

Chapter Title: Foreword: Ideality in Fragmentation

Chapter Author(s): Rodolphe Gasché

Book Title: Philosophical Fragments

Book Author(s): Friedrich Schlegel

Published by: University of Minnesota Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.com/stable/10.5749/j.ctttsxnm.3>

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



University of Minnesota Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Philosophical Fragments*

JSTOR

# *Foreword*

## *Ideality in Fragmentation*

Rodolphe Gasché

Just as theories of writing, and on the multiplicity of the text, have gained hold in the field of literary studies over the last two decades, so also has the assumption that an inescapable fragmentation has always already gotten the best of the idea of totality associated with the book, the *oeuvre*, the opus, and so on. Undoubtedly, these theories aim at conceptually making sense of a destruction of the book that has not only been under way for some time but also has affected more domains than the merely literary. And yet, it is generally taken for granted that “fragmentation” and “fragmentary writing” capture the energy and the effects of the disruption by writing, the complex of referrals, and the inner multiplicity constitutive of the text denuded in the destruction that is taking place. Whether the very concept of the fragment, as well as its history, is indeed sufficient to describe the *form* of the more significant literary experiments from the late nineteenth century up to the present, as well as to conceptualize the intrinsic difference(s), heterogeneity, plurality, and so forth, of the text, has to my knowledge never been attended to explicitly. What should be obvious is that if the fragment, or rather its notion, is to bring out the radical atotality of writing, or the text, it must be a notion of fragment thoroughly distinct from its (historically) prevailing notion(s). A concept of the fragment that merely emphasizes incompleteness, residualness, detachment, or brokenness will not serve here. A piece struck by incompleteness, a detached piece, a piece left over from a broken whole, or even an erratic piece, is structurally linked with the whole or totality of which it would have been, or of which it has been, a part. Such a fragment is a piece of an ensemble, possible or constituted at one point. It receives its very meaning from that ensemble that it thus posits and presupposes rather than challenges. Yet more often than not, this is the concept of fragment and fragmenta-

tion that one encounters in texts of criticism where reference is made to the disruption of totality by writing and textuality. It is the classical, pre-Romantic concept of the fragment. More promising, therefore, might be the early German Romantic reflections on this notion. Indeed, much of the renewed interest in the writings of Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis is based to a large extent on the premise that the early Romantics' theory and practice of the fragment prefigure the discoveries associated with contemporary theories on writing and textuality. Although the early Romantics' fragment is still indebted to the history of a genre that must be traced back to Montaigne's *Essais*, Pascal's *Pensées*, and the entire tradition of the English and French moralists—it is well established that Friedrich Schlegel introduced the form of the fragment into German literature after the strong impression he received from the publication in 1795 of Chamfort's *Pensées, maximes et anecdotes*—the Romantic fragment is not a *pensée*, maxim, saying, opinion, anecdote, or remark, all of which are marked by only relative incompleteness, and which receive their unity from the subject who has authored them. Although Friedrich Schlegel refers to it as the “Chamfortian form,” the Romantic fragment is, as Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy have shown, “a determinate and deliberate statement, assuming or transfiguring the accidental and involuntary aspects of fragmentation.” The Romantic fragment “aims at fragmentation for its own sake.”<sup>1</sup> Rather than a piece to be understood from the whole of which it would be a remainder, or a broken part, the Romantic fragment is a genre by itself, characterized by a concept of its own. This *concept*, rather than the Romantic fragment's literary, rhetorical, or stylistic form—it is indeed questionable whether the very concept of the Romantic fragment is ever enacted on the level of the signifier—is what shall concern us hereafter.

Before analyzing in some detail what this concept amounts to, it must be noted that the fragments that embody what later came to be known as the Romantic literary ideal were written in an amazingly short period of time (during the two years from 1798 to 1800 that the *Athenaeum* lasted) and are also largely the result of Friedrich Schlegel's obsession with the genre. Against the sometimes overt hostility on the part of the other members of the group, including his own brother, to practice the fragmentary genre, and to publish more fragments in the journal, Friedrich stubbornly maintained the Romantic exigency. It is thanks to this determination by a single person—Friedrich Schlegel and his engrossment with the form in question—that there exists a Romantic genre at all. Deeply personal reasons seem to have motivated him in pursuing this ideal, namely, the difficulty, to which many critics have pointed, in disciplining his intellectual energy. Moreover, a discrepancy between

his creative abilities and his monumental plans added to his developing a habit of jotting down his thoughts at the moment they occurred. As a result, Friedrich Schlegel filled notebook after notebook with “notes written on the spur of the moment.” Indeed, the fragments published between 1798 and 1800—the *Critical Fragments*, the *Athenaeum Fragments*, and the *Ideas*—constitute only a very small part of the ensemble of his attempts to catch his burgeoning thoughts at the moment of their genesis. By the time of his death, approximately 180 notebooks existed, half of which have survived.<sup>2</sup> The Chamfortian genre, with its demand for concise expression, had therefore to become the ideal and most appropriate literary form for fixing (and communicating) the inexorable flow of his thoughts. But this very same excess of thought also, more often than not, prevented Schlegel from fine-tuning his notes in accordance with the form of the fragment. In Maurice Blanchot’s words, the fragments often appear to be for Schlegel “a complacent self-indulgence, rather than the attempt to elaborate a more rigorous mode of writing.”<sup>3</sup> Yet the paradox remains that although Schlegel’s fragments are of uneven value, rarely even distinguishable from maxims, aphorisms, notes, thoughts, opinions, and remarks, they were to become the manifesto of the Romantic exigency. What we have advanced as reasons for Schlegel’s personal predilection for the genre in no way explain that fate. Moreover, the fact that these fragments only rarely conform in style and form to the fragmentary exigency itself makes their success even more intriguing. The question I would like to raise here then concerns an additional reason that would explain the thrust Schlegel’s fragments were to acquire. As I will argue, this other reason lies in Schlegel’s encounter with Kant. More precisely, it is from the recontre between a “characteristic weakness” (Eichner) in Schlegel (i.e., his inability to develop and systematically present his insights, and to carry out his innumerable projects) and Kant’s theory of the transcendental ideas that the exigency or concept of fragmentation was born. It is this encounter that guards writing fragmentarily from becoming the mere reflection of Schlegel’s own discord or disorder and that allows the fragment to have a closure other than the perfect sentence of the aphorism. If the Romantic fragment achieves the task of introducing, in Blanchot’s terms, “a totally new mode of fulfillment (*accomplissement*),”<sup>4</sup> then this becomes rigorously possible only through a cross-fertilization between the Romantics’ practice of writing and the Kantian doctrine, which, as we shall see, deals with the universal conditions of completion.

It is certainly true that the Romantics did not explicitly develop a theory of the fragment. There is no such theory to be found in the pub-

lished fragments, but they contain an ongoing reflection on the very concept of the fragment. In *The Literary Absolute*, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy have argued, in a manner consistent with what Walter Benjamin already suggested in his dissertation, “Der Begriff der Kunstkritik in der deutschen Romantik” (1920), that “although it is not entirely or simply philosophical, romanticism [i.e., the Jena Romanticism] is rigorously comprehensible (or even accessible) only on a philosophical basis, in its proper and in fact unique (in other words, entirely new) articulation with the philosophical.”<sup>5</sup> If I contend that the fragments attempt to elaborate a *concept* of the fragment—a concept that remains clearly discrepant from the literary devices on which the written fragments rely<sup>6</sup>—it is also to make the point that the Romantic fragment is a *philosophical* conception.

