

Article

Hölderlin: Between Kant and the Greeks

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Abstract: In *Hyperion, or the Hermit in Greece*, Hölderlin introduces two narrative planes: the description of action and the reflection (or memory) of past events. The transition between these points of view is facilitated by the extensive use of metaphor. This paper examines Hölderlin's use of metaphorical language through Plato's conception of beauty as a link between the sensible and intelligible worlds and Kant's notion of the "aesthetic idea" as an imaginative representation that "occasions much thinking" (*viel zu denken veranlasst*). This analysis shows how both sources constitute the theoretical framework for the construction of a New Mythology, as outlined in *Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus*.

Keywords: Plato; Kant; aesthetic idea; Hölderlin; Schiller; metaphor; New Mythology; Systemprogramm

1. Introduction

One of the earliest written testimonies of the project to draft a literary text (whether in poetic form, prose, or epistolary format) centered on Hyperion, the *Thalia Fragment*, dates back to 1794.¹ At that time, Hölderlin's primary "scientific" (*wissenschaftlich*) pursuits were "Kantian philosophy and the Greeks" (*die Kantische Philosophie und die Griechen*).² More specifically, what interested Hölderlin was becoming familiar with "the aesthetic part of critical philosophy" (*dem ästhetischen Theile der kritischen Philosophie*).³ In a letter from the same year, dated a few months after the former, Hölderlin provides more detail about his primary line of research and highlights the issue of aesthetic ideas as the commonality between Kant and Plato:

Vielleicht kann ich Dir einen Aufsatz über die ästhetischen Ideen schicken; weil er als ein Kommentar über den Phädrus des Plato gelten kann, und eine Stelle desselben mein ausdrücklicher Text ist, so wär' er vielleicht für Konz brauchbar. Im Grunde soll er eine Analyse des Schönen und Erhabenen enthalten, nach welcher die Kantische vereinfacht, und von der andern Seite vielseitiger wird, wie es schon Schiller zum Theil in s. Schrift über Anmuth und Würde gethan hat, der aber doch auch einen Schritt weniger über die Kantische Gränzlinie gewagt hat, als er nach meiner Meinung hätte wagen sollen. Lächle nicht! Ich kann irren; aber ich habe geprüft, und lange und mit Anstrengung geprüft.⁴

Perhaps I can send you an essay on aesthetic ideas; as it could be considered a commentary on Plato's *Phaedrus*, and since a passage from it is my explicit text, it might be useful for Konz. Essentially, it is meant to be an analysis of the beautiful and the sublime, in which the Kantian perspective is simplified on one hand and made more versatile on the other, as Schiller has already partially done in his work *On Grace and Dignity*. However, Schiller dared one step less beyond the



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Kantian boundary than, in my opinion, he should have. Don't laugh! I may be wrong; but I have examined it, and for a long time, and with effort.

Although this essay was never completed, the sources mentioned in this letter are crucial for clarifying the theoretical foundations on which Hölderlin bases his literary writing. It is therefore necessary to make explicit Hölderlin's reception of Plato's and Kant's aesthetic reflections, which involve crossing the "Kantian boundary" (*Kantische Gränzlinie*) and imply a critical appropriation of the theoretical movements operated by Schiller in his reception of Kant's philosophy.

To demonstrate these influences, the text is structured as follows: (a) first, it analyzes the main theses presented by Plato in the *Phaedrus* fragment mentioned by Hölderlin (Section 2); (b) it expounds the Kantian notion of the aesthetic idea, emphasizing its connections with the Platonic reflection on beauty (Section 3); (c) it justifies in what sense Hölderlin's appropriation of both authors implies both simplifying the Kantian analysis of the beautiful and the sublime and going a step beyond Kant and Schiller (Section 4); (d) finally, it shows how these theoretical assumptions allow for the explanation of the project of a New Mythology that appears in the fragment known as *Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus* (Section 5).

2. Hölderlin and the Greeks

One of the cornerstones of Hölderlin's aesthetic reflection is Plato's philosophy. The main mature dialogues in which the Greek thinker addresses beauty are *The Symposium* and *Phaedrus*. The resonances of the first dialogue in the final version of *Hyperion, or the Hermit in Greece* (1797 and 1799) are quite evident: the fall (the loss of the happy innocence of childhood), the character of Diotima, the importance of friendship, love understood as a desire for reconciliation with our original unitary nature, the recollective or anamnestic structure of the letters Hyperion sends to Bellarmin (Henrich 1992a, p. 512 ff.). The influence of *Phaedrus* on Hölderlin's thought is evident in the careful consideration of Plato's reflections on the nature of ideas, to the point of being able to identify precisely the specific passage of the dialogue referenced in the letter to Neuffer dated 10 October 1794.⁵

The Platonic passage Hölderlin comments on must be framed within the context of an apology or praise of love (*Eros*), countering the two preceding condemnatory speeches, a palinode that presents this deity as a source of the greatest blessings (244a). Although there is a certain type of madness in amorous feelings, not all madness should be considered harmful. Plato describes four beneficial types of "possession" or "divine madness": that which fosters prophetic art (as in the case of the Sibyl), divinatory practices (like the priestesses of the temple of Delphi), poetic inspiration, and amorous rapture. The latter two are particularly relevant for understanding Hölderlin's thought.

For Plato, poetic inspiration is of divine origin, and its product, poetry, has an educational function for future generations (245a-b). Expressed in the terms of Schiller, Hölderlin, and the *Älteste Systemprogramm*, it makes sense to speak of the aesthetic education of humanity, and poetry must play an essential role. Both poetry and amorous rapture are mediated by the experience of beauty, which acts as a bridge between the diversity of the sensible and the unity of the intelligible. The perception of the idea implies that the soul "must understand a general conception formed by collecting into a unity by means of reason the many perceptions of the senses" (249b-c; Plato 1982, p. 481). This process involves the recollection of what the soul already knows because it has contemplated "when it journeyed with God and, lifting its vision above the things which we now say exist, rose up into real being" (249c; Plato 1982, p. 481). In other words, the contemplation of ideas consists of a process of reminiscence that only occurs in "the mind of the philosopher" (ibidem) and brings us closer to what is divine in us, allowing us to feel full of divinity or

“enthused”. This enthusiasm involves a “form of madness” or “mania” that arises “when he sees the beauty on earth [and], remembering the true beauty, feels his wings growing and longs to stretch them for an upward flight” (249d; Plato 1982, p. 483). Among all forms of madness, the one arising from love for beauty is the best, and the person experiencing it is called a “lover”. For this reason, the experience of love constitutes a form of knowledge (a central topic in both *The Symposium* and *Hyperion*). It is important to note that the soul has already contemplated true reality before forgetting it due to its contact with the body, existing without being marked “by this which we carry about with us and call the body, in which we are imprisoned like an oyster in its shell” (250c; Plato 1982, p. 485). The experience of beauty acts as a signal or reminder of this communion with the intelligible. What characterizes beauty is its radiance, its light, which allows us to glimpse the region of the supersensible through our most refined sense, sight. Among the various ideas, beauty is the one whose nature essentially requires sensible manifestation (250d-e).

With Plato, Hölderlin understands that the experience of beauty enables the transition from the sensible to the intelligible and that this beauty can be found both in the contemplation of nature and in the desire for another’s body—whether in the sentiment of friendship (in the Greek sense of camaraderie, leading to political action) or in the experience of love.⁶ All these themes constitute the pillars of the *Hyperion* project and are symbolized in its main protagonists: Alabanda (friendship), Diotima (love), and Nature itself (cf. Cortés 1996, p. 84 ff.). This mediating function of beauty is clearly perceived in the following fragment from the Preface to the *Thalia Fragment*:

Wir hätten auch keine Ahndung von jenem unendlichen Frieden, von jenem Seyn, im einzigen Sinne des Worts, wir strebten gar nicht, die Natur mit uns zu vereinigen, wir dächten und wir handelten nicht, es wäre überhaupt gar nichts, (für uns) wir wären selbst nichts, (für uns) wenn nicht dennoch jene unendliche Vereinigung, jenes Seyn, im einzigen Sinne des Worts vorhanden wäre. Es ist vorhanden—als Schönheit; es wartet, um mit Hyperion zu reden, ein neues Reich auf uns, wo die Schönheit Königin ist.—Ich glaube, wir werden am Ende alle sagen: heiliger Plato, vergieb! man hat schwer an dir gesündigt.⁷

We would have no insight of that infinite peace, of that being in the only sense of the word; we would not strive to unite nature with ourselves; we would neither think nor act; there would be nothing at all (for us); we ourselves would be nothing (for us) if that infinite union, that being in the only sense of the word, did not exist. But it does exist—as beauty. It awaits, to speak with Hyperion, a new kingdom where beauty reigns as queen.—I believe, in the end, we will all say: Holy Plato, forgive us! Much sin has been committed against you.

