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Hegel's Introduction to Aesthetics

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1. Introduction: Hegel on the Death of Art

1

In the Spring semester of 2008 I taught, for the last time, a seminar on Heidegger's *The Origin of the Work of Art*. A reworked version of my class notes has just been published as a book by Springer.¹ In my mind that seminar and this seminar on Hegel, while they do not depend on each other, belong together. What joins them is most fundamentally the question of the place of art in the modern world. Both seminars are part of an attempt to work out in more detail the concluding chapter of my *The Ethical Function of Architecture*,² which confronts Hegel with Heidegger.

What is at issue in this confrontation is hinted at by some remarks Heidegger makes in the *Epilogue to The Origin of the Work of Art*. Heidegger there considers the possibility of the death of art, linking that death to the rise of aesthetics and the rise of aesthetics to experience.

Almost from the time when specialized thinking about art and the artist began, this thought was called aesthetic. Aesthetics takes the work of art as an object, the object of *aisthesis*, of sensuous apprehension in the wide sense. Today we call this apprehension experience. The way in which man experiences art is supposed to give information about its nature. Experience is the source that is standard not only for art appreciation and enjoyment, but also for artistic creation. Everything is an experience. Yet perhaps experience is the element in which art dies. This dying occurs so slowly that it takes a few centuries.³

In thinking the possibility of art's dying Heidegger gestures beyond it.

When Heidegger here considers the possibility of art's dying, he is thinking first of all of Hegel.

In the most comprehensive reflection on the nature of art that the West possesses — comprehensive because it stems from metaphysics — namely Hegel's *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, the following propositions occur:

¹ Karsten Harries, *Art Matters: A Critical Commentary on Heidegger's The Origin of the Work of Art* (New York: Springer, 2009)

² Karsten Harries, *The Ethical Function of Architecture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997).

³ Martin Heidegger, "Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes," *Holzwege* (1935–1946), *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 5 (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1977). p. 67; "The Origin of the Work of Art," trans. Albert Hofstadter, *Language, Thought* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 79.

Art no longer counts for us as the highest manner in which truth may obtain existence for itself.

One may well hope that art will continue to advance and perfect itself, but its form has ceased to be the highest need of the spirit.

In all these relationships art is and remains for us, on the side of its highest vocation something past.⁴

Heidegger is of course aware that much of the art that most draws visitors to museums today, just think of Van Gogh or Picasso, was created long after Hegel made his gloomy pronouncements. But apparently their evident success is not sufficient to refute Hegel. That is to say, it is not art “on the side of its highest vocation.”

The judgment that Hegel passes in these statements cannot be evaded by pointing out that since Hegel's lectures in aesthetics were given for the last time during the winter of 1828-29 at the University of Berlin, we have seen the rise of many new art works and new art movements. Hegel never meant to deny this possibility. But the question remains: is art still an essential and necessary way in which that truth happens which is decisive for our historical existence, or is art no longer of this character? If, however, it is such no longer, then there remains the question why this is so.⁵

Heidegger here understands art “on the side of its highest vocation” as art “in which that truth happens which is decisive for our historical existence.” As we shall see, Hegel has a very similar understanding of art. But it would seem that the truth that is “decisive for our historical existence” has not been established by art, but by science, by thought. And is not thought the proper custodian of truth? Is this not why Socrates exiled the poets from his *Republic*?

Heidegger refuses to accept this judgment, even as he acknowledges its strength:

The truth of Hegel's judgment has not yet been decided; for behind this verdict there stands Western thought since the Greeks, which thought corresponds to a truth of beings that has already happened. Decision upon the judgment will be made, when it is made, from and about the truth of what is. Until then the judgment remains in force. But for that very reason, the question is necessary whether the truth that the judgment declares is final and conclusive and what follows if it is.⁶

But, if Hegel's judgment is supported by “Western thought since the Greeks,” how can Heidegger say, “The truth of Hegel's judgment has not yet been decided”? Must such

⁴ Ibid., p. 68; trans. pp. 79-80.

⁵ Ibid., p. 68; trans. p. 80.

⁶ Ibid., p. 68; trans. 79-80.

thought be challenged? Heidegger apparently thinks that such a challenge is of vital importance. And it would seem that the presence of art “on the side of its highest vocation” would present such a challenge. The question is: is such an art possible in our modern world?

Such questions, which solicit us more or less definitely, can be asked only after we have first taken into consideration the nature of art.⁷ (G5, 69/80)

2

Let me return to Heidegger's observation that Hegel never meant to deny the rise of many new works of art and art movements. This suggests the need to distinguish between two kinds of art: art “on the side of its highest vocation” and art as understood by aesthetics. How then did Hegel understand art? Apparently not as the aesthetic approach understands it. Hegel, Heidegger suggests, still understands art “on the side of its highest vocation” as the happening of truth. Just this the aesthetic approach refuses to do. And this refusal is a consequence of a development of thought that has shaped the world we live in today. The shape of modernity supports Hegel's proclamation of the end of art in its highest sense. The aesthetic approach to art is an expression of this death.

But will Hegel's be the last word on the future of art? “Decision upon the judgment will be made, when it is made, from and about the truth of what is. Until then the judgment remains in force.”⁸ Crucial then in Heidegger's confrontation with Hegel is the issue of truth.

3

Before returning to Hegel, it is necessary to take a second and closer look at what I have called the aesthetic approach. This approach and the rise of philosophical aesthetics belong together. We owe the word "aesthetics" to Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, who thus named the philosophical inquiry into aesthetic experience, but, also established aesthetics as a discipline, one of the main branches of philosophy.⁹

⁷ Ibid., p. 69; trans. p. 80.

⁸ Ibid., p. 68; trans. p. 80.

⁹ Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, *Reflections on Poetry (Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus)*, trans. Karl Aschenbrenner and William B. Holther (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1954).

But to give a bit more definition to what I mean by "aesthetic" let me turn here to a passage from Kant's "First Introduction" to the *Critique of Judgment*, where Kant distinguishes two rather different meanings of "aesthetic." "Aesthetic" indicates for one what has to do with sensibility. The aesthetic is understood here as belonging to the object (phenomenon). Think of the green of the grass, the smell of the rose. These are its aesthetic, i. e. its sensible qualities. "From this meaning of "aesthetic" we have to distinguish a second, where by means of the aesthetic mode of representation the represented is not related to the *faculty of knowledge*, but to the *feeling of pleasure and displeasure*."¹⁰ I call the green of the grass soothing, the smell of the rose delightful. Here the aesthetic is understood as belonging first of all to the subject.

It is this second sense that is presupposed by the aesthetic approach. Aesthetic judgment so understood involves a reflective movement. "Reflective" here suggests a looking back from the object to the kind of experience it elicits. The philosophy of art understood as aesthetics thus has its foundation in a more subjective approach to art that tends to reduce the work of art to an occasion for a certain kind of enjoyable experience. What is enjoyed is not so much the work of art, as the occasioned experience or state of mind. Aesthetic enjoyment is fundamentally self-enjoyment.

As the distinction between the pleasure we take in a good meal and the satisfaction we take in a beautiful picture suggests, the second sense of "aesthetic" invites a further distinction, between a broader sense that includes the merely pleasant and the beautiful, and a narrower sense, that now distinguishes properly aesthetic judgments from judgments about what makes, say, food or some caress delightful. This is how Kant came to use the term in the *Critique of Judgment*; and this is the meaning that has come to be taken for granted by aesthetics. As the distinction between the beautiful, the sublime — and we can add such other aesthetic categories as the interesting or the characteristic — suggests, not every aesthetic judgment so understood need be a judgment of beauty. To these different aesthetic categories correspond different kinds of aesthetic experience.

The philosophy of art understood as aesthetics has its foundation in a more subjective approach to art that tends to reduce the work of art to an occasion for a certain

¹⁰ Immanuel Kant, "First Introduction into the Critique of Judgment, trans. Werner S. Pluhar, *Critique of Judgment* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 409-410.

kind of pleasant experience. What is enjoyed is not really the work of art, but the occasioned experience or state of mind. And we should keep in mind that, as the distinction between the **beautiful**, the **sublime**, and the **interesting** suggests, not every aesthetic judgment need be a judgment of beauty. Today's artists would seem to be more concerned with the interesting.

4

It is evident that on the aesthetic approach as here defined the pursuit of truth and art should belong to different provinces. Works of art should be enjoyable, where in this context it does not matter whether the judgment is one of beauty, sublimity, or the interesting — all are species of aesthetic judgments. Whether the judged works are true or false matters little. **Art is a form of entertainment.**

Is art more than entertainment? Works of art should be enjoyable, where in this context it does not matter whether the judgment is one of beauty, sublimity, or the interesting — all are species of the aesthetic judgment. Whether the judged works are true or false matters little. With this art becomes first of all a form of perhaps high class entertainment. No doubt, often it is no more. As Hegel observed:

Beauty and art, no doubt, pervade the business of life like a kindly genius, and form the bright adornment of all our surroundings, both mental and material, soothing the sadness of our condition and the embarrassment of real life, killing time in entertaining fashion, and where there is nothing good to be achieved, occupying the place of what is vicious, better at any rate, than vice. Yet although art presses in with its pleasing shapes on every possible occasion, from the rude adornments of the savage to the splendor of the temple with its untold wealth of decoration, still these shapes themselves appear to fall outside the real purposes of life. And even if the creations of art do not prove detrimental to our graver purposes, if they appear at times actually to further them by keeping evil at a distance, still it is so far true that art belongs rather to the relaxation and leisure of the mind, while the substantive interests of life demand its exertion.¹¹

Can art be more than entertainment? And if just entertainment, is it worthy of the philosopher's attention? We can of course use art to express moral and other important

¹¹ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Aesthetik*, in *Jubiläumsausgabe*, ed. Hermann Glockner (Stuttgart: Fromann, 1937), vol. 12, p. 22; Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, trans. Bernard Bosanquet, ed. and intro. Michael Inwood (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993), pp. 5-6..

ideas, but in that case is it not profoundly superfluous? Like Heidegger, Hegel demands more of art.

Fine art is not real art till it is in this sense free, and only achieves its highest task when it has taken its place in the same sphere with religion and philosophy, and has become simply a mode of revealing to consciousness and bringing to utterance the Divine Nature, the deepest interests of humanity, and the most comprehensive truths of the mind. It is in works of art that nations have deposited the profoundest intuitions and ideas of their hearts; and fine art is frequently the key — with many nations there is no other — to the understanding of their wisdom and of their religion.¹²

Today, Hegel suggests, art in its highest sense belongs into a **museum**.¹³ In this seminar I hope to say more about this conjunction of the death of art in Hegel's highest sense and the rise of the museum as an institution, also about the emergence of the museum as a leading building type, where Schinkel's Altes Museum in Berlin deserves to be singled out, given that Hegel lived quite near the museum and was bothered by its noisy workmen.

Does the emergence of the museum as a leading building type in the nineteenth century challenge Hegel's thesis that art has lost the significance it had in ancient Greece or medieval Europe, where architecture is very much included in that judgment? In a figurative sense to be sure, architecture in its highest sense, the kind of architecture mentioned by Heidegger, Greek temples and Gothic cathedrals, the ruined temple in Paestum and Bamberg cathedral, would seem to belong into a museum. Does this mean that Hegel is right? Can the museum perhaps take their place? Or does the modern world no longer have room for art "on the side of its highest vocation"?

5

According to Heidegger, "the truth of Hegel's judgment has not yet been decided." That is to say, if Heidegger is right, the very shape of modernity, correctly described by Hegel, leaves no place for art in its highest sense. This is not to say that what Hegel asserts must be accepted as a last and final word. But for Heidegger it is clear that to challenge Hegel we have to take a step beyond modernity, have to become pre- or postmodern in some sense. On this view art in its highest sense and modernity do not go

¹² Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Aesthetik*, vol. 12, p. 22; trans. pp. 5-6.

together. The spiritual situation of the age could be said to demand the **death of such art.**

Why should this be so? Hegel, as we shall see, links this death to the authority of reason which becomes the arbiter of what deserves to be called real or good. On this point Hegel is close to Nietzsche, who in *The Birth of Tragedy* blames the death of tragedy, and tragedy figures here as the paradigmatically ethical art work, on the Socratic spirit, which is characterized by its confident trust in reason to guide us to the good life. With this art must lose its ethical function. To be sure, art may continue to serve reason, but such service is not essential to the work of reason. And with this Heidegger agrees. But he, like Nietzsche, dreams of a possible return of "art on the side of its highest vocation."

6

What matters here isn't Hegel. Any critique of Hegel would itself be pointless, were it not for the fact that Hegel has given us a profound analysis of certain aspects of our modern world, aspects that do indeed imply the death of art in what both Hegel and Heidegger would consider its highest sense.

Hegel's thesis of the death of art invites comparison with Arthur Danto's thesis of the end of art, which explicitly refers the reader to Hegel and to which I want to turn next time to give a sharper focus to my own discussion. Danto speaks of a "certain gloom" that "had settled upon the art world itself at the time (1984) — it has not altogether dissipated today — so that artists and critics alike expressed themselves with varying degrees of pessimism as to whether art had a future at all."¹⁴ Danto's reflections were prompted in part by the way art itself had come to pose the question its own nature. This "philosophization" of art meant the end of a history he suggested.¹⁵ For Danto, too, this end of art does not mean that art, perhaps even great art, is no longer made. What it means is that a history that allowed one to speak of progress in art had come to an end. Danto refers us to Vasari as someone who long before Hegel had already proclaimed that

¹³ For a more extended discussion of Hegel's understanding of the death of art see "Hegel on the Future of Art," *The Review of Metaphysics*, vol. 27, no. 4, 1974, pp. 677-696.

¹⁴ Arthur Danto, "Narratives of the End of Art," *Art in the Historical Present* (New York: Noonday, 1991), p. 331.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 334.

art had come to an end. Art here was tied to the project of using perspective to create ever more convincing illusions of reality. That project Vasari thought had come to an end in his own day, where we should ask ourselves why that project was taken up with such seriousness. We should also note that this is no longer art in the sense in which Hegel speaks of art in the highest sense.

Modern art, according to Danto, is governed by another master narrative: key here is said to be the art's concern with the essence of art: modernist art, according to Danto, is marked by "an effort at self-definition which consist in saying Art is X and nothing else."¹⁶ With his Brillo boxes Warhol is said to have brought this quest to an end. The question: why is Warhol's Brillo-box art while that in the supermarket is not could no longer be answered by art; it required philosophy. Once again thought has overtaken art. But talk of an end of art now has a different meaning, appears in a different key: what has ended here is precisely not art in its highest sense, but the project of art's self-definition. And once again we should ask ourselves why that project was taken up with such seriousness. I shall return to Danto next time.

7

As is Danto's understanding of the end of art, so Hegel's is inseparable from his understanding of history, where history means first of all not the history of art, but the history of spirit, in which the history of art must be nested. History, if Hegel is right, cannot be understood as a sequence of events without rhyme or reason, but presents itself to us an irreversible process, leading to an ever increasing freedom. Despite countless setbacks, history can be understood as the progress of freedom. As such it is also a process that has to bring with it an increasing spiritual and literal mobility. Is Hegel right? In its general outline the thesis seems difficult to dispute. The other side of this process is that the authority of such natural givens as distinctions of gender or race, or the place one happens to occupy, are granted less and less authority. With this the very meaning of "home" becomes problematic.

Following a tradition going back at least to Plato, Hegel understands the human being as a citizen of two worlds: he, too, like the animal, is part of nature, but not just another animal, but the *animal rationale*, the animal that by virtue of his reason raises

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 343.

himself above nature, becomes conscious of it, experiences it, including his own nature, as not simply given, but as material to be shaped and bent to his will. His spirit places the human being in opposition to nature, demands mastery over it. In something as simple as a child throwing stones into the water and enjoying the rings formed Hegel finds evidence of this drive. The human being here seeks to appropriate the natural given by transforming it in his own image and this means first of all in the image of his own spirit. History is understood as the progress of such appropriation. Art is part of the effort to make the natural and sensible our own, to rob it of its character of being a mute, alien other, and thus to help transform it into a dwelling place fit for human beings. The goal of art, too, is the humanization of the sensible, where humanization means spiritualization. In every work of art we can therefore distinguish a spiritual content and a material embodiment. It should be clear that so understood art prefigures science and technology, which allow for a far more effective mastery of the material and for that very reason overtake art and leave it behind.

8

In this seminar, especially in its second half, I want to give special consideration to Hegel's understanding of architecture. In part I want to do so because Heidegger in "The Origin of the Work of Art" chooses the Greek temple as the paradigmatic work of art, that is to say, a representative of that art which, according to Hegel, the spirit's progress has most decisively left behind. Hegel understands architecture as the original, the first, and that means also as the most primitive of all the arts. "It is architecture that pioneers the way for the adequate realization of the God, and in this service bestows hard toil upon existing nature, in order to disentangle it from the jungle of finitude and the abortiveness of chance."¹⁷ (90-91)

Like so many of his contemporaries, Hegel, too, thought that Greek art could not be surpassed as art. Marx later was to concur. Its defect, if we can speak here of a defect at all, is one that attaches to all art, indeed to the entire sensible dimension. Given the inwardness of modern man, his emphasis on reflection, thought alone can do justice to the Idea, by which Hegel thinks the reconciliation of spirit and nature. This is what lets him say that thought and reflection have overtaken the fine arts. Our approach to art is

¹⁷ Hegel, *Introductory Lectures*, pp. 90-91.

more thoughtful than sensuous. More and more we moderns approach works of art and more especially works of architecture as occasions for reflection.

If we accept any version of the presupposed understanding of history as spiritual progress, we have to accept also that art and more especially architecture have lost their ethical function. This is not to question that aesthetic objects will continue to be created and to delight us. It is not to say that art will not go on. With Danto we might say that art has ended, but that this does not mean that it will therefore stop. But, given such an understanding of history, any attempt to return to architecture its ethical function, as I attempted to do in my book of that title, must seem anachronistic: it fails to take seriously enough the shape of modernity, the way that shape is ruled by reason.

According to Hegel, art in its highest sense has to be considered a thing of the past. Some will mourn this, but, if Hegel is right, such mourning is as pointless as wishing to be returned to that wonder which was ours when we were children. Hegel is aware of the loss. He is too close to Winckelmann and to his friend and former roommate, the poet Hölderlin, not to know what has been lost. But he asks those who deplore this death of art in its highest sense to consider the necessity of this death: We should not blame it on certain shortcomings of the age, but recognize it in its necessity. Art in its highest sense belongs to the past. And if this can be said of art in general, it is especially true of architecture as the first art, and therefore the art that is most decisively left behind by the spirit's progress.

9

In closing let me point out that Hegel's thesis on the end or death of art is hardly derived from a careful examination of the evidence provided by the history of art; it represents rather an at times willful fitting of the evidence into a schema that is derived from his own determination of art and architecture and their place in the history of the spirit. But I will try to show that, regardless of details, that determination is difficult to get around: if we grant Hegel the importance he grants spirit and freedom, we grant him the substance of his case. If human freedom demands that the individual liberate himself from the accidents of what happens to be the case, then our real home should not be sought by looking towards a particular region or *genius loci*; rather our real home must be a spiritual home to which the sensible, and that means also art and architecture, cannot

do justice. I remind you of the recurrent insistence on the inessential nature of what is considered the accident of location, place of birth, gender, race. Is any refusal to accept the death of art not born of nostalgia that should be resisted? Is it not reason alone that in the end should determine our ethos? Think of Kant's emphasis on pure practical reason and the categorical imperative. Hegel's philosophy, too, is born of the confidence that humanity has finally come of age, that human beings have finally asserted themselves as the masters of nature, including their own nature. On this interpretation the loss of art in its highest sense is not really a loss at all, but a sign of humanity's coming of age.

And yet, against Hegel, I would like to insist that the power of the human spirit has here been exaggerated in a way that returns us to the Tower of Babel, where modernity's tower of Babel is not a tower at all, but that spiritual architecture Descartes promised and hoped to build, that Hegel hoped to complete, and on which we are still building even as it comes to look more and more like a ruin. Hegel was unable to effect that reconciliation of spirit and nature that his philosophy promises. He could not effect it, because from the very beginning the spirit was given priority and the assumption was made that reality and the human spirit are finally commensurable.

Challenging this assumption, I would insist that they are finally incommensurable, would insist with Heidegger on the rift between spirit and nature, word and reality, insist also that meanings cannot finally be invented, but must be disclosed.¹⁸ It is sufficient to contemplate any concrete natural object, say a rock or a tree, to know about the inadequacy of all our attempts to describe it, to recognize that reality will finally always transcend and thus elude our grasp. Against any understanding of reality that makes our ability to grasp it clearly and distinctly its measure, I want to maintain that we know that something is real precisely because we are aware that we are unable to finally understand it. Reality transcends our understanding. Art recalls us to this transcendence.

Nietzsche might have said that art recalls us to the Dionysian ground of our existence. In Hegel's philosophy — and to us moderns — what I have here called the transcendence of reality announces itself first of all as the concrete, sensuous, arbitrary, contingent. The place that as a matter of fact I occupy to reason appears as a place that I just happen to occupy. The sex that is as a matter of fact my own to reason appears as a

¹⁸ See Karsten Harries, *Wahrheit: Die Architektur der Welt* (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2012).

contingent fact that does not touch my essence. This goes for all my physical characteristics, also for my particular background. Reason lets me see the factual as the merely contingent, lets me see the world *sub specie possibilitatis*, from the vantage point of possibility. But if my biological and historical make-up are all understood as merely contingent facts, who or what is the "I"? When I take away all my supposedly accidental, contingent properties, what remains of me? In the end, as Kierkegaard saw, the self itself becomes empty, meaningless and abstract, a mere ghost of a self.

At this point, as Nietzsche put it, reason coils back on itself and begins to recognize its limits. Inseparable from such recognition is an awareness of what I want to call "material transcendence." With that expression I want to point in the same general direction as Kant with his "thing-in-itself," which is present to us only as appearance. What invites talk of a thing-in-itself is the fact that, even if constituted by our language or concepts and as such appearance, what thus appears is not created by our understanding, but given. Inseparable from our experience of things, is a sense of this gift, an awareness that our understanding is finite, and that means also that the reach of our concepts and words is limited. Everything real is infinitely complex and thus can never be fully translated into words. The rift between thing and word, between reality and language cannot be closed. Speaking that refuses to recognize this rift must degenerate into idle talk.

Language opens human beings to reality. Yet, as Heidegger emphasized, language conceals even as it reveals. Where this essential concealment is forgotten, language cannot but replace reality with a false, merely linguistic reality. To be sure, human being is essentially a dwelling in language. But the house of language is not a prison. Art may be understood as a way of opening the windows of that house, and that goes also for architecture. Needed is a **new realism**.¹⁹

Art and especially architecture are needed to reintegrate the human being, whose essence is threatened by the shape of the modern world, determined as that shape is by an overemphasis on spirit, on logos. And it should be clear that the aesthetic approach cannot effect such a reconciliation.

2. Danto on the End of Art

1

Last time I suggested that Hegel's thesis of the death of art invites comparison with Arthur Danto's thesis of the end of art. To relate this examination of Hegel more directly to what is going on in the art world today, I would like to begin this discussion with a consideration of Danto's thesis.

Danto is quite explicit about his debt to Hegel and about the relationship of his and Hegel's theses on the end of art. He has no quarrel with Hegel's claim that the impression art works make on us moderns is "of a more reflective kind, and the emotions which they arouse require a higher test and a further verification." **The question "What is Art?" can be expected to accompany the end of art.**

But why should that question be left to philosophers? Why should artists not participate in such work of reflection, participate in it as artists? Did Duchamp not contribute decisively to that discussion when he exhibited a quite ordinary urinal as an artwork? And did Warhol not make a similarly significant contribution with his *Brillo Box*?

Only when we can imagine works of art that outwardly resemble ordinary things like urinals or packing cases can we begin to draw lines between reality and art, which has concerned philosophers from ancient times. If *Fountain* is an artwork, there must be an answer to the question of why the other urinals in Mott's inventory are not, even if the resemblances are perfect. If *Brillo Box* is an artwork and the ordinary Brillo carton not, surely the difference cannot lie in the obvious differences, such as one being made of plywood and the other of corrugated cardboard, not if the differences between reality and art must divide art from reality on a serious philosophical map.²⁰

The argument must be accepted: if *Fountain* and *Brillo Box* are artworks, what makes them so cannot be located in their material make-up. The question is: are they artworks? It is a question that according to Danto is raised by the works themselves, but not just raised: these works force us to separate art from material reality, let us recognize that art belongs to spirit, not to matter.

¹⁹ Cf. Karsten Harries, *The Meaning of Modern Art: A Philosophical Interpretation* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), pp. 131-143.

²⁰ Arthur C. Danto, *Encounters and Reflections. Art in the Historical Present* (Noonday Press, Farrar Straus Giroux: New York, 1990), p. 5.