With the foregoing references to “Der Begriff der Kunstkritik” and *The Literary Absolute*, I have made it evident from what angle I shall broach the problematic of the Romantic fragment. I shall approach its problematic from a philosophical perspective, armed, as it were, with a thesis that if developed further than I can hope to do here would complement the analyses and findings by Benjamin and the authors of *The Literary Absolute*. Traditionally, Jena Romanticism has been traced back to Fichte’s transcendental philosophy. Benjamin still follows that line of interpretation when he seeks to demarcate the revolutionary conceptions of the early Romantics from Weimar classicism. It is certainly the case that Fichte exercised a decisive influence on the theoreticians of Romanticism. Schlegel’s first notebooks are a clear sign of their preoccupation with Fichte’s thought, and so are Novalis’s studies on Fichte. But however illuminating such derivation of Romanticism from Fichte’s metaphysics may be, it does not allow for a clear recognition of the originality of the position. What is truly new about it can come into view only if Romantic thought is seen to arise, as does Fichte’s metaphysics, from possibilities opened up in Kant’s philosophy. The originality of *The Literary Absolute* has been to argue that rather than merely applying some schemes found in Kant (or for that matter in Fichte), and transforming them in some original fashion, early Romanticism represents—together and in distinction, from Idealism properly speaking, and the thought of Hölderlin—a third, genuinely new philosophical position in the aftermath of critical philosophy. With these two other positions, early Romanticism shares, in spite of all the differences, the “first stages of Idealism,” namely, the task of “completion, in the strongest sense of the word. The goal is to have done with partition and division, with the separation constitutive of history; the goal is to construct, to produce, to effectuate what even at the origin of history was already thought of as a

lost and forever inaccessible ‘Golden Age.’<sup>7</sup> But as we shall see, the originality of the Romantic position consisted in arguing that such completion could always be achieved only in a singular and finite way. It is this paradox around which Romantic theory revolves—according to which the universal can be achieved only in a manner that is each time singular—that led the early Romantics to consider art as a paradigm for thought, and to conceive of philosophy as accomplishing itself as art. Yet although this unique philosophical position arises from possibilities opened up by Kant’s philosophical legacy, neither Benjamin nor the authors of *The Literary Absolute* have tried to clarify what these possibilities are. Benjamin explicitly puts aside any discussion concerning the relation between Romantic and Kantian theories of art, as beyond the scope of his monography,<sup>8</sup> whereas Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy largely assume the reader’s familiarity with these possibilities. I shall develop here the thesis that the Romantic position, and in particular the theory of fragmentation, is understandable (that is, distinguishable in what it philosophically puts forward) only if it is seen to derive, elaborate on, and enact a series of implications that follow from Kant’s reflections on the presentability of ideas.

Before taking up this problematic, I shall characterize the Romantic position in some detail. First, however, this: fragmentation does not exclude systematic intention and exposition. If this is indeed the case, it is not primarily because any reading of the fragments reveals an indisputably coherent system of thought. Nor does the fact that the Romantics practiced continuous genres as well—that is, properly theoretical expositions of their doctrine—explain this link between fragment and system. Fragmentation and systematic intentions are not exclusive for fundamental reasons: a fragment, in the Romantic sense, is the only possible presentation they could conceive of the system. The Romantics’ conception takes place within the horizon of the notion of the system that they inherit and revive through a reflection on its presentability. In the often-quoted *Athenaeum Fragment* 53, Schlegel notes that “it’s equally fatal for the mind to have a system and to have none. It will simply have to decide to combine the two.” If the system is, “according to the way many philosophers think, a regiment of soldiers on parade” (*Athenaeum Fragment* 46), then it is fatal for the mind. Yet without systematic exigency, thought does not live up to its concept and remains stuck with the manifold. In *Literary Notebooks*, Schlegel remarks: “All philosophy that is not systematical is rhapsodic”; in other words, it is an ensemble of unconnected pieces merely stitched together. On the other hand, he continues, “every system is a rhapsody of masses and a mass of rhapsodies.” Now the idea of the system is nothing less than the idea

of totality (“Totality is the systematic idea”). Yet “even the greatest system is merely a fragment.”<sup>9</sup> The inevitable exigency of the system can thus be achieved only in a manner that is fragmentary. But it is nothing less than the system that takes shape in the fragment. By combining system and fragment in this fashion, the Romantics were able to avoid the dogmatic and sclerotic connotations that come with the notion of the system, and to ward off the specter of abstraction associated with system building, while supporting at the same time the traditional demand. This intrinsic relation of system and fragment has the additional meaning that all fragments are systems *in nuce*. In *Athenaeum Fragment* 206 we read: “A fragment, like a miniature work of art, has to be entirely isolated from the surrounding world and be complete in itself like a porcupine.” Fragments are individuals, singular organic totalities, that is, systems in miniature. Indeed, as the *Literary Notebooks* remark, “The more organic something is, the more systematic it is. — The system is not so much a *species* of form as the *essence* of the work itself.” Or: “A system alone is properly a work.”<sup>10</sup> In short, then, the following equation pertains: fragment = system = work = individual. It would thus seem that Schlegel confines the synthetic power of absolute unity to the punctual entities of the fragment alone. In the closed-off individualities of the fragment, unity is achieved in chaos, but at the expense of any systematic relation as the absoluteness, or isolation, of the fragment suggests. A lack of coherence, or of “a-systasy,” as Schelling called it, would characterize the fragmentary universe. But as *Athenaeum Fragment* 242 holds, “All individuals are systems at least in embryo and tendency.” They are the seeds for future systems. Schlegel, indeed, uses the term “project” synonymously with “fragment.” Peter Szondi has noted that “the fragment is conceived as ‘the subjective embryo of a developing object,’ i.e. as preparation of the longed-for synthesis. Rather than the not-yet-achieved, or what has remained a detached piece, the fragment is perceived as anticipation, promise.”<sup>11</sup> The fragmentary universe, however incoherent, is thus made up of entities heavy with potential systems. But these fragments, complete in themselves as individualities, yet incomplete at the same time in that they are only embryos of developing systems — isolated and yet striving at a whole — are not simply without all systematic relation. Even if the fragment is (merely) “the failing expression of totality,” as Manfred Frank has argued, it can be understood as such only “if nonetheless it has its place in the negative frame of a system.”<sup>12</sup> As a matter of fact, does not Schlegel himself suggest that systems are made up entirely of fragments? More important, however, is the following: *Ideas* 48 claims that “every thinking part of an organization should not feel its limits without at the