And before moving to the next section, one final consideration regarding *Phaedrus*. In the passage referenced in Hölderlin’s letter to Neuffer, Plato introduces the famous Chariot Allegory. Beyond its specific development, what interests us is Plato’s appeal to the necessity of using myths to speak of that which is divine (246a). That is to say, mythical language, i.e., the use of comparisons and metaphors referring to sensible objects (like the chariot, the charioteer, horses, and wings) is characteristic of human discourse when it attempts to speak (sensible rendering) of supersensible objects (such as, for example, the human soul). As we will demonstrate below, this idea is echoed in the Kantian concept of “symbolic presentation” (*symbolische Darstellung*).⁸

3. Hölderlin and Kant

As noted above, the experience of beauty enables the transition from the diversity of the sensible to the unity of the intelligible. However, for Plato, this transition toward the

intelligible aims at the knowledge of the Idea of the Good. That is, the experience of beauty is intimately marked by the ethical demands of the Platonic system. This relationship between beauty and morality is also found in the reflections developed by Kant in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790), although in Hölderlin's approach, the Kantian analysis of beauty and the sublime is "simplified" (*vereinfacht*) and simultaneously endowed with greater philosophical repercussions (*vielseitiger wird*), which, as we shall see, involves morally grounding the aesthetic domain by going a step further *pace Schiller* than Kant's transcendental system allowed.

For Kant, the term "idea" refers to those representations of reason that, in a sense similar to Plato's, are characterized by being beyond all possible experience, that is, beyond any reference to sensibility. Unlike understanding, which unifies the diversity of what is given in intuition by providing partial syntheses that are determined in judgments of experience, reason is the faculty that demands the unconditioned regarding any given condition. It is this tendency toward the unconditioned, both inevitable and unattainable, that leads us into contradictions and illusions of knowledge, which the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781/1787) seeks to correct through an analysis of the origin, extent, and limits of our knowledge. In this sense, for Kant, an idea is "a concept for which no intuition (representation of the imagination) can be adequate" ["ein Begriff ist, dem keine Anschauung (Vorstellung der Einbildungskraft) adäquat sein kann"] [KU, §49 (Ak, V, 314) (Kant 2000, p. 192)].

However, there exists another type of representation that exhibits an intuition incapable of being subsumed under any concept, "aesthetic ideas" (*ästhetische Ideen*), which constitute the "counterpart" (*Gegenstück, Pendant*) to the ideas of reason (*Ibidem*). Faced with these representations of the imagination, the understanding seeks a unitary representation under which to subsume them. Unable to do so, a process begins whereby the faculty of concepts is driven to produce new ones, none of which exhausts what the imagination presents to us. For this reason, Kant asserts that aesthetic ideas are representations of the imagination that "occasion much thinking" ("*viel zu denken veranlassen*") and "consequently, no language fully attains or can make intelligible" ("*die folglich keine Sprache völlig erreicht und verständlich machen kann*") (*Ibidem*).⁹ They can be called "ideas" not only because no concept is entirely adequate but also because, thanks to the productive capacity of the imagination, they are capable of going beyond what is directly shown to the senses and "creating another nature" from the one that actually exists.¹⁰

The productive or "poetic function" (*dichtende Funktion*) of the imagination is exercised in transforming the regular course of nature (which is subject to the laws of association of reproductive imagination), producing representations in relation to which no concept can be entirely adequate. This allows the spirit to "linger" (*sich verweilen*) in the contemplation of what is given. The irresolvable nature of this process reveals the free harmonic play between the imagination and understanding, accompanied by a feeling of pleasure that underlies the judgment of taste. Additionally, the impossibility of concluding one's reflection allows us to grasp our own activity, the "vivifying principle of our mind" ("*das belebende Prinzip im Gemüte*"), that is, the "spirit" (*Geist*), which Kant defines in its aesthetic sense as "the faculty for the presentation of aesthetic ideas" ("*das Vermögen der Darstellung ästhetischer Ideen*"). (*Ibidem*) For this reason, in the exposition of aesthetic ideas, we find an occasion to perceive the "floating" (*Schweben*) of our productive imagination before its concretion into neither the theoretical nor the practical activity.¹¹

For Kant, both natural and artistic beauty express aesthetic ideas [KU, §51 (Ak, V, 320) (Kant 2000, p. 197)]. The poet's role consists of providing these representations of the imagination "that occasion much thinking," since "it is really the art of poetry in which the faculty of aesthetic ideas can reveal itself in its full measure" ("*es ist eigentlich die*

Dichtkunst, in welcher sich das Vermögen ästhetischer Ideen in seinem ganzen Maße zeigen kann").¹² This task is accomplished through "supplementary representations of the imagination" ("*Nebenvorstellungen der Einbildungskraft*") that "express only the implications connected with it and its affinity with others" ("die damit verknüpften Folgen und die Verwandtschaft desselben mit andern ausdrücken"), what Kant calls "aesthetic attributes" (*ästhetische Attribute*) (*Ibidem*):¹³

Die schöne Kunst aber tut dieses nicht allein in der Malerei oder Bildhauerkunst (wo der Namen der Attribute gewöhnlich gebraucht wird); sondern die Dichtkunst und Beredsamkeit nehmen den Geist, der ihre Werke belebt, auch lediglich von den ästhetischen Attributen der Gegenstände her, welche den logischen zur Seite gehen, und der Einbildungskraft einen Schwung geben, mehr dabei, obzwar auf unentwickelte Art, zu denken, als sich in einem Begriffe, mithin in einem bestimmten Sprachausdrucke, zusammenfassen läßt.

[KU, §49 (Ak, V, 315 ff.) (Kant 2000, pp. 193–94)]

Beautiful art, however, does this not only in painting or sculpture (where the names of the attributes are commonly used); rather, poetry and oratory also derive the spirit which animates their works solely from the aesthetic attributes of the objects, which go alongside the logical ones, and give the imagination an impetus to think more, although in an undeveloped way, than can be comprehended in a concept, and hence in a determinate linguistic expression.

If we analyze the examples Kant offers in the cited passage, we can observe at least two points: (a) First, they are examples of the use of comparison (and, by extension, metaphorical language): the comparison between the serene acceptance of death and the serenity of a summer sunset, or the peace emanating from virtue, compared to the peace of a sunrise [KU, §49 (Ak, V, 314) (Kant 2000, p. 193)]. Kant also calls these metaphors "symbolic presentations", understood as indirect sensibilizations (mediated by analogy) of the realm of the supersensible. (b) There is a predominance of examples that make sensible theological–moral ideas: the kingdom of the blessed, the kingdom of hell, eternity, creation, death, envy, and all vices, love, and glory.¹⁴ That is, in the aesthetic domain, there can be a symbolic or indirect presentation of the moral supersensible, mediated by analogy and lacking constitutive epistemological value.

For Kant, the moral domain is indirectly presented both in the experience of beauty and the sublime. The power of judgment of the finite rational being presupposes the possibility of apprehending any given diversity as a unity functioning as if nature had been arranged in accordance with the operational demands of our representative faculties [cf. EEKU (Ak, XX, 202) (Kant 2000, p. 8)]. Specifically, in every judgment of taste, the power of judgment operates according to the idea of a "formal technique of nature" (*formale Technik der Natur*), through which we conceive the beautiful object as if it had been produced to provoke a feeling of pleasure in us [cf. EEKU (Ak, XX, 232) (Kant 2000, pp. 33–34)]. The power of judgment thus contains a reference to the idea of a supersensible substratum of nature, within and outside of us, as an explanatory principle of both the harmonious functioning of the finite rational being's cognitive faculties and nature's conformity to them [cf. KU, §59 (Ak, V, 353) (Kant 2000, p. 227)]. Since the "purposiveness" (*Zweckmäßigkeit*) of nature in the judgment of beauty cannot be associated with any specific end (as this conformity could be explained mechanically), the finite rational being tends to seek it in itself, finding it in what constitutes the "ultimate end" (*letzter Zweck*) of its existence, i.e., its inherent "moral determination" (*moralische Bestimmung*) [cf. KU, §42 (Ak, V, 301) (Kant 2000, p. 181)]. Thus, the pleasure underlying every judgment of taste is associated with an (intellectual) interest that can be connected with the domain of morality, insofar as

the “sign” (*Wink*) that nature seems to give us through beautiful forms is interpreted as the “trace” (*Spur*) of nature’s arrangement in line with the moral determination within us. This legitimizes the expectation of the “realization” (*Verwirklichung*) of moral ideas through the exercise of our freedom [cf. KU, §42 (Ak, V, 300) (Kant 2000, p. 180)]. In this sense, “the beautiful is the symbol of the morally good” (“das Schöne ist das Symbol des Sittlich-Guten”) [KU, §59 (Ak, V, 353) (Kant 2000, p. 227)]. The power of judgment thus contains a reference to the idea of the supersensible in general, as a principle enabling us to think of the “correspondence” (*Übereinstimmung*) between nature and the purposes of freedom: [cf. KU, §57 (Ak, V, 346) (Kant 2000, p. 220)] it provides a “moral image of the world,” that is, a conception of nature that represents it as hospitable or receptive to the realization of our moral purposes.¹⁵ However, as will be developed in the next section, this hospitable character does not imply the necessary realization of our moral ends, for which the free activity of the subject is required. In the terms of the *Älteste Systemprogramm*, “only that which is an object of freedom can be named an idea” (“Nur was Gegenstand der Freiheit ist, heißt Idee”). [*Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus* (StA 4, 297)].

