

THE PLACE OF AESTHETICS IN FICHTE'S EARLY SYSTEM

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This is a preprint. A shortened Version of this paper has been published in : *New Essays on Fichte's Later Jena Wissenschaftslehre*, D. Breazeale and T. Rockmore (eds), Evanston (Illinois), Northwestern University Press, 2002, p. 299-316.

See the FRENCH original version of 1995 here on Papyrus.

ABSTRACT : The aim of this paper is to demonstrate that aesthetics had its place in Fichte's early system of the WL, and that due to contingent circumstances he did not have the chance to expound it. But we can reconstruct the main lines of what his aesthetics would have looked like if we pay attention to the article sent to Schiller in 1795 on the "spirit" and the "letter" in philosophy, completing it with the courses he gave in the preceding months on that topic and with other sources. We discover not only that aesthetics is an important part of the philosophical system but that art stands close the act of philosophising itself. In fact, both the philosopher and the artist draw from the same original source: "spirit" as defined in Kant's third Critique. For the philosopher as well as for the artist the central faculty is then "imagination", an imagination that relies on "feeling". In the end Fichte sketches an aesthetics based on the creative genius of the artist, leaving little room for the faculty of judgment and for taste, that is: the receptive attitude toward beauty, that play a prominent role in Kant's aesthetics.

KEYWORDS : Kant, Schiller, aesthetics, philosophy, spirit, imagination, art

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During his lifetime, Fichte published almost nothing directly concerned with art and aesthetics. The only document dealing with such questions appeared in 1800, although its draft dates from 1795. The document in question, as we know, is the article entitled "On the Spirit and the Letter in Philosophy". As a matter of course, this text bears little resemblance with, for example, Schelling's Philosophy of Art or Hegel's great Aesthetics. The fact that its title betrays no trace of aesthetic preoccupations, as well as its length--barely thirty pages--make obvious that it cannot stand the comparison with, say, the ambitious undertakings of German Idealism. It does not even contain an outline of an aesthetic theory worthy of the name. Admittedly, it is an unfinished work. In adopting an epistolary style, Fichte's intention was to explicitly stress his reaction to Friedrich Schiller's Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Mankind, published as a series of articles in the journal Die Horen (1794-1795). Hence, the three letters, published by Fichte himself in 1800, betray the circumstances of their immediate purpose: Fichte's desire to position himself in relation to the aesthetic theory of Schiller. Evidently, Schiller did not take long to detect the critical intent of Fichte's text, which upset him to the point of refusing, in 1795, to publish it in his own journal. This being the case, how can one hope to take advantage of such a polemic writing that, moreover, has the reputation of being highly complex? In what follows, I do not intend to offer a systematic interpretation of this text, but would simply like to unearth the few elements that are likely to

provide an indication of what a Fichtean aesthetics would have looked like. In truth, the criticism contained in "On the Spirit and the Letter in Philosophy" is directed against Schiller from the perspective of an autonomous and original aesthetic theory, which belongs properly to Fichte. In this regard, his posthumous writings can be called upon to complete the picture.

In other words, I would like to suggest that the absence of a completed aesthetic theory within the works of Fichte can be related to contingent circumstances having to do with, among other things, his disappointment in Schiller's refusal to publish the first three parts of his text. As the Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo states: "Aesthetic philosophy is a principal part of the Wissenschaftslehre" (GA, IV/2: 266). Thus there is no reason to believe that Fichte would have considered himself exempt from the task of proposing an aesthetic theory. As we shall see, he was not altogether satisfied with the developments in Kant's Critique of Judgment.¹ Fichte has a high opinion of aesthetics, not because it simply fills the gap between theory and practice, as suggested in Kantian philosophy,² but because art can be exploited in order to explore, on the basis of a remarkable affinity, the origin of philosophical discourse as such.

I - The Reaction to Schiller's Project of an Aesthetic Education

At first glance, Fichte's article "On the Spirit and the Letter in Philosophy" looks very much like a critique directed against both Schiller and aesthetics in general. In that Schiller is a dramatist, the charge against him is unmistakable. Before addressing the theoretical content of the Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Mankind, Fichte questions, in an allusive manner,

Schiller's talent as an artist. When the time comes to give examples of good works of art, he contrives to mention the works of Schiller's great rival: Goethe. He quotes in a very laudatory style the Tasso and the Iphigenie, whereas his criticisms concerning works which are unsuccessful in hiding the mechanical aspects of their construction, or the "letter" behind the "spirit" are clearly, although allusively, directed against the author of Die Räuber.³

