’s philosophy as “a work in becoming (\textit{ein Werk im Werden})”. Cf. H. J. Sandkühler (hrsg.), \textit{F. W. J. Schelling}, 1998, p.1–49.}

\footnotetext[9]{Schulz, W., \textit{Die Vollendung des deutschen Idealismus in der Spätphilosophie Schellings}, Stuttgart/Köln, 1975 (c1955), S. 132.}


Three types of studies have thus far been conducted on the idea of the imagination in Schelling’s Philosophy of Art. The first reveals the relationship between the archetype (Urbild) and the reflected image (Gegenbild), which is, Bernhard Barth’s view, the relationship between the ideas (Ideen) and artworks and denotes the dialectic process of the imagination in art. The second type of investigation, exemplified by James Engel or Bernd Küster, shows that Schelling’s differentiation of imagination and fantasy is elucidated in the influence relation of early German Romanticism. The third category is typified by the comparatively new investigation conducted by Reinhard Loock, analyzing the conceptual history of the imagination from the philosophy of Kant, Fichte, and Schelling. Loock describes Schelling’s notion of the imagination as the simultaneous realization of necessity and freedom.

Grounded in these previous studies, this paper takes the position that Schelling’s consciousness of the problems of art is sustained in different ways throughout his philosophical explorations, from his early to late expositions. Taking this perspective, this paper postulates that Schelling’s notion of the imagination is the key conception of his discussions on the arts. This paper thus aims to examine the Philosophy of Art from both the theoretical and applicative aspects that is focusing on the notion of imagination to evaluate the theory of art and the analysis of artworks. This discussion will elucidate the function and essence of imagination. The


specific works referenced in this study include the *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800) and works on the philosophy of nature such as the lecture titled the *Philosophy of Art* (delivered in 1802–1803 in Jena and in 1804–1805 in Würzburg), and the Munich speech called *On the Relationship of the Plastic Arts to Nature* (1807). The methodology of this paper is grounded by three pillars (Comparing Schelling’s and Kant’s Conception of Imagination, The Relationship Between the Philosophy of Art and the Philosophy of Nature, and The concrete Side of the Philosophy of Art) to comprehensively explicate the notion of imagination in Schelling’s Philosophy of Art.

**Comparing Schelling’s and Kant's Conception of Imagination**

The first pillar relates Schelling’s notion of imagination with Kant’s. As mentioned above, Kant’s conception of imagination forms the context of Schelling’s articulation. The examination of the way Schelling accepts and develops Kant’s ideas enables us to illuminate the originality of Schelling’s theory of imagination. Specifically, Part I of this paper offers an overview of the conceptual history of the imagination vis-à-vis Schelling’s imagination to create the foundations for a deeper discussion. Chapter 2 in Part I reflects on the analogy between the creativity of God and the imagination of the artist by following Barth’s argument of imagination and discover two directions functioning within the imagination to link the finite with the infinite. Chapter 1 in Part II then compares Kant’s theory of aesthetic judgment and genius in the *Critique of Judgement* with Schelling’s postulation of aesthetic intuition and genius in the Philosophy of Art. Chapter 2 in Part II focuses on the notions of schema and symbol in connection with the imagination and analyzes the way Schelling accepts Kant’s ideas of schema and symbol in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and *Critique of Judgement* and then develops his own theory of both notions in the *System of Transcendental Idealism*. Chapter 2 of Part II further examines how Schelling later completes his trichotomy of schema, analogy, and symbol.
in the Philosophy of Art.\textsuperscript{15} Through this elucidation, we can ascertain that Schelling’s conception of the imagination encompasses a transcendental function and acts to produce beauty in a manner analogous to Kant’s idea of the imagination. This determination clarifies the difference between the two philosophies and leads to the realization that Schelling distances himself from Kant’s postulation of the functioning of imagination, which is biased toward subjectivity. Instead, Schelling accords imagination the function of objectively realizing beauty.