same time feeling its unity in relation to the whole.” Indeed, if “idea” is for Schlegel another concept for “fragment,” then fragments, like ideas, point “toward the heart of things,” or more precisely, toward the center, toward what orients all individual things (see *Ideas* 155). The fragments thus long for a higher unity, but this higher unity, the “system of fragments,” is itself made up again of “a chain or garland of fragments” (*Athenaeum Fragment* 77). In other words, the higher unity that the fragments long for, and that they contain within themselves as a seed, is only another individuality. Schlegel writes in *Athenaeum Fragment* 242: “Aren’t all systems individuals just as all individuals are systems at least in embryo and tendency?” Consequently, the totality that is sought by the fragment is an always singular totality, a totality that is therefore also necessarily plural, and thus incomplete. To conclude, fragmentation constitutes the properly Romantic vision of the system. It conceives of the absolute under the form of the individual, of totality as being at the same time finite and plural. But this is not yet all: if fragmentation is indeed the Romantic vision of the system, it is because “system” for the Romantics means not “the so-called systematic ordering of an ensemble, but that by which and as which an ensemble holds together . . . and establishes itself for itself in the autonomy of the self-jointure.”<sup>13</sup> With the system, they conceive of the *production* of the whole, of what *makes* an ensemble of pieces a whole or a totality; and this closing upon itself of an ensemble can occur, they hold, only under the form of a work, an individuality—in short, a fragment. The fragment thus captures, as one would say today, the event character of the system, of the interlinkage of the pieces of a whole. If fragmentation is thus the specifically Romantic thought of the system, it is (as will become obvious later on, because the production of totality is thought by them as a self-production) a self-jointure of what makes up a whole. In contradistinction from the Idealist position strictly speaking—Hegel, for instance—according to which the system consists of an ordering totally transparent to itself, the early Romantics think the system through fragmentation, that is, as presenting itself, not in a pure medium of thought and in absolute figurelessness, but as always an individuality, and hence, in principle, multiple. But with these elaborations on the relation between the Romantic fragment and the system—which we engaged in order to show that the genre of fragmentation does not for essential reasons exclude a coherent unity of thought, even though this unity can be achieved only in the form of a fragment—we have also already characterized the Romantic position itself. For the Romantics, the philosophy of the system is an aesthetic philosophy. For them the ideality and absoluteness of the whole, of the totality, are thinkable only in



terms of an individuality, that is, as a sensible, and hence intrinsically plural, unity. For them the question of the presentability (*Darstellung*) of the manifold's gathering into one remains an irreducible question. In this sense, the Romantics are closer to Kant than to the Idealists, with whom they share their theoretical concerns. It is this insistence of the question of the presentation of what unifies that has led them to seek the unity of thought in art. Art, indeed, stands for the irreducibility of presentation. If beauty becomes the unifying idea by which all the Kantian oppositions become sublated, this sublation takes place in the realm of the *Darstellung* itself.<sup>14</sup> It takes place in an aesthetic speculation that yields to become a work of art itself, and in which philosophy accomplishes itself as art. Within the landscape of Idealism in general, the very possibility that the *unifying idea* (of the beautiful) can seek presentation as *beautiful idea*, and that unification hence is always necessarily aesthetic, sensible, and manifold, in other words, fragmentary—this is what constitutes the Romantic vision and demarcates it from the Idealism of Fichte and Hegel, as well as from the poetry of poetry of Hölderlin.

In *The Literary Absolute*, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy hold that although Schlegel had been forced to abandon the term “fragment” by other members of the group, the fragments entitled “Ideas,” published in 1800 in the *Athenaeum*, are engaged, from a philosophical point of view, in a deepening of the concept of the fragment. Indeed, even if the fragments of the *Ideas* are no longer fragments strictly speaking, in that they are not written collectively and have a unifying title, they further deepen, as the authors put it, the idea of the subject, that is, of self-conception and self-production as an interminable process. But what is an idea for Schlegel in the first place? In *Athenaeum Fragment* 121, he writes: “An idea is a concept perfected to the point of irony, an absolute synthesis of absolute antitheses, the continual self-creating interchange of two conflicting thoughts.” In an idea, synthesis of opposites occurs; they lose their individuality and dissolve in it. An idea, therefore, is (in the same way as a work) formed (*gebildet*), “everywhere sharply delimited, but within those limits limitless and inexhaustible” (*Athenaeum Fragment* 297). But the idea is a synthetic concept perfected to the point of irony, Schlegel insists, that is, to refer to the aforementioned *Fragment* once again, a concept that in spite of its faithfulness to itself, and homogeneity, is “nonetheless exalted above itself [*über sich selbst erhaben ist*].” An idea, consequently, continuously transcends the synthesis, or sublation that it achieves. It is destructive of the form of the idea itself as not fully adequate to its concept. An idea that unifies and brings into infinite interchange two absolutely antithetical thoughts is always

only a self-presentation of the idea as such, and must therefore, ironically, destroy its own actualization. If ideas are called “infinite, independent, unceasingly moving, godlike thoughts”—the idea of God being “the Idea of ideas” (*Ideas* 10 and 15)—it is in order to point not only to the continual interchange of what is sublated in the idea but to one infinite strife of the idea to approximate itself, to make idea and its presentation alike. Although Schlegel was a lifelong avid reader of Plato, such an understanding of “idea,” as infinitely inappropriate to its own self-presentation, does not belong to the order of the *proteron te physei*. Nor is the Schlegelian concept of idea to be assimilated with the speculative idea, that is, the idea as the unity of the ideal and the real. As Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy put it, “The idealistic ‘step’ has been effectuated (in the motif of infinitization), but not without a kind of obscure resistance to idealism itself, or more precisely, not without a sort of (quite unexpected) folding back of idealism into Kant, and of the transgression of finitude into the finite itself.”<sup>15</sup> The Romantic notion of the idea is, indeed, more Kantian than Platonic or Idealist; and if between fragment and idea there is a close (or rather, deepening) connection, it is certainly appropriate to inquire, however briefly, into Kant’s theory of the idea.

As Kant readily acknowledges in *Critique of Pure Reason*, his own use of the term “idea”—with which Plato designated “something which not only can never be borrowed from the senses but far surpasses even the concepts of understanding . . . inasmuch as in experience nothing is ever to be met with that is coincident with it”—is dependent on Plato, but only as far as the spirit of Plato’s doctrine of the ideas is concerned. By following Plato’s intentions, rather than certain things he explicitly said about the ideas, Kant, in developing his own concept of the idea, claims to have understood Plato “better than he has understood himself.”<sup>16</sup> But what, then, are ideas in the Kantian sense? In very general terms, they are concepts of reason to which no corresponding object can be given in sensation, and which therefore can only be approximated in an infinite process. Such a dictionary definition, however, does not allow us to grasp the specificity and range of Kant’s concept of idea. It certainly does little to disarm the popular opinion, that however defined, ideas are only ideas, in other words, superfluous and void. To show that ideas in the Kantian sense represent a valid problematic, and indeed, one that flows from Kant’s (and much of the tradition’s) conception that the activities of the mind are primarily judgmental activities, I turn to his discussion of the notion of idea in *Critique of Pure Reason*, more precisely, to “The First Book of the Transcendental Dialectic.”