Thus, through the sublime object, the idea of freedom is also indirectly presented. The feeling of the sublime reveals the inadequacy between our representative faculties and that which presents itself in our intuition, whether due to the irresistible character of its force (dynamic sublime) or the incapacity of our imagination in its effort to make sensible the idea of totality demanded by reason (mathematical sublime). It is precisely in the awareness of the “contrapurposive” (*zweckwidrig*) disposition of the representation of an object concerning our faculties that the finite rational being perceives the mutual conformity between imagination, in its capacity to indefinitely continue the apprehension of what is presented in intuition, and reason as the faculty demanding absolute totality in the series of conditions for any given condition. The sublime object thus constitutes that “which even to be able to think of demonstrates a faculty of the mind that surpasses every measure of the senses” (“was auch nur denken zu können ein Vermögen des Gemüts beweiset, das jeden Maßstab der Sinne übertrifft”) [KU, §25 (Ak, V, 250) (Kant 2000, p. 134)]. And, given that this indication of independence from what originates in the senses is analogous to the capacity of the finite rational being to determine the will to act according to its own principles, the representation of a sublime object indirectly exposes the idea of freedom.¹⁶

In conclusion, in the aesthetic domain (both in natural beauty and in the experience of the sublime), Kant finds a symbolic or indirect presentation of the moral supersensible domain, a sensibilization mediated by analogy and lacking constitutive value. However, the fact that the relationship between the two domains is merely analogical implies that a strict differentiation between aesthetics and morality must be established [cf. KU, §57 (Ak, V, 342 ff.) (Kant 2000, pp. 217–28)]—a boundary that Schiller timidly at first, and Hölderlin decisively later, will transcend.

4. Hölderlin and Schiller

Hölderlin’s aesthetic reflections involve a simplification of Kant’s analysis of the beautiful and the sublime, as the author of *Hyperion* seeks to ground morally the entire aesthetic domain and, in particular, artistic beauty. The goal is for the “purposiveness without an end” (*Zweckmäßigkeit ohne Zweck*) in the harmonious play of our faculties to find its translation into the world through the spontaneous action of the rational subject, that is, the creation of “a new kingdom [...] where beauty is queen” (“ein neues Reich [...] wo die Schönheit Königin ist”) [*Preface to the Penultimate Version of Hyperion* (StA 3, 237)]. To express it in the terms of the *Älteste Systemprogramm*, “The first idea is, of course, the representation of *myself* as an absolutely free being. With the free, self-conscious being, an entire *world* arises—from nothing—the only true and conceivable *creation from nothing*” (“Die erste Idee

ist natürlich die Vorstellung *von mir selbst* als einem absolut freien Wesen. Mit dem freien, selbstbewußten Wesen tritt zugleich eine ganze *Welt*—aus dem Nichts hervor—die einzig wahre und gedenkbare *Schöpfung aus Nichts*“) [*Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus* (StA 4, 297)].

This idea goes beyond Kant, as the conformity of action to our practical ends is strictly different from the purposiveness proper to aesthetic pleasure [cf. KU Einleitung IV (Ak, V, 181) (Kant 2000, p. 68)]. Moreover, this Hölderlinian reinterpretation requires expanding Kant’s conception of the sublime into the realm of artistic beauty: the experience of the sublime is accompanied by a vibration of the spirit, which Hölderlin equates with the “animation” (*Belebung*) felt in the production of aesthetic ideas. Thus, the reference to the moral determination of humanity provided by the feeling of the sublime can also be extended to artistic beauty (Strack 1976, p. 122 ff.). This simplification of the relationship between the beautiful and the sublime is not yet present in Schiller, who continues to maintain a distinction between the concepts of “grace” (*Anmut*) and “dignity” (*Würde*).¹⁷ Furthermore, for Hölderlin, it is possible to unify the aesthetic and practical domains, as both can be traced back to the same “selbst-activity” (*Selbsttätigkeit*) of the subject.

Hölderlin criticizes Schiller for not being bold enough in crossing the boundary set by Kant, a transgression tied to the possibility of granting constitutive status to aesthetic experience, which rejects any characterization of beauty in terms of “play” (*Spiel*) or “appearance” (*Schein*).¹⁸ As a producer of a beautiful world, aesthetic experience approaches the proscribed notion of an intellectual intuition:

Das Mißfallen an mir selbst und dem was mich umgiebt hat mich in die Abstraction hineingetrieben; ich suche mir die Idee eines unendlichen Progresses der Philosophie zu entwickeln, ich suche zu zeigen, daß die unnachlässliche Forderung, die an jedes System gemacht werden muß, die Vereinigung des Subjects und Objects in einem absoluten—Ich oder wie man es nennen will—zwar ästhetisch, in der intellectualen Anschauung, theoretisch aber nur durch eine unendliche Annäherung möglich ist, wie die Annäherung des Quadrats zum Zirkel, und daß, in ein System des Denkens zu realisiren, eine Unsterblichkeit eben so nothwendig ist, als sie es ist für ein System des Handelns. Ich glaube, dadurch beweisen zu können, in wie ferne die Skeptiker recht haben, und in wie ferne nicht.¹⁹

The dissatisfaction with myself and with what surrounds me has driven me into abstraction; I seek to develop the idea of an infinite progression in philosophy, to show that the unrelenting demand that must be made of every system—the unification of subject and object in an absolute, whether one calls it the I or by another name—is possible aesthetically, in intellectual intuition, but theoretically only through an infinite approximation, like the approximation of the square to the circle. I also aim to demonstrate that, in order to realize this in a system of thought, immortality is just as necessary as it is for a system of action. I believe this allows me to prove to what extent the skeptics are correct, and to what extent they are not.

Thus, it is evident that unification does not entirely occur in the theoretical domain, as strictly cognitive aspirations lead to an infinite approximation of the Absolute, which, being never fully attained, justifies skeptical positions. However, this impossibility is not immutable. The path to unification is found aesthetically, once the creative character of poetic art is recognized. This reinterpretation of beauty allows the Platonic erotic impulse to be united with the active nature of Kantian moral rationality, understood as a “striving” (*Streben*) to realize the demands of the moral law.²⁰ Schiller’s still insufficient recognition of

this productive condition leads Hölderlin to conceive of his epistolary novel project as an update of the *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1795). This is expressed in a letter to Niethammer, where he revisits one of the concepts central to the Fichte–Schiller controversy over the epistemic value of aesthetic experience, namely, the notion of “aesthetic sense” (*ästhetischer Sinn*):

In den philosophischen Briefen will ich das Prinzip finden, das mir die Trennungen, in denen wir denken und existieren, erklärt, das aber auch vermögend ist, den Widerstreit verschwinden zu machen, den Widerstreit zwischen dem Subject und dem Object, zwischen unserem Selbst und der Welt, ja auch zwischen Vernunft und Offenbarung,—theoretisch, in intellectualischer Anschauung, ohne daß unsere praktische Vernunft zu Hilfe kommen müßte. Wir bedürfen dafür ästhetischen Sinn, und ich werde meine philosophischen Briefe »Neue Briefe über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen« nennen. Auch werde ich darin von der Philosophie auf Poesie und Religion kommen.²¹

In the Philosophical Letters, I aim to find the principle that explains to me the divisions in which we think and exist, but which is also capable of dissolving the conflict—the conflict between subject and object, between our self and the world, and even between reason and revelation—theoretically, in intellectual intuition, without requiring the assistance of our practical reason. For this, we need an aesthetic sense, and I will name my philosophical letters *New Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*. I will also, in them, move from philosophy to poetry and religion.