But even when Fichte turns his attention toward works of art that are the product of real genius, he does not seem ready to acknowledge unrestrictedly the educational benefits that can be drawn from art. In doing this, he touches upon the central thesis of Schillerian aesthetics. That a great artist is able to lead the spectator to the highest spheres of spirituality is not questioned, the problem is the following: this process of apprenticeships implies that the spectator falls beneath the "spell" (Entzückung) of the artist, that he literally falls "prey" (Beute) to him, who by the same token deprives him of his "freedom" (Freiheit).⁴ "The inspired artist does not address himself at all to our freedom. So little does he do so that, on the contrary, his magic [Zauber] begins only when we have given it up" (SW, VIII, p. 300). For the reader of Fichte's "Some Lectures Concerning the Scholar's Vocation" given in the summer of 1794, the above statement looks like a condemnation: in it one learns that the task of education in no way consists of an unconscious conditioning, of a kind of taming, but rather each individual must take charge of his or her own freedom. Given the conditions of the time, the class of scholars appeared to be the most appropriate élite to promote the cause of human emancipation. This is precisely why, in his lectures of 1794, Fichte could confer upon the learned, in the name of the education of mankind, the highest dignity.⁵

One must not, however, draw hasty conclusions: this characterization of the influence

of the artist in no way means that Fichte refuses altogether the magic of art. He is willing to admit that the spirituality of the artwork "removes [man] from [the] influence [of the sensible world]" (SW, VIII, p. 291), so that when the moralist wants to open him to "the unploughed fields of our minds", he discovers that "half the work [has already been] done" (SW, VIII, p. 300). Three years after the writing of the article on the "Spirit" and the "letter", in 1798, the System of Ethics repeats this same phrase (SW, IV, p. 355). We find this reference to art and the artist in the last part of this work, in the chapters dealing with the duties of man according to his particular profession. It is astonishing to note that when considering contributions to the education of mankind, Fichte put the work of the artist on par with the task of the scholar and the moral educator of the people. This might come as a surprise, especially if we keep in mind the conclusions of "Some Lectures Concerning the Scholar's Vocation", but this statement, found in a book devoted specifically to the principles of morals, confirms the idea according to which Fichte's work betrays a great respect for aesthetics. Be that as it may, it does not seem that the criticism directed against Schiller's aesthetics in "On the Spirit and the Letter in Philosophy" is geared toward the dismissal of the principle, and subsequent project, of aesthetic education as such. Concerning the validity of such a project, both Schiller and Fichte agree.

It seems that we have to search elsewhere if we want to identify the real point of dissent between them. Could it be, perhaps, that the controversy involves purely theoretical questions pertaining to the structure of Schillerian aesthetics itself? An attentive reading of Fichte's article will reveal the fact that he stigmatizes in passing the play-drive (the key concept in the Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Mankind) which is, as we know, the establishing link

between sensible and formal drive. Yet Fichte mentions the concept of play in his text only to characterize the merely mechanical aspect of an artwork, that which is unable to raise the spectator to the level of ideas (SW, VIII, p. 295). In other words, a work apprehended as sheer play is simply void of spirit, meaning that play, in Fichte's opinion, can only relate to an unsuccessful artwork. This calls for a total reconsideration of an aesthetics based on the concept of play, and more so, as play reaches the status of a distinct and autonomous drive, as is the case in the Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Mankind.

Hence, it is for purely theoretical considerations that Fichte feels compelled to enter into a discussion with Schillerian aesthetics. Fichte felt invited to intervene, if only by the fact that Schiller had borrowed in an explicit manner some elements of the Foundations of the Entire Science of Knowledge (the concept of Wechselwirkung namely) for use in his Letters. In order to illustrate the importance of the litigious point at issue here, I would like to introduce a recent thesis formulated by Dieter Henrich, according to which Schiller, without knowing it, directly challenged the Fichtean conception of aesthetics. In order to support this thesis, Henrich refers to the letter of a student of medicine at the University of Jena, David Veit. At the time of the debate, Veit was not a student of Fichte, but they used to dine together, so that the opinion reported by Veit in a letter to his friend Rahel Levin most probably reproduces Fichte's reaction to Schiller's Letters.

Consider this: many well educated donkeys are willing to pretend that Schiller's Letters are nothing more than Fichte's system presented in a nicer fashion; they could not notice that those letters are based on it, but that they nevertheless go their own way. Instead of the play-drive, says Fichte, he [Schiller] should have rather used

'imagination'.⁶

If this is a faithful report, we are in a position to assess the distance that separates both aesthetics. In fact, Fichte cannot accept Schiller's claim according to which there are in the human nature two radically independent drives (the sensible and the formal) which are mediated by a third: the play-drive. For his part, Fichte does not hesitate to distinguish three different drives (the practical, the cognitive and the aesthetic) in "On the Spirit and the Letter in Philosophy" but he does not claim that they are independent of one another. On the contrary, they are mere ramifications of "the one indivisible primary force in man" (SW, VIII, p. 278), so that none of them have a foundation of their own: we do not find in Fichte a plurality of Grundtriebe. Human being stems from a unique dynamic impulse; it is this "self-activity" which we find at the basis of the Science of Knowledge that, in the realm of aesthetics, takes the form of an imagination envisioned in its "total freedom" (SW, VIII, p. 290). We can now understand the meaning of Fichte's remark, as reported by Veit : the center of philosophical aesthetics lies in the imagination, and not in the all too problematic play-drive. The Foundations of the Entire Science of Knowledge, to which Schiller refers, had already familiarized the reader with the important role assigned to imagination--through which every representation becomes possible. Fichte can see no other basis for a philosophical aesthetics than the productive imagination left to its own freedom. This is to say that he deliberately reserved a place for an aesthetic theory in his Science of Knowledge. Thus, bearing this in mind, it becomes clear to us why he could not forgive Schiller for having situated the aesthetic discourse on the level of a hybrid play-drive. For Fichte then, replying to Schiller's Letters is a matter of philosophical duty.