As Kant's elaborations in the context of the *First Critique* on the formal (i.e., logical) function of reason under the form of the syllogism (*Vernunftschluss*) demonstrate, universal concepts that do not originate in understanding, but that "depend on thought alone," serve as principles (of sorts) to provide unity to the manifold judgmental acts of understanding. Through the syllogism and its universal concepts, reason, or pure thought for that matter, gives a unity to knowledge (i.e., to the manifold of cognitive judgments) that is called "the unity of reason, and which is quite different in kind from any unity that can be accomplished by the understanding" (*CPR*, p. 303). Reason achieves such unification of the manifold of understanding through the a priori synthetic principles and rules that it spontaneously formulates. They represent a knowledge on the basis of concepts alone and that is implied in the very acts of judgments of knowledge. It is the a priori knowledge of the unconditioned, of the whole series of conditions—synthetic knowledge, in short. Kant calls these universal synthetic concepts that accompany all our intellectual efforts to understand phenomena "ideas." As opposed to the pure concepts of understanding, which contain nothing more than "the unity of reflection upon appearances, in so far as appearances must necessarily belong to a possible empirical consciousness," the ideas, or concepts of reason, contain the unconditioned to which all experience is subordinate, yet which itself can never be an object of experience, and which must be obtained by mere reflection on the acts of cognitive judgments. The transcendental concepts of reason—the ideas—are, writes Kant, "none other than the concept[s] of the *totality* of the *conditions* for any given conditioned," that is, the unconditioned or the ground of the synthesis of the conditioned. They are concepts of the "totality in the synthesis of conditions," of the "*allness (universitas)* or totality of the conditions" or, as he also calls it, the *absolute* (*CPR*, p. 316). He writes: "The transcendental concept of reason is directed always solely towards absolute totality in the synthesis of conditions, and never terminates save in what is absolutely, that is, in all relations, unconditioned." Reason, Kant continues, occupies itself with prescribing "to the understanding its direction towards a certain unity of which it has itself no concept, and in such a manner as to unite all the acts of the understanding, in respect of every object, into an *absolute whole*" (*CPR*, p. 318). While Kant had called the concepts of understanding, that is, the forms of all experience, *categories*, he now names the formal elements involved in all inferring by reason, *transcendental ideas*. Whereas categories serve to *understand* phenomena, transcendental ideas that pertain to the knowledge about phenomena serve to make sense of what is understood or known. Concepts of reason, or ideas,

make it possible to *conceive of or comprehend (begreifen)* judgments regarding perceptions. Kant can thus, in the section entitled “The Transcendental Ideas,” advance the following definition of *ideas*:

I understand by idea a necessary concept of reason to which no corresponding object can be given in sense-experience. Thus the pure concepts of reason, now under consideration, are *transcendental ideas*. They are concepts of pure reason, in that they view all knowledge gained in experience as being determined through an absolute totality of conditions. They are not arbitrarily invented; they are imposed by the very nature of reason itself, and therefore stand in necessary relation to the whole employment of understanding. Finally, they are transcendent and overstep the limits of all experience; no object adequate to the transcendental idea can ever be found within experience. (*CPR*, pp. 318–19)

Although this definition is biased to the extent that the frame of the *First Critique* makes it center on the *regulative* use of the ideas for theoretical cognition, the basic features that inform Kant’s elaboration on the same topic in the two other critiques transpire clearly. First, ideas are concepts of reason, of pure thought—in other words, of thought engaged not with determining objects but with the judgmental statements about them. Second, they are *necessary* concepts in that they have an indispensable function to play in the economy of the faculties of the mind, here, for cognition’s extended and consistent employment. Their task is that of “extending the unity of understanding,” a task that, as the role of reason in the syllogism demonstrates, is not only consistent with theoretical understanding, but indispensable to it. Such an attempt to bring conditioned knowledge to completion by deriving it from and subsuming it under the ideas is a task required by “the very nature of human reason” as evidenced in the form of syllogistic inferring (*CPR*, p. 316). Where such completion is not achieved, and the complete system of causes is not established, reason plunges, as Kant writes, “into an abyss of skepticism.”<sup>17</sup>

Although the ideas do not help understanding to gain knowledge of objects, they help such knowledge “receive better and more extensive guidance” (*CPR*, p. 320). They have, in other words, no constitutive, but only a regulative, role to play in the domain of theoretical reason. The definition quoted above also stresses that from the viewpoint of knowing, ideas are transcendent. They cannot become objects of experience, or known. But the fact that they cannot be known in no way pre-

cludes their indispensable regulative use in knowing. In addition, to resist all cognitive apprehension does not mean to resist thinking.

First, ideas can be shown to represent precise concepts, and to be limited in number. In analogy to what he had done with respect to the categories, Kant, in the *First Critique*, deduces the ideas from the various logical forms that characterize the formal employment of reason in the judgment about judgments that is the syllogism. In this analysis of the different forms of inferring, that is, of judging mediately, Kant distinguishes three kinds of inference that yield, indeed, three, and only three classes of principles, or transcendental ideas: “the *first* containing the absolute (unconditioned) *unity* of the *thinking subject*, the *second*, the absolute *unity of the series of the conditions of appearance*, the *third* the absolute *unity of the condition of all objects of thought in general*.” These three classes of ideas exhaust the “unconditioned synthetic unity of all conditions in general” with which pure concepts of reason are concerned (*CPR*, p. 323). The names under which these three kinds of ideas are usually known are freedom, immortality, and God. Although theoretical reason cannot establish any objective reality for these concepts, its own need to extend the function of reason in order to achieve completion shows that these concepts are thinkable without contradiction. These *problematic* concepts are necessary hypothetical concepts for theoretical reason. They are not objects of possible experience, but all experience as experience presupposes them. They lie beyond the boundaries of the sensible, and constitute the “world” of the supersensible. Yet, the very transcendence of the transcendental ideas, or concepts of pure thought, is not an obstacle to their being thought (one may well surmise that they are the thinkable par excellence). But, “I cannot think without a category,” Kant remarks in *The Critique of Practical Reason* (*CPrR*, p. 107); that is, I cannot think without also applying pure concepts of understanding to merely intelligible objects. “To each employment of reason with respect to objects, pure concepts of the understanding (categories) are required, for without them no object can be thought” (*CPrR*, p. 141). However, in serving to think the intelligible and supersensible, the categories are freed of their hold in experience; their pure use is thus theoretically empty. Indeed, since sensible intuition is lacking here, no knowledge of what nonetheless is thought can be expected. Yet although the thinking of the intelligible does not a priori determine its objects, the pure use of the categories with respect to the ideas does not imply that “as mere form(s) of thought,” they would be completely empty and without significance (*Bedeutung*) (*CPrR*, p. 141). On the contrary, in such thinking, *reality* is supplied to these ideas. Reality and intuitive presentation are indeed entirely differ-

ent things. Reality becomes bestowed on noumena by practical reason, that is, by that kind of thinking that applies categories to them independently of the categories' hold in intuitions. In practical reason, Kant writes, one is not concerned with furnishing intuitions for ideas—this is, as seen, impossible—“but only with whether they do have objects or not. This reality is supplied by pure practical reason” (*CPrR*, p. 141). Through practical reason, the idea acquires actuality and concreteness. This is the reason why, in the realm of morality, ideas can themselves play a role that goes far beyond the one that is theirs in the realm of cognition. In the domain of practical reason, ideas have a constitutive function. Kant notes:

Here they become immanent and constitutive, since they are the grounds of the possibility of realizing the necessary object of pure practical reason (the highest good); for otherwise they are transcendent and merely regulative principles of speculative [that is, theoretical] reason, which is charged with the task not of assuming a new object beyond experience but only of approaching perfection in its employment within experience. (*CPrR*, pp. 140–41)