The aesthetic sense is precisely one of the requirements that the three friends from Tübingen attribute to the true philosopher in the *Älteste Systemprogramm*:

Der Philosoph muß ebensoviel ästhetische Kraft besitzen als der Dichter. Die Menschen ohne ästhetischen Sinn sind unsere Buchstabenphilosophen. Die Philosophie des Geistes ist eine ästhetische Philosophie. Man kann in nichts geistreich sein, selbst über Geschichte kann man nicht geistreich raisonnieren—ohne ästhetischen Sinn.²²

The philosopher, therefore, must possess as much aesthetic strength as the poet. Men without aesthetic sense are our philosophers of the letter. The philosophy of the spirit is an aesthetic philosophy. One cannot be ingenious in anything, not even reason ingeniously about history, without an aesthetic sense.

The Highest Good and beauty might be identified thanks to the transformative action of an individual who is embedded in a community of free beings acting according to moral purposes.²³ The aim is “the reconstruction of the world order”, and the phenomenon of beauty is an indication (or promise) that this reconstruction is possible.²⁴ In *Hyperion*, the importance of the character of Diotima, understood as a priestess of beauty, lies precisely in safeguarding beauty in the world and serving as a promise of future reconciliation [cf. *Hyperion* (StA 3, 100) (Hölderlin 2019, p. 87)]. At this point, we find the link between aesthetics and morality, connected to the project of elaborating a New Mythology present in the *Älteste Systemprogramm*, a project under the aegis of beauty “in the highest Platonic sense” (“in höherem platonischem Sinne”) [*Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus* (StA 4, 298)].

5. The Project of a New Mythology

The understanding of productive imagination as the creator of a new nature that can achieve moral ends, the idea of a “new physics” in the terms of the *Älteste Systemprogramm*,

implies conceiving of this faculty as creating its own object, which in Kantian terminology constitutes an intellectual intuition. This concept is key to the fragment *Urteil und Sein* (1795), where Hölderlin expresses his critical stance toward Fichte's philosophy.²⁵ The "original partition" (*Ur-teilung*) by which the subject–object relationship is instituted through the loss of prereflexive unity allows for the possibility of an absolute foundation, as only that which is lost can be conceived as eventually recoverable. In the words of Hölderlin in the *Preface to the Penultimate Version of Hyperion*,

Die seelige Einigkeit, das Seyn, im einzigen Sinne des Worts, ist für uns verloren und wir mußten es verlieren, wenn wir es erstreben, erringen sollten. Wir reißen uns los vom friedlichen *Hen Kai Pan* der Welt, um es herzustellen, durch uns Selbst. Wir sind zerfallen mit der Natur, und was einst, wie man glauben kann, Eins war, widerstreitet sich jetzt, und Herrschaft und Knechtschaft wechselt auf beiden Seiten. Oft ist uns, als wäre die Welt Alles und wir Nichts, oft aber auch, als wären wir Alles und die Welt nichts. Auch Hyperion theilte sich unter diese beiden Extreme.

Jenen ewigen Widerstreit zwischen unserem Selbst und der Welt zu endigen, den Frieden alles Friedens, der höher ist, denn alle Vernunft, den wiederzubringen, uns mit der Natur zu vereinigen zu Einem unendlichen Ganzen, das ist das Ziel all' unseres Strebens, wir mögen uns darüber verstehen oder nicht.²⁶

The happy concord, being, in the only sense of the word, is lost to us, and we had to lose it if we were to strive to attain it. We violently separate ourselves from the tranquil *Hen Kai Pan* of the world to produce it through ourselves. We have fallen apart from nature, and what was once believed to be One is now in conflict with itself, and mastery and servitude alternate with one another. Often, it seems as if the world were everything and we nothing; but often, it also seems as if we were everything and the world nothing. Hyperion, too, was torn between these two extremes.

Ending this eternal conflict between our self and the world, restoring the peace of all peace, that which surpasses all reason, uniting ourselves with nature in an infinite totality, is the goal of all our striving, whether we understand it or not.

This ultimate ground, or Absolute—"being, in the only sense of the word", as mentioned in *Judgment and Being*, and which would be the object of an intellectual intuition—constitutes Hölderlin's critical response to Fichte's proposal of grounding philosophy in the Absolute I. For Hölderlin, it is through beauty that this unity becomes achievable. The mediating function of aesthetic experience, influenced by Plato, is evident in *Hyperion*:

Ich hab' es Einmal gesehen, das Einzige, das meine Seele suchte, und die Vollendung, die wir über die Sterne hinauf entfernen, die wir hinausschieben bis an's Ende der Zeit, die hab' ich gegenwärtig gefühlt. Es war da, das Höchste, in diesem Kreise der Menschennatur und der Dinge war es da!

Ich frage nicht mehr, wo es sey; es war in der Welt, es kann wiederkehren in ihr, es ist jetzt nur verborgner in ihr. Ich frage nicht mehr, was es sey; ich hab' es gesehen, ich hab' es kennen gelernt.

Oh ihr, die ihr das Höchste und Beste sucht, in der Tiefe des Wissens, im Getümmel des Handelns, im Dunkel der Vergangenheit, im Labyrinth der Zukunft, in den Gräbern oder über den Sternen! wißt ihr seinen Namen? Den Namen deß, das Eins ist und Alles?

Sein Nähme ist Schönheit.

[*Hyperion* (StA 3, 52–53)]

I have seen it once, the one and only that my soul was seeking, and the consummation we project beyond the stars, that we defer until the end of time, I've felt it in the here and now. It was here, the most high, in this cycle of human nature and of things, it was here!

I no longer ask where it is; it was in the world, it can return in the world, it's in the world now, only more hidden. I no longer ask what it is; I've seen it, I've known it.

O you who seek the highest and the best, be it in the depths of knowledge, in the turmoil of action, in the darkness of the past, in the labyrinth of the future, in the graves or above the stars! Do you know its name? The name of what is one and all?

Its name is beauty.

Beauty holds a constitutive status as the producer of a new community through the political–educational function of certain images that must act as symbols of the moral supersensible, i.e., a New Mythology.²⁷ The goal is for certain sensible representations to contribute to the “revolution of ways of thinking and modes of representation” (“Revolution der Gesinnungen und Vorstellungsarten”).²⁸ Moreover, any political action devoid of beauty ends in barbarism and tyranny:

Das erste Kind der göttlichen Schönheit ist die Kunst. So war es bei den Athenern.

Der Schönheit zweite Tochter ist Religion. Religion ist Liebe der Schönheit. Der Weise liebt sie selbst, die Unendliche, die Allumfassende; das Volk liebt ihre Kinder, die Götter, die in mannigfaltigen Gestalten ihm erscheinen. Auch so war's bei den Athenern. Und ohne solche Liebe der Schönheit, ohne solche Religion ist jeder Staat ein dürr Gerippe ohne Leben und Geist, und alles Denken und Thun ein Baum ohne Gipfel, eine Säule, wovon die Krone herabgeschlagen ist [*Hyperion* (StA 3, 79–80) (Hölderlin 2019, p. 68)]

The first child of divine beauty is art. So it was with the Athenians.

Beauty's second daughter is religion. Religion is love of beauty. The wise man loves beauty itself, infinite and all-embracing; the people love its children, the gods, who appear to them in multifarious forms. So it was too with the Athenians. And without such love of beauty, without such religion any state is a shrivelled skeleton without life and spirit, and all thought and deed a tree without a top, a column whose crown has been lopped off.

In Hölderlin's “creative” (*dichtend*) work, this transformation occurs through the elaboration of a network of images, metaphors, and symbols that generally starts from a concrete fact located on the real plane (biographical, historical, or geographical) [terminus a quo] and leads to a transposition onto a mythical or general plane [terminus ad quem]. This structure is characteristic of metaphorical discourse.²⁹

Etymologically, the Greek expression “μεταφορά” (metaphorá) means “passage” or “transition.” The classical reference for the conceptualization of metaphor is found in Aristotle,³⁰ who characterizes it in terms of analogy [cf. *Poetics*, 1457b18–33 (Aristotle 1982, pp. 81–83), and *Rhetoric*, 1405a12 (Aristotle 1975, pp. 355–59)]. Analogy establishes a comparison between two elements based on a shared trait or characteristic: Achilles' bravery and that of a lion, [cf. *Rhetoric*, 1406b20–24 (Aristotle 1975, p. 367)], the blades of a mill, and the citizens of a despotic state [cf. KU, §59 (Ak, V, 352) (Kant 2000, p. 226)]. In fact, metaphor can be understood as a solidified comparison (thus, through reference to

the god Ares, the cup becomes “the shield of Dionysus”) [*Poetics*, 1457b33 (Aristotle 1982, p. 83)]. Beyond this substitutive interpretation of metaphor, which reduces its potential to a decorative or ornamental function (Ricoeur 1975, p. 30), metaphor leads to a plurality of collateral meanings of imagination. These not only allow us to recognize the activity of our spirit in its free play but also enable its use in constituting a new community; that is, they possess a politically transformative educational potential, which constitutes a true aesthetic education.³¹ In the case of *Hyperion*, in which more than 400 metaphors can be found (Vöhler 2009, p. 23), the use of comparison and metaphor enables the protagonist to move from the sphere of action to that of reflection and/or memory (Hayden-Roy 2018). This very same use also allows the reader to be carried along by the literary flow and to have a certain experience of the “floating of the imagination” (*Schweben der Einbildungskraft*).³²

This connection between beauty and metaphorical discourse is explicitly found in *Hyperion*: when the protagonist can no longer perceive beauty in the world, he loses his poetic capacity. That is, he begins naming things by their proper names:

Sonst lag oft, wie das ewigleere Faß der Danaiden, vor meinem Sinne diß
Jahrhundert, und mit verschwenderischer Liebe goß meine Seele sich aus, die
Lücken auszufüllen; nun sah ich keine Lücke mehr, nun drückte mich des Lebens
Langeweile nicht mehr.

