This paper investigates the implicit aesthetics of Schelling’s early Naturphilosophie. Within the framework of Naturphilosophie, Schelling naturalizes the categories of the beautiful and the sublime, making not only the purposiveness of the beautiful, but also the disorder and perturbation of the sublime into part of the internal dynamic of nature. A disequilibrium between the transcendental forces of attraction and repulsion conditions all systems of differentiation, thus giving rise to an aesthetics of production inherent within nature that moves throughout the order and disorder of signs, things, and conscious states.

In its earliest formulation, aesthetics purports to study not simply the work of art, but everything that appears, whether objects of artifice or of nature: sensuous givenness in all of its complexity and uncertainty, harmony and dissonance. Alexander Baumgarten, in the first book of his Aesthetica (1750), defines aesthetics as the “study of sensuous cognition.”¹ The simplicity of this definition is deceptive, since, as Baumgarten notes, it includes a multiplicity of heterogeneous subdisciplines: empirical epistemology (gnoseologia inferior), a theory of the arts (theoria liberalium artium), an ethics of beautiful thinking (ars pulcri cogitandi), and a field of sensuous practices construed as analogues of reason (ars analogi rationis).²

Given this discursive multiplicity, it is problematic to assume that aesthetics in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries refers to simply another name for the philosophy of art. In his lectures on the philosophy of art, Schelling writes, “Above all I request that you not confuse this science of art with anything previously presented under this or any other title as aesthetics or as a theory of the fine arts and

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¹ Alexander Baumgarten, Ästhetik, (tr.) D. Mirbach (Hamburg: Meiner, 2007), 11. All translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own.
² Ibid.
The Aesthetics of Schelling’s Naturphilosophie

For Schelling, aesthetics is not philosophy. Because the philosophy of art aims to make present the chiasmatic imbrication of ideality and materiality, the “essential form of things” in the form of “archetypes [Urbilder],” the philosophy of art must be strictly differentiated from empirical and normative discourses that had previously been associated with aesthetics, discourses such as Wolffian empirical psychology and the rule poetics of Gottsched or Bodmer and Breitinger.

Schelling nevertheless hints that there is something worth preserving in Baumgarten’s original formulation of aesthetics as a discipline, a fundamental gesture that he wishes to recover and develop: “In the most general principles of the first founder of that designation [of aesthetics, i.e., Baumgarten] there still inhered at least the trace of the idea of the beautiful as that archetypal element appearing in the concrete and reflected world.” There is indeed an ontology that undergirds the disciplinary heterogeneity of aesthetics. For Baumgarten, this ontology is grounded in an operation of analogy, or the manner in which sensuous practices, through beautiful cognition, manifest themselves as analogues of reason (ars analogi rationis), thus embodying and reflecting the rationality of a well-ordered cosmos. Schelling’s philosophy of art wishes to uncover and return to the primordial ontology implicit in Baumgarten’s formulation of aesthetics. However, as we shall see, Schelling no longer understands this ontological order as merely beautiful, purposive, or rational.

For Schelling, in contrast to Baumgarten, the relation between the ideal and the real, the absolute and the phenomenal, is no longer analogical, nor even a relation, strictly speaking: the labor of the philosopher traces a movement whereby the ontological absolute and the empirical particular are indifferen-tiated. This unconditioned absolute, however, moves not merely through art, but through all appearances. Although this ontology manifests itself in and through cultural artifacts, it nevertheless encourages us to conceptualize aesthetics in a much broader sense.

This alternative concept of aesthetics extends beyond the realm of human practices, encompassing that which is already present in physis as a domain logically prior to the emergence of technē. Aesthetics in this manner, as a play of forces coextensive with the organ-

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4 Ibid., 7.