That art appears to us in the form of artworks that are presented to us as beauty in its objective aspect is one of the most important features of Schelling’s Philosophy of Art. For Kant, however, beauty is not a perception of the object; it is grasped through aesthetic judgment based on subjective feelings. In comparison to Kant, Schelling acknowledges the ability of imagination to produce beauty in its objective facet, transcending the subjective through the working of “the aesthetic intuition” (\textit{die ästhetische Anschauung}) as “the intellectual intuition which has become objective” (\textit{die objektiv gewordene intellektuelle [Anschauung]}) (SWIII, 625). This point denotes a major difference between Kant’s aesthetics and Schelling’s Philosophy of Art. Hence, Schelling’s Philosophy of Art should be clearly distinguished from Kant’s aesthetics in terms of the objective reality of beauty. Heidegger displays the same concern as Schelling, opposing the view that subjective aesthetics depend on subjective capacities and ontologically positions art as a place of truth. Schelling’s Philosophy of Art is not restricted to subjective capacities and can acknowledge the objectivity of beauty; it could thus be associated with Heidegger’s theory of art.\textsuperscript{16}

We can also compare Schelling’s Philosophy of Art to Kant’s aesthetics in terms that the former incorporates the aspect of acceptance aesthetics while the latter strongly encompasses the facet of the theory of art production. This feature of Schelling’s Philosophy of


\textsuperscript{16} The problem of the relation of Schelling’s philosophy of art to Heidegger’s ontology is not the purpose of this paper. Cf. Yate, C., \textit{The Poetic Imagination in Heidegger and Schelling}, London; New York: Bloomsbury, 2013.
Art is emphasized by connecting the notion of the imagination to the creativity of genius. This paper argues that the Philosophy of Art, however, includes both the aspect of production theory and the properties of acceptance aesthetics and that it envisions both as two sides of the same creative activity. Moreover, this paper insists that the imagination, the faculty that supports this creative activity, functions as a common attribute of both artists and beholders.

The Relationship Between the Philosophy of Art and the Philosophy of Nature

The second pillar concerns the relationship of the Philosophy of Art to the philosophy of nature. In this paper, Schelling’s notion of imagination is understood as the power to synthesize opposites and to represent the identity that forms the foundation of everything as the idea in a real, objective entity. As Barth indicates, we can discover a similar dialectical process throughout the progress of the functioning of the imagination in art (Part I, Chapter 2). Additionally, the imagination is deeply related to the notion of potency (Potenz) and becomes a methodological base for the construction of a system (Part III, Chapter 1).\(^\text{17}\) This notion of potency works with “the history of self-consciousness” that develops from subject to object in the System of Transcendental Idealism. The history of self-consciousness is deemed the process of the evolution of imagination based on the function of potency as exponentiation (Potenzierung), a term borrowed from the mathematical meaning to be multiplied by itself. Therefore, the history of self-consciousness may be rephrased as “the history of imagination,”\(^\text{18}\) based on its potentiation as exponentiation. This notion of potency is applied to the Philosophy of Art, so the Philosophy of Art enables a classification of art genres. This paper then contends

\(^{17}\) Schelling refers to the concept of potency in First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature (1799) at first, and he intensively argues the notion in Introduction to the Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature (1799). In the latter, nature from material to organism is understood as a whole developing process according to three potencies (e.g., SW III, 294, 303 u. 323). Juichi Matsuyama clarifies the influence from A. C. A. Eschenmeyer's study of nature on Schelling's philosophy of nature. J. Matsuyama, Humans and Nature (Ningen to Shizen) [in Japanese], Nara: Kizasu-shōbō, 2004, pp. 48–58.