Nun sprach ich nimmer zu der Blume, du bist meine Schwester! und zu den
Quellen, wir sind Eines Geschlechts! ich gab nun treulich, wie ein Echo, jedem
Dinge seinen Nahmen.

Wie ein Strom an dürrern Ufern, wo kein Weidenblatt im Wasser sich spiegelt, lief
unverschönert vorüber an mir die Welt. [*Hyperion* (StA 3, 42) (Hölderlin 2019,
pp. 36–37)]

Once this age would often lie before my mind like the eternally empty vessel of
the Danaids, and with prodigal love my soul poured itself out to fill up the holes;
now I saw no more holes, now life’s tedium bore down on me no more.

Now never more did I say to the flower, ‘you’re my sister!’ nor to the springs,
‘we’re of a kind!’ Now, like an echo, I faithfully gave to every thing its name.

Like a stream past arid banks, where no willow-leaf mirrors in the water, the
world untouched by beauty passed me by.

Some examples of these symbolic images can be found in Hölderlin’s use of elements from the world of wine. The fruits of the vineyard (grapes and wine) serve as metaphors for a new community; the need for rain (poems, also symbolized with the image of flowers) to fertilize the earth; the harvest as a moment of joint gathering to collect the fruits of labor; the feast and the meeting with friends to share bread and wine, reinterpreting the Eucharist as a moment of gratitude and remembrance of lived time; the figure of Dionysus as a banner of a new spirituality.³³ References to various regions of his homeland (Stuttgart, Heidelberg) and its rivers (the Rhine, the Main, the Danube) also play a crucial role as symbols of the poet’s life and community. Hölderlin also alludes to historical figures (Empedocles, Kepler, Rousseau) and reinterprets mythological characters morally to serve the construction of this new kingdom of beauty. Another example can be found in the poem “An Herkules” (written between 1796 and 1798), where Hercules, characterized by his tireless struggle against the adversities and trials of fate, acts as a symbol of humanity’s struggle for freedom:

Wenn für deines Schicksals Wogen
Hohe Götterkräfte dich,
Kühner Schwimmer! Auferzogen,

Was erzog dem Siege mich?
 Was berief den Vaterlosen,
 Der in dunkler Halle saß,
 Zu dem Göttlichen und Großen,
 Daß er kühn an dir sich maß [. . .]
 Freundlich nahm des jungen Lebens
 Keines Gärtners Hand sich an,
 Aber kraft des eigenen Strebens
 Blickt und wuchs ich himmelan [“An Herkules” (StA 1.1, 199–200)]³⁴

If by the waves of your destiny,
 exalted divine powers
 raised you, daring swimmer!
 What prepared me for victory?
 What called the orphan,
 seated in the dark hall,
 to the divine and important,
 with which he daringly compares himself? [. . .]
 No gardener gently took
 the young life by the hand,
 but with my own effort
 I grew and gazed toward heaven.

6. Conclusions

In the context of addressing the challenges posed by Kant’s work (the role of the subject in providing a ground for the whole philosophical system, the possibility of a transition between nature and freedom),³⁵ the main concern of Hölderlin’s thought is the search for an element that allows the unification of “the divisions in which we think and exist”.³⁶ Throughout this text, the role played by beauty in these problems has been justified.

However, if we analyze *Hyperion* in its final version, the failed nature of the various attempts at reconciliation presented in the novel becomes evident. Neither friendship with Alabanda, nor love with Diotima, nor identification with Nature (all mediated by beauty) provide the longed-for “peace of all peace”, but rather fleeting moments of unity, whose provisional nature is revealed in the sadness Hyperion feels after each of these encounters. The various experiences of “unity” (*Einheit*) presented (friendship, love, and fusion with Nature) are failed attempts at “unification” (*Vereinigung*) because they do not integrate sadness and disappointment as constitutive elements of existence.³⁷ Hence the necessity for Diotima’s death, as Hölderlin communicates to Susette Gontard in one of his letters.³⁸ The experiences of unity in the novel are insufficient and lead to failure because unification can only occur through the understanding of Nature’s eccentric character, something that does not happen until the end of the text and is accompanied by the mature Hyperion’s change of perspective.³⁹

One of the fundamental metaphors in Hölderlin’s thought is the comparison of human existence with the eccentric orbit of the planets. The expression “eccentric path” (*exzentrische Bahn*) refers to the astronomical semantic field, specifically to Kepler’s elliptical interpretation of planetary motion. The eccentric nature of human life implies its lack of a center, the fact that, unlike the gods, we mortals are not given rest anywhere:

Doch uns ist gegeben,
 Auf keiner Stätte zu ruhn,
 Es schwinden, es fallen

Die leidenden Menschen
 Blindlings von einer
 Stunde zur andern,
 Wie Wasser von Klippe
 Zu Klippe geworfen,
 Jahr lang ins Ungewisse hinab.⁴⁰

But to us it is given
 In no place to rest,
 They dwindle, they fall,
 The suffering mortals
 Blindling from one
 Hour to another,
 Like water from rock
 To rock hurled down,
 Year long into confusion below.

In this poem, the author turns to the image of water cascading down the mountainside—unstoppable, directionless, pausing nowhere—to evoke the wandering existence of the human being, adrift without a clear destination. This downward motion symbolizes the fall that distances humanity from its serene and original *Hen kai Pan*, marking the primordial rupture that gives rise to consciousness and history. It is a painful separation, steeped in disorientation, in which the human being finds herself blind and lost, immersed in the dissonance that defines her journey through the world.

As is well known, *Hyperion* ends with the following words: “so dachte ich, nächstens mehr” (“So I thought. More anon”), [*Hyperion* (StA 3, 160) (Hölderlin 2019, p. 137)] a conclusion that indicates both the mature Hyperion’s change of perspective (“so dachte ich”) and the acknowledgment that life continues beyond his anamnestic narrative (“nächstens mehr”). It is fair to argue that this alludes to the protagonist’s future life as the creator of the new realm of beauty (his “poetic days”).⁴¹ The eccentric nature of human life means that unification cannot be conceived as closure; understanding the intricacies of existence does not lead to the end of suffering (nor to the renunciation of joy), and the novel’s open-ended conclusion signals this.⁴²

The “original partition” (*Ur-teilung*) of consciousness, being constitutive, entails a dissonance regarding ourselves, others, and the world: human beings are essentially decentered with respect to themselves. For this reason, the structure of metaphor is itself a metaphor for the dialectical and productive structure of reality, in which the individual participates.⁴³ Metaphor makes sensible the nature of reality because it presents the “unity of identity and difference” (Zimmer 2010, p. 115), explaining the characterization of beauty in Heraclitean terms at the end of the first part of *Hyperion*: “Ich bin ganz nah an ihnen, sagt’ ich. Das große Wort, das ἐν διαφέρον ἐαυτῷ (das Eine in sich selber unterschiedne) des Heraklit, das konnte nur ein Grieche finden, denn es ist das Wesen der Schönheit, und ehe das gefunden war, gabs keine Philosophie” [“The mighty phrase of Heraclitus, ἐν διαφέρον ἐαυτῷ (the One differentiated in itself), could have been arrived at only by a Greek, for it is the essence of beauty and before that was found, there was no philosophy”] [*Hyperion* (StA 3, 81) (Hölderlin 2019, p. 70)] a reference to Heraclitus already found in Plato’s *Symposium* (187a-b).