5 Ibid., 8.
ization of matter itself, is localizable neither in the human subject nor in the products of human artifice: it is an aesthetics in nature rather than an aesthetics of nature. The undercurrents of such an aesthetics can be found in texts whose primary purpose is not, at first glance, aesthetic, namely in the works of Schelling’s earlier Naturphilosophie, and above all in his first extended work in this domain, Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature (1797).6

One may speak of an aesthetics of Naturphilosophie in at least three different senses: a methodological aesthetics, a transcendental aesthetics, and an aesthetics of production. The methodological aesthetics, which is essentially metadiscursive, emerges from the central philosophical operation of Naturphilosophie, namely, the binding of the sensible to the transcendental. Philosophy performs this operation by examining the conditions of its own discursive emergence, tracing its own sensuous and reflective form of appearance back to its point of origin: Schelling writes, “the idea of philosophy is only the result of philosophy itself.”7 Although philosophy aims to make present (rather than represent) an a priori absolute, the sensuous grasping of this absolute remains irreducibly part of its own discursive order. Thus, the philosopher must “let such a concept [of philosophy] first of all emerge before the eyes of the reader.” (IPN, xv)

6 In general, Schelling scholarship is torn between those who find a unified project that undergirds Schelling’s philosophical production as a whole and those who see a series of articulations that is always in a state of becoming. For a compelling attempt to find a “naturephilosophy core” in Schelling’s thought, see Iain Hamilton Grant, Philosophies of Nature After Schelling (London: Continuum, 2006). 3. Grant’s attempt to read Schelling’s Naturphilosophie as a systematic process of “unconditioning” that has its source in an autonomous nature (e.g., a nature not just as “perceived” by a human subject) throughout Schelling’s Naturphilosophie has been critical in shaping my thinking about the aesthetics of Naturphilosophie. In contrast, most commentators only see this autonomy of nature in Schelling’s First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature (1799). This paper, however, is less concerned with Schelling’s philosophy as a whole, and more focused on the ideas that manifest themselves in the early stages of Naturphilosophie, above all in the first edition of Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature (rather than the revisions that he later undertakes to this text). I refer to this particular text and this particular edition for two reasons. First, the latent aesthetics of Naturphilosophie and the specific discursive semiosis of empirical science are more rigorously present in this work. Second, this work is critical for an understanding of what would become Romantic aesthetics, and it is this edition, along with Von der Weltseele (1798), that most influenced Novalis, for example.

7 Friedrich Schelling, Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Natur (Leipzig: Breitkopf and Härtel, 1797), xv. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as IPN.
The desire to let philosophy sensuously emerge before a reader should not be confused with a Cartesian phenomenology of nature or a description of how natural objects appear immediately to human perception. On the contrary, it is the latent and imperceptible order of nature that Naturphilosophie seeks to sensuously make present: an internal, invisible and even unconditioned dynamic that can only be externalized and rendered visible through the mediation of differential systems. This invisibility of the phenomenal world presents itself discursively through the investigation of mechanical, chemical, and organic operations, and following these orders of discourse becomes tantamount to tracing the movements of the forces through which the phenomenon itself comes into being. The philosopher must analyze the discursive forms of these primordially non-discursive movements—movements that are thus aestheticized inasmuch as they thereby become differentiated and capable of being sensuously perceived.

There is also a transcendental aesthetics to be found in Naturphilosophie, one that differs substantially from its Kantian, subject-centered precedent. Schelling describes the a priori constitution of sensuous perception—the conditions that govern the possibility of an intuition (Anschauung)—as a dynamic that is already present in a potentially subjectless physis. The internal and subjective dynamics of sensibility are thus exteriorized, and what is most internal to a subject’s condition of possible experience, e.g., the pure forms of space and time in Kant’s Transcendental Aesthetic, inheres in the material ground of an exteriority.\(^8\) This transcendental aesthetics is at the same time not merely transcendental, but also ontological: Naturphilosophie both articulates the specific conditions of its own discursive emergence and purports to make present the unrepresentable and unconditioned play of forces presupposed by and manifesting itself within all forms of differentiation.

Finally, although Naturphilosophie describes the genesis of possible intuitions as a feature of an unconditioned physis that indifferen-
tiates matter and mind, exteriority and interiority, it also embodies and participates in the productivity of nature that it purports to grasp philosophically. This form of aesthetics is not merely per-
formative; rather, there is an implicit grammar of the organization of the sensible world that comes to light in Naturphilosophie, and it concerns the differential tensions that condition acts of signification. In Schelling’s Ideas, the forces of attraction and repulsion make

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\(^8\) According to Grant, Schelling “materializes the transcendental.” See Grant, Philosophies of Nature, 39.
possible the appearance of differentiation; indeed, as we shall see, all appearances, including all signifying systems, are nothing other than the organization and disorganization of these forces. All differences are characterized by an internal agonism, a tension whereby one discrete form of appearances defines itself against an other and yet, appears bound together with this oppositional other as part of one and the same system. This form of signification—a drive to multiplicity through an internal dissonance, the presence of an irreducible exteriority to spirit within spirit, for example—will be taken up and integrated into the artistic practices of the Romantics, for example, in the works of Novalis.