\(^{18}\) Loock calls the history of imagination “the history of the imagination”. Loock 2007, S. 468.
through the analysis of texts from *System* (Part III, Chapter 2) that the productivity of nature is a source of imagination for the productivity of art. The relationship between nature and art as mentioned above is intensively explained by Schelling in *On the Relationship of the Plastic Art to Nature* rather than in the *Philosophy of Art*. The present paper attempts to clarify that Schelling’s concepts of potency or power in the philosophy of nature and his idea that the imagination corresponds to the productivity of nature are the springs of creativity in artworks revealed in the *Philosophy of Art* (Part III, Chapter 3). In the lecture delivered in Munich, Schelling posited the productivity of nature as a model for the creativity of the artist and as a power that drives artists to produce and complete artworks.

Schelling’s philosophy of nature consistently posits nature as a sleeping state and spirit as an awakened condition. He also maintains this progression from nature to spirit in his *Philosophy of Art*. Besides, he attempts to elucidate the creativity of the artist through this development. The unconscious aspect of nature calls upon artists to create a work of art and to deliver in return in the finished artwork something unconscious that is beyond consciousness. In other words, the spirit that evolves beyond nature returns to it in art. In this manner, the *Philosophy of Art* incorporates and advances the fundamental ideas of the philosophy of nature: the inherent connection between nature and spirit, and the productivity of nature. The above discussion allows the conclusion that the *Philosophy of Art* connotes the philosophy of nature in which nature functions as the foundation and animator of the creative capacity.

**The concrete Side of the Philosophy of Art**

The third pillar of this paper represents the tangible aspect of the Philosophy of Art, which is not an empty argument about art; rather, it is the theory based on Schelling’s own material experience of the arts. To examine the concrete aspect of the Philosophy of Art is to demonstrate that the Philosophy of Art is not merely a speculative theory but an applicative thought that can be utilized to analyze works of art. It is vital to apprehend in detail Schelling’s
experiences of art and to reconstruct them in order to demonstrate the specificity of the Philosophy of Art. Thus, this paper will also contend with Schelling’s experiences of art. The observation of Schelling’s visit to the picture gallery in Dresden (Dresdner Gemäldegalerie) in 1798 denotes a starting point of such an examination. Based on this visit to Dresden, the first chapter of Part IV reconstructs Schelling’s formative experiences of art as being the basis of his Philosophy of Art. At that time, Schelling accompanied the Schlegel brothers to a picture gallery in Dresden in which many paintings were displayed in a manner totally different from the current manner of exhibition at the picture gallery in Dresden. By referring to Arne Zerbst’s study of Schelling’s substantial knowledge of the arts and Tristan Weddigen’s digital reconstruction of the gallery as it was in the 18th and 19th centuries, this paper examines the interior of the gallery to scrutinize the exhibits Schelling appreciated there. In so doing, the chapter clarifies that Schelling’s high evaluation of Correggio in the Philosophy of Art is strongly influenced by the contemporary exhibition at the gallery and Die Gemählde. Ein Gespräch von W. by A. W. Schlegel. Thus, we deduce that Schelling’s evaluation of artists and artworks, including those by Correggio, is based on his real-life experience and analysis of pieces of art that he actually appreciated or knew. Besides, it becomes clear that the construction of his Philosophy of Art is based on his actual experiences and that his analysis of artworks has a concrete foundation.

The next chapter (Part IV, Chapter 2) organizes the genres described in the theory of art on the basis of Schelling’s experiences and contemplates the differences between Philosophy of Art and On the Relationship of the Plastic Arts to the Nature. Additionally, the chapter details

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Schelling’s evaluation of each genre of art and argues that a logical coherence exists between his evaluation and explanation of the historical character of the dichotomy of the ancient versus the modern. Chapter 3 of Part IV deals with the genres described in the theory of art in order to examine the applicability of Schelling’s *Philosophy of Art* in analyzing material artworks. The chapter concentrates on tragedy, in particular the Greek tragedy *Oedipus*, as a most highly evaluated art form by Schelling. He regards it as the highest appearance of art aimed at by the Philosophy of Art because it precisely expresses the indifference between destiny (necessity) and freedom. This chapter delves into Schelling’s theory of tragedy from *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism* (*Philosophische Briefe über Dogmatismus und Kriticismus*, 1795) and *the Philosophy of Art*. It endeavors to interpret Schelling’s theory of tragedy as a theory of the acknowledgment of human freedom.