At this point, it is necessary to recall that Kant, in the chapter “On Ideas in General” in the *First Critique*, had determined the ideas as a kind of representation, indeed, as its highest form. Within the genus of representation in general, the idea hovers above representation with consciousness. The latter, we are told, includes subjective perception (sensation) and objective perception (knowledge). Objective perception is either intuitive or conceptual. A concept, however, can be empirical or pure. A pure concept, Kant continues, “in so far as it has its origin in the understanding alone (not in the pure image of sensibility), is called a *notion*. A concept formed from notions and transcending the possibility of experience is an *idea* or concept of reason” (*CPrR*, p. 314). It follows from this that an idea is a representation by a concept of the concepts that serve to represent representation with consciousness. Representation here translates the German *Vorstellung*, a term Kant uses to designate the operation by which the different faculties that constitute the mind bring their respective objects before themselves. Yet when Kant claims that in spite of the impossibility of intuitively representing (and thus knowing) the ideas, they nonetheless play a decisive role in the realm of cognition, or that in the moral realm they acquire an at least partial concretization, he broaches the question of the becoming present of the highest, but intuitively unrepresentable representation that is the



idea. This is the problem of the *presentation*, or *Darstellung* of the idea, and it is rigorously distinct from that of representation. The issue is no longer how to depict, articulate, or illustrate something already present yet resisting adequate discursive or figural expression, but of how something acquires presence—reality, actuality, effectiveness—in the first place. The question of *Darstellung* centers on the coming into presence, or occurring, of the ideas.

This problem is addressed (and solved) in the *Second Critique* in a section entitled “Of the Typic of Pure Practical Judgement.” To fully appraise Kant’s achievement in this part, it is necessary first to indicate how the first two *Critiques* relate to each other. In the history of philosophy it is commonly accepted that the genesis of German Idealism, that is, of post-Kantian thought, is largely the result of the primacy that practical philosophy gains over theoretical thought. From Kant’s *Critique of Practical Reason*, Fichte concluded that the principle of thinking, of reason itself, is moral freedom. Undoubtedly, the very notion of practical reason that Fichte invokes is already an interpretation of what Kant understood by that term.<sup>18</sup> But it is also clear that the way for the ascendancy of practical reason is prepared, if not already effectuated, in Kant’s text of 1788. In the preface to the *Second Critique*, Kant notes that the demonstration that pure reason is actually practical, or what amounts to the same, that transcendental freedom is real, provides “the keystone of the whole architecture of the system of pure reason and even of speculative reason.” Although the concept of freedom, that is, of the entirely self-determining causality of the thinking subject, is at best for theoretical reason, a problematic concept whose objective reality it can never hope to assure, theoretical reason needs this concept “in its use of the concept of causality, for this freedom is required if reason is to rescue itself from the antinomy in which it is inevitably entangled when attempting to think the unconditioned in a causal series” (*CPrR*, p. 3). Even though the postulation of the objective reality of those objects that had only a problematic status in theoretical reason in no way implies that any positive use could be made of those objects for theoretical purposes, this very postulation substantiates the recourse to ideas that theoretical reason has to make in order to overcome its antinomies. Consequently, the inquiry into how ideas are presented—into how they acquire objective reality or practical necessity—is the touchstone on which the system rests. With it the theoretical exigency for merely formal concepts of unity appears to have its substantive ground in the law of morality. It also follows from this that the Kantian problematic of *Darstellung* is an eminently practical problem.

It has been observed that the section called ‘‘Typic’’ parallels the section entitled ‘‘The Schematism of the Pure Concepts of Understanding’’ in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. It is true that both sections play a crucial role in their respective edifices. Kant himself has pointed to the analogical role that they perform. Kant’s theory on schematism served as an answer to the question of how, in a judgment, things as heterogeneous as an intuition and a pure concept of understanding can possibly come together. The need for a theory on typic, by contrast, arises from the difficulty of subsuming particular actions in the sensible world under the law of reason, to which, moreover, no intuition can be adequate. But apart from the fact that this impossibility of providing an adequate intuition for practical rules or concepts makes the problem faced by practical judgment more difficult than that of theoretical judgments where the schemata allow for a mediation of sorts between the sensible and the intelligible, there is perhaps a more decisive dissymmetry between the two theories. Undoubtedly, the question of how pure concepts of understanding—categories—can be applied to intuitions is not without relation to the question of how concepts of reason—ideas—can become the causes of moral action. Between categories and ideas a certain kinship exists. Freed of their anchorage in experience, categories become—as Kant argues in the *Second Critique* with respect to the idea of freedom—ideas of reason. Conversely, one ought to be able to show that when ideas become restricted so as to be able to refer to objects of sense, they have turned into categories. And yet, considering the architectonic of Kantian thinking, one wonders whether perhaps a section in the *First Critique*, on how ideas lend themselves to becoming *formal concepts* of theoretical reasoning and syllogistic inferring, would not have represented the true symmetric counterpart to that presented in ‘‘Typic.’’

I recall that the problem Kant faces in ‘‘Typic’’ is that of how the supersensible idea of freedom, an idea of which no intuition is possible, and which escapes empirical experience, can nevertheless become real, that is, take on sensible existence. In Kant’s own words:

A practical rule of pure reason, as *practical*, concerns the existence of an object, and, as practical *rule* of pure reason, implies necessity with reference to the occurrence of an action; hence it is a practical law, not a natural law because of empirical determining grounds but a law of freedom by which the will is determinable independently of everything empirical and merely through the conception of a law in general and its form. Because of this, and since all instances of possible

actions are only empirical and can belong only to experience and nature, it seems absurd to wish to find a case in the world of sense, and thus standing under the law of nature, which admits the application of a law of freedom to it, and to which we could apply the supersensuous ideal of the morally good, so that the latter could be exhibited *in concreto*. (*CPrR*, p. 70)

And yet even the commonest mind, Kant adds, constantly applies ideas in a practical sense. Thus, the question that necessarily arises is that of the bridge between what is and what ought to be, what is sensuous and what is “merely” ideal. At issue is a third something that could mediate between the morally good—or the law of freedom for which by virtue of its supersensuous nature nothing corresponding in sensuous intuition can be found—and something concrete in the order of sense, or nature. Without this third instance, practical judgments are impossible.