But are these works not also things, more precisely artifacts, even if created (or re-presented) to be appreciated, not as serving some other purpose, but for being just this particular incarnation of spirit in matter? Danto claims to find himself in fundamental agreement with Hegel's determination of beautiful art:

Hegel, with characteristic profundity, spoke of beautiful art as the Idea given sensuous embodiment [Danto later was to praise Hegel for having “quite powerfully sundered the idea of art from having anything essential to do with beauty.”] As a start that gives us the rudiments of a philosophical concept of art, and a first stab at a theory of criticism: the critic must identify the idea embodied in the work and assess the adequacy of its embodiment. “Embodiment” is a difficult concept, and here is not the place to deal with it directly, but it helps to draw a distinction between the expression and the embodiment of an idea. Perhaps every meaningful sentence expresses an idea, true or false, which is its thought or meaning. But language achieves the status of art when our sentences embody the ideas they express, as if displaying what the sentences are about. A picture becomes art when, beyond representing its idea, properties of itself become salient in the work of embodiment. Rembrandt's paintings embody and do not merely show light.²¹

But such a quite traditional understanding of **art as an incarnation or embodiment of spirit in matter** has to call into question that separation of art from matter on which Danto insists. Is the mystery of great art not the mystery of such incarnation? Every great work of art is a riddle. To understand art in this way is to insist that, to the extent that a work of art is adequately understood as a representation or illustration of some idea, it fails as art. All too much art today offers little more than such illustrations, where the ideas are taken from the issues that currently agitate the world, including issues of gender, race, health, technology. No matter how worthy these issues may be, thought here has overtaken art. With this, art has become at bottom dispensable. It has been reduced to an ornament of reflection. But art dies when it in this sense becomes a mere decoration of ideas and ideologies. This claim to be sure, presupposes an understanding of art as essentially an incarnation of meaning in matter, meaning that cannot be translated into some other discourse or wrapped into concepts without loss. And this would seem to move us into the vicinity of art in Hegel's highest sense.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 8-9.

2

Hegel's definition of beautiful art as the Idea given sensuous embodiment invites us to inquire both into the Idea in question and in to the effectiveness of its embodiment. Danto does not seem to be overly unconcerned with Hegel's understanding of the former, nor with Hegel's insistence on effective embodiment. Only because of this can he give an upbeat twist to his telling of the story of the end of art.

Danto leaves no doubt concerning his admiration for Hegel, even as he claims little interest in what other philosophers have said or written about art, mentioning Plato and Aristotle, Kant and Dewey. But this self-proclaimed philosopher in the analytic tradition admits to having "come to a great admiration for Hegel's philosophical writings on art."²² Indeed, Danto admires Hegel, not just as a philosopher of art, but as an art critic: "Hegel, by the way, showed us how to do the kind of art criticism I fumbled toward in discussing the great engravings of the flea, in his *marvelous* — I would say *unparalleled* — passages on Dutch painting and on the differences between it and the work of those whom he terms modern painters who attempt the same thing". The reference is to an engraving executed for Hooker's *Micrographia* of 1665, which, together with another illustration from that work showing a louse, appears now as the frontispiece and only illustration of *Embodied Meanings*, an illustration chosen to demonstrate Danto's "readiness with which, as aesthetician and art critic, I am prepared to think of works as distinct from the masterpieces of high art as the flea is distant from the horse in the common schema of value."²³ The timeliness of this choice requires no comment. Also Danto's readiness to forget about art in Hegel's highest sense.

Danto does not claim to be an expert on Hegel. He admits to being an "insufficient" Hegel scholar;²⁴ yet the terms he uses to describe Hegel's reflections on art are often almost reverential: Hegel is thus said to have spoken of art in the already quoted passage with "characteristic profundity."²⁵ Danto calls his work on aesthetics "always astonishing"²⁶; contrasts the dark and murky painter Anselm Kiefer — Danto far prefers

²² Arthur C. Danto, *Embodied Meanings. Critical Essays and Meditations* (Farrar Straus Giroux: New York, 1990), p. 387.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 373.

²⁴ Danto, *Encounters and Reflections*, p. 342,

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

Gerhard Richter — with his “luminous compatriot, the philosopher Hegel,”²⁷ whose work on the philosophy of art he calls “stupendous.”²⁸ And so he does again in *Embodied Meanings*, where Hegel’s lectures on Fine Art are also called “marvelous.”²⁹

Less unambiguously complimentary, although seemingly less relevant, is a remark on what Danto calls Hegel's sidesplitting *Bildungsroman*, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*.³⁰ There is a side to Hegel, shall we call it the underlying metaphysical assumptions, with which Danto would seem to have little patience. It is the same side, I suspect, that makes Danto's talk of the end of art so very different from Hegel's seemingly closely related thesis.

3

What draws Danto to Hegel is then first of all his own thesis of the end of art. Duchamp and Warhol figure importantly in his development of that thesis. With a work such as *Fountain* Duchamp is said by Danto to have brought us closer to an adequate understanding of the **essence of art**. Such a claim presupposes what cannot be presupposed: that there is indeed such an essence. But in what Platonic heaven do we find an essence of art that would allow us to say with confidence that the Beautiful and the Sublime do not belong to it? What Duchamp did demonstrate was that the art-world was willing to apply the term “art” to creations that were neither beautiful nor sublime, that given a traditional understanding of art, were beyond the pale. In that sense Duchamp can be cited in support of Danto’s and Dickie’s **institutional theory of art**: “art” is whatever the art-world declares to be art. And we can agree: Duchamp’s *Fountain* does call the meaning of art into question; more especially it calls into question an understanding of the work of art as an aesthetic object as this had come to be understood. Just this allows Danto to call on this work as a witness to support his own critique of traditional aesthetics:

I felt that aesthetics does not really belong to the essence of art, and my argument was as follows. Two objects, one a work of art and the other not, but which happen to resemble one another as closely as may be required for purposes of the argument, will have very

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 329.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 341.

²⁹ Danto, *Embodied Meanings*, pp. 366, 322.

³⁰ Danto, *Encounters and Reflections. Art in the Historical Present* (Noonday Press, Farrar Straus Giroux: New York, 1990), p. 287.

different aesthetic properties. But since the difference depended on the ontological difference between art and non-art, it could not account for the former difference. The aesthetic difference presupposed the ontological difference. Hence aesthetic qualities could not be part of the definition of art.³¹

The claim that aesthetics does not belong to the essence of art is readily granted. Art may be influenced by aesthetics, some art even crucially so, but Barnett Newman had a point when he suggested that aesthetics is no more for artists, than ornithology is for birds.³² Aesthetics is a theory that artists may or may not find important. But what mattered to Danto was something else: the hold a certain understanding of art, presupposed by much traditional aesthetic thinking, continues to have on us, even given countless works that the current art world has certified to be art, but which do not fit what such an aesthetics has declared works of art to be. In this connection Danto points to the importance Warhol's *Brillo Box* (1964) had for the development of his own understanding of art.

His discussion of the difference between Warhol's *Brillo Box* and a Brillo box found in some supermarket is telling: the real Brillo box had been designed by an artist, Steve Harvey, a second-generation Abstract Expressionist forced to take up commercial art. Danto points to the connection between the Brillo box and "the high art styles of that time."³³ But Warhol's *Brillo Box* has nothing to do with Abstract Expressionism, is in fact much closer to works by such artists as Oldenburg or Lichtenstein than it is to the actual Brillo box.

I find it difficult not to agree with Danto on the difference between the two Brillo boxes, although I would want to draw a different lesson. Danto has good reason to claim that **the question, why is Warhol's *Brillo Box* art, while that in the supermarket is not? could no longer be answered by art: it required philosophy.** But this claim conflicts with another claim that Danto, agreeing with Hegel, makes: that successful art effectively embodies a spiritual content. Such art has to incarnate spirit in matter. In that sense of "successful art" I find it difficult to cite *Brillo Box* as an example. Does it not demonstrate that success in art does not depend on such an incarnation of meaning in

³¹ Danto, *Embodied Meanings*, p. 384.

³² Barnett Newman, "Remarks at the Fourth Annual Woodstock Conference," Barnett Newman, "Remarks at the Fourth Annual Woodstock Conference," *Selected Writings and Interviews* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p. 247. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p. 247.

³³ Danto, *Embodied Meanings*, p. 384.

a particular piece of matter? That it depends rather on the mode of presentation, the artist's intention, the context into which he chose to insert his work? This to be sure only re-raises the question of how to understand success in art. Appeals to some supposed "essence of art" do no real work here in that they presuppose that this question has already been answered.

One last time let me return to Danto's discussion of the lessons of *Brillo Box*.

Steve Harvey's boxes are about Brillo and about the values of speed, cleanliness, and the relentless advantages of the new and the gigantic. Warhol's iconography is more complex and has little to do with those values at all. In a way it is philosophical, being about art or, if you like, about the differences between high art and commercial art. So Hegel may be right that there is a special aesthetic quality peculiar to art. He impressively says it is, unlike natural aesthetic qualities (he uses the term "beauty," but that was the way aestheticians in his era thought), the kind of aesthetic quality which is *aus dem Geiste geboren und wiedergeboren*. But that is no less true of the aesthetic qualities of Brillo boxes than of those of *Brillo Box*. We would expect nothing else, given that both are dense with meaning and, in a sense, *aus der Kultur geboren*. It may be less important to distinguish high art from low than either from mere natural aesthetics of the kind we derive from our genetic endowment.³⁴

A first question is raised by Danto's parenthetical remark: Hegel "uses the term 'beauty,' but that was the way aestheticians in his era thought."

A second question is raised by Danto's reduction of Hegel's *geboren und wiedergeboren* to just *geboren*. What is the significance of Hegel's *wiedergeboren*?³⁵ This raises the question of the relationship of the beauty of art to the beauty of nature. Is *wiedergeboren* to suggest that art responds to the beauty it finds in nature, but lets it be born again, creating thus a higher beauty? **Does art perhaps need that ground in nature, must it perhaps wither and die when uprooted?**

And does not beauty, as Hegel understand it, require a kind of incarnation of spirit in matter for which philosophy has no need. This raises the question whether an art whose achievement is fundamentally philosophical, as Danto claims for the art of Duchamp and Warhol, does not mean the end of art in Hegel's highest sense.

³⁴ *Embodied Meanings*, p. 386.

³⁵ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Aesthetik*, in *Jubiläumsausgabe*, ed. Hermann Glockner (Stuttgart: Frommann, 1937, vol. 12, p. 20).

That such a "**philosophization**" of art signifies the end of art in some sense is of course Danto's very point.³⁶ A distance now opens up between "work of art" and "object of perception." Something like that was indeed claimed by Hegel, though not about art, but about spirit: the progress of spirit was said by him to have left the sensible, and with it art behind, where Hegel understood this end of art as simply part of humanity's coming of age.

4

Hegel is not the only precursor mentioned by Danto. He also mentions Aristotle, Aristophanes, and Vasari. These references rob talk of the end of art of some of its weight and pathos by suggesting that such endings may be part of the history of art: **art is thought to end whenever the agenda set by some narrative about art's essence has been carried out in such a way that on this front no further progress seems possible.** Such agenda attainment can be expected to issue in a period of disorientation, followed by the formation of new agendas. One of these may capture the imagination of artists and critics in such a way that it comes to be accepted as a new kind of master narrative.

Danto would seem to entertain some such view:

For the past few years I have been speculating about the structures of art history, and considering the hypothesis — it can be no more than that — that these structures imply an end that may have been reached. This sort of thing can happen, I suppose. It certainly happened in ancient times with tragedy. Aristotle wrote:

Arising from an improvisatory beginning ... tragedy grew little by little, so the poets developed whatever new part of it had appeared; and passing through many changes, tragedy came to a halt, since it had attained its own nature
[*Poetics*, 1449a10-15].³⁷

Aristotle's brief remark deserves careful attention: Aristotle is not speaking here of art as such, not even of poetry. A particular poetic genre is said to have come to a halt when it finally found its proper form. Aristotle suggests that a similar story can be told about comedy, although, since in the beginning "it was not as yet taken up in a serious way, ... its early stages passed unnoticed" and the authors of the changes in its form have

³⁶ Danto, *Encounters and Reflections. Art in the Historical Present*, p. 34.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 308-309.

remained unknown.³⁸ Tragedy and comedy are here assumed to have a nature, which once attained should be accepted. All attempts to change the form demanded by that nature do violence to what the genre demands. Aristotle does not say that when tragedy attained its nature it died. Should we not rather say that it had finally come of age? What had come to an end was the evolution of this genre. **But to contribute to the evolution of a genre is one thing, to create a successful work of art quite another.**

Perhaps we can liken working in a given genre to playing a game such as chess. That game, too, has a long history. But by now it has arrived at a form so satisfactory that chess players tend to accept the rules of the game as a given. That does not mean that playing chess has come to an end. Quite the opposite: the very rigidity of the rules provides a spur that raises the players' imagination and creativity to greater heights. And why not look at the rules provided by artistic genres in a similar way? This invites a distinction between creative artists, on the one hand, and innovators that transform some genre, on the other. Often a great artist has been both. Think of Picasso! Or Pollock! But does an artist have to be both? To answer that question in the affirmative is to imply that, once some genre has attained its own nature, it no longer leaves room for great art in this genre, that great art can now only come into being by challenging or turning its back on it.

Does Aristotle's talk of tragedy attaining its nature and in this sense coming to an end help us understand that end of art Danto dates to the 1960's? If so, it would suggest that we look at the art in question, and here we are concerned first of all with painting, as a genre comparable to tragedy, which in the work of painters such as Pollock, Rothko, De Kooning, Reinhardt, Newman, and Stella could be said to have finally attained its nature. Henceforth the painter's task would be to work within that form as best as he or she could — although it says something about our modern understanding of art that this does not seem a very convincing suggestion: do we not expect the great painter to advance art, to be an innovator who changes the rules of the game? In this respect we expect him to be different from the great chess player.

But would we want to say that painting as such had attained its nature in the work of the just mentioned painters? A certain kind of painting did come to some sort of end,

³⁸ Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1449a37-1449b1. trans. I. Bywater, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*. The Revised Oxford Translation, ed. Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols. (Princeton:

an end bound up with a specific narrative concerning the essence of painting. But did not artists like Duchamp and Warhol demonstrate that the essence of art could not be limited in that way? Did this particular end of art not mean that artists had finally rid themselves of a straight-jacket?

Danto does suggest that in works like Warhol's *Brillo Box* art did finally arrive at its nature, a nature, however, so generous that from now on artists could do everything. Art could then be said to have ended in a stronger and more definitive sense. But that end should not be understood as disabling, rather as allowing the artist to display his or her creativity precisely because no longer concerned with advancing art or with working within the rules that a particular understanding of art might provide? Does the German painter Hermann Albert's "You can do everything" usher in an art that has finally come of age?

The evolution of tragedy may have come to an end, but that does not mean that tragedies could no longer be written — Danto insists on distinguishing his talk of the end of art from the claim that art comes to a stop, when it reached its natural form. I could imagine something like this being said about the symphonic form; or about abstract expressionism. In all these cases it would of course not seem to be art as such that came to an end.

5

Here it is instructive to compare Aristotle's thesis with that advanced by Nietzsche in the *Birth of Tragedy*. What dies with tragedy, according to Nietzsche is art in what Hegel and Heidegger consider art in its highest sense. Is this also how Danto understands the death of tragedy?

Nietzsche's claim is indebted to Aristophanes. So let me now turn to him.

Aristotle saw no reason to mourn the fact that tragedy had attained its nature. Nor does Danto see reason to mourn that end of art he thinks has occurred some time in the sixties. He is deeply suspicious of those many modern followers of the comic poet Aristophanes, who in *The Frogs* complained that Athens "no longer had a tragic poet, and imagined a god taking on the mission of dragging one back from the underworld to save

the staggering state.”³⁹ What Danto thinks is at stake becomes clear in a review of Anselm Kiefer:

At just that fateful moment, when the Spartans were drawn up outside its walls and the great spring offensive was being drafted, when Athens had been through pestilence, defection, breakdown, humiliation and defeat, leave it to the muddled reactionary mind of Aristophanes to diagnose the difficulties as due to the lack of great art! The decline of Greek art, in a late postmortem by Nietzsche, was attributed to the triumph of reason over myth. True to form, the artist whom Aristophanes has his comic hero in *The Frogs* drag back from the netherworld embodies the belief that myth must trump reason if art is to discharge its redemptive function. Language had better be portentous, exalted, obscure and grand if the Athenian populace is to be led by art into a new moral era.

The Aristophanic charge to art is to produce work that is dense, dark, prophetic, heroic, mythic, runic, arcane, dangerous, reassuring, accusatory, reinforcing, grandiloquent, too compelling for mere reason to deal with, fraught, fearful, bearing signs that the artist is in touch with powers that will make us whole, and is spiritual, oceanic, urgent, romantic and vast. Since Wagner no one has sought more scrupulously to comply with this imperative than Anselm Kiefer, whose sludged and operatic fabrications have moved to tears viewers who felt they saw in them a remorseful Teutonic conscience.⁴⁰

Danto has little patience with those who, like Heidegger, want to connect the difficulties of our culture to a lack of great art: that would attribute to art a power that does not and should not belong to it. The difficulties of our culture, and there are many, demand a more reasoned response. We should not look to art for redemption. For diversion perhaps, but not for moral leadership, and certainly not, if such leadership is thought to demand that myth trump reason.

Although Aristophanes is here the target, he also stands for the author of *The Birth of Tragedy*. The young Nietzsche thought that his call for a rebirth of tragedy had already been answered by Wagner — an artist Danto most definitely does not like, just as he does not like Kiefer, another artist whose popularity presupposes a deep suspicion of enlightenment, of a reason that, as Nietzsche recognizes, leaves no room for an art that would be more than entertainment or perhaps an illustration of or propaganda for pre-given ideas. Nietzsche's charge here is not all that different from Hegel's understanding of the death of art in its highest sense as the other side of enlightenment. There is, to be

³⁹ Danto, *Encounters and Reflection*, p. 309.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 237-238.

sure, one important difference: as heir of the Enlightenment, Hegel accepts this death as part of humanity's coming of age. To want to undo it would be to want to return to some less advanced stage of spiritual development. Hegel would have understood *The Birth of Tragedy* and its call for a rebirth of tragedy in the modern period as yet another romantic attempt to turn back the clock. No more than Danto, would he have had patience with Nietzsche's lament that by allowing reason to rule our lives we condemn ourselves to an impoverished, ghostly existence.

Hegel could have agreed with Nietzsche's understanding of the Greeks as "the chariot-drivers of every subsequent culture" and of Socrates as one of these: he gave us our model of the theoretical man. While the artist is content with beautiful appearance, theoretical man wants to get to the bottom of things. Just this desire Nietzsche questions. One thing pre-Socratic Greek culture can teach us is, in the words of *The Gay Science*, "to stop courageously at the surface, the fold, the skin, to adore appearance, to believe in forms, tones, words, the whole Olympus of appearance. Those Greeks were superficial — out of profundity."⁴¹ Art is content with appearance. It lets it be. This ability to let things be presupposes a certain renunciation. The artist, so understood, does not insist on being, as Descartes put it, the master and possessor of nature; all genuine art, according to Nietzsche, has something of tragedy about it. It is born of a will to power that recognizes its own lack of power.

Science, on the other hand, wants to master reality. Over its progress presides the "profound illusion that first saw the light of the world in the person of Socrates: the unshakable faith that thought, using the thread of causality, can penetrate the deepest abysses of being, and that thought is capable not only of knowing being, but even of *correcting it*."⁴² Nietzsche understands modern science and even more technology as the triumph of this Socratic tendency. Presupposed is the conviction that whatever deserves to be called "real" reason can grasp and comprehend. But I can comprehend only what has a certain hardness and endures. Reality is thus understood in opposition to time.

⁴¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft*, "Vorrede zur zweiten Ausgabe," in *Sämtliche Werke, Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980), vol. 5, p. 42.

⁴² Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, 15, KSA, vol. 1, p. 98; trans. Walter Kaufmann, *The Birth of Tragedy and the Case of Wagner* (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), p. 95.

Inseparable from the Socratic project is faith in the power of reason to lead us to the good life. “Socrates is the prototype of the theoretical optimist who, with his faith that the nature of things can be fathomed, ascribes to knowledge and to insight the power of a panacea, while understanding error as the evil par excellence.”⁴³ But this faith in reason's power to grasp the essence of reality and to guide human beings to happiness must, Nietzsche is convinced, in the end undermine itself. Reason itself calls such optimism into question, where Nietzsche is thinking first of all of Kant and Schopenhauer as critics of the claims of reason. “But science, spurred on by its powerful illusion, speeds irresistibly towards its limits, where its optimism, concealed in the essence of logic, suffers shipwreck. . . . suddenly the new form of insight breaks through, tragic insight which, merely to be endured, needs art as a protection and remedy.”⁴⁴ Nietzsche welcomes such tragic insight, terrifying as it is and much as it needs art for a remedy; for he is convinced that the Socratic spirit and its understanding of reality tend towards disaster precisely because they raise the false expectation that, just by being reasonable, we can render ourselves, as Descartes promises, the masters and possessors of nature, including our own nature, and assure universal happiness.

Now we must not hide from ourselves what is concealed in the womb of this Socratic culture: optimism with its delusion of limitless power. We must not be alarmed if the fruits of this optimism ripen — if society, leavened to the very lowest strata by this kind of culture, gradually begins to tremble with wanton agitations and desires, if the belief in the earthly happiness of all, if the belief in the possibility of such a general intellectual culture changes into the threatening demand for such an Alexandrian earthly happiness, into the conjuring up of a Euripidean *deus ex machina*.⁴⁵

Socratic optimism generates the dream of paradise regained by reason. But this dream, Nietzsche insists, is incompatible with the human condition, tempting those unwilling to accept this renunciation to embrace some version of what Nietzsche here calls a “Euripidean *deus ex machina*.”

Nietzsche credits Kant and Schopenhauer with having demonstrated the limits that are set to knowledge and to our desire for happiness: they showed us that what science investigates is only the world of phenomena, that it gives us no insight into things in themselves. But why should that matter? Is it not precisely the world of phenomena

⁴³ *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, 15, KSA, vol. 1, p. 100; trans. p. 97.

⁴⁴ *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, 15, KSA, vol. 1, p. 101; trans. pp. 97-98.

that matters? Why should we care about some supposed depth, inaccessible to scientific investigation? Why is it important to oppose to the understanding of reality governing our science a deeper one? I shall have to return to that question. Here I only want to point out that Kant knew that nature, as known by science, should not be equated with reality, for in nature so understood we meet neither with persons nor with values. But practical reason, he was convinced, was sufficient to provide the needed orientation. Nietzsche had read his Schopenhauer too well to find such Enlightenment conviction convincing: what makes our lives worth living finally has its ground in our affective life, above all in eros. It is the downgrading of the affects, of instinct, that he holds against the Socratic tradition, including Kant and Hegel.

Nietzsche does find some recognition of the final inadequacy of the Socratic project in Plato's account of the life of Socrates.⁴⁶ In the *Phaedo* Plato tells of Evenus, a poet, who had heard that Socrates, awaiting his death in prison, had turned to the writing of verse and music. Evenus asks Cebes about the rumor and Cebes in turn checks it with Socrates. Socrates answers that there is indeed something to the story: he had a recurrent dream that always told him that he should "cultivate and make music." Hitherto, Socrates explains, he had thought that he had been engaged in making the right kind of music when engaging others in conversation, that the dream was just exhorting him to continue his pursuit of philosophy. But now, facing death, he is uneasy about that interpretation: could it be that the dream meant popular music rather than philosophy? The delay of the return of Apollo's sacred ship from Delos has given him a bit of extra time, which he spends composing a hymn to Apollo and putting some of Aesop's fables into verse. And Nietzsche finds an analogue in the life of Euripides:

In the evening of his life, Euripides himself propounded to his contemporaries the question of the value and the significance of this [the Socratic] tendency, using myth. Is the Dionysian entitled to exist at all? Should it not be forcibly uprooted from Hellenic soil? Certainly, the poet tells us, if only that were possible; but the God Dionysus is too powerful; his most intelligent adversary — like Pentheus in the *Bacchae* — is unwittingly enchanted by him, and in this enchantment runs to meet his fate.⁴⁷

One cannot but sympathize with Pentheus, who sees in the anarchic potential of Dionysian frenzy a threat to the establishment, to the state. And yet the Dionysian power

⁴⁵ *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, 18, KSA, vol. 1, p. 17; trans. p. 111.

⁴⁶ *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, 14, KSA, vol. 1, p. 96; trans. p. 93.

he battles proves stronger than his measures. In the end he is torn to pieces by his own mother in just such a frenzy.

But if indeed both Euripides and Socrates came to recognize the one-sidedness of Socratic culture, such recognition, Nietzsche suggests, came too late. With the privileging of reason art has to lose its religious, mythical significance, has to lose what Hegel, too, took to be its highest function. **And to the extent that this Socratic spirit presides over our modern understanding of reality, such art would indeed seem to be a thing of the past.**

Danto would, I think, accept this conclusion, although, like Hegel, he would question the presupposed nostalgia for a recovery of what lies irrecoverably behind us. Nietzsche, on the other hand, remained convinced that we, especially we moderns, need an art for which our modern world would seem to leave no room. He was unwilling to accept the finality of Hegel's judgment and such unwillingness led him to challenge the presupposed understanding of reality and its relation to reason. In this respect *The Birth of Tragedy* belongs with Heidegger's "The Origin of the Work of Art." Both works claim that it is vitally important to at least struggle to keep open the possibility of a rebirth or return of art in its highest sense. *The Birth of Tragedy* was thus meant to help create a climate of receptivity for Wagner's music drama, for a dense and dark prophetic art, "too compelling for mere reason to deal with," and "The Origin of the Work of Art" does help us appreciate what Danto calls the "sludged and operatic fabrications" of Anselm Kiefer, some of which include Heidegger's name and image. Whether we side here with Hegel or Nietzsche will depend on whether we remain optimists concerning the sufficiency of reason to lead us to the good life.