That is, in the course of Hölderlin’s philosophical evolution, we witness a processual transformation of the Absolute, where an understanding of it in terms of unity or assimilation (“Ἐν καὶ Πᾶν”) transforms into the idea of an inherently contradictory unity, which divides within itself (ἐν διαφέρον ἐαυτῷ), a being understood as becoming (Bremer 1996–1997, p. 185; Huckle 1992). This is expressed in the final lines of *Hyperion*:

Wie der Zwist der Liebenden, sind die Dissonanzen der Welt. Versöhnung ist
 mitten im Streit und alles Getrennte findet sich wieder.
 Es scheiden und kehren im Herzen die Adern und einiges, ewiges, glühendes
 Leben ist Alles.
 So dacht' ich. Nächstens mehr. [*Hyperion* (StA 3, 160) (Hölderlin 2019, p. 137)].
 The dissonances of the world are like lovers' tiffs. There's reconciliation in the
 middle of strife, and all that's apart comes together again.
 The arteries part and return in the heart and one eternal glowing life is All.
 So I thought. More anon.

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Notes

- ¹ With regard to the various stages in the drafting and composition of *Hyperion*, we find an initial reference during Hölderlin's years of study at the Tübingen Stiftung to a project for writing a “Greek novel” (*griechischer Roman*), of which only brief mentions remain in his letters [Letter to Neuffer, Tübingen, between 21 and 23 July 1793, Nr. 60 (StA 6.1, 86)]. The second version is the *Thalia Fragment* or *Fragment von Hyperion*, published in 1794 in Schiller's journal *Thalia*. From November 1794 onwards, Hölderlin began working on a metrical version of the work, which ultimately developed into a prose version entitled *Hyperions Jugend*. In 1795, Hölderlin wrote the *Vorletzte Fassung* (“Penultimate Version”) of the work, which was published in its definitive form in two parts, in 1797 and 1799, respectively. For an account of the editorial history of the novel, see Ryan (2002, p. 176).
- ² “Ich hoffe dann wieder um so wirksamer mein Tagewerk zu besorgen. Meine eignen Beschäftigungen sind izt ser konzentriert, zum Teil aus freier Neigung, zum Teil, weil doch meine Zeit etwas beschränkt ist. Ich teile mich jezt, was das Wissenschaftliche betrifft, einzig in die Kantische Philosophie und die Griechen, suche wol auch zuweilen etwas aus mir selbst zu produzieren. Durch günstige Zufälle ist mirs möglich gemacht worden, meine Kleinigkeiten in Herders *Briefen für die Humanität*, Schillers *Thalia*, auch Ewalds *Urania* aufzustellen. Gute Gesellschaft hab' ich da gröstenteils” (“Then I hope to attend again to my daily work all the more effectively. My own occupations are now very focused, partly out of free inclination and partly because my time is somewhat limited. At present, as far as scholarly matters are concerned, I devote myself solely to Kantian philosophy and the Greeks, occasionally attempting to produce something of my own. By fortunate circumstances, I have been able to present my minor works in Herder's *Letters for the Humanity*, Schiller's *Thalia*, and also Ewald's *Urania*. I have mostly good company there”); Letter to Breunlin, Völkershäusen, 8 June 1794, Nr. 81 (StA 6.1, 120).
- ³ “Kant und die Griechen sind beinahe meine einzige Lectüre. Mit dem ästhetischen Theile der kritischen Philosophie such' ich vorzüglich vertraut zu werden” (“Kant and the Greeks are almost my only reading. I am striving to become particularly familiar with the aesthetic part of critical philosophy”); Letter to Hegel, Waltershausen-Meiningen, 10 July 1794, Nr. 84 (StA 6.1, 128). The letter begins with a reference to the idea of the “Kingdom of God” (*Reich Gottes!*), a motto shared by the three from Tübingen (Hölderlin, Hegel, and Schelling), whose realization frames the political, aesthetic, philosophical, and religious project of *Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus*. The authorship of this fragment—whether attributable to Hölderlin, Hegel, or Schelling—remains a matter of significant scholarly controversy. This article does not aim to resolve the question of Hölderlin's authorship, nor does it rest its central claims on that attribution. Rather, it argues that the ideas articulated in the *Systemprogramm*—particularly the constitutive function of beauty and the project of constructing a new community—are fundamental to Hölderlin's aesthetic–philosophical enterprise, irrespective of whether he is ultimately responsible for the text's theoretical foundations.

- 4 Letter to Neuffer, Waltershausen-Meiningen, 10 October 1794, Nr. 88 (StA 6.1, 137). Regarding the various interpretations of the meaning of the expression “kantische Grenzlinie”, cf. [Von Bassermann-Jordan \(2007, p. 295, note\)](#). It should be noted that Konz was the name of one of Hölderlin’s professors at the Tübinger Stift, and the director of the publication *Attisches Museum*.
- 5 Contrary to the more restrictive interpretation proposed by Dieter Henrich, who points to passage 249b-250e ([Henrich 1992a, p. 178 ff.](#)), this paper supports Friedrich Strack’s argument to extend the reference to the *Phaedrus* to passages 244a-257b ([Strack 1976, p. 134](#)). In this article, we will not consider the influence of other Platonic dialogues, such as the *Timaeus*, in the development of the *Hyperion* (cf. [Franz 2012, p. 86 ff.](#)).
- 6 The friendship between Hyperion and Alabanda at times approaches a type of homoerotic relationship, similar to that of Achilles and Patroclus in the *Iliad*. This interpretative line of Homer is presented by Plato in *The Symposium* (179e), a key text in the formation of Hölderlin’s thought.
- 7 *Preface to the Penultimate Version of Hyperion* (StA 3, 236–237). The Platonic amorous desire contains a directional component that makes it comparable with the Kantian conception of rationality as activity ([Strack 1976, p. 6](#)). Moreover, it is important to highlight that the unification that appears in beauty would be the result of the free and spontaneous activity of the subject, although it is an endless (*unendliche*) unification.
- 8 KU, §59 (Ak, V, 351) ([Kant 2000, pp. 225–26](#)). Quotations from Kant’s works will follow the edition of the Prussian Academy of Sciences (Ak), indicating the volume number in Roman and the page number in Arabic numerals. In our text, we will use the following abbreviations of Kant’s cited works: KU (*Critique of the Power of Judgment*); EEKU (*First Introduction to the Critique of the Power of Judgment*); Anth (*Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*).
- 9 “Mit einem Worte, die ästhetische Idee ist eine einem gegebenen Begriffe beigeordnete Vorstellung der Einbildungskraft, welche mit einer solchen Mannigfaltigkeit der Teilvorstellungen in dem freien Gebrauche derselben verbunden ist, daß für sie kein Ausdruck, der einen bestimmten Begriff bezeichnet, gefunden werden kann, die also zu einem Begriffe viel Unnennbares hinzu denken läßt, dessen Gefühl die Erkenntnisvermögen belebt und mit der Sprache, als bloßem Buchstaben, Geist verbindet. Die Gemüthskräfte also, deren Vereinigung (in gewissem Verhältnisse) das Genie ausmacht, sind Einbildungskraft und Verstand” (“In a word, the aesthetic idea is a representation of the imagination, associated with a given concept, which is combined with such a manifold of partial representations in the free use of the imagination that no expression designating a determinate concept can be found for it, which therefore allows the addition to a concept of much that is unnameable, the feeling of which animates the cognitive faculties and combines spirit with the mere letter of language. The mental powers, then, whose union (in a certain relation) constitutes genius, are imagination and understanding”); KU, §49 (Ak, V, 316) ([Kant 2000, p. 194](#)). The influence of this Kantian idea can be found in *Hyperions Jugend*, for example, in the statement “wie ein zufällig Wörtchen von ihr eine Welt von Gedanken in mir hervorrief” (A casual word from her [Diotima] sparked a world of thoughts) (StA 3, 221); cf. [Strack \(1976, p. 111\)](#).
- 10 “Die Einbildungskraft (als produktives Erkenntnisvermögen) ist nämlich sehr mächtig in Schaffung gleichsam einer andern Natur, aus dem Stoffe, den ihr die wirkliche gibt. Wir unterhalten uns mit ihr, wo uns die Erfahrung zu alltäglich vorkommt; bilden diese auch wohl um: zwar noch immer nach analogischen Gesetzen, aber doch auch nach Prinzipien, die höher hinauf in der Vernunft liegen” [“The imagination (as a productive cognitive faculty) is, namely, very powerful in creating, as it were, another nature, out of the material which the real one gives it. We entertain ourselves with it when experience seems too mundane to us; we transform the latter, no doubt always in accordance with analogous laws, but also in accordance with principles that lie higher in reason”]; KU, §49 (Ak, V, 314) ([Kant 2000, p. 192](#)).
- 11 Cf. [Martínez Marzosa \(1987, p. 37\)](#). On this topic, within the context of early German Romanticism, particularly Schlegel and Novalis, see [Hühn \(1996a\)](#).
- 12 KU, §49 (Ak, V, 314) ([Kant 2000, pp. 192–23](#)). Regarding the aesthetic use of imagination, see the distinction between productive imagination (*dichtend—produktiv*) and creative imagination (*schöpferisch*) presented in Kant, Anth §28 (Ak, VII, 168 ff.).
- 13 The passage continues as follows: “So ist der Adler Jupiters, mit dem Blitze in den Klauen, ein Attribut des mächtigen Himmelskönigs, und der Pfau der prächtigen Himmelskönigin. Sie stellen nicht wie die *logischen Attribute*, das was in unsern Begriffen von der Erhabenheit und Majestät der Schöpfung liegt, sondern etwas anderes vor, was der Einbildungskraft Anlaß gibt, sich über eine Menge von verwandten Vorstellungen zu verbreiten, die mehr denken lassen, als man in einem durch Worte bestimmten Begriff ausdrücken kann; und geben eine *ästhetische Idee*, die jener Vernunftidee statt logischer Darstellung dient, eigentlich aber um das Gemüt zu beleben, indem sie ihm die Aussicht in ein unabsehliches Feld verwandter Vorstellungen eröffnet” (“Thus Jupiter’s eagle, with the lightning in its claws, is an attribute of the powerful king of heaven, as is the peacock of the splendid queen of heaven. They do not, like *logical attributes*, represent what lies in our concepts of the sublimity and majesty of creation, but something else, which gives the imagination cause to spread itself over a multitude of related representations, which let one think more than one can express in a concept determined by words; and they yield an *aesthetic idea*, which serves that idea of reason instead of logical presentation, although really only to animate the mind by opening up for it the prospect of an immeasurable field of related representations”); KU, §49 (Ak, V, 315) ([Kant 2000, p. 193](#)).