II - Fichte's own Aesthetic Theory

So far, our inquiry has revealed that Fichte did not raise any fundamental objections about the pedagogic virtues of art against Schiller. Over this point they both agree, although Schiller, for his part, tends to make of the aesthetic state not only a means of education, but an end in itself. The real debate concerns, as we have seen, purely theoretical questions as Schiller, according to Fichte, lacked discernment in his choice of elements taken from the Science of Knowledge--he should have realized that imagination is the cornerstone of aesthetic theory. But as far as Fichte is concerned, we have addressed only a few declarations that answer to Schiller. There may very well be an open space in his philosophy for an aesthetics; however, we do not yet understand why he feels that aesthetics constitutes, "a principal part of the Science of Knowledge". Further, in looking through his published works, we are even less sure if Fichte has at his disposal the theoretical means to develop such an aesthetics. There does exist, however, a few indications in this respect. For instance, the third section of his programmatic paper written in the spring of 1794, "Concerning the Concept of the Wissenschaftslehre", clearly indicates that aesthetics is a component of the Science of Knowledge. In the section devoted to "practical philosophy" Fichte finds "a new fully determinate theory of the agreeable, the beautiful and the sublime,..."⁷ What deserves to be noticed here is not so much the promise to provide the Science of Knowledge with further developments concerning aesthetics, but the fact that this projected aesthetic theory is "new". This amounts to saying that, despite the Kantian overtone of the three proposed themes, Fichte wants to innovate, or at least place under revision Kantian philosophy. This proposition is

confirmed by the manuscript of a course given in the summer and the fall of 1794, which was actually a continuation of his lectures on the "Scholar's Vocation". This manuscript deals with the "spirit" and the "letter" in philosophy, constituting the background of Fichte's article bearing the same title, even though its contents differ from the text sent to Schiller, drafted a year later in 1795. The manuscript shows beyond any doubt that Fichte clearly intended to renew aesthetic discourse, regarding, for instance, poetry. "According to my theory, which I do not have to prove here, the object of poetry is entertainment [das Ergötzende], the play of sensations in time."⁸ What theory is it that he refers to here? A future theory or an already existing one? Fichte's posthumous writings allow us to shed light on these questions.

Before his departure from Zurich, Fichte spent the winter of 1794 working on a document entitled Practical Philosophy, in which he worked out the first elaboration of this part of the future Science of Knowledge. In it we find the questions pertaining to poetics developed to such a degree that it can be considered, in the very least, as a serious outline of this theory, to which he was to make allusions in class later in the same year (GA, II/3: 221-223). Further, the manuscript comprises extensive developments that represent a first sketch of an autonomous aesthetics, that is, of an aesthetics cut loose from the theoretical yoke of the Critique of Judgment. For the sake of brevity, I shall limit myself to a few remarks in order to mark the distance taken from Kant's aesthetics. To begin with, one cannot but notice that the angle of approach through which Kant arrives at the problem of beauty, i. e. the judgment of taste, is completely left aside. According to Fichte, the feeling of pleasure related to beauty has nothing to do with a "judgment" (GA, II/3: 299). Consequently, the faculty of judgment (Urteilkraft) is ostracized from his developments in aesthetics. As was to be expected,

imagination becomes the main theoretical basis of this new aesthetics, insofar as it is considered as a productive faculty; which entails, in turn, a reorientation of the theory of the beautiful towards a theory of art. In other words, Fichte's turn is similar to what we find in Schiller: the philosophy of art becomes increasingly the sole field of aesthetics. The work of art becomes the center of interest precisely because it is the object of a creation. This inflection towards a theory of artistic production is, from the outset, in accordance with the new Science of Knowledge and its primacy of practical philosophy.

The fact that the Kantian problematic centered around judgment is put into abeyance implies that its correlate, taste, also loses ground. The Critique of Judgment reveals a marked difference between genius and taste, insofar as the act of production (Hervorbringung) is clearly opposed to judgment (Beurteilung).⁹ Fichte, being well aware of this distinction (SW, VIII, p. 290), does not hesitate to base his theory on spirit and genius. Without doubt, he will be obliged to return to the problematic of taste,¹⁰ but taste never represents more than a merely passive dimension of the aesthetic experience, as opposed to the active dimension clearly emphasized here. Because taste is a matter of judgment, it only fulfils a regulative function, whereas the genuine spontaneity of the spirit is instantiated in its whole range by the creative genius, which according to Fichte, overshadows the aesthetic dimension of external nature. This overshadowing is a direct consequence of the elimination of the problematic of judgment. Henceforth, natural beauty's appearances in Fichte's texts are scarce,¹¹ since original beauty, das Urschöne (GA, II/3: 319; cf. 207), does not find expression in the external world. Archetypal beauty, in truth, can only be found in the deepest spheres of the human soul, where the artist discovers his raw materials and gives them aesthetic expression. The

spectator need no more wait passively to be surprised and overwhelmed by the contingency of natural beauty, as was the case in Kant. The aesthetic phenomenon takes place within the intimacy of the soul.