6

Danto is such an optimist. He agrees with Hegel, who would have us consider the death of art in its highest sense part of humanity's coming of age. But the end of art that interests him is quite different. To understand it, we do not need to look at art, as Nietzsche demanded, in the perspective of life.⁴⁸ All we need do is look at the history of both art and of reflection on art, which teaches us that others have spoken of art, more

⁴⁷ *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, 12, KSA, vol. 1, p. 82; trans, p. 81.

especially of painting, ending, long before Belting and Danto, long before even Hegel. Danto himself cites Aristotle. But the most important of these, given the story Danto has to tell us, is Giorgio Vasari:

Vasari supposed that painting had attained “its own nature” in his own times, and his history was meant to show the development that had led up to a climax which he did not see as a crisis, thinking that there would be other things for art to do than seek its own nature. And in a sense painting was able to continue a developmental history after Vasari only by redefining its own nature — and the interesting thought for me is whether we have really reached the end of redefinition itself, a progress that accelerated so in this strange century. And so no more breakthroughs?⁴⁹

Danto here suggests two possible ways of looking at what happened in the sixties: as just another in an ongoing series of endings, each preceded by some redefinition of the supposed essence of art or painting, or as a final end, final because it put an end to that process of redefinition. To answer Danto's last question: “And so no more breakthroughs?” resolutely in the affirmative would require an understanding of art so definitive, and that would presumably mean also so generous, that a move beyond it would seem inconceivable, although it is hard to see what such an understanding might be: will there not always be things we can point to that we refuse to call art? But such a refusal presupposes a boundary that can be challenged. And who is to say that the art world might not eventually endorse such a challenge, no matter how outrageous it might seem at first? This is one lesson van Bladeren, who thought that to slash monumental canvasses by Barnett Newman was to create art, has taught us. And is this not also a lesson taught by Danto's precursors, Vasari and Hegel? The one may have proclaimed the end of art in 1550, the other in 1828, but in neither case did art stop. This might be taken as a lesson in how foolish it is to make such strong claims.

Vasari was no fool. What exactly did he assert? In what sense did he think that art had finally attained its nature?

Vasari might well have been surprised to find himself discussed as someone who proclaimed the end of art. Yes, he did think that the painters of the day, especially Michelangelo, had brought that art to a “pitch of perfection” that made it difficult to expect much improvement. But this no more meant the end of art than coming of age

⁴⁸ *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, “Versuch einer Selbstkritik,” 2, KSA vol. 1, p. 14; trans. “Attempt at a Self-Criticism,” p. 19.

means the end of life. Michelangelo is said to have led painting and a world that had for so long been in darkness into the light of day. But this is celebrated as a liberation. Because a work like the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel “contains every perfection that can be given” — and we must not forget how fond Vasari was of hyperbole — it caused painters to “no longer care about novelties, inventions, attitudes and draperies, methods of new expression painted in different ways.” The deliverance from such care is understood by Vasari as a gift. Artists born in his century owed Michelangelo, this “greatest artist of all time,” “a great debt, for he has removed the veil of all imaginable difficulties in his painting, sculpture, and architecture.”⁵⁰ Vasari takes for granted that the artist must know how to reproduce and imitate nature, that Giotto, learning from Cimabue, “threw open the gates of Truth to those who afterwards brought art to that perfection and grandeur which we see in our own age,” surpassing the Greeks, whose good manner had been forsaken by the medievals.⁵¹ Presupposed is an understanding of painting as striving for convincing representations of visible reality, where perspective was sought to provide a key.⁵² But no more than Alberti, did Vasari think that the point of art was to advance the cause of representation. “The greatest work of the painter,” according to Alberti, “is the *istoria*,” the story told in paint.⁵³ Such an “*istoria* will move the soul of the beholder when each man painted there clearly shows the movement of his soul... These movements of the soul are made known by movements of the body.”⁵⁴ The poets should here be the painter's teachers. To be sure, to tell his tales effectively the painter must have mastered representation. But there is no need to think that such story telling must ever come to an end; nor does it mean that the painter should not bend or play with perspective when his story demands it. The perfection of art of which Vasari speaks only removed obstacles to the effective presentation of the *istoria*.

Vasari was convinced that all the tools a painter needs had now been made available. But he was also convinced that mastery of these tools does not yet make one a

⁴⁹ Danto, *Encounters and Reflection*, p. 309.

⁵⁰ Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, trans. A. B. Hinds, ed. and abridged by Edmund Fuller (New York: Dell, 1968), pp. 462, 367, 422, 386.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 18 and 25.

⁵² See Karsten Harries, “Alberti and Perspective Construction,” *Infinity and Perspective* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001), pp. 64-77.

⁵³ Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting*, trans. John R. Spencer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956), p. 70, repeated on 72.

great painter, as he thought his own example proved, despite all his devotion to the art and painstaking effort. He was very much aware that he did not possess Michelangelo's genius.⁵⁵ Vasari knew that painting aimed at more than the creation of representations that ideally would be like what is seen in a mirror, an understanding of the nature of painting at least as old as Plato, who states it, however, only to put down the painter. Such mirroring is very different from what Michelangelo did when he painted the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Vasari praises him precisely for his willingness "to use no perspective or foreshortening, or any fixed point of view" when the disposition of the whole required it.⁵⁶ Mastery of perspective here allows the painter to rise above it and to play with it whenever the *istoria* required it. As Holbein demonstrated in the *Ambassadors*, Brueghel in *The Fall of Icarus*, Hobbema in *The Avenue, Middelharnis*, such play opened possibilities that Mannerist and Baroque painters were eager to explore.

Vasari remarks that Michelangelo showed both, "the greatness of God and the perfection of art," when he represented "the Dividing of Light from Darkness, showing with love and art the Almighty, self-supported, with extended arms."⁵⁷ Vasari must have thought that this love manifested itself in the painting and made it come alive. Again and again in the *Lives* we come across passages that show how much the **appearance of life** mattered to Vasari, where there is some tension between the way Albertian perspective demanded a freezing of time and the demand that the painting seem alive. Especially interesting in this connection is Vasari's praise of Titian, who is said to have worked in "an impressionist manner, with bold strokes and blobs," and thereby to have made his "paintings appear alive and achieved without labour."⁵⁸ Important here is not just the representation of some real or imagined scene, but the way paint is handled and re-presented, communicating a sense of spontaneity that made the art seem alive. Vasari had a special interest in the painter's ability to transmute matter. In his life of Raphael he thus tells of a self-portrait Dürer had sent the painter in homage, "painted in water-colours, on cambric, so fine that it was transparent, without the use of white paint, the white

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

⁵⁵ Vasari, *Lives*, p. 347.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 367.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 368.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 438.

material forming the lights of the picture. This appeared marvelous to Raphael...⁵⁹

What is marvelous is not so much the fine representation, but the way light is not represented here by means of paint, but it is the material that bears the likeness that itself becomes light. The painter appears as a kind of alchemist, transforming base matter into light, which had long been thought to mediate between spirit and matter.

As a student and friend of Michelangelo, Vasari was well aware that the creation of great art involved more than a dutiful carrying out of what representation required. Paintings should appear to live. But the secret of how to achieve such appearance, how to animate paint on canvas, is not easily taught, as shown by those who, trying to make Titian's method their own, only end up with "clumsy pictures."⁶⁰ It is thus to caricature Vasari's *Lives* to suggest that the book offers

an internal narrative of the mastery of visual appearances, a bit like the history of the airplane or the automobile: a progressive sequence in which technology generates technology better than itself with reference to a defining goal, after which there are minor refinements and, as said before, institutionalization. There would be external references, as Piero della Francesca's *Legend of the True Cross* refers to the fall of Constantinople in 1453, but Piero's place in the internal history has nothing to do with this, but rather with his contribution to perspective.⁶¹

What Vasari emphasizes in his discussion of Piero della Francesca, however, is not just his mastery of perspective, but also the way the painter was able to give his representations the appearance of life, e. g., to execute heads from life so well that "but for the gift of life they seemed alive" or to paint "in a smooth and novel manner many portraits antique in style and full of life."⁶²

That a preoccupation with perspective can become an obstacle to the incarnation of animating spirit in paint was demonstrated, so Vasari thought, by the example of Paolo Uccello, whose immoderate devotion to this machine-like method did lead to a significant advance in art, allowing that painter, among other things, "to bring to perfection the method of representing buildings," but also threatened to drain all life from his art, preventing him from becoming a better painter.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 293.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 368.

⁶¹ Danto, *Encounters and Reflection*, p. 338.

⁶² Vasari, pp. 128, 130.

7

Danto's simile, likening the narrative of the mastery of visual appearances to the history of the airplane or the automobile, should not let us forget that working on the perfection of airplane or automobile is one thing, flying or driving one another. Similarly, to contribute to the mastery of visual appearances is one thing, to create art another. But if so, it is misleading to call the account of the mastery of visual appearances the "internal narrative," as if the story of art could be reduced to the story of the development of a key tool, as if its machinery mattered more than its life. And it is also misleading to suggest that

What happened between Raphael and Caravaggio was an external event, not part at all of Vasari's story, the parameters of which are developments in what he enumerates as rule, proportion, order, draftsmanship, and manner. It was with respect to these that the "Masters of the Third Age," as Vasari designates them, attained "supreme perfection," excluding the possibility of a Fourth Age" in which Caravaggio would have to fall, or the Carracci, or the great masters of the Baroque. Belting claims that "a historical theory of Baroque art, properly speaking, never emerged at all." The external event, which Vasari's scheme had no way of forecasting, was the Counter-Reformation. And here is one way to continue the narrative.⁶³

I have called Danto's sketch of "Vasari's story" a caricature: Vasari does not allow us to distinguish in quite that way between "internal narrative" and "external events." Nor can his understanding of painting be reduced to the parameters mentioned by Danto. For that Vasari is far too interested in life, including the life of the spirit. And we must not forget that Alberti called the *istoria* the greatest work of the painter." This opens the door to narratives that do not relegate the spiritual and narrative dimension of art to the status of a merely external event. We do not do justice to the greatness of Vasari's Michelangelo when we understand him, to use Danto's simile, as having built a better airplane than anyone before him, but when we appreciate that he knew how to fly. Only the latter leads us to the essence of art and that essence is linked to spirit. And as the example of Titian shows: Vasari did not think that Michelangelo's was the only way to fly. There was no reason for Vasari to be concerned with the end of the story that begins with Cimabue's revival of the art of painting.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 338.

This is not to challenge the usefulness of Danto's caricature. Something does end with the masters of the Renaissance celebrated by Vasari. But an "internal" account such as the one suggested here cannot do justice to that end. **The very distinction between "internal" and "external" calls itself into question.** The history of art demands to be placed in the wider context of the history of ideas and this in turn demands to be placed in the still wider context of history.

The narrative that supports Danto's account of the history and end of art in the 1960's includes and extends the narrative he ascribes to Vasari.

I have found it valuable, if a bit too neat and simple, to see the history of Western art as falling into three main periods, circa 1300, circa 1600, and circa 1900. I cannot speculate over what external event it was that gives rise to Giotto and the internal history of visual representation which generates the progress Vasari brought to general consciousness. I think we know what in general stimulated the shift to multidimensional illusionism around 1600 — namely, the conscious decision by the Church to enlist art in the service of faith by operating at the level of visual rhetoric. The shift to Modernism is more difficult to identify. Though two thoughts have occurred to me. One was that the advent of motion picture technology meant that the capacity for illusion had passed entirely outside the hands of painters, forcing them either to rethink the nature of painting or simply to become outmoded. The Vasarian history continues into the moving picture, the entire narrative construed as the technical conquest of appearances, while painting moves along another, abruptly concerned as it is with what is the essence of painting. The other thought has to do with the sudden perception in the late nineteenth century of the artistic merit of primitive art, and that had to have been connected with the fading of a belief that Western civilization, emblemized by Western art, defined the apex of human attainment — defined as a narrative that was to chart the course for aspiring cultures. Here I give particular credit to Paul Gauguin, and my inclination is to believe that all the strategies of Modernism just short of abstraction are to be found in his own innovation as an artist. Gauguin described himself as a "cerebral" artist and primitive art as rational or — as Picasso would say of the works that so stirred him in the Ethnographic Museum at Trocadéro — "*raisonnable*." ⁶⁴

Danto calls his account "a bit too neat and simple." And so it is. I thus would want to add circa 1770 and I suspect that Danto would be receptive to such a proposal: cannot Hegel's philosophy be understood as an attempt to come to terms with that epochal threshold, marked by all sorts of revolutions, including not only the American and the French, but Kant's Copernican revolution, and also by a revolution in art that found an

eloquent spokesman in Winckelmann, who also defended a version of the end of art thesis, claiming that art could never hope to surpass what the Greeks had achieved long ago, a claim that Hegel was very familiar with and could not dismiss. One characteristic expression of this threshold is the sharp distinction drawn by Lessing between arts of space and arts of time. No longer does *ut pictura poesis* seem convincing, as painting takes its leave from that *istoria* in which Alberti once sought the painting's very soul. Painting now turns its back on Baroque allegory, and that is to say also on the Counter-Reformation. No longer can painting be understood as an art of the Word or of words. A different sort of narrative concerning painting's essence and task came to be demanded.

One key to the narrative that supported the art that came to some sort of end in the 1960's is provided by an approach to art that we can call "the aesthetic approach" because supported by, as it in turn supports philosophical aesthetics, itself a product of the Enlightenment. *To the extent* that the aesthetic approach is indeed presupposed by modern art, Danto's suggestive remarks on moving pictures — why not also mention photography in this context? — and primitive art have to leave one dissatisfied. Danto's appeal to the way the moving picture can be understood as continuing the Vasarian narrative of artifice conquering appearances, almost forcing painting, by the camera's very success, to radically change its course and to abruptly concern itself with the essence of painting, does not help us to understand the enormous passion that the modernist narrative generated. Why such concern to purify painting from everything external, to distill its very *essence* — a concern that still echoes in Danto's own distinction between what is internal and external to painting? Why should the pursuit of purity have figured so significantly in the progress of modern art? The desire to return to the primitive and archaic, too, has its roots in the Enlightenment and is linked to an attempt to found all authority in reason and nature instead of accepting worn-out inherited patterns. Art, too, sought to return to its very *arche*.

Essence and arche — the pursuit of both would seem to have exhausted itself. And no comparable project is in sight. In this respect the situation appears vastly different from what it was in Vasari's day, when the essence of art was believed to be something well understood and quite unproblematic. Today the very idea of such an essence would seem to have become more than questionable. Everything goes.

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp., 340-341.

What Warhol demonstrated was that anything, if a work of art, can be matched by something that looks just like it which is not one, so the difference between art and non-art cannot rest in what they have in common — and that will be everything that strikes the eye. But once it is recognized that we must look for differentiating features at right angles to their surfaces, the entire urgency is drained from the enterprise of producing counterinstances, and the analysis of the concept can proceed without examples and without counter examples: we are in the thin unhistorical atmosphere of philosophy. But once art makers are freed from the task of finding the essence of art, which had been thrust upon art at the inception of Modernism, they too have been liberated from history, and have entered the era of freedom. Art does not end with the end of art history. What happens only is that one set of imperatives has been lifted from its practice as it enters what I think of as its posthistorical phase.⁶⁵

Danto can give such an upbeat ending to his story because he does not have art end in philosophy, as Hegel seems to suggest, but in passing through and liberating itself from philosophy. Today, he suggests, art no longer has a need for master-narratives concerning its essence or for an agenda that would call artists in a certain direction. This burden artists have finally shed.

Hegel's story is different. For Hegel, too, there is a sense in which art has come to an end, not in the sense that a particular artistic agenda has been carried out, so that here nothing important was left to be done, nor in the sense that all such agendas were finally a thing of the past, but in the sense that art from the side of what Hegel considered its highest vocation had been left behind by the progress of spirit. The whole progress of modern art is, from this Hegelian perspective, a progress of an art that has already surrendered its highest function, a progress that comes after the death of art in its highest sense. But I shall turn to Hegel next time.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 344.

3. Art and Nature

1

To better relate what Hegel has to say about art and the death of art I turned last time to Arthur Danto's related thesis about the end of art. As Danto understands this end, it is tied to modern art's ever more resolute preoccupation with itself, with what art should be. Works like Duchamp's ready-mades and Warhol's Brillo box gain here an exemplary significance. The artist here does philosophy in the medium of art, philosophizes about the meaning of art. Such "art" means the end of art as it had been understood by someone like Clement Greenberg, who rightly sees himself as standing in the same tradition as Lessing and Kant. With this a certain narrative has lost its hold on art.

And Danto does not see a new narrative to take its place. This loss of any master narrative grants art an unheard freedom. Contemporary art, as the title of one of Danto's books claims, lies beyond the *Pale of History*.

Something like this, as we shall see, is also claimed by Hegel. There is, however, a decisive difference. For Hegel art has come to an end not just in a sense that a particular narrative has lost its hold on art, that a particular agenda has been worked out, but that art from the side of what Hegel calls its highest vocation has been left behind by the progress of spirit. The whole progress of modern art, and that most definitely includes the narrative that Danto takes to define modern art, is understood by Hegel to have already surrendered art's highest function, a progress that presupposes the death of art from the side of its highest vocation.

2

With this let me turn to the Introduction of Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics*. Hegel begins with what seems a quite uncontroversial description of what concerns him and yet already this first paragraph raises a host of questions.

The present course of lectures deals with 'Aesthetic'. Their subject is the wide *realm of the beautiful*; and, more particularly, their province is *Art*, we may restrict it indeed to *Fine Art*. (3)⁶⁶

Just how are beauty and art related? Hegel's statement invites comparison with the first part of Kant's *Critique of Judgment*: the "Critique of Aesthetic Judgment." Kant there focuses on beauty. Art becomes an express subject only in par. 43 of the *Critique of Judgment*. For Hegel **aesthetics comes to mean the philosophy of fine art**.

This calls for a second look at the term, and just this is furnished by the second paragraph:

The name 'Aesthetic' in its natural sense is not quite appropriate to this subject. 'Aesthetic' means more precisely the science of sensations or feeling. This understood, it arose as a new science, or rather as something that was to become a branch of philosophy for the first time in the school of Wolff, at the epoch when works of art were being considered in Germany in the light of the feelings which they were supposed to evoke — feelings of pleasure, admiration, fear, pity, etc. The name was so inappropriate, or, strictly speaking, so superficial, that for this reason it was attempted to form other names, e. g. 'Kallistic'. But this name, again, is unsatisfactory, for the science to be designated does not treat of beauty in general, but merely of artistic beauty. We shall therefore, permit the name Aesthetic to stand, because it is nothing but a name, and so is indifferent to us, and, moreover, has up to a certain point passed into common language. As a name therefore it may be retained. The proper expression, however, for our science is the 'Philosophy of Art', or more definitely, 'The Philosophy of Fine Art'. (3)

The reference to Kallistic is of interest. Hegel rejects it because it casts its net too widely, including among other things the beauty of nature. Another kind of objection that Hegel, and this is worth noting, does not raise, is that it does not cast its net widely enough: should aesthetics not consider also other aesthetic judgments, such as judgments of the sublime or the interesting? Hegel, at any rate, is content to retain the term "Aesthetics," despite some misgivings.

It was Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten who first used the term, not, however in his *Metaphysica*, as Michale Inwooi's commentary suggests, but in his dissertation of 1735, *Meditationes Philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus*, translated as

⁶⁶ Page references to Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, trans. Bernard Bosanquet, ed. and intro. Michael Inwood (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993)

Reflections on Poetry. Hegel also gestures towards the context: the school of Wolff, who in turn was a student of Leibniz. But let me unpack this:

Let me return to the phrase: "works of art were considered in the light of the feelings they were supposed to evoke." Heidegger would seem to have been thinking of this passage in his Epilogue to "The Origin of the Work of Art" when he wrote,

Aesthetics takes the work of art as an object, the object of *aisthesis*, of sensuous apprehension in the wide sense. Today we call this apprehension experience. The way in which man experiences art is supposed to give information about its nature. Experience is the source that is standard not only for art appreciation and enjoyment, but also for artistic creation. Everything is an experience. Yet perhaps experience is the element in which art dies.⁶⁷

A turn to the subject is characteristic of aesthetics so understood, as it is generally of modern philosophy. Consider in this connection this remark from Kant's "First Introduction" to the *Critique of Judgment*, where he distinguishes two rather different meanings of "aesthetic."

Aesthetic indicates for one what has to do with sensibility. Space and time as forms of sensibility being necessarily to knowledge, in so far as knowledge has its origin in the joining of intuition and concept. The aesthetic is understood here as belonging to the object (phenomenon). From this meaning of aesthetic we have to distinguish as second, where by means of the aesthetic mode of representation the represented is not related to the *faculty of knowledge*, but to the *faculty of pleasure and pain*.⁶⁸

It is this second sense that is presupposed by what I called the aesthetic approach.

Aesthetic judgment involves a reflective movement. Reflective here suggests a looking back from the beautiful object to the kind of experience it evokes. The philosophy of art understood as aesthetics has its foundation in a more subjective approach to art that tends to reduce the work of art to an occasion for a certain kind of enjoyable experience. What is enjoyed is not really the work of art, but the occasioned experience or state of mind.

⁶⁷ Martin Heidegger, "Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes," *Holzwege* (1935–1946), *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 5 (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1977). p. 65; "The Origin of the Work of Art," trans. Albert Hofstadter, *Language, Thought* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 79.

⁶⁸ Immanuel Kant, "First Introduction into the Critique of Judgment," trans. Werner S. Pluhar, *Critique of Judgment* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 409–410.

3

Baumgarten's establishment of modern **aesthetics** then is part of a turn to the subject. We associate that subjective turn taken by modern philosophy above all with Descartes. And Baumgarten relies on the framework provided by Descartes and appropriated by Leibniz, when he proposes this characterization of the experience of the beautiful: **a perception of perfection that is clear, but not distinct.**

That characterization deserves careful scrutiny: first of all, what is meant by **clear, but not distinct?**

What does Descartes mean by *clear and distinct*? In the *Principles* Descartes offers us the following definition:

I term that clear and distinct which is present to an attentive mind in the same way as we assert that we see objects clearly when, being present to the regarding eye, they operate upon it with sufficient strength. But the distinct is that which is so precise and different from all other objects that it contains within itself nothing but what is clear.⁶⁹

What presents itself clearly and distinctly is thus **transparent**. In it there is nothing that escapes the mind's grasp. Nothing is hidden, no mystery remains. Everything is **present**.

From this definition it follows that whatever we are presented by our eyes may be clear, but can never be distinct; for to see something clearly and distinctly is to see it totally and with complete adequacy. The phenomenon of perspective precludes this. Perspectival understanding is inevitably partial. Clarity and distinctness demands thus a standpoint beyond perspective, beyond sensation: the stand-point of thought.

It should be noted that for Descartes the difference between concept and percept does not seem to be one of kind, but of degree. Both are modes of perception. Sense impressions are **confused and obscure** perceptions. But only the clear and distinct gives us access to truth and to reality. Sensory perception thus has to yield to intellectual knowledge if it is to lead us to the truth. A downgrading of the senses is the inevitable consequence. The threat that this poses to what I called in our first session the ontological conception of art should be evident. If art is not to give up its claim to serve the truth, it must become as much like thought as possible, i. e., it must destroy itself as art? Neo-classicism was well on the road towards such a self-destruction of art. Its embarrassment about color, about the sensuous aspect of art is of a piece with its

⁶⁹ René Descartes, *Principles*, I, XLV. *Philosophical Works of Descartes*, 2 vols., trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross (New York: Dover, 1955), vol. I, p. 237.

fundamentally Cartesian approach to art. Presupposed is that clear and distinct thinking and the corresponding discourse are the proper vehicles of the pursuit of truth.

Descartes himself spent little time discussing perceptions that are clear, but not distinct. But their future importance for aesthetics is anticipated by a passage in Leibniz's *Discourse on Metaphysics*:

When I am able to recognize a thing among others, without being able to say in what its difference and characteristics consist, the knowledge is confused. Sometimes indeed we may know clearly, that is without being in the slightest doubt, that a poem or a picture is well or badly done because there is in it an "I don't know what" which satisfies or shocks us. Such knowledge is not yet distinct.⁷⁰

This is not just a mere sensation. Something like knowledge is involved. But the knowledge that something is beautiful is an odd kind of knowledge: it is clear, but not distinct, where distinct is defined as follows:

It is when I am able to explain the peculiarities which a thing has, that the knowledge is called distinct.

There is no clear and distinct understanding when we experience the beautiful. And yet the person who sees something beautiful is convinced that what he sees is indeed beautiful. Even if he cannot give an account of why he should hold this conviction, he claims something like insight. Such insight Leibniz terms clear. Leibniz here recognizes a kind of quasi-knowledge. What opens up here is the need for a mental faculty that stands between *perceptio* and *cogitatio*. To this third faculty the name *taste* was widely given. Judgments of beauty are judgments of taste.

4

The appreciation of beauty, according to Baumgarten is a perception of perfection. What then is meant by **perfection**? In his *Metaphysics* Baumgarten defines perfection as follows:

If many things considered together contain the reason for some other thing, they harmonize in respect to this thing. This harmony is perfection.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics*, XXIV, trans. Montgomery (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1953).

⁷¹ Baumgarten, *Metaphysica* (Halle, Hemmerden, 1779), par. 73.

In this sense the different steps of a proof may be said to harmonize with respect to the theorem to be proved. But the perfection of a proof must be distinguished from the perfection of a work of art, from beauty. Beauty Baumgarten understands as perceived perfection:

Perfection, in so far as it is to be found in appearance, or in so far as it is recognized by the faculty of **taste** in its widest sense, is beauty.

The notion of perfection refers thus to **a manifold united by a common theme**.

The faculty of recognizing the connections between things indistinctly is the analogon of reason (*analogon rationis*).⁷²

This *analogon rationis* is **taste**. Just as **logic** is the science that investigates the norms that govern **clear and distinct reasoning**, **aesthetics** investigates the norms governing **taste**.