This paper will focus primarily on the transcendental aesthetics of Schelling’s early *Naturphilosophie*. Specifically, one may observe a naturalization of aesthetic judgment according to which the main categories of Kantian aesthetics—the beautiful and the sublime—become exteriorized properties of natural organization itself. In contrast to Kantian doctrine, these two aesthetic modes, which are merely implicit in *Naturphilosophie*, concern more the in-itself of nature rather than aesthetic judgments or experiences. In my concluding remarks, however, I will turn briefly to the productive aesthetics of *Naturphilosophie*, specifically to the transcendental and ontological forces of attraction and repulsion as a source of the generation of representations.

The function of the beautiful has traditionally been associated not only with purposive natural order, but has also been endowed with an ontological binding function that embeds the human being in this purposive natural system. In the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant writes, “natural beauty carries with it a purposiveness in its form, through which the object seems as it were predetermined for our power of judgment.”9 For Kant, although the natural system may empirically be beautiful, this purposiveness can only become present to human cognition through the power of judgment.10 Moreover, the purposiveness that one experiences in the beauty of art functions as

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9 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, (tr.) P. Guyer and E. Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 129. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as CPJ.

an analogy to the purposiveness that one judges, but cannot prove, to exist in nature. Kant writes:

The self-sufficient beauty of nature reveals to us a technique of nature, which makes it possible to represent it as a system in accordance with laws the principle of which we do not encounter anywhere in our entire faculty of understanding, namely that of a purposiveness with respect to the use of the power of judgment in regard to appearances, so that this must be judged as belonging not merely to nature in its purposeless mechanism but rather also to the analogy with art. (CPJ, 129-30)

Nature, seen organically (as self-organization) rather than mechanically (as chain of cause and effects), exhibits a purposiveness that becomes comprehensible to human judgment through the analogy with art.

Although Kant postulates that nature exhibits an empirical, objective order, this order can never become an object of experience, and therefore remains a mere regulative principle. Schelling’s Naturphilosophie, in contrast to Kant’s transcendental idealism, exteriorizes the notion of self-organization in Kantian natural teleology: rather than self-organization as that which is made possible by reflective judgment, this principle will become part of an objective structure of nature that then produces human consciousness as something that can recursively make judgments about its own self-organization. Schelling does not wish to lapse into a rationalist ontology as one might find in the works of Wolff and Baumgarten, for example, according to which the true, the beautiful, and the good are simply metaphysically and logically posited as extant and identical.11 The beautiful, as natural purposiveness, is intended as both a transcendental and an ontological dynamic, as that which moves through both matter and spirit and makes them part of the same purposive system; asking the transcendental question of nature—seeking the material conditions of possibility of an intuition—culminates in an ontology of the object. Schelling, in the Ideas, writes: “Organization is not mere appearance, but itself object, and indeed, an object existing through itself, something whole in itself and indivisible.” (IPN, xlviii) Self-organization, which emerges as part of the structure of aesthetic judgment in Kant, becomes part of the actual structure of matter.

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11 For such a representation of rationalist aesthetics, see Frederick Beiser, Diotima’s Children: German Aesthetic Rationalism from Leibniz to Lessing (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
More importantly, teleological purposiveness, although it at first belongs to the domain of the organic over and against the mechanical chain of causes and effects, ultimately does not simply exclude the mechanical as its lifeless other. Rather, this purposiveness includes the mechanical as part of the total system of self-organization; Schelling wishes to “unify both extremes [of mechanism and purposiveness]” and thereby allow “the idea of the purposiveness of the whole [of nature] to emerge in us.” (IPN, lxii)

The ontological exteriorization of beauty, or natural purposiveness as part of the dynamic of inorganic and organic nature, seems at first to recapitulate a philosophical cliché: beauty reveals nature as a purposive system of self-organization. More striking, however, is the fact that one may perceive in Schelling’s Naturphilosophie this very same exteriorization and ontologization of aesthetic judgment with the category of the sublime.