Where is the world of the beautiful spirit? Within humanity, and nowhere else. In this way: the art of the beautiful (schöne Kunst) draws man back into himself and makes him feel at home. It tears him from the given nature and sets him free to be alone with himself. Throughout, the autonomy of reason remains our ultimate goal (SW, IV, p. 354).

From this remark taken from the System of Ethics, we can see just how far the artistic phenomenon contributes in returning the acting subject to itself, and making it conscious of its sovereign independence towards the world. We realize in what sense an aesthetics based on the active faculties of creative genius and spirit coincide exactly with the orientation of Fichte's philosophy. Finally, we can understand why the faculty of judgment, with its mere regulative role, had to make room for the productive imagination.

Now that we have summarized the main elements of the Fichtean aesthetics as laid out in the Zurich manuscript Practical Philosophy (1794), we can return to the debate with Schiller, knowing that Fichte's reply can only be fully grasped in relation to his original aesthetic theory, whose main ideas were quite well defined before the time of this debate. Naturally Schiller knew nothing of it, and in justifying his refusal to publish Fichte's article, he allowed himself to adopt the tone of a Schullehrer.

You entitle your article "On the Spirit and the Letter in Philosophy," and the first three parts deal with nothing other than the spirit in the arts, which means, as far as I

know, something totally different from the counterpart of the letter. Spirit as the counterpart of the letter, and spirit as an aesthetic property seem to me to be entirely different concepts...¹²

Doubtless, we cannot hold against Schiller his introduction of a clear distinction between spirit and letter in philosophy, and the concept of spirit--inaugurated by Kant--that we find in the realm of art. In fact, Schiller is aware of neither the contents of the manuscript Practical Philosophy nor the details of the course given by Fichte the year before, in which the concept of spirit--in the sense of the third Critique--was clearly related to philosophy. Consequently, Schiller did not suspect that, as is the case in art, there must be a place for spirit in philosophy. In reading the first three parts of the article and then refusing them, Schiller believed that Fichte condemns aesthetics in the name of the superiority of the philosophical concept. Yet the Science of Knowledge is aimed at nothing other than bringing the status of the artistic experience to the level of philosophical discourse, at least in regard to the depth of their origin in the human soul. This was indeed the global intent of the article; hence the necessity of correcting, at the outset, Schiller's misconceptions.

Astonished by the negative reaction of Schiller, Fichte offered further explanation in order to reveal the profound motivation of his endeavour, which was in no way aimed at the devaluation of art. "As far as I know, spirit in philosophy and spirit in the arts are as closely related as any subspecies of the same genus..."¹³ Art and philosophy originate from the same spirit, to which they have a privileged access. It is precisely this "parenthood" (Verwandtschaft) that Fichte purported to demonstrate in his article. He added in his reply: "Isn't it likely that there would have to be within man an original tendency to philosophize?"

And what if the tendency in question were the drive to represent simply for the sake of representing--the same drive which is the ultimate basis of the fine arts, of taste, etc?" (GA, III/2: 336). No doubt, Schiller was not prepared to face such an unexpected reply, especially since Fichte situated the artistic drive, i.e. the "drive to represent simply for the sake of representing", at the lowest rank of the hierarchy of drives; below the practical and cognitive drives. Now, against all expectations he associates the aptitude for philosophy with the very drive which occupies the third and lowest rank. Yet his reason for doing so is very good: the aesthetic drive is the most uninterested, and so the freest and closest to the spirit. In Fichte's view, art and philosophy rely on a faculty of imagination endowed with such a freedom that it can generate its own rules.

The pains Schiller takes in stressing the difference between artistic spirit and the spirit of a philosophical production are, in fact, to protect philosophy from the extravagances of the genius.¹⁴ Fichte, for his part, does not sense any danger in allowing such a close affinity between the spirit at work in philosophy and the creative spirit in art, because imagination, which is productive in both cases, is not an arbitrary process. There is nothing unbridled about it and it cannot therefore be automatically associated with Schwärmerey. As if anticipating this very objection, Fichte told his students in his course on "the spirit and the letter" that there was no reason to be upset by the contiguity of art and philosophy, since a philosophy deprived of spirit and inventiveness would be, so to speak, an empty shell.