Let me sum up the discussion so far by yet another quote from Baumgarten's *Metaphysics*:

The law of the faculty of judgment is as follows: if a given manifold is recognized as either fitting together or as not fitting together, then its perfection or imperfection is recognized. This happens either sensually or distinctly. The faculty of judging by means of sense is taste in its widest sense.⁷³

The implications of this understanding of **beauty as sensible perfection** are developed in pars. 65 – 76 of the dissertation. The definition of perfection, given above, which spoke of a thing in which other things cohere, recurs in Baumgarten's conception of the understanding of the poem's **theme**.

Par. 66. By **theme** we mean that whose representation contains the sufficient reason of other representations supplied in the discourse, but which does not have its own sufficient reason in them.

In creating a unity out of a manifold the poet is like another **god**, the work he creates like another world, having its own closure. The simile leads Baumgarten to make the following provocative claim:

Par. 68. We observed a little while ago that the poet is like a maker or creator. So the poem ought to be like a world. Hence by analogy whatever is evident to the philosophers concerning the real world, the same ought to be thought of a poem.

⁷² *Metaphysica*, par. 640.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

This is to say that whatever the metaphysicians have said about the world is by analogy true of the poem. Take Leibniz's monadology, which represents the world as a perfectly ordered whole. The philosopher's discourse, to be sure, aims to be not sensate, but clear and distinct. But note what the simile suggests: the work of art has a structure that is very much like that of Leibniz's best of all possible worlds. The poem's theme is its God. Or, we can say, **the world is a poem that has God for its theme**. Today we are, to be sure, unlikely to be convinced by Leibniz's metaphysics. But note that Baumgarten's simile does not depend for its effectiveness on whether Leibniz is right or wrong. Baumgarten invites us, although this is hardly what he intended, to read the *Monadology* as a philosophical poem that presents a world whose order is not secured by clear and distinct reasoning but by an act of imagination, where the imagination appears as the creative side of taste. Just this makes it a poem, despite its medium.

5

The aesthetic object appears here first of all as a human artifact, as a work of art. It is no accident that the term aesthetics makes its first appearance in a work on Poetry. And Hegel simply **equates Aesthetics with the Philosophy of Fine Arts**, an equation that must seem problematic, however, to any reader of Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, where Kant's paradigms of beautiful or sublime subjects are first of all taken from **nature**. Hegel is of another mind.

By the above expression we at once exclude the *beauty of Nature*. Such a limitation of our subject may appear to be an arbitrary demarcation, resting on the principle that every science has the prerogative of marking out its boundaries at pleasure. But this is not the sense in which we are to understand the limitation of Aesthetic to the *beauty of art*. (3)

Compare this with Kant's explanation of the difference between what he calls *free* and merely *adherent beauty*. Here are Kant's words:

Par. 16. Flowers are free natural beauties. Hardly anyone apart from the botanist knows what sort of thing a flower is [meant] to be; and even he, while recognizing it as the reproductive organ of the plant, pays no attention to this natural purpose when he judges the flower by taste. Hence the judgment is based on no perfection of any kind, no intrinsic purposiveness to which the combination of the manifold might refer. Many birds (the parrot, the humming-bird, the bird of paradise) and a lot of crustaceans in the sea are [free] beauties themselves [and] belong to no object determined by concepts as to the purpose, but we like them freely and on their own account. Thus designs *à la*

grecque, the foliage on borders or on wallpaper, etc., mean nothing on their own; they represent [*vorstellen*] nothing, no object under a determinate concept, and are free beauties. What we call fantasias in music (namely, music without a topic [*Thema*]), indeed all music not set to words, may also be included in the same class (76-77).⁷⁴

As if this were obvious **Kant joins** here **nature** (exotic birds and sea shells) **and art** (ornament and music without theme or text). Such joining, however, is anything but unproblematic.

That Kant does not turn to painting or sculpture for his examples of artificial free beauties is hardly surprising, given their then taken for granted character as arts of imitation. As such both have their measure in nature and are judged by that measure. But such a judgment cannot be free. The possibility of a truly abstract visual art had not yet presented itself to Kant, with the ambiguous exception of **decoration**, which, precisely because not quite taken seriously as art, allowed its designers a freedom denied to practitioners of the higher arts.

Especially the last sentences of the quote would seem to call themselves into question. “Designs *à la grecque*” follow a certain manner, are bound by a certain model, and this model gives our judgment a measure that allows us to call one design more successful than another. But, if so, the judgment of taste, according to Kant, is no longer pure and we are dealing with a merely adherent beauty. Similarly, when judging “foliage on borders or on wallpaper,” we are bound by quite specific expectations: ornamental foliage makes reference to more or less familiar leaves, and borders (*Einfassungen*) and wallpaper have an ornamental and that means also a serving function. In judging them we keep in mind the nature of such service. Is all **ornament** not by its very nature unfree?

What then leads Kant to choose ornament for his first example of an artificial, yet pure beauty? He himself goes on to immediately raise what would seem to be a decisive objection:

Much that would be liked directly in intuition could be added to a building, if only the building were not [meant] to be a church. A figure could be embellished with all sorts of curlicues and light but regular lines, as the New Zealanders do with their tattoos, if only it were not the figure of a human being. And this human being might have had more

⁷⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 409-410. pp. 76-77

delicate features and a facial structure with a softer and more likable outline, if only he were not [meant] to represent a man, let alone a warlike one.⁷⁵

Must something similar not be said of “designs *à la grecque*” or of “foliage on borders or wallpaper”? But here Kant is willing to bracket the serving function of ornament.

In order to consider something good, I must always know what sort of thing the object is [meant] to be, i. e., I must have a [determinate] concept of it. But I do not need this in order to find beauty in something. Flowers, free designs, lines aimlessly intertwined and called foliage: these have no significance, depend on no determinate concept; and yet we like [*gefallen*] them.⁷⁶

We don't need to subject decorative foliage to a concept. This does not mean that this is not possible: we can thus ask whether a certain leaf ornament or wallpaper fits some interior. But such questions presuppose an approach that is no longer purely aesthetic. As Kant understands it, unlike painting or sculpture, ornament invites a purely aesthetic appreciation, *as if* it were a product of nature.

But has not such an approach lost sight of the very essence of ornament, which must serve the ornament-bearer by so re-presenting it that our attention is led to what is essential? Successful ornament makes the ornament-bearer more legible. Ornament dies as ornament, perhaps to be re-born as art for art's sake, when it loses this hermeneutic-decorative function, when the attempt is made to raise it to the status of a self-sufficient beauty. This attempt has to first loosen and finally to dissolve the tie between ornament and ornament-bearer. **The transformation of ornament into mere decoration** is implied by Kant's use of this example. Such transformation means the **death of ornament** “on the side of its highest destiny.” This death and the rise of a more autonomous, distinctly modern art go together. As Greenberg recognized, Kant's *Critique of Judgment* marks the threshold that separates the new from an older approach. And yet Kant stands too much on this threshold to recognize it as such. Thus he sees neither the death of ornament nor the birth of a new art, sees neither what renders the examples he has chosen so profoundly questionable, nor what makes them so prophetic.

Not only do Kant's examples call themselves into question. Despite Greenberg's attempt to make Kant's discussion of free beauty the basis of a modernist aesthetic, it is difficult to see how there can be free beauties in art at all. When the discussion turns

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 77

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 48-49

from the aesthetic judgment to art, Kant himself is forced to admit this. “In [dealing with] a product of fine art we must become conscious that it is art rather than nature” and “if the object is given as a product of art, and as such is to be declared beautiful, then we must first base it on a concept of what the thing is [meant] to be, since art always presupposes a purpose in the cause (and its causality).”⁷⁷ **To judge something as a work of art is to presuppose an intention, and be it the intention of creating just as nature does, a truly free beauty.** But this intention remains an intention and provides the observer with a measure. The concept of an artificial and truly free beauty is self-contradictory, even if the natural look demanded by Kant may cover up such contradiction. And yet, just this contradictory concept gave a direction to modern art. The examples mentioned by Kant seem prophetic in retrospect: the models provided by both music and ornament were to help art, especially painting, to free itself from representation and pointed the way to an ever more rigorous abstraction. Kant's self-contradictory examples of an artificial and yet pure beauty look ahead, not only to modern art, but also to its inevitable shipwreck: modern art has to suffer shipwreck on the reef of the contradiction inherent in its chosen telos. And this shipwreck invites a post-modern art that once again affirms what on the aesthetic approach constitutes the essential impurity of art.

As Kant himself later explicitly recognizes, notwithstanding what he had said earlier about ornament and musical fantasies, truly free beauties are encountered, if anywhere, only in nature. In the concept of a pure and yet artificial beauty lies a contradiction we cannot get around. Notwithstanding this contradiction, Kant's determination of a pure, free beauty influenced a whole series of thinkers from Schopenhauer to Clement Greenberg and helps to illuminate the epochal threshold that separates a distinctively modern aesthetic sensibility from the artistic culture that preceded it and perhaps also that more problematic threshold that separates it from a postmodern sensibility. It makes one think that just ornament and music, art forms, by the way, which Kant himself held in very low esteem, should have anticipated future developments: both helped art, especially painting, to free itself from the rule of representation and pointed the way toward an ever more rigorous abstraction and a more pronounced autonomy.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 179.

6

Hegel, as we have seen, does not follow Kant in his high estimation of the beauty of nature, on which the beauty of art depends and to which it is subordinated. He does not hesitate to place the beauty of art higher than that of nature. What is at issue becomes clearer in the following paragraph:

We may however, begin at once by asserting that artistic beauty stands higher than nature. For the beauty of art is the beauty that is born, born again, that is — of the mind; and by as much as the mind and its products are higher than nature and its appearances, by so much the beauty of art is higher than the beauty of nature. Indeed, if we look at it formally — i. e. only considering it in what way it exists, not what there is in it — even a silly fancy such a may pass through a man's head, is higher than any product of nature, for such a fancy must at least be characterized by intellectual being and by freedom (4)

The beautiful is beautiful only in so far as it is born of the Spirit. That presumably would be true of natural beauty, too, which leads readily to thoughts of God. The phrase "the beauty of art is the beauty that is born, born again," raises the question of the **relationship of the beauty of art to that of nature.** The general view would seem to hark back to Plato. But unlike Plato, when Hegel is thinking here of spirit, he is first of all thinking of the human spirit, not of a higher logos or of God. In its own being nature is indifferent.

The young Hegel's response to the Swiss Alps is telling:

Reason finds in the thought of the permanence of these mountains or in the kind of sublimity that is ascribed to them nothing that impresses it, that demands wonder and admiration. Seeing these dead masses gave me nothing but the monotonous and in time boring idea: this is the way it is.⁷⁸

Such a bored response to what was then considered a paradigmatically sublime landscape is of a piece with Hegel's later understanding of nature and its processes as an ever repeating circular movement.

In nature nothing new happens under the sun, and thus the play of its formations in all their variety brings with it boredom.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Hegel, "Auszüge aus dem Tagebuch der Reise in die Berner Oberalpen (25. Juli bis August 1796)" *Werke*, 20 vols., ed. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1971), vol. 1, *Frühe Schriften*, p. 618.

⁷⁹ *Dokumente zu Hegels Entwicklung*, ed. Johannes Hoffmeister (Stuttgart: Fromann, 1936), p. 149.

Nature divorced from mind is thought to be mute. Considered as such it cannot be considered beautiful.

Mind, and mind only, is capable of truth, and comprehends in itself all that is, so that whatever is beautiful can only be really and truly beautiful as partaking in this higher element and as created thereby. In this sense the beauty of nature reveals itself as but a reflection of the beauty which belongs to the mind, as an imperfect, incomplete mode of being, as a mode whose really substantial element is contained in the mind itself. (4)

Arnold Hauser shows how representative Hegel here is of subsequent 19th century developments:

Raw, unformed nature untouched by culture loses its aesthetic attraction and the ideal of naturalness is thrust aside by an ideal of artificiality. The city, urban culture, urban amusements, the “*vie factice*” and the “*paradis artificiels*,” seem not only incomparably more attractive, but also much more spiritual and soulful than the so-called charms of nature. Nature itself is ugly, ordinary, shapeless; art alone makes it enjoyable. Baudelaire hates the country, the Goncourts regard nature as an enemy and the later aesthetes, especially Whistler and Wilde, speak of it in a tone of contemptuous irony. This is the end of the pastoral, of the romantic enthusiasm for the natural and the belief in the identity of reason and nature. The reaction against Rousseau and the cult of the state of nature initiated by him now has come to its definite conclusion.⁸⁰

Kant's understanding of beauty, by contrast, owes much to Rousseau and his celebration of nature. He leaves no doubt that for him the ground of all beauty, including that of art, is a nature that transcends our comprehension.

For Hegel nature comes into view here first of all into view under the aspect of utility, as **resource**:

Moreover, we shall find the restriction to fine art very natural, for however much has been and is said — though less by the ancients than by ourselves — of the beauties of nature, yet no one has taken it into his head to emphasize the point of view of the *beauty* of natural objects and to attempt to make a science, a systematic account of these beauties. The aspect of *Utility*, indeed, has been accentuated, and a science, e., g. of natural things useful against diseases, a *materia medica*, has been compiled, consisting in

⁸⁰ Arnold Hauser, *The Social History of Art*, 4 vols., trans. Stanley Godman (New York: Vintage Books, n.d.), vol. 4, p. 182.

a description of minerals, chemical products, plants and animals that are of use for curative purposes. But the realm of nature has not been arrayed and estimated under the aspect of beauty. In dealing with natural beauty we find ourselves too open to *vagueness*, and to destitute of a *criterion*, for which reason such a review would have little interest.
(4 – 5)

With these brief remarks Hegel hopes to have shown that the beauties of nature deserve no place in a philosophical aesthetics. In this session I hope to have shown, with reference especially to Kant, that a thoughtful examination of just this judgment deserves an important place in philosophical aesthetics.

4. Art and Theory

1

Last time I spent quite a bit of time on the very beginning of the Introduction of Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics*. Indeed the first three lines, which tell us that in his lectures he will deal with aesthetic, that is to say with the wide realm of the beautiful, and more especially with fine art, raises a host of questions.

1. Is the subject of aesthetics really the wide realm of the beautiful? What about such aesthetic categories as the sublime, the interesting, the characteristic? Are all these to be understood as species of the beautiful? We shall have to return to this topic.

2. And what about the restriction of aesthetics to fine art? Kant, after all, whose *Critique of Judgment* can claim to be at the very center of philosophical aesthetics, unlike Hegel, looks to nature for paradigms of beauty.

3. To gain a better understanding of philosophical aesthetic I turned last time to Baumgarten, who can be said to have founded philosophical aesthetics and certainly gave the discipline its name. I also spent some time on Kant.

4. In conclusion I turned to Hegel's dismissal of natural beauty as a worthy topic for aesthetics. The beautiful, he tells us, is beautiful only in so far as it is born of the spirit. This seems to hark back to Plato. But unlike Plato, Hegel when thinking here of spirit, would seem to be thinking first of all of the human spirit, not of God. In its own being nature is indifferent. Nature thus comes into view for Hegel first of all under the aspect of utility, as resource. Here we have a decisive point of difference, not just between Kant and Hegel, but also between Hegel and Heidegger. What Heidegger has to say about the artwork as a presentation of the earth is difficult to reconcile with Hegel's understanding.

2

Having restricted the discussion in this manner, Hegel goes on to ask whether art is indeed worthy of and susceptible of scientific treatment. Is art more than mere **entertainment**?

Beauty and art, no doubt, pervade all the business of life like a kindly genius, and form the bright adornment of all our surroundings, both mental and material, soothing the sadness

of our condition and the embarrassments of real life, killing time in entertaining fashion, and where there is nothing good to be achieved, occupying the place of what is vicious, better at any rate than vice." (5)

Is art more than fundamentally superfluous ornament? Should art perhaps be considered the ornament of life? If such a view is accepted then the kind of critique the architect Adolf Loos directs against ornament would apply to all art, where the question remains why Loos, this critic of ornament, should also appear as a defender of art for art's sake.⁸¹

I would point especially to the suggestion that so understood art becomes a matter of **killing time**. Killing time of course would appear to be often the point of entertainment, but is this desire to kill time not also at the very center of aesthetic thinking, which, ever since Plato has tended to think beauty against time? Schopenhauer's understanding of art would seem to fit in with what Hegel has to say, although Schopenhauer would locate just here what gives art its importance. When absorbed in some work of art, we are freed from the terror of time. Art here furnishes a humanity that finds it impossible to find the sacred in nature with *Ersatz*. To be sure, time does not stand still in aesthetic experience. What Michael Fried calls "presentness" is no more than an elusive idea that may haunt painters, but inevitably withdraws when they try to seize it. All art can do is gesture towards such a standing still. Fried hints at this when he retreats from the indicative to the subjunctive: "It is this continuous and entire presentness, amounting, as it were, to the perpetual creation of itself, that one experiences as a kind of *instantaneousness*: as though, if only one were infinitely more acute, a single infinitely brief instant would be long enough to see everything..."⁸² "If only one were infinitely more acute." This corresponds to Frank Stella's wishful pronouncement that if a painting "were lean enough, we would be able just to look at it."⁸³ But of course, it will never be lean enough, we will never be granted a completely innocent perception. The dream of creating an art dense enough to absorb all of our attention, full enough to allow us to experience it in a way unclouded by meanings, by words, by absence, remains a dream. No art object can ever have the required plenitude.

⁸¹ Cf. Karsten Harries, *The Ethical Function of Architecture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997)

⁸² Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1968), p. 146.

⁸³ Bruce Glaser, "Questions to Stella and Judd," *Minimal Art. A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: Dutton, 1968), p. 158.

Meanings will always get in our way. The idea of presentness is itself such a meaning. The modernist works praised by Fried do not so much grant presentness as they signify it. Signifying presentness they mean a secularized grace.

Hegel of course is suspicious of such an understanding of art which would seem to place it outside the real purposes:

Yet although art presses in with its pleasing shapes on every possible occasion, from the rude adornments of the savage to the splendor of the temple with its untold wealth of decoration, still these shapes themselves appear to fall outside the real purposes of life. And even if the creations of art do not prove detrimental to our graver purposes, if they appear at times actually to further them by keeping evil at a distance, still it is so far true that art belongs rather to the relaxation and leisure of the mind, while the substantive interests of life demand its exertion. Hence it may seem unsuitable and pedantic to treat with scientific seriousness what is not in itself a serious matter. (5-6)

If just entertainment, perhaps even a high class entertainment, is art worthy of the philosopher's attention?

On the advanced view then art would seem to be essentially superfluous, excessive, inviting a Puritan critique:

In any case, on such a view art appears as a superfluity, even if the softening of the mental temper which preoccupation with beauty has power to produce does not turn out to be a detrimental, because effeminating influence. In this aspect of the matter, the fine arts being granted to be a luxury, it has been thought necessary in various ways to take up their defense with reference to their relation towards *practical* necessities, and more especially towards morality and piety; and as it is impossible to demonstrate their harmlessness, at least to make it credible that the mental luxury in question afford a larger sum of advantages than disadvantages. (6)

We can of course use art to express moral and other important ideas, but even in that case, does it not remain profoundly superfluous? Consider in this connection the place of the arts in Plato's *Republic*. Worth noting is the association of art here with woman, an association that keep recurring, especially in discussions of ornament.

3

Hegel next points to attempts to show that art does have the serious aim of mediating between spirit and sensuousness:

With this view very serious aims have been ascribed to art, and it has been recommended in various ways as a mediator between reason and sensuousness, between inclination and

duty, as the reconciler of these elements in the obstinate conflict and repulsion which their collision generates. But the opinion may be maintained that, assuming such aims of art, more serious though they are, nothing is gained for reason and duty by the attempt at mediation, because these principles, as essentially incapable of intermixture, can be parties to no such compromise, but demand in the manifestation the same purity which they have in themselves. And it might be said that art is not made more worthy of scientific discussion by such treatment, seeing that it is still doubly a servant — to higher aims, no doubt, on the one hand, but none the less to vacuity and frivolity, on the other; and in such service can at best display itself as a means, instead of being an end pursued for its own sake. (6)

When Hegel speaks of art as a reconciler we should think both of Kant and of Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*.

The reflection concludes that art understood in these ways would not be worthy of the philosopher's time and effort.

4

Hegel turns next to a different kind of consideration that focuses on the suggestion that whatever art may have to offer us, it does not offer it to the understanding, to spirit, but to other faculties such as the imagination. Do art and science therefore not belong to different provinces that are best kept apart.

But, in the second place, it is a still more probable aspect of the question that, even if fine art were to form a subject of philosophical reflections in a general way, it would be no *appropriate* matter for strictly scientific treatment. The beauty of art presents itself to sense, to feeling, to perception, to imagination; its sphere is not that of thought, and the apprehension of its activity and its productions demand another organ than that of scientific intelligence. (7)

This raises the question of what the imagination can contribute to philosophical reflection or generally the question of the relationship of the imagination to the realm of truth that science claims for its proper province. Is the imagination excluded from that realm. And what of the freedom we find in art?

Moreover, what we enjoy in the beauty of art is precisely the freedom of its productive and plastic energy. In the origination, as in the contemplation, of its creations we appear to escape wholly from the fetters of rule and regularity. In the forms of art we seek for repose and animation in place of the austerity of the reign of law and the somber self-concentration of thought; we would exchange the shadowland of the idea for cheerful vigorous reality. (7)

The paragraph concludes by bringing these two themes together.

And lastly, the source of artistic creation is the free activity of fancy, which in her imagination is more free than nature's self. Not only has art at command the whole wealth of natural forms in the brilliant variety of their appearance, but also the creative imagination has power to expatiate immeasurably beyond their limit in products *of its own*. It may be supposed that, in presence of this immeasurable abundance of inspiration and its free creations, thought will necessarily lose the courage to bring them *completely* before it, to criticize them, and to array them under its universal formulae. (7)

The free imagination seems by its very nature to elude scientific treatment. For what is science:

Science, on the other hand, everyone admits, is compelled by its form to busy itself with thought which abstracts from the mass of particulars. For this reason, on the one hand, imagination with its contingency and caprice — that is, the organ of artistic activity and enjoyment, is of necessity excluded from science. And on the other hand, seeing that art is what cheers and animates the dull and withered dryness of the idea, reconciles with reality its abstraction and its dissociation therefrom, and supplies out of the real world what is lacking to the notion, it follows, we may think that a *purely* intellectual treatment of art destroys this very means of supplementation, annihilates it, and reduces the idea once more to its simplicity devoid of reality, and to its shadowy abstractness (7 -8)

All of this seems to add up to the conclusion that art is no suitable object for scientific discussion.

Hegel, to be sure, given the length of his *Lectures*, has to claim that art is indeed more than just entertainment, is indeed worthy of the philosopher's attention, and to do so he has to give up what I have called an **aesthetic** conception of art, which, as he recognizes, threatens to reduce art to ornament, and here I would remind you of Kant's discussion of ornament as an example of a free, yet artificial beauty. I pointed out that this is a rather odd example for him to choose, for ornament is of course a dependent art form. Hegel seizes on such dependence:

In the first place, as regards the worthiness of art to be scientifically considered, it is no doubt the case that art can be employed as a fleeting pastime, to serve the ends of pleasure and entertainment, to decorate our surroundings, to impart pleasantness to the external conditions of our life, and to emphasize other objects by means of ornament. In this mode of employment art is indeed not independent, not free, but servile. But what we mean to consider, is the art which is *free* in its end as in its means. (9)

The question is of course how this freedom is to be understood. This might be understood as a call for an art only for art's sake. But what would this mean. Decisive

here is that Hegel thinks the freedom of art in analogy to the freedom of science. What then is the latter?

That art is in the abstract capable of serving other aims, and of being a mere pastime, is moreover a relation which it shares with thought. For, on the one hand, science, in the shape of the subservient understanding, submits to be used for finite purposes, and as an accidental means, and in that case is not self-determined, but determined by alien objects and relations; but, on the other hand, science liberates itself from this service to rise in free independence to the attainment of truth, in which medium, free from all interference, it fulfils itself in conformity with its proper aims. (9)

Science is free only when it serves truth alone, free from all interference. We may well want to ask ourselves whether this idea of a completely free science makes any more sense than the idea of a completely free beauty. Why investigate x rather than b. What of someone trying to count all the flagstones in the Old Campus. Would that be an example of free science? If not, why not? How is its freedom bound? Clear is that Hegel must have a different understanding of truth. To be in possession of the truth is to understand the absolute in which reality and reason are joined.

Crucial is the following paragraph, which attributes to art more than just an aesthetic function.

Fine art is not real art till it is in this sense free, and only achieves its highest task when it has taken its place in the same sphere with religion and philosophy, and has become simply a mode of revealing to consciousness and bringing to utterance the Divine Nature, the deepest interests of humanity, and the most comprehensive truths of the mind. It is in works of art that nations have deposited the profoundest intuitions and ideas of their hearts; and fine art is frequently the key—with many nations there is no other—to the understanding of their wisdom and of their religion. (9)

Art is placed here in a common circle with philosophy and religion. The profoundest interests of human beings find expression in art. There is to be sure the obvious difference:

This is an attribute which it shares with religion and philosophy, only in this peculiar mode, that it represents even the highest ideas *in sensuous forms*, thereby bringing them nearer to the character of natural phenomena, to the senses, and to feeling. The world, into whose depth thought penetrates, is a supra-sensuous world, which is thus, to begin with, erected as a *beyond* over against immediate consciousness and present sensation; the power which thus rescues itself from the *here*, that consists in the actuality and finiteness of sense, is the freedom of thought in cognition. (9)

Art expresses the highest ideas in sensuous forms, which raises the question how this mode of bringing to utterance the Divine Nature compares to religion and philosophy. There is also the question of how we are to understand the penetration of thought into a supra-sensuous world, a very Platonic phrase. And here we come to the problem of the presuppositions of such work of mediation. How satisfactory is Hegel's opposition of finite actuality and infinite freedom, of the "here" from which we need to be rescued, and a supra-sensuous beyond, which is the spirit's true home. How could thought ascend beyond nature and find access to this supra-sensuous world, if nature did not present itself from the very beginning as animated by spirit? This is to say, must we not spiritualize nature if the work of mediation Hegel envisions is to be possible? And if so, must we not call into question Hegel's too ready dismissal of nature and its beauties?