Here, the aesthetics of Naturphilosophie is at its most original. It is important to recall that according to Kant, “the concept of the sublime in nature is far from being as important and rich in consequences as that of its beauty, and that in general it indicates nothing purposive in nature itself, but only in the possible use of its intuitions to make palpable in ourselves a purposiveness that is entirely independent of nature.” (CPJ, 130) For Kant, the sublime provokes a cognitive response to a violation of natural order; it can be triggered, for example, by a “formless and nonpurposive” object. (CPJ, 161) The function of the sublime is to stimulate the human mind to be conscious of its own freedom—to overcome the fear or danger that seems to threaten the human organism in its confrontation with chaotic formlessness or nonpurposiveness—and thereby to bear witness to the freedom of the human being as an entity that can step outside the mechanistic chain of causes and effects.

For Kant, one may speak of a beautiful natural object, but not of a sublime natural object. The sublime only exists as a relation in the mind. Kant says, “sublimity is not contained in anything in nature, but only in our mind, insofar as we can become conscious of being superior to nature within us and thus also to nature outside us (insofar as it influences us).” (CPJ, 147) In the case of both Kant, and then later Schiller, who makes the sublime a cornerstone of his theory of tragedy (and yet does not hesitate to locate the sublime in objects), the human being is made aware of its freedom only by detaching itself from natural phenomenality. The sublime, as an aesthetic category, is endowed with a special function, namely to widen and deepen the cleft between nature and spirit, or between object and subject.
The sublime is equivalent to a movement, a perturbation, or a disruption whose order we ourselves must restore. Kant says: “The mind feels itself moved in the representation of the sublime in nature, while in the aesthetic judgment on the beautiful in nature it is in calm contemplation. This movement (especially in its inception) may be compared to a vibration [Erschütterung], i.e., to a rapidly alternating repulsion from and attraction to one and the same object.” (CP, 141) The fundamental operation of the sublime, then, consists in the provocation of an awareness of the transcendence of the subject—of both negative freedom (as existing outside the chain of causes and effects) and positive freedom (as autonomy)—that comes from an attraction and a repulsion to an external object.

In Schelling’s Naturphilosophie, this very process, which for Kant only emerges by forming an aesthetic judgment that in turn widens the gap between nature and human, becomes a property of exteriorized nature itself, and is therefore used to suture the gap between nature and human. More simply stated: for Schelling, the structure of matter itself is sublime. It is sublime not in the sense of its grandeur, but inasmuch as the very condition of appearance results from a provocation of movement, or a tension between attraction and repulsion predicated on an imbalance or a disruption that then produces a higher movement of integration. Whereas this higher movement of integration in the sublime for Kant and Schiller is consciousness of freedom as something outside of nature, for Schelling, the higher movement of integration is the self-consciousness of human freedom as something emerging from nature.

This self-provoking, attractive-repulsive structure of perturbation constitutes the condition of possibility of the appearance of matter itself. In the Ideas—which draws clear inspiration from Kant’s Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science—the powers of attraction and repulsion, because they cannot appear at all, neither as phenomena in nature nor in consciousness, constitute transcendental forces that condition the emergence of matter, and hence, of spirit. Schelling writes, “Matter and body are therefore nothing but products of opposing forces, or rather, they are nothing other than these forces.” (IPN, 111) Attraction and repulsion do not merely condition matter and spirit, but matter and spirit are ontologically identical with these forces. The human subject comes into being as part of this attractive-repulsive, self-perturbing and self-organizing dynamic of matter. According to Schelling:

The dynamic forces [of attraction and repulsion] cannot be thought in their necessity, unless they at the same time appear in their contingency. In every individual body, attracting and repel-
ling forces are necessarily in balance [nothwendig im Gleichgewicht]. But this necessity is only felt in opposition to the possibility that this balance is perturbed. Now, we must seek this possibility in matter itself. The ground of this possibility can even be conceptualized as an effort [Bestreben] of matter to step out of its equilibrium and to leave itself over to the free play of its forces. (IPN, 104)

This dynamic—the necessity of a balance that, in order to appear, requires the contingency of finite multiplicity, a possible disequilibrium in the order of things—permeates the movements of mind as well as matter.