...For there are undoubtedly plenty of people who will readily grant everything that I said last time and will really understand and feel the truth of what I was saying, but will nevertheless make the following objection: "Spirit may certainly be needed in the fine

arts, in literature, painting, music, etc., but what role does it have in philosophy?"¹⁵

If Schiller, by publishing the first three parts of Fichte's article "On the Spirit and the Letter in Philosophy," had encouraged him to write the rest--all in all the essay was to consist of nine or ten parts--thus bringing his initial project to an end, he would have been better able to figure out how serious Fichte was in claiming that philosophy and art share the same spirit and draw from the same source. It would then have been possible to examine in detail the reasoning with which Fichte relates purely aesthetic questions to problems pertaining to his conception of philosophy and the conditions of such a discourse. The text sent to the journal Die Horen unfortunately remained a fragment, cut off from the section devoted to the spirit at work in philosophy. Certainly, Fichte later came back, on some occasions, to this proximity between aesthetics and philosophy,¹⁶ but the rich and fruitful reflection which he had undertaken while distinguishing the spirit and the letter was never pursued. This is regrettable, precisely because he had initially intended to "determine" the very nature of the spirit in philosophy with the help of aesthetic theory, especially the aesthetic drive. "You find the basis for my classification [of the drives] unreliable because you have no idea of the full scope of what I have provisionally designated as the "aesthetic drive", and because you yourself classify and designate things differently."¹⁷

Without doubt Fichte was well aware of, so to speak, the differentia specifica that prevails between art and philosophy. Art is nevertheless called upon to serve as a guiding thread, if not as a paradigm for philosophy, because of their common belonging to spirit as a genus proximum. Anyone interested in Fichte's philosophical discourse would profit in consulting the manuscript of his course dealing with the difference between the spirit and the letter in

which, contrary to the version sent to Schiller, the problem of the spirit in philosophy is directly addressed. One supposes that ignorance of this dimension of Fichte's thesis led Schiller to proffer a "precipitated judgment" on the Fichtean project. This would manifestly explain Fichte's tone in his retort: "Zu welchem Stümper machen Sie mich!" (GA, III/2: 337).

III - Philosophy and the Creativeness of spirit

So far, we have seen that Fichte does not find anything to oppose to the pedagogic function of art. On the contrary art raises man from the standpoint of ordinary life to the transcendental standpoint of philosophy. But art is thereby considered from the perspective of an aesthetic of reception, as we would say nowadays. Fichte, as is obvious, prefers to envisage art from the perspective of an aesthetic of production, because this vantage point allows attention to be drawn to the creative spirit common to art and philosophy.¹⁸ In this manner art can become paradigmatic for philosophy.

The manuscript of the course on "the spirit and the letter" addresses directly the theoretical status of philosophy. More precisely, its purpose was to give a new account of the "whole essence of philosophizing". This preoccupation was not entirely new for Fichte, since in the spring of the same year (1794), he had systematically developed these questions in his programmatic text BWL (GA, I/2: 159), without however, exploiting the concept of "spirit" in all its consequences; although a note in §7 clearly anticipates the future developments:

It becomes clear that the philosopher is no less in need of the obscure feelings of what is right and of genius than for example the poet or the artist; [he needs them] only in

another way. The artist needs a sense for beauty whereas the philosopher needs a sense for truth, which doubtless exists. (GA, I/2: 142)

In fact, this footnote mention of a special "sense" for philosophy remains, so long as it is not instantiated, a mere hypothesis. As we shall see, the demonstration of its existence will be provided a few months later in the course on "the spirit and the letter". But when he began to formulate the methodology of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, Fichte already possessed a relatively precise idea of what constitutes the essence of the philosophical activity; that which he himself tried to exert. Yet he does not claim that this idea is wholly original; on the contrary, he openly admits that his treatment of the concept of the "spirit" as well as the parallel he draws between the artist and the philosopher using the notions of "genius" and "spirit", are of Kantian inspiration.¹⁹ If nothing else, he established an original link between two theses introduced by Kant, one from the first Critique, and the other from the third. The Critique of Pure Reason issues a well known caution, according to which one cannot expect to learn philosophy but, at best, to learn how to philosophize.²⁰ The step is small from this distinction to the one put forth in the Critique of Judgment between slavish imitation in art, the lot of an artist deprived of talent (Nachahmung), and inspired imitation through which a genuine artist draws from the same original source as his model, which marks the work as that of a genius (Nachfolge). No matter what Kant himself might have thought of this bringing together of philosophical originality and the originality that is specific to art,²¹ it was most likely he who gave Fichte, who knew the third Critique so well, the idea of drawing such an analogy. It remains to be seen however if Fichte has the means at his disposal to concretize what in the programmatic text still appears like an unfounded parallel between artistic and philosophical

genius.

If the concepts of "genius" and "spirit" serve as the common denominator for art and philosophy, an inquiry into the extent to which Fichte remains faithful to the definitions of the third Critique and the extent he departs from them, is of first order. The reader is at first stricken by a series of similarities to be found even in his choice of expressions. For example, for Fichte spirit is the "vitalizing force in a work of art", and "spirit is therefore a faculty of the ideals" (SW, VIII, pp. 274, 291). This reminds us of the Kantian definition stating that the spirit is the "faculty of presenting aesthetic ideas".²² Moreover, as is the case in Kant, spirit and genius have a privileged relation, in comparison to all other faculties, to productive imagination.²³ But, notwithstanding these similarities in vocabulary, Fichte integrates these Kantian ideas into a whole new framework, although the proposed readjustments are designed, in his eyes, only to attain a deeper understanding of what Kant really intended to say.