This point is taken up in the next section, which begins with a reflection on nature as a supposedly unworthy element.

The element of art was said to be in its general nature an unworthy element, as consisting in appearance and deception. This censure would not be devoid of justice, if it were possible to class appearance as something that ought not to exist. An appearance or show, however, is essential to existence. Truth could not be, did it not appear and reveal itself, were it not truth for someone or something, for itself as also for Mind. (10)

Hegel here insists on the necessity of appearance. Truth itself could not be indeed there would be no existence, if it did not present and thus appear to someone. To be is to come into presence. On this point Hegel agrees with Heidegger. Appearance is necessary to truth.

This does not yet answer the argument from the *Republic* that the artist only imitates appearance. Hegel's answer is in the spirit of Plato; but even more in the spirit of Plotinus, Hegel defends art against Plato's charge that it is but an imitation of a reality that is itself but an imitation of the forms.

Now this whole sphere of the empirical inner and outer world is just what is not the world of genuine reality, but is to be entitled a mere appearance more strictly than is true art, and a crueler deception. Genuine reality is only to be found beyond the immediacy of feeling and of external projects. Nothing is genuinely real but that which is actual in its own right, that which is the substance of nature and of mind, fixing itself indeed in present and definite existence, but in this existence still retaining its essential and self-centred being, and thus and not otherwise attaining genuine reality. The dominion of these universal powers is exactly what art accentuates and reveals. (10)

Here is what Plotinus had written:

Still the arts are not to be slighted on the ground that they create by imitation of natural objects: for, to begin with, these natural objects are themselves imitations; then, we must recognize that they give no bare reproduction of the thing seen but go back to the Reason-Principles from which Nature itself derives, and furthermore, that much of their work is all their own; they are holders of beauty and add where nature is lacking. Thus Pheidias wrought the Zeus upon no model among things of sense but by apprehending what form Zeus must take if he chose to become manifest to sight.⁸⁴

With Aristotle, Hegel goes on to argue that art is more philosophical than a mere description of phenomena as they present themselves could ever be.

Art liberates the real import of appearances from the semblance and deception of this bad and fleeting world, and imparts to phenomenal semblance a higher reality, born of mind. The appearances of art, therefore, far from being mere semblances, have the higher reality and the more genuine existence in comparison with the realities of common life. (11)

And like Aristotle, Hegel, claims that art is more true than history:

But the work of art brings before us eternal powers that hold dominion in history, without any such superfluity in the way of immediate sensuous presentation and its unstable semblances. (11)

5

All this does not deny that a certain defectiveness attaches to art, when we compare it with religion and philosophy:

Again, the more of appearance of the shapes produced by art may be called a deception in comparison with philosophical thought, with religious or moral principles. Beyond a doubt the mode of revelation which a content attains in the realm of thought is the truest reality; but in comparison with the show or semblance of immediate sensuous existence or of historical narrative, the artistic semblance has the advantage that in itself it points beyond itself, and refers us away from itself to something spiritual which it is meant to bring before the mind's eye. (11)

But that advantage is not sufficient to forestall the death of art, once the spiritual culture of a people is sufficiently far advanced.

There is, however, a deeper form of truth, in which it is no longer so closely akin and so friendly to sense as to be adequately expressed by that medium. Of such a kind is the Christian conception of truth; and more especially the spirit of our modern world, or, to come closer, of our religion and our intellectual culture, reveals itself as beyond the stage at which art is the highest mode assumed by man's consciousness of the absolute. The

⁸⁴ Plotinus, *Ennead V*, Eighth Tractate, 1, trans. Stephen McKenna.

peculiar mode to which artistic production and works of art belong no longer satisfies our supreme need. We are above the level at which works of art can be venerated as divine, and actually worshipped; the impression which they make is of a more considerate kind, and the feelings which they stir within us require a higher test and a further confirmation. Thought and reflection have taken their flight above fine art. Those who delight in grumbling and censure may set down this phenomenon for a corruption, and ascribe it to the predominance of passion and selfish interests, which scare away at once the seriousness and the cheerfulness of art. Or we may accuse the troubles of the present time and the complicated condition of civil and political life as hindering the feelings, entangled in minute preoccupations, from finding themselves, and rising to the higher aims of art, the intelligence itself being subordinate to petty needs and interests, in sciences which only subserve such purposes and are seduced into making this barren region their home. (12)

Thought and reflection have taken their flight above fine art.

It is pointless, according to Hegel, to blame the age for this development:

However all this may be, it certainly is the case that art no longer affords that satisfaction of spiritual wants which earlier epochs and peoples found therein only; a satisfaction which, at all events on the religious side, was intimately and profoundly connected with art. The beautiful days of Greek art, and the golden time of the later middle ages are gone by. The reflective culture of our life of today, makes it a necessity for us, in respect of our will no less than our judgment, to adhere to general points of view, and to regulate particular matters according to them, so that general forms, laws, duties, rights, maxims are what have validity as grounds of determination and are the chief regulative force. (12)

Those who see a connection between the death of art in its highest sense and modern individualism and the liberal conception of the state are of course not wrong, although it would be pointless to blame the latter. Art has been recognized to be inadequate to what truth demands.

Therefore our present in its universal condition is not favorable to art. As regards the artist himself, it is not merely that the reflection which finds utterance all round him, and the universal habit of having an opinion and passing judgment about art infect him, and mislead him into putting more abstract thought into his works themselves, but also the whole spiritual culture of the age is of such a kind that he himself stands within this reflective world and its conditions, and it is impossible for him to abstract from it by will and resolve, or to contrive for himself and bring to pass, by means of peculiar education or removal from the relations of life, a peculiar solitude that would replace all that is lost.

In all these respects art is, and remains for us, on the side of its highest destiny, a thing of the past. (13)

Here I would like to add just the footnote that the sixteenth century witnessed both the rise of a new aesthetic art, but also a rise of iconoclastic tendencies. Is the spiritual truth of the Christian faith not debased by art? Also from the point of view of religion, the marriage of art and religion is beginning to come apart. The counter-reformation sought to counter that development. But just because of this it was condemned for its love of theater and pointless ornament by more enlightened Protestants. As religion takes its leave from art, art becomes increasingly autonomous. There is more than a trace of that iconoclastic spirit in Hegel.

5. Towards a Science of Art

1

Last time we concluded by turning to Hegel's claim that the shape of the modern world denies a place to art in its highest sense. Let me begin his session by returning to this claim. To show something of its force let me consider three premises on which it is based:

1. **Genuine art transcends our conceptual grasp.** On this point Hegel would appear to be in agreement with Kant. Like Kant, he insists that man is "born to religion, to thought, to science." Their acquisition requires therefore "nothing besides birth itself, and training, education, industry, etc."⁸⁵ Art "demands a specific disposition, in which a natural factor plays an essential part."⁸⁶ Artistic **genius** is a gift. In the successful work of art the spirit incarnates itself so completely in the sensible that it becomes impossible to abstract the embodied meaning from the sensible presentation. This impossibility has its counterpart in the artist's inability to discriminate what in her work is really her own and what has come to her as a gift of nature. Just as aesthetic appreciation is *sinnliches Wissen*, sensible (or should it be sensuous?) knowledge, so artistic creation is *sinnliche Gestaltung*, not simply a shaping of the sensible, but a shaping that is itself sensible.⁸⁷ As a product of spirit, the work of art has a meaning, but the incarnation of this meaning in the sensible makes it impossible to capture it in concepts without destroying that unity of sense and spirit on which, according to Hegel, beauty and art rest. To thought art is essentially a mystery.

It seems difficult to deny such claims. To do so we would have to subordinate sense and imagination to a higher cognitive faculty. Such subordination threatens to make art into mere illustration and at bottom superfluous. To insist on this point is not to deny that, as already Aristotle emphasized and Kant reiterated, the artist must have some reason for doing just what he does. To understand a work of art as such is to understand it as the product of an attempt to realize some end. With reference to this end we can judge the work a success or a failure. You can for example try to sketch a likeness of your friend. There is a quite obvious sense in which you can fail in that attempt. No

⁸⁵ Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Aesthetik*, vol. 12, p. 382.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

work is adequately understood as such when it is understood simply as the product of inspiration. That includes works of fine art. This is granted by Danto's appropriation of the Hegelian understanding of art as the embodiment of some idea.

Some theories of art lose sight of this. Examples are provided by the **inspiration theories** that were common in discussions of expressionist and surrealist art. Herbert Read, for example, called the artist a mere medium, a channel for forces that are impersonal, where following Freud and Jung he tied these to an impersonal subconscious. Plato invoked in this connection a realm of timeless forms. Someone else might want to invoke the gods. Jackson Pollock claimed to be nature. The subconscious, Plato's forms, the gods, or nature can thus occupy what is fundamentally the same place: they all represent attempts to name what is experienced as a transcendent reality that acts through the artist, using him or her as its medium. But this cannot be quite right. Were it the whole story, how would it be possible to distinguish a work of art from a product of accident or nature. Against an exaggerated inspiration theory, we have to insist that every work of art is also the product of a deliberate doing. Not that it is adequately understood in this way either. Anyone who has ever tried to paint or write a poem will be aware of the gifts of inspiration or just accident. A few lines put down more or less at random may suddenly coalesce into a poem. Or a painter may try to realize a fixed plan and be forced by what appears on the canvas to modify it. Every artist has to acknowledge the stubborn independence of what he has put down; also that there is something about his own doing over which he has only very incomplete control. This includes the artist's dependence on what we may want to call inspiration.

But granting all this, nevertheless the work of art remains the artist's own creation. He or she chose to make it and make it in a certain manner. As Aristotle, Kant, and Hegel recognized, to experience something as a work of art, as opposed to a mere thing such as a rock in some brook, is to experience it as the realization of an intention. This is part of its meaning. Certainly, there have been and continue to be attempts to have the work of art be no more than the product of accident, of a spontaneous happening, or to have it present itself to the observer as an ideally meaningless presence. But in all these cases we look at the artwork as a work of art, i. e., we refer it back to the intention of the artist. The not very long ago fashionable rhetoric of **presence** should not

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 148

deceive us: the very attempt to create art works that should not mean, but be — as Archibald MacLeish demanded of the poem and Kasimir Malevich and Frank Stella of a painting — refers us back to the governing intention. That it is supposed to be and not mean becomes part of the meaning of the work of art, which, intended to have no meaning, inevitably means something after all.

Both, a one-sided emphasis on inspiration and a one-sided emphasis on intention fail to do justice to artistic creation. Suppose you want to paint a picture. There will be some idea you want to realize. You will know, e.g., that you want to paint a picture. You will have decided on the medium. And presumably you will know what kind of painting it is likely to be, e.g., abstract or representational; if abstract, using a geometric or a more organic vocabulary; if representational, you are likely to have some understanding not only of what it is you want to represent, but also of the style of representation you are likely to employ. All this is just to say that you will have a many-faceted understanding of what you are up to. But however complex, this understanding will not have sufficient content to determine what you are going to create in all relevant respects, perhaps not even in the most important respects. You will not be able to point to a conception fully adequate to what you are actually doing. And in most cases there will be a constant reinterpretation of what you are up to in light of what you have already done. It is thus not altogether wrong to think that there is first a process of thinking that yields the idea, which is then to be realized. But can an artist distinguish successfully between what is a contribution of reason and what a contribution of the hand? Consider doodling. The lines you have set down on the paper in front of you will influence the next lines you draw. In our doodles we tend to hit on some vocabulary and remain with it. Creative vision will always suggest possibilities that are suggested by what you have already put down on paper. That goes also for painting: I have painted a purplish form that demands to be answered by an olive green. I proceed to put down the olive green. You ask me, why did you put that green there? I point to the purple. Perhaps you will understand. But if you understand, your understanding will not be a matter of disengaged reflection. It will be a creative seeing on your part. You will see why I had to do what I did.

Is such **creative seeing** a form of reasoning? Or does it belong to inspiration? I would say that it mediates between both. The actual production of the work of art is just how

I get hold of the aesthetic idea floating before me. That idea is not antecedently given. What was given was at most a concept, a ghostly anticipation of that idea, not the idea itself. For that idea to show itself I had to put paint on paper or canvas. And it is just this integration of reflection and the work of the hand, of the spirit and of the body, that is part of the satisfaction of making and appreciating works of art. The work of art heals us, binds together what is usually split, makes us whole. How it does so remains a mystery.

2. In the *Lectures on Aesthetics* the second proposition, **tying art to truth**, is similarly taken for granted. Hegel knows that what is called art often is no more than what he considers a trifling diversion: decoration or entertainment. But he demands more of art. The true purpose of art is to provide us with sensuous representations of the absolute. (76) That is what the definition of art as the embodiment of the Idea claims. Beauty is understood here as “only a certain manner of expressing and representing the true.”⁸⁸ The last formulation determines what I shall call an ontological conception of the beautiful.⁸⁹ As here stated, it is not particularly Hegelian — equally well one could point to Plato, Thomas Aquinas, or Heidegger — to give just some examples. It would become so only with a further determination of the meaning of truth.

This second claim, which ties art to truth, is, however, more controversial. Here we return to the rivalry of the aesthetic and the ontological approaches. I have spent enough time on the aesthetic approach already. Let me recall here just a few of its main features. The work of art is taken as occasioning a certain kind of satisfaction or pleasure. It is judged beautiful, sublime, or interesting with respect to the occasioned state of mind, which is what is really enjoyed. There is a sense in which the aesthetic approach is by its very nature self-centered and narcissistic.

I have suggested that the shift from an ontological to an aesthetic conception of art is associated with the emergence of the modern world. In this respect Hegel may seem conservative, less in tune with the modern world and its art than Kant. And yet, I think, it is Hegel rather than Kant, who helps us to understand the shape of the modern world and the place of the aesthetic approach to art within that world. What Hegel lets us

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 135-136.

⁸⁹ For the distinction between an ontological and an aesthetic conception of beauty, see Ernesto Grassi, *Die Theorie des Schönen in der Antike* (Cologne: Dumont, 1962) and Walter Biemel, *Die Bedeutung von Kants Begründung der Ästhetik and Philosophische Analysen zur Kunst der Gegenwart* (Den Haag: Nijhoff, 1968).

understand is precisely why it is that the ontological view of art should no longer have a place in the modern world. This is not to say that there are not many who continue to be attached to such a view. Many still expect truth from art, expect to be edified by it.

Hegel helps us to understand why such attempts should so often have yielded **Kitsch**.

3. The central proposition is the third. **Truth demands transparency**. Only what can be comprehended is real. At the center of our modern sense of reality is our faith in our ability to grasp and manipulate all that deserves to be called real. Hegel expressed this faith forcefully in his *Heidelberg Inaugural Address*:

Man, since he is spirit, may and should consider himself worthy even of the highest; he cannot think the greatness and power of his spirit great enough; and with this faith nothing will be so stubborn and hard as not to open itself to him. The essence of the universe [not, however, the universe!], hidden and closed at first, has no power that could offer resistance to the courage of knowledge; it must open itself to him and lay its riches and depths before his eyes and open them to his enjoyment.⁹⁰

In order to gain this godlike power, we must raise ourselves above our particular being as these individuals we just happen to be:

In all things other than thought the spirit does not come to this freedom. So in intuitions, in feelings; I find myself determined, am not free, but in this particular manner, even if I have consciousness of this, my sentiment. Willing, one has determinate purposes, a determinate interest; I am indeed free in that this interest is mine, but these purposes always contain something other, or something that for me is another, as passions, inclination, etc. Only in thought has all strangeness become transparent; has disappeared; here the spirit is free in an absolute manner. With this the interest of the Idea, and at the same time of philosophy is expressed.⁹¹

The similarity between Hegel's analysis and the Cartesian program is evident. In the final pages of his *Discourse on Method* Descartes thus claims that his principles had opened up the possibility of finding a

practical philosophy by means of which, knowing the force and the action of fire, water, air, the stars, heavens, and all other bodies that environ us, as distinctly as we know the

⁹⁰ Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie, Jubiläumsausgabe*, vols. 17-19, vol. 17, p. 22.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

different crafts of our artisans, we can in the same way employ them in all those uses to which they are adapted and thus render ourselves the masters and possessors of nature.⁹²

Modern science triumphs in technology.

The life of the individual is part of the drama of the spirit's homecoming that is history. Our own place in that drama is determined by the fact that ours is an age of **reflection** and by the same token an age of **objectivity**. Reflection lets me recognize the impossibility of stopping at any finite point of view. All merely perspectival, merely relative modes of knowing, demand to be transcended. To all finite points of view I have to oppose the standpoint of the absolute. This standpoint opens up a new understanding of reality and of truth. Given this absolute standpoint the locus of truth can alone be thought. This lets Hegel say that thought and reflection have overtaken the fine arts.

2

What then is our **modern way with art**?

What is now aroused in us by works of art is over and above our immediate enjoyment, and together with it, our judgment; inasmuch as we subject the content and the means of representation of the work of art and the suitability and unsuitability of the work to our intellectual consideration. Therefore the *science* of art is a much more pressing need in our day than in times in which art, simply as art, was enough to furnish a full satisfaction. Art invites us to consideration of it by means of thought, not to the end of stimulating art production, but in order to ascertain scientifically what art is. (13)

Consider modern art criticism and its role in the art world? Hegel speaks here of ascertaining scientifically what art is. Does art permit such a scientific understanding: with this we are back to the question with which we began.

It will be admitted, to begin with, that the mind is capable of contemplating itself, and of possessing a consciousness, and that a *thinking* consciousness, of itself and of all that is generated by itself. Thought — to think — is precisely that in which the mind has its innermost and essential nature. In gaining this thinking consciousness concerning itself and its products, the mind is behaving according to its essential nature, however much freedom and caprice these products may display, supposing only that in real truth they have mind in them. Now art and its works as generated by the mind (spirit) are themselves of a spiritual nature, even if their mode of representation admits

⁹² René Descartes, *Discourse on Method, The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, trans. Elizabeth Haldane and G. R. T. Ross (New York: Dover, 1955), vol. I, p. 119.

into itself the semblance of sensuous being, and pervades what is sensuous with mind.
(14-15)

Hegel here reiterates the Cartesian point that mind is capable of contemplating itself and, in this context more importantly, its products. Mind can understand things precisely to the extent that it can produce them. But art is a product of mind. Art is born of the spirit: Hegel speaks of an alienation from itself towards the sensuous. Philosophical reflection on art restores the spirit to itself.

In this respect art is, to begin with, nearer to mind and its thinking activity than is mere external unintelligent nature; in works of art, mind has to do but with its own. And even if artistic works are not abstract thought and notion, but are an evolution of the notion (Begriff) *out of itself*, an alienation from itself towards the sensuous, still the power of the thinking spirit (mind) lies herein, *not merely* to grasp *itself only* in this peculiar form of the self-conscious spirit (mind), but just as much to recognize itself in its alienation in the shape of feeling and the sensuous, in its other form, by transmuting the metamorphosed thought back into definite thoughts, and so restoring it to itself. (15)

Once again Hegel returns to the threat posed to this project by the artist's supposed freedom. But freedom is bound by the **essence of art: to bring home to consciousness the highest interests of the mind, if in sensuous form.**

3

How then should we approach art? What is the "required mode of scientific consideration? Hegel distinguishes two general approaches:

On one side we see the science of art merely, so to speak, busying itself about the actual productions of art from the outside, arranging them in series as a history of art, initiating discussions about extant works, or sketching out theories intended to provide the general points of view that are to govern both criticism and artistic production.

On the other side we see science abandoning itself independently to reflection upon the beautiful, and producing mere generalities which do not touch the work of art in its peculiarity, creating, in short, an abstract philosophy of the beautiful. (17)

The former he considers indispensable for anyone concerned with art, and Hegel, like his contemporaries, takes it pretty much for granted that one should be thus concerned.

And just as in the present day everyone even though he is not busied with natural science, yet pretends to be equipped with the essentials of physical knowledge, so it has become more or less obligatory for a cultivated man to possess some acquaintance with art, and the pretension to display oneself as a dilettante and connoisseur is pretty universal (17)

Hegel here emphasizes the importance of learning about a great number of different works, of placing them in their proper context, where a great deal of information is said to be important, but also a "vivid imagination" (18), which keeps works we have seen in our mind, when we look at some work of art.

Such a historical understanding of art leads to "theories of art" (18). Hegel mentions Aristotle's *Poetics*, Horace's *Ars Poetica*, and Longinus's *Treatise on the Sublime*, as in his day canonic examples. Note how **the emergence of such theories is tied by Hegel to artistic decline**:

The general formulae which were abstracted by such writers were meant to stand especially as precepts and rules, according to which, particularly in times of degeneration of poetry and art, works of art were meant to be produced. The prescriptions, however, compiled by these physicians of art had even less assured success than those of physicians whose aim was the restoration of health. (18)

Hegel makes the obvious criticism that such theories are inevitably based on a narrow set of examples; and that the prescriptions such theory yields tend to amount to no more than empty platitudes, where he singles out one of Horace's maxims.

He carries all votes, who has mingled the pleasant and the useful, by at once charming and instructing the reader (19)

4

From such texts addressed primarily to artists, Hegel distinguishes another, first of all serving the appreciation of art by forming taste. Hegel mentions Home, Batteux, Ramler. Hegel finds such treatises, too, quite unenlightening, too bound up with a particular cultural situation, products of a *beschränkte* (trans: borné) intellectual culture. Inevitably, such theorizing remains caught up in a narrow circle. But is this not true of all attempts to determine the essence of art? We shall have to return to the problem of such **circularity**.

It might seem at first as if the beautiful were a perfectly simple idea. But it soon becomes evident that manifold sides may be found in it, one of which is emphasized by one writer and another by another, or, even if the same points of view are adopted, a dispute arises on the question which side after all is to be regarded as the essential one. (20)

Hegel proposes to consider briefly some of the most successful of these accounts, where he singles out Goethe, Meyer, and Hirt.

5

Aloys Hirt, a personal friend of Hegel's and a professor of archeology at Berlin is singled out for special praise, where Hegel focuses on Hirt's conception of the **characteristic**, which, as I already pointed out offers itself as an aesthetic category, to be placed besides the beautiful, the sublime, and the interesting. The concept is not really Hirt's own; it is present, e.g., already in the young **Goethe's** essay on Strassbourg Cathedral, which deserves a significant place in the history of aesthetics.

Hirt's definition of the beautiful appears to be essentially that of Baumgarten:

That is to say, he defines the beautiful as the 'perfect, which is or can be an object of eye, ear, or imagination'. (20)

Baumgarten identified the purpose or intention presiding over the beautiful with the artwork's **theme**. It is the work's organizing center. For Baumgarten's **theme** Hirt substitutes the **characteristic**. How close Hirt here remains, not only to Baumgarten, but to a commonplace of aesthetics is suggested by the following:

But, according to the rule of the characteristic, only so much ought to enter into the work of art as belongs to the display and essentially, to the expression of that content and no other; for nothing must announce itself as otiose and superfluous. (21)

But this makes it difficult to understand the worry, attributed to **Johann Heinrich Meyer**, that the emphasis on the characteristic invites an art of **caricature**. Hegel defends Hirt against such criticism, but this defense becomes intelligible only when we return to the characteristic and ask just how it differs from Baumgarten's beauty: why was it even thought necessary to introduce the concept?

Goethe's essay on Strassbourg Cathedral here provides a hint. To the artwork understood as **composed of different parts** Goethe opposes the conception of the artwork understood as an **organic whole**, animated by the same spirit in all its several parts. In this context Goethe's discussion of the importance of **physiognomy**, where he refers to Johann Kaspar **Lavater**, (Cf. *Physiognomische Fragmente zur Beförderung der Menschenkenntnis und Menschenliebe*, 1775-1778). Consider in this connection also the shift from Baumgarten's understanding of perfection to Kant's understanding of beauty as purposiveness without a purpose. What reflects itself in this shift is also a **shift in aesthetic taste from patterns of subordination to patterns of coordination**.

Let us keep in mind here that the beautiful as an object addressed to sense is inevitably a particular. The theme presiding over it must then be similarly individuated

as the particular is to present itself to us as a perfect whole. It cannot be a universal. The theme must be the spirit presiding over that whole. Take a beautiful person. Beauty is not adequately thought here as a universal inadequately embodied in particulars. It is rather this individual character the artist must capture.

For which reason, in order to form our judgment on a question of beauty, we ought to direct our observation as far as possible to the individual marks which constitute a definite essence. For it is these marks that form its characteristics. And so by *character* as the law of art he means 'that determinate individual modification whereby forms, movement, and gesture [*Gebehrde*], bearing and expression, local colour, light and shade, chiaroscuro and attitude distinguish themselves, in conformity of course, with the requirements of an object previously selected. (20 -21)

Let me single out here the word "gesture." The characteristic links a particular content to the way in which this content is embodied in a representation.

Consider a portrait of a person who is not beautiful, say of Socrates, who, we know, was ugly. What would a proper rendition of Socrates be like? We can see how the characteristic might open the door not only to **caricature** but also to the **ugly** as having a legitimate place in art.