The seemingly hopeless difficulty can, however, be overcome, precisely since

The subsumption under a pure practical law of an action which is possible to me in the world of sense does not concern the possibility of the *action* as an event of the world of sense. This possibility is a matter to be decided by the theoretical use of reason according to the law of causality, a pure concept of the understanding for which reason has a schema in sensuous intuition. The physical causality or the condition under which it occurs belongs among the concepts of nature, whose schema is sketched by the transcendental imagination. (*CPrR*, p. 71)

In a practical judgment, consequently, the question is not one of subsuming an empirical, physical action motivated by the moral principle, under that very law. Only theoretical judgment can deal with events of sense such as concrete actions, and that according to the law of causality. In contrast to physical causality, which becomes established by means of concepts of nature for which imagination provides the mediating schema, “here we are concerned not with the schema of a case occurring according to laws but with the schema (if this word is suitable here) of a law itself, because the determination of the will through law alone and without any other determining ground (and not the action with reference to its consequences) connects the concept of causality to conditions altogether different from those which constitute natural connection” (*CPrR*, p. 71). In other words, what is determined in the practical judgment is whether the will as will yields to the law. The practical judgment concerns the becoming concrete of the ideal law under the form of

the will. Whether such a will as which the supersensuous idea of freedom takes shape truly leads to empirical, physical actions according to the law, is an altogether different issue, for whose causality theoretical reason (with its schemata) alone is responsible. Practical judgment is solely concerned with the becoming actual, concrete, real of the idea of freedom as will. This is what Kant means when he claims that in the case of the practical judgment, he is concerned with the schema of the law itself. Let us recall that schemata mediate between concepts of understanding and sense perceptions by presenting the a priori concepts' unifying function in terms of the pure forms of sensibility, that is, through temporalization (successive presentation) and spatialization (simultaneous presentation). Without singularizing the concepts of understanding as images would do, the *pure images* of the schemata, as Kant also calls them, provide the unifying concepts with a *pure* sensible form. However, since the idea of a causality that is not sensuously conditioned is a supersensuous concept, "no intuition and hence no schema can be supplied for the purpose of applying it *in concreto*." With the possibility of intuitive presentation being excluded, the only other possibility left is to present such an idea through understanding, that is, the faculty that ordinarily provides the laws for the empirical manifold. Kant writes: "Thus the moral law has no other cognitive faculty to mediate its application to objects of nature than the understanding (not the imagination); and the understanding can supply to an idea of reason not a schema of sensibility, but a law" (*CPrR*, p. 71). Hence, in contrast to what happens in theoretical judgment, where a priori intuitions of the categories permit sense-data to be subsumed under intelligible rules or laws, concepts of understanding, or laws, serve in practical judgment to explain the possible application of the morally good to the will. Understanding provides a *law for the law*, an *intellectual presentation*, rather than a sensuous one, of what ought to be. Without such an intellectual presentation of the moral law, the will would not yield to the idea of freedom. Kant continues: "This law [required to present the moral law], as one which can be exhibited *in concreto* in objects of the senses, is a natural law (*Naturgesetz*). But this natural law can, for the purpose of judgement, be used only in its formal aspect, and it may, therefore, be called the *type* of the moral law" (*CPrR*, p. 72). The type, in contradistinction from the schema, thus achieves the required presentation by which the intuitively unpresentable ideas become real, effective, and actual, by intellectually "illustrating" them in terms of the pure, that is, formal aspects of the natural law. The natural law is always at hand, Kant adds. In its merely formal sense of lawfulness in general, the order of nature, phenomena under law (that is, a pure construct of understand-

ing), makes it possible for ideas of reason to find the hold in the will without which they would have no reality. Through the *type*, as the “‘image’” of the organic nature of the sensuous world viewed exclusively from the lawfulness of its phenomena, freedom can become the determining ground of the will. This presentation of the ideas commonly referred to as superfluous and void secures their practical reality and necessity. As seen, it is not the reality of the intuitively objective, but that of the determining ground of the will. In practical reason, the transcendental ideas of the unity of the thinking subject, and by extension of immortality and God, acquire a practical reality in that they give the will its shape. As will, the ultimate synthetic concepts of reason, the ideas of completion, have thus taken on an objective practical reality. This presentation of the ideas is the substantive ground on which rests the merely hypothetical use of ideas in the kingdom of cognition.

This practical presentative reality of the ideas, however, is not total; it is only a partial concretization, Kant insists. The ideas’ practical reality is as much an indication of the human being’s finitude as is the human being’s inability to know them. The very fact that the presentation of ideas is plural—we have seen that it divides into the hypothetical occurrence of ideas in the theoretical realm and their partial realization as determinants of the will in the practical realm—shows an intrinsic limit in the becoming effective or operative of the ideas. Yet, there is still a third kind of ideas that we have not mentioned: the aesthetical ideas. In the *Critique of Judgement*, Kant proposes the following definition:

By an aesthetical idea I understand that representation of the imagination which occasions much thought, without any definite thought, i.e. any *concept*, being capable of being adequate to it; it consequently cannot be completely compassed and made intelligible by language. We easily see that it is the counterpart (pendant) of a *rational idea* (*Vernunftidee*), which conversely is a concept to which no *intuition* (or representation of the imagination) can be adequate. (*CJ*, p. 157)<sup>19</sup>

Before commenting on this definition it is imperative that I once again situate the *Third Critique*, in extremely succinct terms at least, with respect to the two preceding ones. Its declared function is to discover a bridge that links the heterogeneous realms investigated by the two previous *Critiques*. The analysis of judgment *as such* (i.e., of a judgment that is not determinant, but that exhibits its own subjective conditions—the reflective, merely formal, or aesthetic judgment) is to

provide this link. As is well known, the aesthetic judgment is double. It divides into the analytics of the beautiful and the sublime. Kant, in *Critique of Judgement*, proceeds to demonstrate that both these reflective judgments are rooted in a free play of the faculties that obeys a priori rules, and that thus explains the universal claims made by these judgments. Yet, the decisive bridging function of reflective judgment comes into light only when Kant argues that the free play between imagination and understanding that is constitutive of judgments on the beautiful brings these faculties into a minimal relation presupposed by all theoretical judgments; whereas the free play between imagination and reason is shown to animate these respective faculties to such an extent that it can be said to represent the minimal condition under which something like a practical judgment can occur. With this in mind I now turn back to the question about aesthetical ideas.

Aesthetical ideas are distinct from rational or intellectual ideas, that is, from ideas strictly speaking. Compared to the latter, which are representations of reason, aesthetical ideas are representations of the imagination as a productive faculty. Yet if Kant nonetheless calls these productions “ideas,” it is “because they at least strive after something which lies beyond the bounds of experience and so seek to approximate to a presentation (*Darstellung*) of concepts of reason (intellectual ideas), thus giving to the latter the appearance of objective reality, but especially because no concept can be fully adequate to them as internal intuitions” (*CJ*, p. 157). By freeing itself from the strict law of association and yielding to principles that “occupy a higher place in reason,” imagination works the material of nature up “into something different which surpasses nature.” Nature is transgressed by nature itself, through a manipulation of the natural material that produces an excess of partial and supplementary representations (*Neben- and Teilvorstellungen*). Thus “an abundance of undeveloped material for the understanding” is brought forth (*CJ*, p. 160). Because these representations multiply their features, no definite concept is capable of exhausting and comprehending them. These aesthetical ideas help the poets “realize to sense, rational ideas of invisible beings,” in short, ideas in the intellectual sense. But the manner in which such presentation to sense occurs is neither through logical presentation—that is, through a presentation of what lies within the concepts that we have of those ideas—nor by providing an example for them in the sensible world, since there is no possible way to present a rational idea adequately. Aesthetical ideas make ideas present to sense by producing an excess of supplementary representation, so that “more thought [is aroused by them] than can be expressed in a concept determined by words” (*CJ*, p. 158). But more im-



portant than the “actual” presentation that aesthetical ideas achieve of intellectual ideas is—as is evidenced by chapter 49 of the *Third Critique*—the fact that aesthetical ideas, by occasioning “more thought (which indeed belongs to the concept of the object) . . . than can in it be grasped or made clear,” enlarge “the concept in an unbounded fashion.” Aesthetical ideas indeed bring “the faculty of intellectual ideas (the reason) into movement” (*CJ*, p. 158). Kant writes:

In a word, the aesthetical idea is a representation of the imagination associated with a given concept, which is bound up with such a multiplicity of partial representations in its free employment that for it no expression marking a definite concept can be found; and such a representation, therefore, adds to a concept much ineffable thought (*viel Unnennbares hinzu denken lässt*), the feeling of which quickens the cognitive faculties, and with language, which is the mere letter, binds up spirit also. (*CJ*, p. 160)

Aesthetical ideas neither help us cognize anything in particular nor compete with the idea’s determination of the will. By contrast, aesthetical ideas serve to enliven the mind by bringing the faculty of the intellectual ideas into movement. They do this “by opening out to it the prospect into an illimitable field of kindred representations” of a given concept (*CJ*, p. 158). Aesthetical ideas hence create the subjective minimal conditions under which the mind can become receptive to ideas strictly speaking—to ideas in the first place—in both their theoretical and practical employment. The aesthetical ideas thus help to bridge the chasm that Kant had said existed between the domain of cognition and morality, by setting forth the minimal set of subjective dispositions required for both to be operative. But the aesthetical ideas provide (perhaps) much more than the subjective space and disposition for the double function of the ideas in the realms of theoretical and practical reason. They (perhaps) also set forth the conditions under which there can be different modes of the ideas’ becoming effective or real, that is, of their presentation in general. Let me therefore return once again to the kind of presentation of ideas that takes place in aesthetical ideas.

In the production of aesthetical ideas, imagination as the faculty of presentation is set at liberty. This freedom enables imagination to unite the presentment of a concept with “the unbounded variety of possible forms accordant therewith,” and to thus produce a presentation of that concept that includes “a wealth of thought to which no verbal expression is completely adequate” (*CJ*, pp. 170–71). Such an aesthetical idea

presents an idea of reason in that it shows these ideas to be inexhaustible. It presents the rational idea by signifying that there is always more to it than any concept can comprehend. Nature, Kant adds, is used in the aesthetical idea “on behalf of, and as a sort of schema for, the supersensible” (*CJ*, p. 171). Presentation occurs in the aesthetical idea through a pseudoschematization that itself clears the way for schematization properly speaking. In *Critique of Judgement*, Kant will argue as well that aesthetical ideas symbolize—that is, symbolically present—the morally good. This presentation is not to be confounded with the type-casting that makes ideas determinants for the will. Rather, by bringing the faculty of intellectual ideas into movement, the aesthetical idea only presents the idea of morality.<sup>20</sup> With this it lays the basis of morality, and opens the possibility of the type through which the idea becomes a law for moral action. It follows from this that the presentation of ideas by aesthetical ideas—a presentation distinct from that which occurs in the realm of cognition and morality—is, in principle at least, a condition as it were under which ideas can become real in either a theoretico-hypothetical or practical sense. Aesthetical ideas provide the mold for the becoming real of ideas in presentation.

If, as we have seen, the whole, or totality, is an idea, then all direct presentation of it, either by intuitions or (moral) examples, is in principle excluded. From a theoretical viewpoint, the concept of a whole cannot be experienced. Where the merely regulative role of the ideas in the realm of cognition is disregarded, and an attempt is made to extend knowledge to the supersensible, thought becomes entangled in dialectical antinomies. In practical reason, where ideas become real to the extent that they directly determine the will, this realization is only partial. Only a nonfinite being—God—could be said to be a full realization of the ideas. Because of these intrinsic limits to the presentation of the idea, all “theoretical experiential judgement [but practical judgment as well] remains necessarily a fragment, and knows itself as fragment as soon as it gains critical clarity about itself,” in Ernst Cassirer’s words.<sup>21</sup> The idea achieves presentative reality exclusively as fragment. All schematization or exemplification of ideas produces only fragments. Conversely, fragments, strictly speaking, are then ideas in presentation. They are not leftover pieces of an integral whole, broken parts of a former or anticipated totality; they are that whole itself *in actualitas*—the only way in which the supersensible substrate occurs, or becomes present. Fragmentation, consequently, rather than implying some loss or lack of presence, represents the *positive* mode in which presentation of the whole occurs. More precisely, it is an index of thinking’s shift to

conceptualizing the very occurring, or coming into presence, of the idea.

Yet it is not Kant, but the Romantics, who proceed to think the presentation of ideas in terms of fragmentation. This, however, is not merely an innocent or arbitrary terminological change, but one that presupposes a paradigm shift, as it were. I shall characterize this shift in the following in an extremely schematic way. Yet before doing so, it must be emphasized that the distinctive traits of this paradigm shift of Romantic post-Kantian thought are not possible without the primacy of practical philosophy already alluded to. The Romantic notion of idea, of totality (*Ganzheit*) or allness (*Allheit*), is unmistakably an ethical notion. “Totality must always be ethical,” Friedrich Schlegel writes. Ethicity is what, according to the *Literary Notebooks 1797–1801*, demarcates totality from unity (*Einheit*).<sup>22</sup> Unity, Schlegel remarks, proceeds from a homogeneous formation of the elements of a given ensemble. It is an economic aspect and “a necessary property of any work (*Werk*).” Thus, classical works have unity, but as Schlegel adds, only unity. Yet, since all elements are said to be infinitely divisible, unity is the result of abstraction and arbitrariness. However, if a work strives *also* to form its elements in a heterogeneous (*verschiedenartig*) fashion, if it “mixes and weaves together extremely heterogeneous (*heterogene*) components” — and such strife takes place in modern or progressive works — the unity of the work becomes ethical (*ethische Einheit*). Such ethical unity is ethical totality, or totality, for short.<sup>23</sup> With the emphasis on the ethical nature of the concept of totality, as opposed to the mere abstract, economic concept of unity, Schlegel clearly privileges the concept of the absolute developed by the *Second Critique*. He continues the practical problematic of presentation, that is, the question of the idea’s realization. But in contradistinction from Kant, for Schlegel the main sphere for the becoming real of the idea is not primarily the sphere of human action. For Schlegel, totality, or the absolute, occurs in the work (*Werk*).