- 14 “Der Dichter wagt es, Vernunftideen von unsichtbaren Wesen, das Reich der Seligen, das Höllenreich, die Ewigkeit, die Schöpfung u. dgl. zu versinnlichen; oder auch das, was zwar Beispiele in der Erfahrung findet, z. B. den Tod, den Neid und alle Laster, imgleichen die Liebe, den Ruhm u. dgl. über die Schranken der Erfahrung hinaus, vermittelt einer Einbildungskraft, die dem Vernunft Vorspiele in Erreichung eines Größten nacheifert, in einer Vollständigkeit sinnlich zu machen, für die sich in der Natur kein Beispiel findet” (“The poet ventures to make sensible rational ideas of invisible beings, the kingdom of the blessed, the kingdom of hell, eternity, creation, etc., as well as to make that of which there are examples in experience, e.g., death, envy, and all sorts of vices, as well as love, fame, etc., sensible beyond the limits of experience, with a completeness that goes beyond anything of which there is an example in nature, by means of an imagination that emulates the precedent of reason in attaining to a maximum”); KU, §49 (Ak, V, 314 ff.) (Kant 2000, pp. 192–93).
- 15 Cf. Henrich (1992b, pp. 3–28). On this subject, see (Mumbrú Mora 2022, pp. 71–89). It is interpreted in these terms the motto that Hölderlin attributes to Kant and includes in the expanded version (1793) of *Hymne an die Schönheit* (1791): “Die Natur in ihren schönen Formen spricht figürlich zu uns, und die Auslegungsgabe ihrer Chifferschrift ist uns im moralischen Gefühl verliehen” (“Nature, in its beautiful forms, speaks figuratively to us, and the ability to interpret its ciphered script is granted to us through moral feeling”) (StA, 1.1, 152).
- 16 The “vibration” (*Erschütterung*) that characterizes the experience of the sublime also indirectly reflects the effect produced by the moral law in us, i.e., the “moral feeling” (*moralisches Gefühl*). On this topic, see (Mumbrú Mora 2022, pp. 81–83).
- 17 “Just as grace is the expression of a beautiful soul, *dignity* is the expression of a noble disposition of mind” (“So wie die Anmut der Ausdruck einer schönen Seele ist, so ist *Würde* der Ausdruck einer erhabenen Gesinnung”); *Über Anmuth und Würde* (NA, XX, 289) (Schiller 1992, p. 370).
- 18 See Hölderlin’s letter to his brother, Homburg, 31 December 1798, and 1 January 1799, Nr. 172 (StA 6.1, 305). In this text, Hölderlin emphasizes the formative character of the fine arts and poetry as creators of community: “Man hat schon so viel gesagt über den Einfluß der schönen Künste auf die Bildung der Menschen, aber es kam immer heraus, als war’ es keinem Ernst damit, und das war natürlich, denn sie dachten nicht, was die Kunst, und besonders die Poesie, ihrer Natur nach, ist. Man hielt sich blos an ihre anspruchlose Außenseite, die freilich von ihrem Wesen unzertrennlich ist, aber nichts weniger, als den ganzen Charakter derselben ausmacht; man nahm sie für Spiel, weil sie in der bescheidenen Gestalt des Spiels erscheint, und so konnte sich auch vernünftiger weise keine andere Wirkung von ihr ergeben, als die des Spiels, nemlich Zerstreung, beinahe das gerade Gegentheil von dem, was sie wirkt, wo sie in ihrer wahren Natur vorhanden ist. Denn alsdann sammelt sich der Mensch bei ihr, und sie giebt ihm Ruhe, nicht die leere, sondern die lebendige Ruhe, wo alle Kräfte regsam sind, und nur wegen ihrer innigen Harmonie nicht als thätig erkannt werden. Sie nähert die Menschen, und bringt sie zusammen, nicht wie das Spiel, wo sie nur dadurch vereinigt sind, daß jeder sich vergißt und die lebendige Eigentümlichkeit von keinem zum Vorschein kömmt” (“Much has already been said about the influence of the fine arts on human development, but it always ends up seeming as though no one takes it seriously—and understandably so, because they do not consider what art, and especially poetry, is by its very nature. People focused solely on its unassuming exterior, which is certainly inseparable from its essence, but is far from constituting its entire character. They regarded it as mere play because it appears in the modest guise of play, and thus, it could reasonably produce no other effect than that of play, namely distraction—almost the exact opposite of what it achieves when present in its true nature. For in its true nature, art gathers the individual within themselves and grants them peace—not an empty peace, but a living calm, where all their powers are active and, due to their profound harmony, are not recognized as active. It brings people closer together, uniting them—not like play, where unity arises only because each person forgets themselves and no one’s living individuality comes to light”).
- 19 Letter to Schiller, Nürtingen bei Stuttgart, 4 September 1795, Nr. 104 (StA 6.1, 181).
- 20 Even natural beauty, unlike Schiller’s characterization in *Anmut und Würde* when defining architectural beauty, does not arise exclusively from the forces of nature but must be achieved through an active effort by the subject. This would be the central thesis of Hölderlin’s text *Über das Gesetz der Freiheit* (cf. Strack 1976, p. 90 ff.).
- 21 Letter to I. Niethammer, Frankfurt am Main, 24 February 1796, Nr. 117 (StA 6.1, 203). This transition from philosophy to poetry and religion is one of the central ideas of the *Älteste Systemprogramm* (StA 4, 298). Hölderlin had already expressed his interest in the idea of an “education of a people” (*Volkserziehung*) in his letter to Hegel on 26 January 1795, Nr. 94 (StA 6.1, 156), where he criticizes Fichte’s excessively subjectivity-focused approach in the *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* (1794).
- 22 *Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus* (StA 4, 298). Here we find the contrast between “spirit” (*Geist*) and “letter” (*Buchstabe*), which underlies the debate on the epistemic status of beauty initiated by Fichte’s text *Ueber Geist und Buchstabe in der Philosophie*, which Schiller refused to publish in *Die Horen*. It is expressed in the terms of the myth of Theuth in Plato’s *Phaedrus*: the danger of writing is that it constitutes dead letters that do not provide us with spirit. Furthermore, as Plato asserts, the use of linguistic signs diminishes memory, something the anamnestic structure of *Hyperion* seeks to avoid: by narrating the course of his life anamnastically, Hyperion attains that “living calm” (*lebendige Ruhe*) through which he understands the dissonant nature of reality and becomes ready to sing it poetically. Regarding this “living calm”, see Hölderlin’s letter to his brother, Homburg, 31 December 1798, and 1 January 1799, Nr. 172 (StA 6.1, 305).