Hegel defends Hirt against Meyer's criticism by pointing out that first of all it is not the task of the philosophy of art to give precepts to art (22), but more importantly that in **caricature** we find a **superfluity of the characteristic**. But the very fact that the definition of the characteristic leaves the content unspecified has to raise questions concerning contents that are ugly or in some other ways difficult to square with the requirements of beauty as these had come to be understood. Think once more of Gothic architecture, say of Strassbourg cathedral.

Meyer's sympathies lie, as Hegel points out, with Antton Raphael Mengs and Winckelmann, i.e. with neo-classicism and their principle of the Ideal, although Meyer prefers Goethe's statement:

The highest principle of the ancients was the *significant*, but the highest result of successful *treatment*, the *beautiful*. (22)

According to this statement whatever finds expression in art must be significant. The quotation is taken from Goethe's "Philostrats Gemälde," where Goethe is imagining a painting of Hercules, who having conquered Diomedes and his terrible horses, which the latter fed with human flesh, ponders how to honor his beloved Abderus, who had become one of the victims. The horrible scene to be painted asks the painter to depict the severed

body parts Diomedes fed to his horses. How can such a scene yield a beautiful painting? And in this connection Goethe remarks that the ancients never shied away from the significant; and is the same not true of medieval paintings of Christian martyrs. (Cf. Karl Rosenkranz: *Ästhetik des Häßlichen*, 1853 — which advances the **ugly** as another aesthetic category, parasitic on the beautiful as its negation, as such related to the sublime?) We might think of Titian's painting of the *Flaying of Marsyas*. How are we to analyse the beauty of such a painting. It is in this context that Goethe made the quoted remark. Beauty is the result of a successful treatment of the significant (*das Bedeutende*). Not every subject matter or any theme makes a painting significant. What is depicted must be significant. And such significance, to be unpacked, requires an inquiry into the spirit and its most profound interests.

Goethe's essay, dating from 1818, fits Hegel's understanding of the highest function of art, where we should note that what Goethe here offers furnishes us an imagined art gallery, created only in words. It is perhaps worth noting that Goethe's essay concludes with an addendum on the distinction between *Antik und Modern*, which would not seem to support Hegel's thesis of the end of art in its highest sense.

Be this as it may, Hegel at any rate had to connect what Goethe means by significance with his own understanding of art in its highest sense as giving expression to humanity's profoundest interests. Hegel goes on to suggest that there is no real difference on this score between Goethe and Hirt.

Thus the requirement of significance in a work of art amounts to hardly anything beyond or different from Hirt's principle of the characteristic.

According to this notion, then, we find distinguished as the elements of the beautiful something inward, a content, and something outer which has that content as its significance; the inner shows itself in the outer and gives itself to be known by its means, inasmuch as the outer points away from itself to the inner. (23)

6

Hegel next calls attention to how the artistic culture of the day had itself turned against theory, where the emergence of "genuine living poetry" (23) had called into question all invocations of a canon such poetry did not fit; in this connection Hegel singles out the invocation of the rights of genius which refuses to be bound by some supposed canon. Hegel also points to the extent to which Europe had begun to open itself

to art from different cultures and times that did not readily fit the accepted canon and the rules derived from it; also to the rise of romantic art. But this also — and this is not really an unrelated point — points to the evolution of spirit itself that demanded a more profound understanding of art:

With this influence there co-operated another, viz., that the idea in its self-conscious form, the thinking mind, attained at this time, on its side, a deeper self-knowledge in philosophy, and was thereby directly impelled to understand the essence of art, too, in a profounder fashion. (24)

The thinking, mind is said to have gained a deeper self-knowledge in philosophy, where that thinking mind is described as the idea in its self-conscious form; "idea" here names not only the concept, but the concept realized. By the absolute idea Hegel thus understands the self-realizing concept of the world. In the thinking mind that idea becomes conscious of itself. This progress, Hegel suggests, has also overtaken past philosophizing about art. Hegel's criticism does not extend to the history of art and here he singles out Goethe once again for having written illuminatingly about "art and particular works of art." (23)

7

Hegel gives much shorter shrift to the second approach which wants to understand beauty as such:

There is an essential distinction between this and the opposite aspect, the wholly theoretical reflection, which made an effort to understand beauty as such out of itself alone, and to get to the bottom of the idea. (25)

Plato, not surprisingly, provides the obvious point of departure:

It is well known that Plato was the first to require of philosophical study, in a really profound sense, that its objects should be apprehended, not in their particularity, but in their universality, in their genus, in their own nature and realization: inasmuch as he affirmed that the truth of things did not consist in individual good acts, true opinions, beautiful human beings or works of art, but in goodness, beauty, and truth themselves. (25)

But in the end Plato, Hegel suggests, does not have very much to teach us moderns: Plato, although his thought, especially his idea of beauty, remains fundamental, leaves us with much too abstract an understanding of beauty.

We must understand this idea more profoundly and more in the concrete, for the emptiness of content which characterizes the Platonic idea is no longer satisfactory to the fuller philosophical wants of the mind of today. (25)

Hegel concludes by suggesting that only a synthesis of the two approaches will allow us to understand art in its truth, "in its real and explicit nature." (26)

6. The Work of Art as an Artifact

1

Once again let me begin by briefly returning to our last session. I began with a reconsideration of Hegel's claim that the shape of the modern world denies a place to art in its highest sense. To show how difficult it is to get around that claim I turned to three considerations on which it is based:

1. Genuine art transcends our conceptual grasp.
2. Art is linked to truth as an expression of the most profound interests of humanity
3. Truth demands transparency.

The three form an incompatible set: we can hold on to any two, but not to all three. Affirming 3, at least as far as our modern age is concerned, Hegel concludes that we moderns have to give up 2. The success of science and technology and the death of art in its highest sense belong together.

How then should we approach art? By way of introduction Hegel distinguishes two general approaches: one focuses on particular works of art, classifies them, places them in their context. This is first of all the approach of the art historian. Hegel does not question its necessity. I spent some time on Hegel's discussion of the view of Hirt, Meyer, and Goethe.

Hegel gives much less space to the second approach, which wants to understand beauty as such. Plato here provides the obvious point of departure. But not only Plato, but this approach in general, is said to leave us with much too abstract an understanding of beauty. A synthesis of the two approaches is needed.

2

Hegel next returns to the task at hand:

After the above prefatory remarks, we approach closer to our subject, the philosophy of artistic beauty. Inasmuch as we are undertaking to treat it scientifically we must begin with its *Conception*. Not till we have established this conception can we map out the division, and with it the plan of the entirety of the science; for a division, if it is not, as is the case with unphilosophical inquiries, taken in hand in a purely external manner, must find its principle in the conception of the object itself. (27)

Aesthetics is that branch of philosophy dealing with artistic beauty — and again I remind you of Hegel's exclusion of the beauty of nature. What then is beauty? Is it one or many? The question is as old as speculation on the beautiful itself. See especially not only Plato's, but also Xenophon's *Symposium*.

In presence of such a demand we are at once met by the question, 'Whence do we get this conception?' If we begin with the given conception of artistic beauty itself, that is enough to make it a *presupposition* and mere assumption; now, mere assumptions are not admitted by the philosophical method, but whatever it allows to pass must have its truth demonstrated, i. e. displayed as necessary. (27)

How do we know where to look? In natural science there would seem to be no problem? I point to the things I want to study. There is, say, a certain family resemblance among some of them, inviting concepts and laws. Why should this not hold of works of art? But just what is the relevant family resemblance? Take Warhol's Brillo box and Shakespeare's Hamlet. Should we be content with something like an institutional theory of art (see Danto and Dickie)? Is not art in the eye of the beholder? But then there would not be very much to the philosophy of art.

The object of every science presents *prima facie* two aspects in the first place, that such an object is; in the second place *what* it is.

In ordinary science, little difficulty attaches to the first of these points. It might even, at first sight, look ridiculous, if the requirement were pressed that in astronomy and physics it should be demonstrated that there was a sun, heavenly bodies, magnetic phenomena, etc. In these sciences, which have to do with what is given to sense, the objects are taken from external experience and instead of demonstrating them it is thought sufficient to show them. Yet even within the non-philosophical sciences, doubts may arise about the existence of their objects, as e. g. in psychology, the science of mind, it may be doubted if there is a soul, a mind, i. e. something subjective, separate, and independent from what is material. (27-28)

For Hegel art is of course the product of mind and therefore something subjective: to be sure, every work of art is also a material thing, a thing that is made, and made for a particular purpose, but the same thing is true of a good meal. How is art different?

If, moreover, the objects are of a subjective kind, i.e. are given only in the mind, and not as external sensuous objects, we are confronted by our conviction that there is nothing in the mind but what its own activity has produced. This brings up the accidental question whether men have produced this inner idea or perception in their minds or not, and even if the former is actually the case, whether they have not made the idea in question vanish again, or at any rate degraded it to a merely subjective idea whose content has no natural or

independent being. So, for instance, the beautiful has often been regarded as not naturally and independently necessary in our ideas, but as a subjective pleasure or accidental sense. (28)

For Hegel, beauty and its realization in art are demanded by spirit itself. Spirit demands its realization in the world. To adequately demonstrate this would demand an understanding of the whole of Hegel's philosophy:

If we are to display the necessity of our object, the beautiful in art, we should have to prove that art or beauty was a result of antecedents such as, when considered in their true conception, to lead us on with scientific necessity to the idea of fine art. But in so far as we begin with *art*, and propose to treat of the essence of *its* idea and of the realization of that idea, not of antecedents which go before it as *demanded by* its idea, so far art, as a peculiar scientific object, has for us, a presupposition which lies beyond our consideration and which, being a different content, belongs in scientific treatment to a different branch of philosophical study. For it is nothing short of the whole of philosophy that is the knowledge of the universe as in itself *one single* organic totality which develops itself out of its own conception, and which, returning into itself so as to form a whole in virtue of the necessity in which it is placed toward itself, binds itself together with itself into *one single* world of truth. (28 – 29)

In this philosophical interlude Hegel gestures towards the whole of his philosophy only to point out that we have to be content here with this gestures: any fuller discussion belongs somewhere else.

This task belongs to an encyclopaedic development of philosophy as a whole and of its particular branches. For us, the idea of beauty and of art is a presupposition given in the system of philosophy. (29)

The world as a whole is understood by Hegel as an unfolding of the absolute idea that in the end is gathered by spirit into the world of truth. There is a sense in which the absolute has to alienate itself from itself, reveal itself in matter, to become truly itself. Hegel's indebtedness to the Christian understanding of the Trinity, more especially of the Incarnation, is apparent. With this gathering of the world into the world of truth spirit returns home to itself.

But what is said of the whole is said by Hegel also of the parts: art for example is an unfolding of the idea or general concept of art that culminates, as we shall see, for Hegel in poetry, which is the universal art, in which, we might say, art returns to itself and reaches its end. But this grand vista is opened up by Hegel only to be set aside:

But as we cannot in this place discuss this system, and the connection of art with it, we have not yet the idea of the beautiful before us *in a scientific form*; what we have at

command are merely the elements and aspects of it, as they are or have at former periods been presented, in the diverse ideas of the beautiful and of art in the mere common consciousness. (29)

3

What then is it that we know about art? Hegel sums it up in three principles

1. We suppose the work of art to be no natural product, but brought to pass by human activity.
2. To be essentially made *for* man and, indeed, to be more or less borrowed from the sensuous and addressed to man's sense.
3. To contain an *end*. (30)

I shall go carefully over all three points, but today I would like to focus just on the first, which seems quite unproblematic and undeniable.

As regards the first point, that a work of art is taken to be a product of human activity, this view has given rise (a) to the view that this activity, being the *conscious* production of an external object, can also be known, and expounded, and learnt, and prosecuted by others. For, what one can do, it might seem, another can do, or imitate, as soon as he is acquainted with the mode of procedure; so that, supposing universal familiarity with the rule of artistic production, it would only be a matter of anyone's will and pleasure to carry out the process in a uniform way, and so to produce works of art. (30)

The key consideration is simple enough and should by now be familiar: As a creation of man the work of art cannot be simply interpreted as the product of a spontaneous doing. Deliberate doing enters into the creation of a work of art. It is consciously produced. But if consciously produced, it must also be possible to say something about the intention of the artist. The content of the work of art must be communicable. But just this threatens to reduce art to a mechanical working out of some preconceived ideas — I already suggested that the aesthetics of neo-classicism came close to such an understanding of art. I also suggested that any such theory is essentially inadequate. Art requires something else.

4

In this connection **talent** and **genius** were often invoked to fill in what has been left out. Just here Hegel seems to be just repeating Kant

(b) The tendency which we have just indicated has therefore been abandoned, and, in place of it, the opposite principle has been pursued to no less lengths. For the work of art came to be regarded no longer as the product of an *activity general* in mankind, but as the work of a mind endowed with wholly peculiar gifts. This mind, it is thought, has then nothing to do but *simply* to give free play to its particular gift, as if were a specific force of nature, and it is to be entirely released from attention to laws of universal validity, as also from the interference of reflection in its instinctively creative operation. And indeed, it is to be guarded therefrom, inasmuch as its productions could only be infected and tainted by such a consciousness. In this aspect the work of art was pronounced to be the product of *talent* and *genius*, and stress was laid on the natural element which talent and genius contain. (31)

Let me turn here briefly to Kant to bring out what in the end would seem to make for a decisive difference, a difference that relates to their very different understanding of the importance of nature to aesthetics.

But first let me turn to what joins these two thinkers. Kant, too, defines art as production through freedom, i. e., through a will that places reason at the basis of its actions.

All art is **productive** and as such distinguished from science, which is merely theoretical. It is distinguished from handicraft, by aiming at the creation of works that have their end within themselves. Art is **autotelic**. In this respect it resembles play. Art is free as craft is not. And yet, unlike play art requires something compulsory.

Par. 44. It is advisable, however, to remind ourselves that in all the free arts there is yet a need for something in the order of a constraint, or, as it is called, a *mechanism*. (In poetry, for example, it is correctness and richness of language, as well as prosody and meter.) Without this the spirit, which in art must be free and which alone animates the work, would have no body at all and would evaporate completely. This reminder is needed because some of the more recent educators believe that they promote a free art best if they remove all constraint from it and convert it from labor into mere play.⁹³
(171)

What **spirit** names here remains rather obscure. It appears to be the source of inspiration, and it is said to be free. But how is the artist's freedom to be distinguished from an **anarchic spontaneity**. To guard against such anarchy Kant suggests that in the creation of a work of art two activities must come together, one that is rather like **play** — perhaps

⁹³ *Critique of Judgment*, p. 171.

we can speak of the play of the spirit; the other subjects this play to what Kant calls a **mechanism**.

What distinguishes all artificial from natural beauty is rooted in the fact that the production of art is an activity governed by the **will**. But the **will requires reasons**. The artist creates having something in mind. His creating is governed by an intention. And yet this intention, if too obvious to the person who is to appreciate the work of art, threatens aesthetic appreciation. The intention must therefore be disguised. The artist, according to Kant, dreams of creating as nature creates. It would be interesting to trace this dream and its consequences for art through what modern artists have said of their creativity. Klee and Pollock, e.g., come to mind.

Therefore, even though the purposiveness in the product of fine art is intentional, it must not seem intentional; i.e. fine art must have the *look* of nature, though we are conscious of it as art. And a product of art appears like nature if, though we find it to agree quite *punctiliously* with the rules that have to be followed for the product to become what it is intended to be, it does not do so *painstakingly*. In other words, the academic form must not show; there must be no hint that the rule was hovering before the artist's eyes and putting fetters on his mental powers.⁹⁴

And yet, even if this is to be disguised, the artist's freedom must unfold itself within the framework provided by **rules**. The beauty of the work of **art can never be a totally free beauty**. Truly free beauty is encountered only in nature. The art character of art inevitably restrains the freedom of the artistic imagination.

How does Kant understand this **imagination**?

For the imagination ([in its role] as a productive cognitive power) is very mighty when it creates, as it were, another nature out of the material that actual nature gives it. We use it to entertain ourselves when experience strikes us as overly routine. We may even restructure experience; and though in doing so we continue to follow analogical laws, yet we also follow principles which reside higher up, namely in reason (and which are just as natural to us as those the understanding follows in apprehending empirical nature). In this process we feel our freedom from the law of association (which attaches to the empirical use of the imagination): for although it is under that law that nature lends us material, yet we can process that material into something quite different, namely into something that surpasses nature.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ *Critique of Judgment*, p. 174.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

The productive imagination manipulates the material nature has furnished in ways that surpass nature. In both cases the imagination is a faculty of **coordination** as opposed to the understanding, which is a faculty of **subordination**. And as the beautiful was analyzed by Kant as a coordinated whole, it cannot surprise that the task of creating beauty is assigned by Kant to the imagination. Coordination implies that there is no explicit rule. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* the imagination is therefore called **blind** (A 78/ B 103). The principles by which the imagination operates are there said to be hidden. Once again we are reminded of the **persistent attempts to root the creation of art in a subconscious faculty**. Kant seems to be heading in this direction with his doctrine of the **imagination**. The imagination is under no control. It is free.

But it is precisely this freedom of the imagination that also makes it suspect to Kant. Thus he insists that the imagination be disciplined:

In order [for a work] to be beautiful, it is not strictly necessary that [it] be rich and original in ideas, but it is necessary that the imagination in its freedom be commensurate with the lawfulness of the understanding. For if it is left in lawless freedom, all its riches [in ideas] produce nothing but nonsense, and it is judgment that adapts the imagination to the understanding.⁹⁶ (188)

Thus taste, and **taste** also involves the understanding, appears **necessary to furnish the imagination with needed discipline**. The imagination is chaotic, rich, free, where freedom here is essentially different from the freedom of the autonomous moral being, who places himself under the law of reason.

The product of the imagination is called by Kant an **idea**. The term "idea" is already familiar in its relation to reason. God is an idea of reason. What the imagination produces is, however, not an idea of reason, but what Kant calls an **aesthetic idea**. The aesthetic idea shares this with the idea of reason: both strive for something that transcends the limits of experience. Both are alike further in trying to present us with something complete: take Leibniz's idea of the cosmos as a perfect whole — an idea of reason. The aesthetic idea presents us with an analogous completeness. Both are born of a dissatisfaction with the accidental. The aesthetic idea thus presents itself as having to be just as it is. Faced with such an idea, one does not want to compare it. All true beauty, according to Kant, is thus beyond comparison. And being beyond comparison it strikes us as having to be just as it is, and not somehow different.

But let me try to be more specific; say I want to paint this tree. I have a more or less clear idea of what I am up to: I want to paint a picture, of this tree, say a water-color. This give us our idea. The imagination gets hold of this idea, but plays with it, develops it into an aesthetic idea so rich that it is in principle inexhaustible by concepts. This is the reason why Kant calls the aesthetic idea **unexpoundable**, while the idea of reason is **indemonstrable**. In the former case it is **impossible to find an adequate concept**; in the latter case **impossible to find an adequate intuition**. And yet, the two are related. In its freedom, the imagination surpasses the understanding's reach. The task of trying to understand the work of art is an infinite one. This does not mean that trying to understand it is a meaningless effort. On the contrary, it is precisely when I try to understand a work of art that I unexpoundable. In this way the idea of reason and the aesthetic idea complement one another.

Kant's discussion of **genius** is closely tied to his analysis of the **aesthetic idea** and of the activity of the **imagination**.

Genius is the talent (natural endowment) that gives the rule to art. Since talent is an innate productive ability of the artist and as such belongs itself to nature, we could also put it this way: Genius is the innate mental predisposition (*ingenium*) through which nature gives the rule to art.⁹⁷

I want to underscore here Kant's point that **nature gives the rule to genius**. Could Hegel have said this? Indeed what kind of an account can Hegel give of genius?

The genius is said by Kant not to have created the rule governing his creation: indeed he cannot really be said to know it. The artist must become free to listen to the voice of inspiration within himself, a voice over which he has no control, which may or may not speak to him. Every work of art is a **gift** he receives. All the artist can do to prepare himself for this call is to silence other voices that might prevent him from hearing it. From this it follows that genius must be **original** and not **imitative**. One cannot learn how to be a genius.

To suggest that art is more than just a mechanical acting out of some preconceived plan, Kant also calls it an activity of the **soul**, but an activity over which the artist he no real control.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 188.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 174.

5

Again: it should be clear that the conception of art advanced here threatens to place it beyond understanding and reason and thus invites anarchy. And if Kant already is struggling with this implication of his own theory, Hegel is much more explicit in his criticism:

In this place we have only to mention the aspect of falsity in the view before us, in that all consciousness respecting the man's own activity was held, in the case of artistic production, not merely superfluous, but injurious. (31)

Hegel is forced to admit the way this cult of genius is bound up with the emergence of an art that would seem to have left all that preceded it far behind:

This notion became prominent in Germany in the so-called *epoch of genius*, which was introduced by the early productions of Goethe, and subsequently sustained by those of Schiller. In their earliest works, these poets began everything anew, in scorn of all the rules which had then been fabricated, transgressed these rules of set purpose, and, while doing so, distanced all rivals by a long interval. (31-32)

The phrase "epoch of genius" does indeed not seem displaced. Just think what had happened in music and literature in the preceding decades.

Yet, Hegel insists, that it is equally indispensable that artistic talent be thoughtfully cultivated.

I will not enter more closely into the confusions which have prevailed respecting the conception of inspiration and genius, and which prevail even at the present day respecting the omnipotence of inspiration as such. We need only lay down as essential the view that, though the artists's talent and genius contains a natural element, yet it is essentially in need of cultivation by thought, and of reflection on the mode in which it produces, as well as of practice and skill in producing. (32)

There is indeed a great deal about art which can and should be learned. First there is the mechanical part of art. We can call this the craft aspect of art. Very obvious in architecture, sculpture, or painting, it is less evident in poetry. Secondly, Hegel insists, it requires the ability to portray **depths of heart and mind**. Music requires this to a far lesser degree than poetry, according to Hegel:

Music, for instance, which concerns itself with the undefined movement of the inward spiritual nature, and deals with musical sounds as, so to speak, feeling without thought, needs little or no spiritual content to be present in consciousness. It is for this reason that musical talent generally announces itself in very early youth, while the head is still empty and the heart has been but little moved, and is capable of attaining to a very considerable height in early years before the mind and life have experience of themselves. (32)

Art is a presentation of our humanity. It presupposes reflective power. In support Hegel cites Goethe and Schiller, whose first productions, he tells us, were of a terrifying immaturity. The general claim invites questioning. Cf. Hugo von Hofmannsthal who wrote his best poems in his teens or Georg Büchner, e. g., who died when only 23.

6

As we have learned by now, Hegel rejects the claim that the beauty of nature must be ranked above the beauty of art, a claim Kant still defends in the *Critique of Judgment*. Hegel calls it an “obvious opinion for the common consciousness.” (33) Obvious, it would seem, for those who think of nature as God’s work of art, as Kant still tends to do.

Hegel grants, things of nature may live, while works of art are dead, but it is not this that counts:

But this aspect, viz. its external existence, is not what makes a work into a production of fine art; it is a work of art only in as far as, being the offspring of mind, it continues to belong to the realm of mind, has received the baptism of the spiritual, and only represents that which has been moulded in harmony with mind. (33)

This gives the work of art a higher rank than anything which has not sustained this passage through the mind. So for instance by reason of the feeling and insight of which a landscape as depicted by an artist is a manifestation, such a work of mind assumes a higher rank than the mere natural landscape. For everything spiritual is better than anything natural. At any rate, no existence in nature is able, like art, to represent divine ideals. (34)

Kant would have questioned much of this.

Important here returns to the old Platonic theme of beauty thought against time:

Upon that which, in works of art, the mind borrows from its own inner life it is able, even on the side of external existence, to confer permanence; whereas the individual living thing of nature is transient, vanishing, and mutable in this aspect, while the work of art persists. Though indeed, it is not mere permanence, but the accentuation of the character which animation by mind confers, that constitutes its genuine pre-eminence as compared with natural reality. (34)

A defender of nature's beauties in Hegel's days might easily have appealed to an understanding of nature as the unsurpassed work of God, the archetype of all artists. How can human work compare to his infinitely perfect creation. Hegel's rejection of this claim could not be more explicit, even as it raises once more questions about Hegel's understanding of nature.

Art brings about the **incarnation of the spirit in the sensible**. As artist the human being makes what is sensible his own. Art can therefore be understood as a **humanization of the sensible**. The human being reads himself into things. Nature is subjected to a human measure.

7

What is the need that such humanization of nature satisfies? Why is the human being driven to humanize the world around him? What makes art more than mere entertainment?

The universal and absolute need out of which art, on its formal side, arises, has its source in the fact that man is a thinking consciousness, i. e. that he draws out of himself, and makes explicit for himself, that which he is, and, generally, whatever is. The things of nature are only *immediate and single*, but man as mind *reduplicates* himself, inasmuch as prima facie he is like the things of nature, but in the second place just as really is *for* himself, perceives himself, has ideas of himself, thinks himself, and only thus is active self-realizedness. (35)

Hegel suggests that the human being gains such consciousness of himself in two ways:

This consciousness of himself man obtains in a twofold way: in the first place theoretically, in as far as he has inwardly to bring himself into his own consciousness, with all that moves in the human breast, all that stirs and works therein, and generally, to observe and form an idea of himself, to fix before himself what thought ascertains to be his real being, and, in what is summoned out of his inner self and in what is received from without, to recognize only himself. 35 – 36

The narcissism implicit in this understanding of what Sartre considered the human being's fundamental project is evident. But the human being finds it difficult to recognize only himself in what he experiences first of all as an alien nature, an other that resists his efforts to make it his own. He therefore feels an impulse not to leave nature alone, but to engage in **practical activity** (36), to transform it in the image of his own spirit.