The concept of "feeling", for instance, had already gained a prominent role in aesthetics. One has only to reread the sentences of the programmatic writing referred to earlier: like the artist, the philosopher needs an "obscure feeling" in order to reach the truth. In the third Critique, feeling is no more than a sensible sign of the transcendental play of the faculties; this very concept, in the course on "the spirit and the letter" gains a new freedom as well as a revised meaning. It is no more to be considered the result of a process that takes place at the level of the cognitive faculties of the mind, it becomes rather an element that provides the cognitive faculty known as imagination with activity orienting content. Compared with imagination and its product, i.e. representation, feeling accesses the unknown territories that lay underneath our conscious representations. It is exclusively on the basis of such obscure

feelings that productive imagination becomes capable of constituting images. The text of the course is very explicit in this regard:

That which the imagination shapes and presents to consciousness is found in feeling. Feeling, which I neither can nor should explain at this point, is the material [der Stoff] of everything which is represented. Thus spirit as such, or productive imagination, may be described as a capacity for raising feelings to consciousness. (GA, II/3: 317)

It is obvious that the philosopher as well as the artist produce conscious representations, but they both draw their materials from a deeply hidden source: feeling. Not content with describing the mechanism of imagination and the nature of its products from an external point of view, Fichte goes on to explore the *abyss* of the human soul from which the work of the genius emerges. Such is his reply to the Elementar-Philosophie of K. L. Reinhold who, in his search for an ultimate foundation, shows himself to be satisfied with a superficial "fact of consciousness".²⁴

But the obscure feeling does not serve only through its providing the raw material for the production of representations. Obscure feelings also maintain a reference, however vague to the whole. For the spirit, feeling represents a first means of orientation. "The true inquirer philosophizes *with* this feeling [for the whole]" (GA, II/3: 340). In effect, this orientation remains at the level of what we are allowed to translate by "presentiment" (*Ahnung*) in English, that is to say at the level of a vague feeling of what ought to happen (GA, II/3: 336). The programmatic writing gave us a taste of this principle in stating overtly that it is only on the basis of this feeling that the philosopher, groping along, progresses in the construction of his system.²⁵ Fichte then sees himself as obliged to bring under closer scrutiny the status of

this feeling, if he is to succeed in his project of explaining what remained something like a postulate for the Kant of the third Critique: common sense (*Gemeinsinn*). In fact, in the version of the text on "the spirit and the letter" sent to Schiller, Fichte proposes to solve, with the help of the feeling, the problem posed by this "universal sense" implied in the claim to universality presented by the work of art. Spirit, because of the nature of its sources, cannot express anything else but what is common to all. Because of its foundation in feeling, spirit becomes a principle of unity. "What the inspired [*Begeisterte*] finds in his breast lies in every human breast, and his capacity is the common capacity [*Gemeinsinn*] of the whole species".²⁶ This simply means that, for Fichte, the universal assent of rational beings does not come firstly from concepts, but rather from a very particular aspect of our sensibility. Even reason sees itself assigned to this unifying principle of feeling. "The spirit is one, and what is laid down by the essence of reason is the same for all individuals..." (SW, VIII, p. 292). Thus the construction of the rational concept by the philosopher becomes a subsequent task. Immediate feeling must trace the line of conduct for philosophy first. In considering this idea we thereby reach the deepest ontological strata of Fichte's undertaking. In this respect, the manuscript of the course is quite eloquent: it is at the outset through feeling that the spirit, understood as this privileged being that genius is, is put into relation with the supersensible order of things.

Spirit, in the special sense in which we certainly appear to be justified in denying spirit altogether to many persons, is the ability to raise to consciousness the deeper feelings underlying those other feelings which relate to the physical world. These deeper feelings relate to a supersensible world order, and the ability to raise them to consciousness may be termed the ability to convert ideals and ideas into

representations.(GA, II/3: 323)

It goes without saying that the supersensible order rendered accessible through feeling in no way resembles a neutral ontological substratum. If we are entitled to characterize Fichte's idealism as an ethical idealism, it is because the moral vocation of man is made manifest to him/her through this feeling, which brings him/her into contact, albeit unconsciously, with "the laws of moral order, the spiritual harmony, [and] the unification of all in the kingdom of truth, and virtue" (GA, II/3: 318). Philosophy, as the activity of finite reason, deploys its system in the realm of the concepts, but this very reason cannot but find its raw material and its first orientation in feeling, which hence becomes an indispensable principle of reality and unity. In Fichte's eyes, philosophical speculation must not be abandoned solely to the mediation of concepts.