The forces of attraction and repulsion manifest themselves in the domain of spirit as a conflict between activity and passivity, or between the expansive and unlimited movement of the ego to realize its freedom and the contractive and limiting experience of resistance occasioned by the givenness of an exteriority. These forces give rise to sensible intuitions: “Every action of the spirit now, in which this spirit, from activity and passivity—from unlimited to limiting activity in itself that creates a product from both of these tendencies in common is called—intuition [Anschauung].” (IPN, 138) The identity established between, on the one hand, the natural forces of attraction and repulsion, and on the other hand, the subjective movements of contraction and expansion, allows Schelling to construct a naturalized and ontologized transcendental aesthetic: this interplay of forces does not merely constitute the condition of possibility of sensible intuitions, but sensible intuitions only have concrete being by virtue of this dynamic.

As Schelling notes, both domains, matter and spirit, are characterized by the necessary contingency of an originary disequilibrium. The isomorphic dynamic that characterizes the striving of the self and the forces of attraction and repulsion was even articulated by Fichte, albeit only metaphorically. In his 1794 Science of Knowledge, after asking the reader “if it is permitted to take an idea from the doctrine of nature”12—he describes the absolute activity of the subject as a struggle between an expansive, centrifugal force that goes into infinity (the tendency of the subject to grasp the real as something posited by its own activity) and a limiting, centripetal force, which makes the subject into an object (the tendency of the

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subject to passively bend to the dictates of the world as it is normatively given). The continually striving nature of subjectivity, or its drive-character, is thus explained as the product of two forces, one that extends into infinite self-assertion, and another that is limited by exteriority and forced back into finitude. For Fichte, it is only on the basis of these two tendencies that the subject can appear to itself—as differentiated, limited, and empirical—at all. Fichtean subjectivity—or, more precisely, the empirical subject—is therefore the product of a sublime agonism within the absolute I. By incorporating this dynamic into an overarching absolute subject, Fichte, in a manner similar to Kant and Schiller’s understanding of the function of the sublime, makes this agonism or struggle a proof of the subject’s freedom as something that belongs to the structure of subjectivity, e.g., as the capacity to raise oneself above the resistance of nature.

Fichte uses centripetal and centrifugal forces purely as heuristic devices to illustrate the internal structure of the ego. For Schelling, such forces are no longer metaphors, but ontological zones of indifferenciation between the sensible and the intelligible, the material and the spiritual. However, because Schelling locates this imbalance in nature itself, this sublime agonism or perturbation that conditions appearances does not apply only to human subjectivity, but to all matter organic and inorganic. This struggle between striving and being met with resistance—or an infinite finitude—does not elevate the human above matter, but brings the human closer to it.

Schelling calls the total natural system a purposiveness (Zweckmässigkeit), thus rendering this system coextensive with an aesthetics of the beautiful. The structure of this seemingly beautiful system, however, is sublime: the provocation of a transcendence occurs through an originary imbalance, a disequilibrium of forces that continually strive for equilibrium. The aesthetic structure of Naturphilosophie therefore effaces the distinction between the beautiful and the sublime. The sublime, or a perturbation that then generates a movement of attraction and repulsion—as nature lifting itself beyond itself—is in fact identical to the very structure of nature as purposiveness, e.g., as beautiful. The internal dynamic of nature thus indifferenciates the beautiful and the sublime. This insight will remain a feature of Schelling’s later philosophy of art, in which he makes the precise point that an object from one point of view can appear chaotic, formless, or sublime, and that this very phenomenon can equally appear as beautiful (purposive) from another point of
view. The structure of nature in Schelling’s Naturphilosophie is a purposive perturbation of equilibrium that generates tension and transcendence, or: a beautiful sublimity.

In conclusion, I will turn briefly to the generative aesthetics of Schelling’s Naturphilosophie. I have thus far attempted to show that the transcendental-ontological account of nature is constructed in such a way that the sensible world, or the possibility of an intuition (Anschauung), and aesthetics—as an ind differentiation between the purposiveness of the beautiful and the perturbation of the sublime—are made possible as part of the total system of differentiated appearances. Schelling’s Naturphilosophie, inasmuch as it contributes to the construction of the sensible world, contains an incipient aesthetics of production in addition to this transcendental aesthetics. Such a generative aesthetics of Naturphilosophie—as opposed to Schelling’s own philosophy of art, for example—permits one to think aesthetic activity as an attempt to modify the relations that inhere in phenomenality as such (rather than focusing on generic or poetological categories such as the epic, the lyric, and the tragic, for example). When Novalis reads Schelling, he understands the absolute as something much more profound than an absolute of identity whose structure is designed to integrate differences into an overarching system. In the Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia (Das allgemeine Brouillon), Novalis, responding ostensibly to On the World Soul (1798), draws attention to Schelling’s “drive to individualize Nature, or better expressed, his drive to diversify nature [Individualisirung, besser Vermannichfaltigungstrieb der Natur].” It is this aesthetics of differentiation and individualization that is implied by Naturphilosophie as a system of productive representation.