This purpose he achieves by the modification of external things upon which he impresses the seal of his inner being, and then finds repeated in them his own characteristics. (36)

Hegel points to something as simple as a boy throwing stones into some pond, enjoying the expanding circles on the water. And the same impulse to make the given their own, will let human beings turn even to their own bodies:

This is the case of all ornament and decoration, though it may be as barbarous, as tasteless, as utterly disfiguring or even destructive as crushing Chinese ladies' feet, or a slitting the ears and lips. It is only among cultivated men that change of the figure, of behavior, and if every kind and mode of self-utterance emanates from spiritual education. (36)

This raises the question: if the point of art is to overcome the otherness of nature, what is the point of naturalism in art. As I pointed out last time, the art historian Wilhelm Worringer advanced the thesis that art is **abstract** in the beginning, that only as human beings begin to feel at home in the world because they have appropriated it, secured their place in it, do we find naturalistic art. The return to abstraction by modern art is therefore interpreted by Worringer as a sign of the renewed insecurity of modern man, where the source of this insecurity is now reflection: reflection that failed to lead us to that home promised by Hegel's reason.

7. The Sensuousness of Art

1

Once again I would like to begin by briefly returning to our last session. Let me recall some of the main points:

Aesthetics is said to be that branch of philosophy dealing with artistic beauty — where I remind you once more of Hegel's exclusion of the beauty of nature.

What then is beauty? Clear is that Hegel understands art and its beauty as products of mind. Beauty partakes of spirit. Indeed, according to Hegel, beauty and its realization in art are demanded by spirit itself, although to demonstrate this would demand an understanding of the whole of Hegel's philosophy. But in these lectures Hegel adopts a different course: he begins with what he takes to be three common assumptions we make concerning art. First of all, a work of art is the product of a deliberate doing. As such it presupposes something like an intention. And yet art would seem to require something else, where **talent** and **genius** were traditionally invoked. But with this, do we not admit the irrational into the essence of art?

In this connection I spent quite a bit of time on Hegel's proximity to Kant. Kant, as I pointed out, makes quite a bit of the need for genius, even as he recognizes that such emphasis threatens to place art beyond understanding and reason, and thus invites the irrational, invites anarchy.

And if Kant already is struggling with this implication of his own theory, Hegel is much more explicit in his criticism: he is thus even more insistent that artistic talent be thoughtfully cultivated. And we should ask whether it is legitimate to link genius as closely to nature as Kant appears to do. Is art not a work of the spirit? How then can it be a gift of nature? But if not, what sense can we make of the fact that, as Kant puts it, genius is a gift to only a few?

All art, according to Hegel, is a presentation of our humanity. It presupposes the power of reflection. It is therefore only to be expected that Hegel should reject the claim that the beauty of nature must be ranked above the beauty of art, a claim Kant still defends in the *Critique of Judgment*. And since today I want to focus on the sensuousness of art, and such sensuousness is closely linked to its materiality, let me return briefly to some key passages:

It was an obvious opinion for the common consciousness to adopt on this head, that the work of art made by man ranked below the product of nature. (33)

One thing that made it seem obvious was an understanding of nature as the work of God. Does the analogy, nature is to God as the work of art is to the artist, not suggest that nature should be placed far above art. Think of Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale of the Emperor's Nightingale. And is nature not alive in a way art never is? Hegel of course has to admit this: to be sure, things of nature may live, while works of art are dead, but it is not this that counts:

But this aspect, viz. its external existence, is not what makes a work into a production of fine art; it is a work of art only in as far as, being the offspring of mind, it continues to belong to the realm of mind, has received the baptism of the spiritual, and only represents that which has been moulded in harmony with mind. (33)

This gives the work of art a higher rank than anything which has not sustained this passage through the mind. So for instance by reason of the feeling and insight of which a landscape as depicted by an artist is a manifestation, such a work of mind assumes a higher rank than the mere natural landscape. For everything spiritual is better than anything natural. At any rate, no existence in nature is able, like art, to represent divine ideals. (34)

Kant might have questioned this. He is not willing altogether to jettison the medieval understanding of nature as a book in which human beings can read about their vocation and destiny,

Upon that which, in works of art, the mind borrows from its own inner life it is able, even on the side of external existence, to confer permanence; whereas the individual living thing of nature is transient, vanishing, and mutable in this aspect, while the work of art persists. Though indeed, it is not mere permanence, but the accentuation of the character which animation by mind confers, that constitutes its genuine pre-eminence as compared with natural reality. (34)

Important here is the old Platonic theme of **beauty thought against time**.

A defender of nature's beauties in Hegel's days might easily have appealed to an understanding of nature as the unsurpassed work of God, the archetype of all artists. How can human work compare to his infinitely perfect creation. Hegel's rejection of this claim could not be more explicit, even as it raises once more questions about Hegel's understanding of nature.

This false opinion is to be entirely abandoned if we mean to penetrate the true conception of art. Indeed, in opposition to such an idea, we must adhere to the very reverse, believing that God is more honored by what mind does or makes than by the

productions or formations of nature. For not only is there a divinity in man, but in him it is operative under a form that is appropriate to the essence of God, in a mode quite other and higher than in nature. God is a spirit, and it is only in man that the medium through which the divine element passes has the form of conscious spirit, that actively realizes itself. In nature the corresponding medium is the unconscious, sensible, and external, which is far below consciousness in value. (34)

Art brings about the **incarnation of the spirit in the sensible**. As artist the human being makes what is sensible his own. Art can therefore be understood as a **humanization of the sensible**. The human being reads himself into things. Nature is subjected to a human measure.

2

What is the need that such **humanization** satisfies? Why is the human being driven to humanize the world around him? What makes art more than mere entertainment?

The universal and absolute need out of which art, on its formal side, arises has its source in the fact that man is a *thinking* consciousness, i.e. that he draws out of himself, and makes explicit *for himself*, that which he is, and generally whatever is. The things of nature are only *immediate and single*, but man as mind *reduplicates* himself, inasmuch as *prima facie* he is like the things of nature, but in the second place just as really is *for himself*, perceives himself, has ideas of himself, thinks himself, and only thus is active self-realizedness. (35)

Hegel suggests that the human being gains such consciousness of himself in two ways:

in the first place theoretically, in so far as he has inwardly to bring himself into his own consciousness, with all that moves in the human breast, all that stirs and work therein, and generally to observe and form an idea of himself, to fix before himself what thought ascertains to be his real being, and, in what is summoned out of his inner self as in what is received from without, to recognize only himself. Secondly man is realized for himself by *practical* activity, inasmuch as he has the impulse, in the medium which is directly given to him, and externally presented before him, to produce himself, and therein at the same time to recognize himself. (35-36)

Hegel points to something as simple as a boy throwing stones into some pond, enjoying the expanding circles on the water. And the same impulse to make the given their own, will let human beings turn even to their own bodies:

This is the cause of all ornament and decoration, though it may be as barbarous, as tasteless, as utterly disfiguring or even destructive as crushing Chinese ladies' feet, or as slitting the ears and lips. It is only among cultivated men that change of the figure, of

behaviour, and of every kind and mode of self-utterance emanates from spiritual education. (36)

This raises the question: if the point of art is to overcome the otherness of nature, what is the point of naturalism in art? As already mentioned, the art historian Wilhelm Worringer advanced the thesis that art is **abstract** in the beginning, that only as human beings begin to feel at home in the world because they have appropriated it, secured their place in it, do we find naturalistic art. The return to abstraction by modern art is therefore interpreted by Worringer as a sign of the renewed insecurity of modern man, where the source of this insecurity is now reflection.

3

But let us pass on now to the second part of Hegel's threefold definition. The work of art is produced for the sense-apprehension of man. This, he suggests, has been responsible for the view that the function of art is to arouse feelings, pleasant feelings, i.e. for what I have called the **aesthetic conception** of art.

(a) This reflection has furnished occasion for the consideration to be advanced that fine art is intended to arouse feeling, and indeed more particularly the feeling which we find suits us — that is, pleasant feeling. Looking at the question thus men have treated the investigation of fine art as an investigation of the feelings, and asked, what feelings it must be held that art ought to evoke — fear, for example, and compassion; and then, how these could be pleasant — how, for example, the contemplation of misfortune could produce satisfaction? (37)

The question invites not necessarily pleasant thoughts about human nature, e.g. about the German saying: *Schadenfreude ist die reinste Freude*. A former student of mine, John Portman, published a book on this topic a few years ago: *When Bad Things Happen to Other People*. Hegel no doubt is thinking about more elevated topics such as **tragedy**. But these are not altogether unrelated.

And Hegel is thinking no doubt about what I have called the aesthetic approach to art. He mentions in this connection Moses Mendelssohn, once a very popular philosopher, as a representative of this view. The difficulty with this approach, according to Hegel, is that it does not tell us very much and tends to lose itself in abstractions.

Yet such an investigation does not lead men far, for feeling is the indefinite dull region of the mind; what is felt remains wrapped in the form of the most abstract individual

subjectivity, and therefore the distinctions of feeling are also quite abstract, and are not distinctions of the actual object-matter itself. (37)

Think of the difficulties we have describing the taste of one particular wine in opposition to that of another,

But this supposed abstractness of feeling deserves more careful consideration. In just what relationship do mind or spirit stand to feeling?

Note what Hegel has to say about the vacancy of feeling.

In feeling it is just this vacant subjectivity that is not merely retained, but given the first place, and that is why men are so fond of having emotions. And for the same reason such a study becomes tedious from its indefiniteness and vacancy, and repulsive from its attentiveness to little subjective peculiarities. (38)

One senses here something like contempt on Hegel's part for the whole realm of emotions rather than concepts. And yet there would seem to be countless aspects of art that communicate feelings rather than concepts. Here the comparison with Heidegger becomes instructive. According to Heidegger works of art communicate ways of standing in the world. And how does art do this? How, e.g. does a person communicate a way of standing in the world? How does a certain discourse? In *Being and Time* Heidegger points in this connection to the **music** of the discourse. It is therefore not unimportant to recall how Hegel devalues music on p. 32. Consider once more:

Music, for instance, which concerns itself only with the undefined movement of the inward spiritual nature, and deals with musical sounds as, so to speak, feeling without thought, needs little or no spiritual content to be present in consciousness. (32)

4

Matters are not helped much when feeling is refined and understood specifically as **aesthetic feeling**, a peculiar feeling of or for beauty, corresponding to a peculiar sense of beauty, a kind of sixth sense. But if we can speak of such a sense at all, this does not seem to be a sense with which human beings are born:

In this search it soon appeared that such a sense is no blind instinct made rigidly definite by nature, and capable from the beginning in its own independent essence of discerning beauty. Hence it followed that education came to be demanded for this sense, and the educated sense of beauty came to be called *taste*, which although an educated appreciation and apprehension of the beautiful, was yet supposed to retain the nature of immediate feeling. (38)

Once again Hegel insists that such an approach is essentially inadequate and the rhetoric is once more revealing:

For this reason such education in its turn came to a standstill in the indefinite, and merely endeavoured so to equip feeling as sense of beauty by help of reflection, that there might thenceforth be capacity to find out beauty whenever and wherever it should exist. Yet the depth of the matter remained a sealed book to mere taste, for these depths demand not only sensibility and abstract reflection, but the undivided reason and the mind in its solid vigour, while taste was only directed to external surface about which the feelings play, and on which one-sided maxims may pass for valid. But, for this very reason, what is called good taste takes fright at all more profound effects of art, and is silent where the reality comes in question, and where externalities and trivialities vanish. (38-39)

Note the contrasts: deep matter - external surface; profound effects of art - externalities, trivialities.

For when great passions and the movements of a profound soul are unveiled, we are no longer concerned with the fine distinctions of taste [*Geschmack*] and its pettifogging particularities [*Kleinigkeitskrämerei*]. It {the reference is to *Geschmack*} feels that genius strides contemptuously over such ground as this, and shrinking before its power, {taste, i. e. the *Geschmack*} becomes uneasy and knows not which way to turn. (39)

Implicit in Hegel's understanding of art is a rejection of any merely formal approach to art. This lies behind his devaluation of the man of taste in favor of the genuine connoisseur or art scholar.

The connoisseur, or scholar of art, has replaced the art-judge, or man of taste. The positive side of art-scholarship, so far as its concerns a thorough acquaintance with the entire circumference of the individual character in a given work of art, we have already pronounced to be essential to the study of art. (39)

The history of art cannot be reduced to the history of forms. Rather the history of art demands to be placed in the context of the history of ideas and indeed of history in general. With this insistence Hegel becomes the precursor of Max Dvorak, who established art history in this manner: *Kunstgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte*. The artwork cannot be isolated from its context. Consider in this connection the case of forgeries.

5

But even such a historical approach is not sufficient. It tends to lead us away from the particular work of art, a unique sensuous presence, but one that is addressed to mind.

But just how is the mind related to the sensuous in the artwork? Hegel here distinguishes three steps:

1. On the lowest level we have **sensation** or "sensuous apprehension."

(40)

(aa) The lowest mode of apprehension, and that least appropriate to the mind, is purely sensuous apprehension. It consists naturally in mere looking, listening, feeling, just as in seasons of mental fatigue it may often be entertaining to go about without thought, and just to hear and look around us. (41)

That usually objects are not simply given in this manner must be granted. But we should also keep in mind that quite a number of artists have made such interested perception the goal of their art. Think of Frank Stella. What would Hegel make of their art?

But let us return to the obvious: first of all objects are given as objects of our interests, of our desire. We want to appropriate the other. Desiring to appropriate we are not free to let things be. Desire wants to annihilate things in their self-subsistency. Here Hegel is simply restating Kant's characterization of our usual apprehension of things as interested perception.

The mind, however, does not rest in the mere apprehension of external things by sight and hearing, it makes them objects for its own inner nature, which then is itself impelled in a correspondingly sensuous form to realize itself in the things, and relates itself to them as *desire*. In this appetitive relation to the outer world, the man stands as a sensuous particular over against the things as likewise particulars; he does not open his mind to them with general ideas a thinking being, but has relations dictated by particular impulses and interests to the objects as themselves particulars, and preserves himself in them, inasmuch as he uses them, consumes them, and puts in act his self-satisfaction by sacrificing them to it. (41)

Man's natural relation to things would thus appear to be self-serving and consuming.

6

A second way in which we relate to things is the theoretical attitude. Theoretic contemplation aims at understanding rather than appropriation. It is interested not in the particular in its particularity, but in the universal. Theoretical contemplation is thus in a

sense unnatural. Hunger or sexual desire is very much part of this natural being. So would appear to be beauty understood as linked to such desire.

Just as little is it possible for desire to let the object subsist in its freedom. For its impulse urges it just precisely to destroy this independence and freedom of external things, and to show that they are only there to be destroyed and consumed. But, at the same time, the subject himself, as entangled in the particular limited and valueless [*nichtigen*] interests of his desires, is neither free in himself, for he has not determined himself out of the essential universality and rationality of his will, nor free in relation to the outer world, for his desire remains essentially determined by things and related to them. (41)

Hegel cannot understand our natural desires, for example eros, as a source of any value. Such interests he calls *nichtig*: they count for nothing.

Our experience of the beautiful is different and here Hegel follows Kant in his emphasis on the disinterested character of our experience of the beautiful. The aesthetic attitude apparently permits us to elide or bracket the existence of things:

This relation of desire is not that in which man stands to the work of art. He allows it to subsist as an object, free and independent, and enters into relation with it apart from desire, as with an object which only appeals to the theoretic side of the mind (41)

Note that any connection between artistic beauty and eros has thereby been elided, an elision that Nietzsche was to mock:

For this reason the work of art, although it has sensuous existence, yet, in this point of view, does not require sensuous existence and natural life; indeed it even *ought* not to remain on such a level, seeing that it has to satisfy only the interests of mind, and is bound to exclude from itself all desire. (41)

Here a passage from the *Genealogy of Morals* that points to what I with Nietzsche find questionable about this aesthetic approach:

If our aestheticians never weary of asserting in Kant's favor that, under the spell of beauty, one can even view undraped female statues "without interest," one may laugh a little at their expense: the experience of artists on this ticklish point are more "interesting" and Pygmalion was in any event not necessarily an unaesthetic man." Let us think all the more highly of the innocence of our aestheticians, which is reflected in such arguments; let us, for example, credit it to the honor of Kant that he should expatiate on the peculiar properties of the sense of touch with the naiveté of a country parson.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, III, 6, *Kritische Studienausgabe*, vol. 5, p. 347; trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, *On the Genealogy of Morals/ Ecce Homo* (New York: Vintage, 1967), p. 104.

Beauty, Nietzsche suggests here, is too intimately **tied to love** to allow us to be convinced by Hegel's Kantian understanding of the beautiful as object of a perception divorced from sexual interest.

Very different from such an interested approach to things, Hegel insists, is that of theory. To be sure, theory, too, is governed by an interest, but it is an interest different in kind:

Therefore the theoretical interest lets the individual thing be, and holds aloof from them as sensuous particulars, because this sensuous particularity is not what the contemplation exercised by the intelligence looks for. For the rational intelligence does not belong, as do the desires, to the individual subject as such, but only to the individual as at the same time in his nature universal. In as far as man has relation to things in respect of this universality, it is his universal reason which attempts to find himself in nature, and thereby to reproduce the inner essence of things, which sensuous existence, though having its ground therein, cannot immediately display. (42)

Science brings with it an elision of the sensuous. The reality that science brings into view is in its essence invisible:

Still, this isolated sensuous thing, as such, has no further relation to the mind, inasmuch as the intelligence aims at the universal, the law, the thought and notion of the object. Not only, therefore, does it abandon all intercourse with the thing as a given individual, but transforms it within the mind, making a concrete object of sense into an abstract matter of thought, and so into something quite other than the same object qua sensuous phenomenon. (42)

Hegel concludes by comparing the interest of art with the practical interest of desire on one hand and the theoretical interest of science on the other.

Thus, the interest of art distinguishes itself from the practical interest of *desire* by the fact that it permits its object to subsist freely and in independence, while desire utilizes it in its own service by its destruction. On the other hand, artistic contemplation differs from theoretical consideration by the scientific intelligence, in cherishing interest for the object as an individual existence, and not setting to work to transmute it into universal thought and notion. (43)

Artistic interest is interested in the particular, in this work of art, but it lets it be. Our relationship to works of art resembles both and is yet different from both, the practical interest of desire and theoretical consideration and holds the mean between the two.

What is required is sensuous presence, which, while not ceasing to be sensuous, is to be liberated from the apparatus of its merely material nature. And thus the sensuous in works of art is exalted to the rank of a mere *semblance* in comparison with the immediate

existence of things in nature, and the work of art occupies the mean between what is immediately sensuous and ideal thought. (43)

We encounter here a traditional theme, familiar from both Baumgarten and Kant, that the artwork mediates between the sensuous and the spiritual. We could go back to Plato who understands sensible beauty as just such a mediation. Hegel follows Kant, when he understands the creative imagination of the artist as the faculty that achieves this unification, although, as already in Plato, such work is shadowed by the philosopher's insistence that spirit must be placed higher than sensuous nature.

The cited passage invites comparison with a related passage in Heidegger's "The Origin of the Work of Art":

A piece of equipment, a pair of shoes for instance, is also self-contained like a mere thing, but it does not have the character of having taken shape by itself like the granite boulder. On the other hand, equipment displays an affinity with the artwork insofar as it is something produced by the human hand. However, by its self-sufficient presence the work of art is similar rather to the mere thing which has taken shape by itself and is self-contained.⁹⁹

For Hegel it follows from the very nature of the aesthetic that there can only be arts of the two theoretical senses, sight and hearing.

This semblance of the sensuous presents itself to the mind externally as the shape, the visible look, and the sonorous vibration of things — supposing that the mind leaves the thing uninterfered with (physically), but does not yet descend into its inner essence (by abstract thought), for if it did so it would entirely destroy their external existence as separate individuals *for* it. For this reason the sensuous aspect of art only refers to the two *theoretical* senses of *sight* and *hearing*, while smell, taste, and feeling remain excluded from being sources of aesthetic enjoyment. (43)

The world of art is a shadow-world, and this, according to Hegel, far from being a weakness, is its strength:

Thus art on its sensuous side purposely produces no more than a shadow-world of shapes, sounds, and imaginable ideas; and it is absolutely out of the question to maintain that it is owing to simple powerlessness and to the limitations on his actions that man, when evoking worlds of art into existence, fails to present more than the mere surface of the sensuous, than mere *schemata*. In art, these sensuous shapes and sounds present

⁹⁹ Martin Heidegger, "Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes," *Holzwege* (1935–1946), *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 5 (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1977), p. 13-14; "The Origin of the Work of Art," *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. and intro. Albert Hofstadter, p. 29.

themselves, not simply for their own sake and for that of their immediate structure, but with the purpose of affording in that shape satisfaction to higher spiritual interests, seeing that they are powerful to call forth a response and echo in the mind from all the depths of consciousness. It is thus that, in art, the sensuous is *spiritualized*, i. e. the *spiritual* appears in sensuous shape. (44)

8. Art and Imitation

1

Let me return to our last session and to the problem raised already by Hegel's understanding of aesthetics as the branch of philosophy dealing with artistic beauty, excluding the beauty of nature, where such exclusion invites comparison of Hegel's position with that of Kant, who very much includes the beauty of nature in his "Critique of the Aesthetic Judgment." Art can therefore be understood as a humanization or spiritualization of the sensible. I want to underscore once more "sensible."

Thomas Aquinas had defined the beautiful as *id quod visum placet*, that which pleases in being seen. The work of art is produced for the sense-apprehension of man. This, Hegel suggests, has been responsible for the view that the function of art is to arouse feelings, i. e., for what I have called the **aesthetic conception** of art. The difficulty with this approach, according to Hegel, is that it does not tell us very much and tends to lose itself in abstractions. Hegel speaks in this connection about the vacancy of feeling. But such talk invites further consideration. In this connection I pointed to Heidegger and his discussion of the cognitive significance of mood; also to Hegel's devaluation of music.

Hegel suggests that the problem posed by the vacancy of feeling is not eliminated when feeling is refined and understood as a specifically aesthetic feeling, e.g. when a philosopher speaks of a peculiar sense of beauty, a kind of sixth sense. In this connection Hegel's devaluation of the man of taste in favor of the connoisseur or art scholar is significant. The history of art, according to Hegel, should not be reduced to the history of forms, but demands to be placed in the context of the **history of ideas** and indeed of history in general.

But such a focus on ideas tends to lead us away from the particular work of art, a unique sensuous presence, but one that is addressed to mind.

This raises the question of just how the mind is related to the sensuous in the artwork? As did Kant and following him quite closely, Hegel distinguishes aesthetic experience from the way objects are given first of all and most of the time: as objects of our interest, of our desire. Such interest is essentially **future directed**. Think of hunger or sexual desire. Or of moral interest. Such interest is also interested in the reality of

what is its object. The hungry person wants to consume; the morally engaged person wants to change the world. Aesthetic experience, according to Kant, is not interested in that sense. It is not future directed; it lets its object be. To be sure, human beings are interested in having aesthetic experiences. So understood artistic interest is interested in the particular, in this work of art, but it lets it be. From this it follows that there can only be arts of the two theoretical senses, sight and hearing. The world of art is a **shadow-world**, and this, far from being a weakness, is its strength.

2

The danger with Hegel's emphasis on spirit is that it may fail to do justice to the **sensuous** and fall back into the aesthetics of neo-classicism when the latter distinguishes a philosophical from a mechanical part of art. Hegel is quite aware of this threat:

For instance, it would be possible in poetical creation to try and proceed by first apprehending the theme to be treated as a prosaic thought, and by then putting it into pictorial ideas, and into rhyme, and so forth; so that the pictorial element would simply be hung upon the abstract reflections as an ornament or decoration. Such a process would only produce bad poetry, for in it there would be operative as two separate activities that which in artistic production has its right place only as undivided unity. (44-45)

Note the similarity of poetry so understood and architecture understood as the production of **decorated sheds**. There is indeed a sense in which our age invites understanding as **the age of the decorated shed**.

But all this leaves us with the question: how are we to understand artistic creativity.

It is neither, on the one hand, purely mechanical work, as mere unconscious skill in sensuous sleight of hand, or a formal activity according to fixed rules learnt by rote; nor is it, on the other hand a scientific productive process, which passes from sense to abstract ideas and thoughts, or exercises itself exclusively in the element of pure thinking; rather the spiritual and the sensuous side must in artistic production be as one. (44)

Hegel speaks in this connection of **fancy [Phantasie]** (45). As the subsequent discussion makes clear, Hegel here pretty much returns to the 18th century concept of **taste**.

Such a process may be compared with the habit even of a man with great experience of the world, or, again, with that of a man of *esprit* or wit, who, although he has complete knowledge of the main stakes of life, of the substantive interests that hold men together, of what moves them, and of what is the power that they recognize, yet neither has himself

apprehended this content in the form of general rules, nor is able to explain it to others in general reflections, but makes plain to himself and to others what occupies his consciousness always in particular cases, whether real or invented in adequate instances and the like. (45)

The same holds for **genius**. How spirit and nature join in genius remains mysterious

Now, Fancy, has in it a mode of instinct-like productiveness, inasmuch as the essential plasticity and sensuousness of the work of art must be subjectively present in the artist as natural disposition and natural impulse, and, considering that it is unconscious operation, must belong to the natural element in man, as well as to the rational. Of course, natural capacity leaves room for other elements in talent and genius, for artistic production is just as much of a spiritual and self-conscious nature; we can but say that its spirituality must, somehow, have an element of natural, plastic, and formative tendency. For this reason, though nearly everyone can reach a certain point in an art, yet in order to go beyond this point, with which art in the strict sense begins, it is impossible to dispense with native artistic talent of the highest order. (46)

Similarly mysterious is that genius should declare itself usually at an early age.