This shift, from the realm of the will to that of the work, however, does not mean that the becoming real of the idea through the type would simply have made room for the symbolic presentation analyzed in the *Critique of Judgement*. Still less does it mean that the question of presentation has become an aesthetic question, if one understands “aesthetic” in terms of the aestheticism that, as some have contended, follows from the Romantics’ almost religious artistic affectations. If the *Third Critique* has unquestionably left its mark on the Jena Romantics, it is not only for its analysis of the minimal conditions for the theoretical and practical presentation of the ideas. What they have also been interested in, apart from Kant’s analyses regarding the production of the

work of art—of what constitutes genius and of how taste combines with genius in the products of beautiful art—is that the absolute, or the universal, becomes realized in *singular* objects, i.e., in the individual works of art that are the objects of the equally singular judgments of taste. Indeed, to say that the presentation of the idea takes place, first and foremost, as work, or as art, has the dominant implication that all presentation of the idea is inevitably singular. This is undoubtedly a conclusion that becomes possible only in the aftermath of the three *Critiques*, and that Kant has not explicitly brought to bear as such on his own theory of the ideas. Fragmentation is the concept by which Schlegel tried to conceive of this inevitable individualization or singularization in the becoming real of the absolute. But this fragmentation does not affect particular ideas only. Nor is it limited to exploring the modes in which ideas become operative in theoretical knowledge, or in which they achieve their impact on the will. With the Romantic fragment, the question about presentation in general experiences a delimitation to a point where it concerns the presentation of the idea *as* idea. This is a problem that had been lying latent in Kant: it concerned the enigma of the inevitable plurality of what as the idea of the absolute could in principle only be one, as well as of the three classes of ideas—(self) presentation as God, the immortality of the soul, and freedom. The Romantic quest thus pertains to the self-production of the idea as such, prior to schematization and typization. Not only must the concept of presentation be understood here as a bringing about, or as Benjamin has shown, “according to the meaning it has in chemistry, that is, as the production of a substance by means of a determined process,”<sup>24</sup> but as centering on the coming into presence of the ideal in its ideality. The object of presentation is thus nothing less than the self-engendering of the idea, or the absolute. With this a new problem becomes manifest that is not explicitly addressed by Kant, and with which the question of presentation acquires a thrust—a universalist thrust, indeed—that it had not had with Kant, or before. It is a problem that only comes into view if the relation to self of the idea—a relation that the idea must entail *qua* idea (of totality, or allness)—is thought for itself, and moreover, in terms of self-production, self-determination, or self-engendering. As said earlier, this coming into presence of the idea in its ideality, of the idea as idea, is what the notion of fragmentation tries to capture, and it does so by making manifest that all such presentation is marked by singularity, or rather individuality. Schlegel’s argument that the idea of art, as the real ground of all empirical artworks, must itself be understood as an individual work is a clear indication that the question of presentation is brought to bear on the very ideality of the idea. Whether in this case

Schlegel indeed committed a category mistake by mixing the levels of the general and the singular, as Benjamin has contended, is highly questionable. The very concept of idea that Schlegel refers to is not, *in its very ideality*, without the relation to self that—according to the Romantics—causes the individualization of the universal, or the absolute. Moreover, since the idea of art as a work takes shape as an invisible work that accommodates all visible works, the difference between the universal and the singular remains intact in a complex manner, even though in its very universality the idea becomes individualized. The idea is *absolutely* individualized.<sup>25</sup> The thought of the “absolute individuality” of the absolute totality is not, therefore, a *metabasis allo eis genos*.

In short, if the Romantic fragment can be demarcated from a notion of fragment that is a part of a (once) constituted or future whole, it is because it thematizes an essential fragmentation of the whole as such, owing to the idea’s necessary individualizing presentation, or self-production. The Romantic fragment cannot be thought properly except if it is seen to articulate a problematic relative to the transcendental idea of totality—the idea, for short—that Kant’s various investigations into the role of the ideas had made unavoidable. With the concept of the fragment, the theme of presentation is raised to a level that must be qualified as universal—it is shown to be constitutive of universality itself. In paradoxical terms: Only because the absolute is the fragment is there an absolute—absolute individuality.

To conclude, can this concept of a universal and essential incompleteness of this whole, or of the idea in its ideality, and without which the whole or the idea would not be *itself*, guide us toward an understanding of the radical writing practices that since the end of the last century have determined what we now understand by literature? Undoubtedly, compared to the classical concept of the fragment, the Romantic fragment thematizes an incompleteness that is universal, essential, and whose scope has no comparison to the incompleteness to which the traditional notion of fragment alludes. Yet, without a radical recasting, the Romantic notion of fragment would be reductionist when applied to contemporary literary texts. Its focus lies on an *essential* incompleteness, an incompleteness that itself is a mode of fulfillment. Throughout our analysis of the Romantic concept of fragment, we have seen that it is in the positive form that the idea achieves itself. As fragment, totality occurs. After all, the Romantic fragment conceptualizes an incompleteness that is a consequence of presentation as *self*-production. The tension that the Romantic fragment reveals to inhabit the idea results from the necessity that in order to be an idea, the idea must cast itself in the form of an individuality.

An incline, a declivity, or sorts, between two sorts of wholes, or totalities—the idea of totality and its self-presentation—causes an incompleteness that is at the same time the ultimate fulfillment of the idea in absolute individuality. Yet it is doubtful whether such essential incompleteness, or incompleteness as a form of fulfillment, characterizes contemporary writing practices. The radicality of the contemporary texts, more cautiously, of some of its forms, is (perhaps) to be attributed to an inessential (but not, for that matter, arbitrary) incompleteness. Such an incompleteness, however, could in no way lend itself any more to closure. To call it fragmentary would be to erase a fracture that resists all dialectics of part and whole.

### Notes

1. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*, trans. P. Barnard and C. Lester (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988), p. 41
2. Hans Eichner, Introduction, in Friedrich Schlegel, *Literary Notebooks 1797–1801* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957), p. 5.
3. Maurice Blanchot, "The Athenaeum," trans. D. Esch and I. Balfour. In *Studies in Romanticism*, 22, no. 2 (1983), p. 172.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 165.
5. Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*, p. 29.
6. From what follows, it should become clear that this discrepancy has its reasons not only in the biographical and psychological facts mentioned, as far as Schlegel is concerned, but perhaps in much more essential (that is, necessary) reasons that follow from the concept of the fragment itself.
7. Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*, p. 11.
8. Walter Benjamin, "Der Begriff der Kunstkritik in der deutschen Romantik" in *Gesammelte Schriften* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1974), vol. 1, 1, p. 64.
9. Friedrich Schlegel, *Literary Notebooks 1797–1801*, ed. H. Eichner (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957), fragments 921, 922, 925, 927, and 930.
10. *Ibid.*, fragments 893 and 931.
11. Peter Szondi, "Friedrich Schlegel und die romantische Ironie," in *Schriften* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1978), vol. 2, p. 20.
12. Manfred Frank, "Das 'fragmentarische Universum' der Romantik," in *Fragment und Totalität*, ed. L. Dällenbach and C. L. Hart Nibbrig (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1984), p. 219.
13. Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*, p. 46.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 64.
16. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. N. Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), p. 310. Hereafter abbreviated as *CPR*.
17. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. L. W. Beck (New York: Macmillan, 1988), p. 3. Hereafter abbreviated as *CPrR*.
18. See, for instance, Alexis Philonenko, "Fichte," in *Histoire de la philosophie*, ed. Y. Belaval (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), vol. 2, pp. 904ff.



19. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. J. H. Bernard (New York: Hafner, 1951), p. 157. Hereafter abbreviated as *CJ*.
20. See chapter 59 in particular. Also see Donald W. Crawford, *Kant's Aesthetic Theory* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1974), p. 157.
21. Ernst Cassirer, *Kants Leben und Werk* (Berlin: Bruno Cassirer, 1921), pp. 328–29.
22. Schlegel, *Literary Notebooks 1797–1801*, p. 20.
23. The preceding quotes refer to fragments 46, 210, 217, 441, 444, 891, and 1565.
24. Benjamin, “Der Begriff der Kunstkritik in der deutschen Romantik,” p. 109.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 20.