- For Kant, the notion of “purpose” (*Zweck*) implies “the concept of an object insofar as it at the same time contains the ground of the reality of this object” (“der Begriff von einem Objekt, sofern er zugleich den Grund der Wirklichkeit dieses Objekts enthält”); KU, Introduction IV (Ak, V, 180) (Kant 2000, p. 68). In the letter to Hegel dated 26 January 1795, mentioned above, Hölderlin speaks highly of Kantian teleology as that which allows him to overcome all the antinomies of reason.
- The idea of the cosmetic function of philosophical discourse is central to Turró’s work (Turró 2016).
- During the Winter Semester of 1794–95, Hölderlin was deeply influenced by his personal contact with F. Schiller and his attendance at Fichte’s lectures, where Fichte presented both his *Grundlage der Gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* (GWL) and some lessons open to a more general audience: “Fichte is now the soul of Jena. And thank God that he is. I know no other man of such depth and energy of spirit” (“Fichte ist jetzt die Seele von Jena. Und gottlob! daß ers ist. Einen Mann von solcher Tiefe und Energie des Geistes kenn’ ich sonst nicht”); Letter to Christian Neuffer, Jena, November 1794, Nr. 89 (StA 6, 139). For his part, Hegel informed Schelling of news from Jena in January 1795: “Hölderlin writes to me occasionally from Jena, [. . .]; he listens to Fichte and speaks of him with enthusiasm as a titan fighting for humanity, whose sphere of influence will certainly not remain confined within the walls of the lecture hall (“Hölderlin schreibt mir zuweilen aus Jena, [. . .]; er hört Fichte’n und spricht mit Begeisterung von ihm als einem Titanen, der für die Menschheit kämpfe und dessen Wirkungskreis gewiss nicht innerhalb der Wände des Auditoriums bleiben werde”); (StA 7.2, 19). Among the numerous studies dedicated to the text *Urteil und Sein*, cf. Beiser (2008, pp. 387–92); Duque (2001, p. 73); Henrich (Henrich [1965] 1966, pp. 73–96) and Henrich (1992a).
- Preface to the Penultimate Version of Hyperion* (StA 3, 236). The fragment continues by presenting the idea that the return to unity occurs through an “infinite approximation” (*Unendliche Annäherung*), which refers to the constellation of concepts associated with understanding Nature as an “eccentric path” (*exzentrische Bahn*), a notion we will further explore. Moreover, unification is understood as the result of the free and spontaneous activity of the subject, i.e., what is referred to in the *Älteste Systemprogramm* as the “creative spirit” (*schöpferischen Geist*); *Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus* (StA 4, 297).
- Regarding the issue of the New Mythology, the classic text is Frank (1982).
- Letter to Ebel, Frankfurt, 10 January 1797, Nr. 132 (StA 6.1, 229).
- This paper builds upon and, in some ways, extends the ideas developed by Cortés (2021), applying them to Hölderlin’s early poetry to demonstrate how the theoretical assumptions underpinning his creative work have been active at least since 1794.
- Specifically, in books XXI, XXII, and XXIII of the *Poetics* and book III of the *Rhetoric*. In this text, we do not aim to develop a theory of metaphor. Nor will we delve into the intricate relationships that can be established between the concepts of metaphor, allegory, and symbol. Regarding this issue in the context of Romanticism, see Todorov (1977).
- In our view, contemporary mass culture (mainly mainstream music and cinema) represents a possible realization of this idea through the creation of icons, symbols, ways of dressing, etc., that are intersubjectively shared and contribute to a sense of belonging to the same collective.
- Furthermore, the expression “floating of the imagination” (*Schweben der Einbildungskraft*) is itself a metaphor (Hühn 1996a, p. 569), and at the same time, the very nature of metaphor consists in being a flotation itself.
- The interpretation of the figure of Dionysus in Hölderlin’s mature poetry as an image of ‘The Coming God’ (*der kommende Gott*), who is to save us from the night of the gods, i.e., the self-destructive nihilism of analytical reason introduced by the new science, can be found in Frank (1982). Dionysus constitutes the counterimage of Christ: he is a god from the East, a stranger to the city, born of a mortal (Semele, an image of the earth and a symbol of bread) and a god (Bacchus, a symbol of wine), both present in the sacrament of the Eucharist, who is dismembered and resurrected. For an alternative interpretation that seeks to move away from the traditional identification of the figure of Dionysus with Christ, see Gloy (2023).
- On this topic, see Turró (1996). For an alternative reading of this same context of problems, see Martínez Marzoa (1992).
- For a commentary on this poem, cf. Strack (1976, p. 187).
- Letter to I. Niethammer, Frankfurt am Main, 24 February 1796, Nr. 117 (StA 6.1, 203).
- Hyperion* states “Warum erzähl’ ich dir und wiederhole mein Leiden und rege die ruhelose Jugend wieder auf in mir? Ists nicht genug, Einmal das Sterbliche durchwandert zu haben? warum bleib’ ich im Frieden meines Geistes nicht stille? Darum, mein Bellarmin! weil jeder Athemzug des Lebens unserm Herzen werth bleibt, weil alle Verwandlungen der reinen Natur auch mit zu ihrer Schöne gehören. Unsre Seele, wenn sie die sterblichen Erfahrungen ablegt und allein nur lebt in heiliger Ruhe, ist sie nicht, wie ein unbelaubter Baum? wie ein Haupt ohne Loken?” (“Why am I telling you, repeating my pain and stirring up again my restless youth in me? Isn’t it enough to have gone through mortality once? why do I not remain still, in the peace of my spirit? This is why, my Bellarmin! because every breath in life remains dear to the heart, because all changes in pure nature belong equally to her beauty. Our soul, when it casts off its mortal experiences and only lives alone in holy peace, is it not like a leafless tree? like a head without locks?”); *Hyperion* (StA 3, 102ff.) (Hölderlin 2019, p. 89). Michael Franz (2012, pp. 9–17) develops an alternative reading proposal that questions the centrality of the concept of a “Vereinigungsphilosophie” as well as the classical interpretative scheme of Kant–Reinhold–Fichte in understanding the philosophical beginnings of the three friends from Tübingen, in favor of emphasizing the importance of Plato’s thought. From this same perspective, the author analyzes the

intellectual landscape in the German-language studies on the origin and development of German idealism since the innovative research of D. Henrich.

38 Letter to Susette Gontard, Homburg, late October or early November 1799, Nr. 198; Hölderlin (StA 6.1, 370).

39 Regarding this issue and the role of the feeling of gratitude as an existential–psychological disposition in response to the eccentric condition of Nature, see Hühn (1996b), Goldoni (2013), and Mumbrú Mora (2023).

40 *Hyperions Schicksaalslied* (1796–1798) (StA 1.1, 265). It can also be found in *Hyperion* (StA 3, 143) (Hölderlin 2019, p. 123). Michael Franz (2012, p. 95 ff.) presents a reading of the concept of an “exzentrische Bahn” that moves away from Kepler’s influence in favor of a strictly geometric interpretation, based on the reception of Euclid’s *Elements* within Proclus’ Neoplatonism. According to this interpretation, the “exzentrische Bahn” should be understood as describing a spiral (Franz 2012, p. 106 ff.).

41 “Trauernder Jüngling! Bald, bald wirst du glücklicher seyn. Dir ist dein Lorbeer nicht gereift und deine Myrthen verblühten, denn Priester sollst du seyn der göttlichen Natur, und die dichterischen Tage keimen dir schon. O könnt’ ich dich sehn in deiner künftigen Schöne! Lebe wohl!” (“Grieving youth! soon, soon you will be happier. Your laurel failed to ripen and your myrtles faded, for priest you shall be of divine nature, and your poetic days burgeon already. Oh, could I only see you in your future beauty! Farewell”); *Hyperion* (StA 3, 149) (Hölderlin 2019, p. 128).

42 If reconciliation cannot be exclusively conceptual and requires the actual experience of the dissonant nature of existence, it is understandable that Hölderlin would choose a literary format as the channel to convey his response to the original partition of consciousness. The choice of a poetic style implies a critique of any doctrine that is not accompanied by the lived experience that gave rise to it—the Spinozist demand to unite “life and doctrine” (*Leben und Lehre*); Wegenast (1990, p. 36). This idea is expressed by Hölderlin in the letter to Hegel dated 26 January 1795, mentioned above. To put it in Beiser’s terms: “The strengths and weaknesses of a philosophy, Hölderlin believed, could only be lived through and experienced, and not determined through pure reason. Since personal character and spiritual development are the proper subject of drama and the novel, they prove to be the only proper medium to explore and resolve philosophical problems”; Beiser (2008, p. 379).

43 To express it with Novalis: “Der Mensch—Metapher” (“The human being—metaphor”); II, 561 [174]. For an extensive analysis of the thought of F. Schlegel and Novalis, see Caner-Liese (2018).

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