Schelling’s concept of an absolute of force (or the absolute as forces of attraction and repulsion that move through all forms of differentiation) provides a description of the way particulars move towards and away from one another that is simultaneously a description of the way discourse and language itself (in this case, both scientific and philosophical discourse) moves. Schelling appears conscious of his own act of representation when he writes, “what we

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13 In his lectures on the philosophy of art, Schelling writes, “The sublime in its absoluteness encompasses the beautiful, just as the beautiful in its absoluteness encompasses the sublime.” (Schelling, Philosophy of Art, 90) He also writes, “That which is perceived as sublimity in one instance...may well appear in another relationship as beauty in contrast to sublimity.” (Ibid., 91)

14 Novalis, Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia (Das allgemeine Brouillon), (tr.) D. Wood (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 152.
can say about light, warmth, fire and matter is nothing more and nothing less than a language of images [Bildersprache] that is only valid within its specific boundaries.” (IPN, 29–30) He even calls these images “fictions.” (IPN, 30) The power of attraction and repulsion conditions not only phenomena, not only spirit, but the discursive forms of philosophy itself. These discursive fictions, which nevertheless claim to reveal the movements of nature as such, become important writing practices for authors such as Schlegel and Novalis, who deploy as part of the relation between textual elements semiotic operations of condensation, dispersion, crystallization, cohesion, collision, intensification, excitation, bifurcation, indifferentiation, elasticity, rest, inertia, fluidity, hovering, among others.15

One can already see this form of semiosis as an implicit practice in the very form of Schelling’s Naturphilosophie. The central law of this absolute of attraction consists in movement through the organization, perturbation, and reorganization of particulars, and therefore gives rise to the immanent tarrying of the mind with the givenness of the sensible world. As a short example, let us take the phenomenality of light. According to Schelling, light is a “striving for expansion and dispersion [Bestreben nach Ausdehnung und Verbreitung].” (IPN, 14) Light, however, only reveals its own law in interaction with other forms of phenomenality, for example, in its relation to warmth and in the transformation of light when it travels through a medium. Thus, the activity of light and the reading of light generate certain operations: movement, resistance, attraction, binding, permeability and passage through zones of indifferentiation that make possible state changes or changes of identity. Schelling writes, “One often claims that warmth permeates bodies, but not light. It would be better to say: light, by penetrating into bodies, ceases to be light, and then becomes from this moment on palpable [fühlbare] warmth.” (IPN, 17–18) Schelling reads light in such a way that does not merely focus on the structure of nature, but more importantly, on what phenomena do in a system of relations to one another. He foregrounds the process of how one supposedly discrete and heterogeneous element, within the overarching homogeneous system of nature, transforms into something else that seems at first glance different from it, thereby becoming other and staying the same. Seeing the absolute as attraction generates a semiosis that is continually looking for zones

15 For an example of the relation between Romantic semiosis, above all in the works of Friedrich Schlegel, and chemistry, see Michel Chaouli, The Laboratory of Poetry: Chemistry and Poetics in the Work of Friedrich Schlegel (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2002).
of interpenetration, interaction, and indifferentiation: when one object or self can all of a sudden become other and yet remain that which it is.

This way of relating particulars goes all the way up: from elementary natural forces to complex systems of signification. Language itself—words, figures, characters—will exhibit these very relations of attraction, repulsion, differentiation and indifferentiation, each movement of which is designed to intensify or move forms of life further along in the chain of transcendence. Schelling’s Naturphilosophie seeks nothing less than a grammar of all differential systems—a play of agonistic forces that individuates, disrupts, reorganizes, and multiplies the forms of the world of appearances—permeating the entire field of consciousness and phenomenality, opening a window onto the way in which attractive-repulsive movements give rise to the order and disorder of signs, things, and the minds that move through them and with them.

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