Finally, the paper contends with the theory of the painting as a genre of plastic arts to examine the applicability of Schelling’s theory of the Philosophy of Art to the artworks. The plastic arts represent objective items as artworks and are appropriate subjects through which to examine the objectivity of beauty as suggested in the Philosophy of Art. However, the plastic arts were not as remarkable as the literary arts (poetic arts) of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.\(^{21}\) Understandably, Schelling places the genre of tragedy at the highest position among the arts (Part IV, Chapter 3). Material media are used in the plastic arts so the purpose is also strongly restricted by the external formation.\(^{22}\) Despite this distinction, the present paper attends to the plastic arts because Schelling himself admits that the plastic arts, especially paintings, are significant in the modern period. Furthermore, the creativity of imagination common to both artists and beholders can be observed in the plastic arts. When a human being witnesses a plastic artwork, an image is formed in the way the artist has imagined it. The viewer

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\(^{22}\) Toshio Takeuchi indicated that language is the medium of the poetic arts; thus, there are comparatively fewer restrictions through external formation than with the plastic arts. In the former, the concept of the imagination is accorded room for free activity. Takeuchi, T. (ed.), *Aesthetics Encyclopedia (Bigaku Jiten)* [in Japanese], Tokyo: Kōbundō, 1974, p. 183.
then contemplates the expressed object in a particular manner. In other words, the creative activity of the imagination of artists and the contemplation or acceptance of artworks by the imagination of the beholders may be considered a continuous activity of art.

For these reasons, the paper advances the discussion as follows. First, Chapter 4 of Part IV evinces the function and essence of the imagination from Schelling’s theory of paintings, particularly by clarifying the functions of three art forms (drawing, chiaroscuro, and coloring) and illuminating the essence of the power of “to-one-forming” (In-Eins-Bildung) and individuation (Individuation). Second, Chapter 5 re-examines Schelling’s analysis of paintings, especially Rafael’s Sistine Madonna (Sixtinische Madonna) (1512/13) and Guido Reni’s Assumption of the Virgin Mary (Himmelfährt Mariae) (1642). Schelling views the former as the premier painter according to the terms discussed in the Philosophy of Art; he considers the latter “the painter of soul” in On the Relationship. This chapter concludes that the highest evaluation of Rafael is encompassed in the latter text. Additionally, there exists a political context for the appreciation of artworks. Third, Chapter 6 tackles Schelling’s often-under-appreciated theory of landscape painting and attempts to demonstrate the relationship between nature and art. This chapter determines the linking of his theory of landscape to the “spirit of nature” (Naturgeist) by reconsidering Schelling’s evaluation of landscape paintings. In addition, it clarifies the aspect of reception aesthetics in landscape paintings through the interaction of the subject and the object. Through this discussion, the chapter is able to offer the interpretation that the appreciation of pieces of art is also a secondary creative activity. Thus, the creative activity of the imagination is common to artists and beholders. The paper suggests the possibility that Schelling’s Philosophy of Art transcends the theory of production and connects to reception aesthetics.

Conclusions of the Full Paper
Through the above discourse, this paper examines the essence and functioning of the imagination in Schelling’s Philosophy of Art. The three conclusions arrived at in this paper are summarized here. First, Schelling’s notion of the imagination accepts Kant’s conception of the imagination. Moreover, Schelling advances his original theory of the imagination from the springboard of Kant’s ideas. Second, the notion of the imagination is deeply connected to the idea of the productivity and potency of nature as referenced in Schelling’s philosophy of nature. Third, Schelling’s Philosophy of Art offers both theoretical and practical dimensions insofar as his artwork analysis is grounded in his actual experience of art. By undertaking a comprehensive discussion on Schelling’s Philosophy of Art in accordance with these three points, this paper supplies a perspective insufficiently articulated in many previous studies and offers new potential for the interpretation of Schelling’s Philosophy of Art.
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