Some commentators have argued that the title "On the Spirit and the Letter in Philosophy" was deliberately chosen by Fichte in order to echo Schiller's ironic remarks on the "spirit" and the "letter" in a footnote to the thirteenth of his Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Mankind.²⁷ For our part, we have discovered that Fichte was already working on this topic in the summer of 1794, well before the debate with Schiller. Thus the polemic aspect of Fichte's article should not be overestimated, as became clear with Fichte's agreement with the project of an aesthetic education. Undoubtedly, Fichte had to stress the originality of his

aesthetics with respect to Schiller's and Kant's theories. But the main intent of his unfinished article was to provide a positive contribution through its exposing the role of creative spirit in philosophy on the basis of an analogy with art.

The fact that feeling is considered as an original source, in philosophy as well as in art, clearly illustrates the extent of Fichte's move away from Kant's third Critique. Whereas in a judgment of taste, feeling plays the role of a mere sign originating in the free play of the cognitive faculties, it is envisaged by Fichte as immediate and irreducible. This is pertinent in relation to their respective conception of aesthetics; the contrast is even more acute with regard to their method of philosophy as a whole, especially when we are reminded that Kant vigorously rejects any philosophy based on feeling. One might well suspect the influence of Jacobi, although Fichte is by no means an advocate of the "non-philosophy"²⁸. Indeed, we cannot characterize him, without further qualification, as a philosopher of *feeling*. The point of departure of philosophy might well be discovered at this level, but the whole task of elaboration and articulation of the system nevertheless remains to be fulfilled. This is the specific task of the philosopher: to make explicit the truth contained in these primary feelings, and render it accessible through the mediation of the concept. But in order to sustain and instantiate the truth of every step in the elaboration of the philosophical system, Fichte feels the need to have recourse to a second kind of immediacy: intellectual intuition (cf. here GA, II/3: 330). With the help of this intuition, the human subject has the capacity to intuit him/herself in his/her self-activity. Intellectual intuition literally gives direct access to the intellect, meaning that each step in the reconstruction of the system of the human mind can be corroborated by this intuition, which has a role similar to the intuition of space when considering geometric

constructions.²⁹ This amounts to saying that in his Jena period Fichte draws upon two different metaphors in order to exemplify the procedures involved in the Wissenschaftslehre: the metaphor of the artist, and the metaphor of the geometer. In the last analysis, he does not have recourse to only one kind of immediacy, but to both feeling and intellectual intuition. In fact, both are needed in that intellectual intuition touches upon the ideal activity of the subject while the feeling anchors the whole process in reality. Fichte sees a necessary complement between the clarity of intuition and the certainty provided by feeling. Whether or not the Jena Wissenschaftslehre succeeds in establishing the complementarity of these roles within a unique theoretical framework remains an open question. What is beyond all doubt, however, is that Fichte was determined to employ all possible means in order to circumvent the aporias linked with Kant's thesis, according to which philosophy cannot rely on any form of immediacy, but solely on a discursive process.

NOTES

*. This text was first published under the title "L'esthétique a-t-elle une place dans la philosophie de Fichte?" in Les Cahiers de Philosophie (Lille, spring 1995): 181-202. I would like to thank Andrew Connochie for his careful revision of the English version.

1. Alexis Philonenko has argued that Fichte, in fundamental agreement with Kant's aesthetics, did not feel the urgency of developing this part of the Wissenschaftslehre. See his La liberté humaine dans la philosophie de Fichte, 2d ed. (Paris: Vrin, 1980), p. 99.

2. Considering the fact that aesthetics no longer plays the mediating role between nature and freedom than we find in Kant, Alain Renaut concludes that from an architectonic point of view aesthetics experiences a depreciation in Fichte's system. See Le système du droit.

Philosophie et droit dans la pensée de Fichte (Paris: P.U.F., 1986), p. 99.

3. Günther Schulz attributes Schiller's refusal to publish Fichte's text to the rivalry that opposes them in their search for Goethe's friendship. See his paper "Die erste Fassung von Fichte's Abhandlung 'Über Geist und Buchstab in der Philosophie in einer Reihe von Briefen' 1795," *Goethe. Neue Folge des Jahrbuchs der Goethe-Gesellschaft* 17 (1955): 114-141.
4. "Ueber Geist und Buchstab in der Philosophie," SW, VIII, pp. 275, 276, 300; trans. E. Rubinstein, "On the Spirit and the Letter in Philosophy," in German aesthetic and Literary Criticism, ed. D. Simpson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 78, 79, 93.
5. Einige Vorlesungen über die Bestimmung des Gelehrten, SW, VI, pp. 323, 328, 329.
6. David Veit's letter to Rahel Levin, April 23, 1795, quoted by Dieter Henrich in Der Grund im Bewusstsein. Untersuchungen zu Hölderlins Denken (1794-1795) (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1992), p. 332. Shortly thereafter, Rahel Levin was to host a literary salon in Berlin where Mme de Staël was invited during her visit to the Prussian capital in 1804. Cf. Reinhard Lauth, "Mme de Staëls Gespräch mit Fichte im März 1804," in Vernünftige Durchdringung der Wirklichkeit (Neuried: ars una, 1994), p. 251.
7. BWL, GA I/2: 71. See also D. Henrich, Der Grund im Bewusstsein, p. 335.
8. This sentence is taken from a preliminary sketch of the course on "the spirit and the letter". It bears the title, Ich will untersuchen, wodurch Geist vom Buchstaben in der Philosophie ueberhaupt sich unterscheidet, GA, II/3: 303 (my emphasis); cf. 319.
9. Kant, Kritik der Urteilskraft, §48, AK, V, 311.
10. SW, VIII, pp. 287, 290-291. See also SS, SW, IV, p. 355; and Ueber das Wesen des Gelehrten [1805], SW, VI, p. 396.

11. For example see SW, VIII, pp. 289-291. Also see Über das Wesen des Gelehrten, SW VI, p. 396. Concerning this last reference, it must be noted that nature in Fichte's thought is primarily associated with the sublime rather than with beauty--something thoroughly consistent with his doctrine. Indeed, the function of the sublime (the confrontation with the incommensurable in nature) is to return the subject to the self in order that it may realize the greatness of its moral vocation.
12. Schiller's letter to Fichte, June 24, 1795, in J. G. Fichte, Briefwechsel, GA, III/2: 333.
13. Fichte's letter to Schiller, June 27, 1795, GA, III/2: 336; trans. D. Breazeale, Fichte. Early Philosophical Writings (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 392.
14. In the letter with which he announced to Fichte his refusal to publish his article, Schiller draws attention to what he considers to be a confusion of genera: "...a philosophical work can entirely lack aesthetic spirit, and nevertheless be considered as an example of pure presentation of the spirit (Geist). In truth, I do not see how you can, without a salto mortale, alternate from the one to the other, and I understand even less how you manage to find a connection between the spirit in the works of Goethe--whose name could hardly be expected considering the title of your article--and the spirit in Kant's or Leibniz's philosophy." Schiller's letter to Fichte, June 24, 1795, GA III/2: 333.
15. GA, II/3: 323; trans D. Breazeale, Fichte. Early Philosophical Writings, p. 199 . In the 1798 edition of BWL, Fichte will have to respond to a similar objection; see GA, I/2: 142.
16. See Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo, GA, IV/2: 266: "...and thus it follows that the philosopher has to possess an aesthetic sense, i.e., «spirit»,...". Cf. Ueber das Wesen des Gelehrten, SW, VI, pp. 374, 376, 443.

17. Fichte's letter to Schiller, June 27, 1795, GA, III/2: 338.
18. See James Engell, The Creative Imagination. Enlightenment to Romanticism (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), pp. 228-231.
19. "I realize that I am here deviating from the opinion characteristic of even recent modern philosophy -- unless one has correctly understood the hints given by the most brilliant thinker of all, i.e., Kant." GA II/3: 316. See also p. 325. Undoubtedly, in this passage Fichte had in mind the role of Kant's productive imagination in philosophical knowledge, and in knowledge in general, but one might certainly assume that the aim of the project that he intended to publish in Die Horen as a whole--the establishment of an explicit analogy between art and philosophy,--was also of Kantian inspiration.
20. Kant, Kritik der reinen Vernunft, A 837/B 866. See also his Nachricht von der Einrichtung seiner Vorlesungen in dem Winterhalbjahre, von 1765-1766, AK II, p. 306.
21. It is well known that Kant refuses to use the notion of "genius" in the realm of science and of the "investigation of reason". See Kant, Kritik der Urteilskraft, §47, AK V, pp. 310, 318.
22. Kant, Kritik der Urteilskraft, §49, AK V, p. 314.
23. GA II/3: 316. Cf. Kant, Kritik der Urteilskraft, §50, AK V, p. 319.
24. GA II/3: 310. See also "Recension des Aenesidemus", SW, I, p. 8.
25. BWL, GA I/2: 142. See also Sonnenklarer Bericht an das grosse Publicum, über das eigentliche Wesen der neuesten Philosophie [1801], SW, II, pp. 359, 362.
26. SW, VIII, p. 292. This incorporation of the Kantian notion of "common sense" reveals how Fichte proceeds in order to "determine precisely" the themes that were only lightly touched upon by Kant in his third Critique. Already in the preface to the first edition of the

programmatic writing, Fichte claims that the Critique of Judgement requires just such a process of elucidation. See BWL, GA I/2: 110. See also his letter to Schiller, June 27, 1795, GA II/3: 336.

27. See, for instance, Xavier Léon, Fichte et son temps, vol. 1 (Paris: Librairie A. Colin, 1954), p. 349.

28. Cf. George Di Giovanni, "From Jacobi's Philosophical Novel to Fichte's Idealism: Some Comments on the 1798-99 Atheism Dispute," Journal of the History of Philosophy 27 (1989): 75-100.

29. See the chapter entitled "Évidence géométrique et certitude philosophique chez Fichte" in my book *Kant et ses épigones. Le jugement critique en appel* (Paris: Vrin, 1995), pp. 129-189.