And mysterious finally is how genius should be able to borrow its contents from nature. I would suggest, and this can at this point be no more than a suggestion, **that the whole relationship of meaning and nature, and that means also of human spirit and nature, has here been misconceived by Hegel**. And that misconception has great deal to do with the devaluation of feeling I noted earlier.

3

The third common determination mentioned on p. 30, is that art contains an end. What then is **the end of art**? We have already anticipated Hegel's answer to this question when we tied the creation of art to the effort of human beings to recover themselves in an initially alien other.

Hegel begins by looking at some familiar answers to the question. First he considers a view that sees the end of art as **imitation**.

According to this view the essential purpose of art consists in imitation, in the sense of a facility in copying natural forms as they exist in a way that corresponds precisely to them; and the success of such a representation, exactly corresponding to nature, is supposed to be what affords full satisfaction. (47)

It is indeed a familiar view. As Ernst **Gombrich** observes,

In Antiquity the conquest of illusion by art was such a recent achievement that the discussion of painting and sculpture inevitably centered on imitation, mimesis. Indeed it

may be said that the progress of art toward that goal was to the ancient world what the progress of technology is to the modern: the model for progress as such. Thus Pliny told the history of sculpture and painting as the history of inventions assigning definite achievements in the rendering of nature to individual artists: the painter Polygnotus was the first to represent people with open mouths and with teeth, the sculptor Pythagoras was the first to render nerves and veins, the painter Nicias was concerned with light and shade.¹⁰⁰

In the Renaissance **Vasari** told a similar story. It is this story that, Danto suggests, provides the master narrative that allowed Vasari to proclaim the end of art in his own day. And in his *Modern Painters* **John Ruskin** still interprets the history of art as "progress toward visual truth."¹⁰¹ For a defense of such a view we may want to turn to Aristotle who suggests that art has its origin in **playful imitation**. Imitation, so understood, is inseparable from freedom. It presupposes the ability of the individual to transcend the here and now, the ability to oppose to this situation other possible situations. In the imagination a space opens up extending far beyond my limited world, indeed beyond reality, a space of boundless possibilities. The imagination extends thus to what is not real. Art thus, according to Aristotle, does not deal with what we usually consider real, but with the possible as being probable.

From what we have said it will be seen that the poet's function is to describe, not the thing that has happened, but a kind of thing that might happen, i. e. what is possible as being probable or necessary. The distinction between historian and poet is not in the one writing prose and the other verse — you might put the work of Herodotus into verse and it would still be a species of history; it consists really in this, that the one describes the thing that has been, and the other a kind of thing that might be. Hence poetry is something more philosophic and of graver import than history, since its statements are of the nature rather of universals, whereas those of history are singulars. By a universal statement I mean one as to what such or such a kind of man will probably or necessarily say or do, — which is the aim of poetry, though it affixes proper names to its characters.¹⁰²

Like Hegel, Aristotle here would seem to place the poet, and we can generalize to the artist, in the same circle as the philosopher. What Aristotle has to say here also would seem to be close to the Platonic definition of **beauty as the epiphany of form**, only that

¹⁰⁰ Ernst H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 11.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

now the form's place is taken by the **universal**. This to be sure, re-raises the question: if so, why art at all? Why not just philosophy? Is imitation so understood not superfluous labor?

Be this as it may, Hegel, at any rate, would seem to understand imitation in the more restricted sense, and so restricted it is difficult not to consider it superfluous labor:

A superfluous labour, seeing that the things which pictures, theatrical representations, etc., imitate and represent — animals, natural scenes, incidents in human life — are before us in other cases already, in our own gardens or our own houses, or in cases within our closer or more remote circle of acquaintance. (47)

How could one answer such an objection? What is the point of such an imitation of the object? Would art, so understood, not necessarily fall infinitely short of what it attempted to imitate, lacking the soul of what it was trying to capture? Kant gives the example of a boy imitating the call of a nightingale, which pleases us much less than the song of the real bird would. Or we may want to point to Plato's *Republic*, where Socrates condemns such an art of imitation for being three times removed from the truth. Hegel in this connection invokes the Islamic injunction against imitation.

Just as Turks, being Muhammedans, tolerate, as is well known, no pictures copied from men or the like; and when James Bruce, on his journey to Abyssinia, showed paintings of a fish to a Turk, the man was amazed at first, but soon enough made answer: 'If this fish shall rise up against you on the last day, and say, "You have created for me a body, but no living soul', how will you defend yourself against such an accusation?"' (47)

To reduce art to no more than such literal imitation is indeed to make it a pointless art:

In this sense the invention of any unimportant and technical product has the higher value, and man may be prouder of having invented the hammer, the nail, and so forth, than achieving feats of mimicry. For this fervor of abstract copying is to be evened with the feat of the man who has taught himself to throw lentils through a small opening without missing. He displayed this skill of his before Alexander, and Alexander presented him with a bushel of lentils as a reward for his frivolous and meaningless art. (49)

And yet there is a point to theories that emphasize representation. Representation renders visible. It "frames" the represented. **Representation** is also **re-presentation**. Such re-presentation places the re-presented in a specific light. In this connection I would like to recommend to you once more Ernst Gombrich's *Art and Illusion*.

But when imitation is made the main point of art, have we not lost sight of beauty?

¹⁰² Aristotle, *Poetics* 9, 1451b 2 – 10, trans. Ingram Bywater, W. Rhys Roberts.

Moreover, seeing that the principle of imitation is purely formal, to make it the end has the result that *objective beauty* itself disappears. For the question in this case is no longer of what nature that is which is to be copied, but only whether it is *correctly* copied. (49)

If faithfulness of the copy were our only criterion, what is being copied, whether it is beautiful or for some other reason worth copying, would not matter. Hegel is right to insist that content is more important than that.

And in fact, if in selecting objects for representation we start from what men think beautiful or ugly, and therefore deserving artistic imitation — that is from their taste — then all circles of natural objects open to us, and not one of them will be likely to fail of a patron. Among men, for instance, it is the case at any rate that any bridegroom thinks his bride beautiful, and indeed perhaps, he alone, though not, it may be, every husband his wife, and that subjective taste for such beauty has no fixed rule one may hold to be the good fortune of both parties. (49)

Hegel here wants to rescue aesthetics from the rule of such subjective taste, and the paradigm here is the bridegroom's judgment that his bride is beautiful. The choice invites questions.

And as Hegel wants to rescue aesthetics from the rule of subjective taste, he also does not want to surrender it to cultural relativity:

If we, moreover, look quite beyond individuals and their accidental taste, to the taste of nations, this again is full of extreme variety and contrasts. How often we hear it said that a European beauty would not please a Chinese or even a Hottentot, in as far as the Chinaman has quite a different conception of beauty from the Negro, and the Negro in turn from the European, and so forth. Indeed, if we took any of the works of art of extra-European peoples — their images of gods for instance— which their fancy has originated as venerable and sublime, they may appear to us as the most gruesome idols, and their music may sound to our ears as the most horrible noise, while they, on their side, will regard our sculptures, paintings, and musical productions as trivial or ugly. (49-50)

These examples, offered in passing, as a kind of joke, once again raise the question of the relationship of **beauty** to **eros**, so important to Plato, and still to Burke, and yet elided by both Kant and Hegel.

Hegel raises a different kind of question when he points out that such emphasis on imitation makes it difficult to do justice to architecture on the one hand, to poetry on the other.

Hegel does indeed insist that imitation is essential to the work of art:

It is indeed, an element essential to the work of art, to have natural shapes for its foundation seeing that its representation is the medium of external and therefore natural

phenomena. In painting, for instance, it is an important study to know how to copy with precision the colours in their relations to one another, the effects of light, reflections, etc., and no less, the forms and figures of objects down to their subtlest characteristics. It is in this respect chiefly that the principle of naturalism in general and of copying nature has recovered its influence in modern times. Its aim is to recall an art which has grown feeble and indistinct to the vigour and crispness of nature; or, again, to invoke against the purely arbitrary and artificial conventionalism, as unnatural as it was inartistic, into which art had strayed, the uniform, direct, and solidly coherent sequences of nature. (50-51)

But this raises the question: just why is it important to know how to copy with precision the colors in their relations to one another? And just how would Hegel have us understand his invocation of the "uniform, direct, and solidly coherent sequences of nature"? Just what is wrong with artificiality in art, right with naturalism? Hegel's conclusion of this section only underscores such questions:

And, therefore, although external appearance in the shape of natural reality constitutes an essential condition of art, yet nevertheless, neither is the given natural world its *rule*. Nor is the mere imitation of external appearance *as* external its *end*. (51)

4

But to return to a question raised earlier: what is the proper content of art? The common opinion would have it that everything that we can perceive or conceive, good as well as evil, is a proper object for art.

Its aim is therefore placed in arousing and animating the slumbering emotions, inclinations, and passions; in filling the *heart*, in forcing the human being, whether cultured or uncultured, to feel the whole range of what man's soul in its inmost and secret corners has power to experience and to create, and all that is able to move and to stir the human breast in its depths and in its manifold aspects and possibilities; to present as a delight to emotion and to perception all that the mind possesses of real and lofty in its thought and in the Idea — all the splendour of the noble, the eternal, and the true, and no less to make intelligible misfortune and misery, wickedness and crime; to make men realize the inmost nature of all that is shocking and horrible, as also of all pleasure and delight; and finally to set imagination roving in idle toying of fancy and luxuriating in the seductive spells of sense-stimulating visions. (51)

Art expands our horizons; **art liberates**. Already in Aristotle's *Poetics* we encounter this liberating power of the imagination, which opens up realms beyond the real.

Man can frame to himself ideas of things that are not actual as though they were actual. Hence it is all the same to our feelings whether external reality or only the semblance of

it is the means of bringing in contact with us a situation, a relation, or the import of a life. Either mode suffices to awaken our response to its burden, in grief and in rejoicing, in pathos and in horror, and in traversing the emotions and the passions of wrath, hatred, compassion, of anxiety, fear, love, reverence, and admiration, or of the desire of honour and of fame. (52)

So understood art should be part of any well thought through program of liberal education.

But just because freedom here remains negative it cannot do justice to what Hegel demands of art. We have not yet arrived at an adequate determination of the end of art.

9. Why Art in a Needy Age?

1

Last time we turned to the third of the three commonplaces about art Hegel mentions on p. 30: "Art contains an *end*." What then is the **end of art**? A first answer is given by Hegel's understanding of art as an effort by human beings to recognize themselves in an initially alien other. How is this answer related to the familiar view, on which we spent most of our time, that the end of art as **imitation**? Is imitation not superfluous labor. Reduced to literal imitation art threatens to lose its point.

And yet, I suggested, there is a point to theories that emphasize representation. I tied representation to re-presentation. Re-presentation renders visible, places the re-presented in a specific light. This raises the question of the relationship of **representation, re-presentation, and beauty**? Does the turn to representation not let us lose sight of the latter? Or are re-presentation and beauty somehow linked in that both make visible? Does beauty not also re-present what is beautiful. **Xenophon**, in his *Symposium*, tells of the effect that the beauty of the young Autolycus has on those assembled: it makes them look again. The beautiful re-presents itself. Beauty may be said to **frame** the beautiful. Discussions of the beautiful, their preoccupation with such notions as perfection or aesthetic self-sufficiency have paid insufficient attention to its framing function.¹⁰³

And what is the relationship of beauty and representation to **content**? If either beautiful form or the faithfulness of the copy were our only criterion, what is being copied would not matter. Hegel is right to insist that content is more important than that. And content cannot be merely a matter of subjective or cultural taste. Consider once more Hegel's example of the bridegroom's judgment that his bride is beautiful, presented to the reader as a kind of joke. But the choice of example deserves serious consideration. It raises the question of the relationship of **beauty to eros**. Do we find here a hint concerning the content of art?

But what is the proper content of art? The common opinion, Hegel suggests, would have it that everything that we can perceive or conceive, good as well as evil, is a

¹⁰³ See Karsten Harries, *The Broken Frame. Three Lectures* (Washington: Catholic University Press, 1989).

proper object for art. "The task and aim of art is to bring in contact with our sense, our feeling, our inspiration, all that finds a place in the mind of man." (51). Hegel rightly objects to the empty formality of such a view.

But he also recognizes that there is something right about such an understanding of art. What is wrong with it is its failure to address what Hegel takes to be the real function of art: to reveal what most profoundly matters in sensuous form. It leaves us adrift amidst countless feelings and passions pulling us in often opposed directions.

It is a fact that art has this formal side, in that it has power to present every possible subject matter in artistic dress, before perception and feeling, just as argumentative reflection has the power of manipulating all possible objects and modes of action, and of furnishing them with reasons and justifications. But when we admit so great a variety of content we are at once met by the remark that the manifold feelings and ideas, which art aims at provoking or reinforcing, intersect and contradict, and by mutual interference cancel one another. Indeed, in this aspect, in so far as art inspires men to directly opposite emotions, it only magnifies the contradiction of our feelings and passions, and either sets them staggering like Bacchantes, or passes into sophistry and skepticism, in the same way as argumentation. (52-53)

As already for Plato, so for Hegel **unity** has a normative function. Plato's eros, as it seeks beauty, is in search of **unity**, demands self-integration, demands a single end. Hegel's view does not seem unrelated.

This diversity of the material of art itself compels us, therefore, not to be content with so formal an aim for it, seeing that rationality forces its way into this wild diversity, and demands to see the emergence of a higher and more universal purpose from these elements in spite of their self-contradiction, and to be assured of its being attained. Just in the same way the State and the social life of men are, of course, credited with the purpose that in them *all* human capacities and *all* individual powers are to be developed and to find utterance in all directions and with all tendencies. But in opposition to so formal a view there at once arises the question in what unity these manifold formations must be comprehended, and what *single end* they must have for their fundamental idea and ultimate purpose. (53)

What then is the end of art? Hegel suggests that such an end readily suggests itself to us — although I wonder whether we would be able say the same today:

As such an end, reflection soon suggests the notion that art has the capacity and the function of mitigating the fierceness of the desires. (53)

The shift from the demand for unity to this function raises questions: how are they connected? And just how does art accomplish what here is demanded?

Hegel insists that to do justice to the whole human being we have to do justice to reason, and thus to the universal, that we should not allow ourselves to be ruled by passion

In respect to this first idea, we have only to ascertain in what feature peculiar to art it is that the capacity lies of eliminating brutality and taming and educating the impulses, desires, and passions. Brutality in general has its reason in a direct selfishness of the impulses, which go to work right away, and exclusively for the satisfaction of their concupiscence. Now, desire is most savage and imperious in proportion as, being isolated and narrow, it occupies the whole man, so that he does not retain the power of separating himself as a universal being from this determinateness, and becoming aware of himself as a universal. (53)

A particular passion, to be sure, can also bring about something like a self-integration. Purity of heart, Kierkegaard said, is to will one thing. Why could not love, anger, or revenge, become such a purifying passion? Think of Heinrich von Kleist's *Michael Kohlhaas*. Hegel, to be sure, would refuse such a suggestion. Passion needs to be put in its proper place.

Even if the man in such a case says, "The passion is stronger than I", it is true that the abstract I is then separated for consciousness from the particular passion; but still only in a formal way, inasmuch as this separation is only made in order to pronounce that, against the power of passion, the I as such is of no account whatever. The savageness of passion consists, therefore, in the oneness of the I as universal with the limited content of its desires, so that the man has no will outside this particular passion. (53-54)

Art, Hegel suggests, breaks the hegemony of passion simply by placing it at a distance:

Now, such brutality and untamed violence of passion is softened through art, to begin with, by the mere fact that it brings before the man as an idea what in such a state he feels and does. And even if art restricts itself to merely setting up pictures of the passions before the mind's eye, or even if it were actually to flatter them, still this is by itself enough to have a softening power, inasmuch as the man is at least *made aware*, of what, apart from such presentation, he simply *is*. (54)

How convincing is this account of the power of art to soften the passions? Can a case not also be made that art may arouse them. Plato certainly was worried about the power of art to arouse the passions. Think of martial music, or more specifically of the function of art in National Socialism.

Hegel is of a different mind and in support he mentions approvingly the old custom of wailing women at funerals:

For this reason, it was a good old custom at deaths and funerals to appoint wailing women, in order to bring the grief before the mind in its utterance. Manifestations of sympathy, too, hold up the content of man's misfortune to his view; when it is much talked about he is forced to reflect upon it, and is thereby relieved. And so it has always been held that to weep or to speak one's fill is a means to obtain freedom from the oppressive weight of care, or at least to find momentary relief for the heart. (54)

So understood art plays an important part in man's self-elevation above the merely natural. While for Heidegger art also has the function of recalling us to the earth, to the natural ground of our valuations, for Hegel art helps us to leave nature behind and thereby lets us become more truly human.

Hence the mitigation of the violence of passion has for its universal reason that man is released from his immediate sunkness in a feeling, and becomes conscious of it as something external to him, towards which he must now enter into an *ideal* relation. (55)

It is not just that art distances us from our passions. Such distance faces us with the task of entering into what Hegel terms "an ideal relation" with them. How are we to understand this **ideal relation**? The end of the paragraph provides us with a hint:

Man's mode of occupying himself with works of art is always purely contemplative, and educates thereby, in the first place, no doubt, merely attention to the representations themselves, but then, going beyond this, it cultivates attention to their significance, the comparison with other contents, and receptivity for the general consideration for them, and for the point of view which it involves. (55)

Not only does art let us attend to the representations, but inevitably also lets us consider their significance and compare them to other representations. Appealing to Aristotle we might say that art places the represented in the light of the universal.

2

But once again Hegel repeats his by now familiar charge: have we not still left everything still far too formal and abstract?

To the above there attaches itself in natural connection the second characteristic which has been ascribed to art as its essential purpose, viz. the purification of the passions, instruction and moral perfecting. For the characteristic that art was to bridle savageness and educate the passions remained quite abstract and general, so that a question must again arise about a determinate kind and essential end of this education. (55)

The question is: how are we to understand **purity**? Aristotle's understanding of catharsis comes to mind. And "purity" has of course become a catchword in modern art. Is the

spirit the measure of purity? Can anger be purified? Could it be that the passions are, just in so far as they are passions, impure? Hegel himself points out that such invocation of purity remains quite general and abstract:

The doctrine of the purification of the passions suffers indeed from the same defect as the above doctrine of the mitigation of the desires; yet, when more closely looked at, it at any rate arrives at the point of accentuating the fact that the presentations of art may be held to lack a standard by which their worth or unworthiness could be measured. This standard simply means their effectiveness in separating pure from impure in the passions. It therefore requires a content that has the capacity to exercise this purifying power, and, in as far as the production of such an effect is taken to constitute the substantive end of art, it must follow that the purifying content must be brought before consciousness in its *universality* and *essentiality*. (55)

That so understood art has a teaching function is evident and in this connection Hegel cites the Horatian dictum that the poets both want to teach and delight. Hegel has no quarrel with this. But what is art to teach? Hegel gave a first answer to this question when he insisted that art is not really art in the highest sense until it seeks to "reveal to consciousness and bring to utterance the Divine Nature, the deepest interests of humanity, and most comprehensive truths of the mind." (9) Hegel now returns to this point:

Such a purpose in relation to teaching could only consist in bringing before consciousness, by help of the work of art, a really and explicitly significant spiritual content. From this point of view it is to be asserted that the higher art ranks itself, the more it is bound to admit into itself such a content as this and that only in the essence of such a content can it find the standard which determines whether what is expressed is appropriate or inappropriate. Art was, in fact, the first *instructress* of people. (56)

And yet, as I pointed out with reference to the aesthetics of neo-classicism or of today's concept art, such an emphasis on teaching threatens to distort the very essence of art by subordinating it to the word. Hegel is quite aware of this danger.

But the purpose of instruction may be created as *purpose*, to such a degree, that the universal nature of the represented content is doomed to be exhibited and expounded directly and obviously as abstract proposition, prosaic reflection, or general theorem, and not merely in an indirect way in the concrete form of a work of art. By such a severance the sensuous plastic form, which is what makes the work of art a work of *art*, becomes a mere otiose accessory, a husk, which is expressly pronounced to be mere husk, a semblance expressly pronounced as mere semblance. (56)

Art here threatens to become no more than at bottom superfluous ornament. But when this happens, it no longer deserves to be considered art in its true sense.

If the work of art does not proceed from this principle, but sets in relief its generalized aspect with the purpose of abstract instruction, then the imaginative and sensuous aspect is only an external and superfluous adornment, and the work of art is a thing divided against itself, in which form and content no longer appear as grown into one. In that case the sensuously individual and the spiritually general are become external to one another. (56 – 57)

Art tends to be reduced to either entertainment or a means of instruction. In either case art in its highest sense has been lost.

3

But let me return to the claim that the end of art is purification. I raised the question: how are we to understand such purification? What is its end? The answer commonly given is moral improvement (57). But once again this remains a highly abstract claim. What lessons will be drawn from a work of art will depend on the interpreter?

Thus one may hear the most immoral representations defended by saying that we must know evil, or sin, in order to act morally; and conversely, it has been said that the portrayal of Mary Magdalene, the beautiful sinner who afterwards repented, has seduced many into sin, because art makes it look so beautiful to repent, and you must sin before you can repent. (57-58)

Must we not demand more of art, demand that **moral instruction** be itself the end of art? But what do we mean here by "moral" and "morality." Hegel here appeals to Kant:

If we look closely at the standpoint of morality as we have to understand it in the best sense at the present day, we soon find that its conception does not immediately coincide with what apart from it we are in the habit of calling in a general way virtue, respectability, uprightness, etc. To be respectable and virtuous is not enough to make man moral. Morality involves *reflection* and the definite consciousness of that which duty prescribes, and acting out of such a proper consciousness. (58)

But are nature and duty not placed here in an opposition that seems incompatible with the kind of reconciliation of spirit and nature that would seem to be the distinctive achievement of art?

For the modern moralistic view starts from the fixed antithesis of the will in its spiritual universality to its sensuous particularity, and consists not in the completed reconciliation of these contrasted ideas, but in their conflict with one another, which involves the requirement that the impulses which conflict with duty ought to yield to it. (59)

Before Hegel calls the antithesis as drawn here into question to call for a mediation of these apparently opposed poles, he points out its fundamental significance. At bottom the recognition of this amphibian character, not just of human beings, but of reality is as old as philosophy. Thus it finds its clear articulation already in Plato.

But if constitutive of the life of consciousness, modernity has raised such oppositions to a new intensity.

These are antitheses which have not been invented, either by the subtlety of reflection or by the pedantry of philosophy, but which have from all time and in manifold forms preoccupied and disquieted the human consciousness, although it was modern culture that elaborated them most distinctly, and forced them up to the point of unbending contradiction. Intellectual culture and the modern play of understanding create in man this contrast, which makes him an amphibious animal, inasmuch as it sets him to live in two contradictory worlds at once, so that even consciousness wanders back and forward in this contradiction, and shuttlecocked from side to side, is unable to satisfy itself as itself on the one side as on the other. For on the one side we see man a prisoner in a common reality and earthly temporality, oppressed by want and poverty, hard driven by nature, entangled in matter, in sensuous aims and their enjoyment; on the other side, he exalts himself to eternal ideas, to a realm of thought and freedom, imposes on himself as will universal laws and attributes, strips the world of its living, and flourishing reality and dissolves it into abstractions, inasmuch as the mind is put upon vindicating its rights and its dignity simply by denying the rights of nature and maltreating it, thereby retaliating the oppression and violence which it itself has experienced from nature (59-60).

Striking is the almost gnostic vehemence of Hegel's language: we are prisoners of the world, entangled in matter, in sensuousness. His rhetoric is itself an expression of that broken character of modern life, of which he speaks. And such a discrepancy calls of course for resolution. And this gives philosophy, and more especially a philosophy such as Hegel's a special importance

If the culture of the world has fallen into such a contradiction, it becomes the task of philosophy to undo or cancel it, i. e. to show that neither the one alternative in its abstraction nor the other in similar one-sidedness possesses truth, but that they are essentially self-dissolving, that truth only lies in the conciliation and mediation [*Versöhnung und Vermittlung*] of the two, and that this mediation is no mere postulate, but is in its nature and in reality accomplished and always self-accomplishing. (60)

But is philosophy able to actually bring about what here is demanded. Does it not belong too much to the side of spirit to be able to do that?

All that philosophy does is to furnish a reflective insight into the essence of the antithesis in so far as it shows that what constitutes truth is merely the resolution [*Auflösung*] of this antithesis, and that not in the sense that the conflict and its aspects in any way *are not*, but in the sense that they *are*, in reconciliation. [*daß nicht etwa der Gegensatz und seine Seiten gar nicht, sondern daß sie in Versöhnung sind*] (60)

But just how are we to understand this reconciliation? As scientific understanding and technological mastery, as far as nature is concerned? As moral action, as far as morality is concerned? But is art not uniquely equipped to offer what is here demanded? For art is more than just an instrument of moral education: is the achievement of the demanded reconciliation not especially the end of art?

Against this [the view that art should serve morality] it is necessary to maintain that art has the vocation of revealing the truth in the form of sensuous artistic shape, of representing the reconciled antithesis just described and therefore, has its purpose in itself, in this representation and revelation. (60)

But would this not lead one to expect that it is art rather than philosophy that should be placed highest? This was indeed a common thought at the time, a thought that the young Hegel would seem to have shared. This, to be sure, was not to be his final word on the matter.

4

In this connection, as a concluding addendum, I would therefore like to turn to a brief consideration of the tantalizing fragment that has been published as "Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus," the "Earliest System Programme of German Idealism,"¹⁰⁴ dating presumably from late 1796 or early 1797 — in January 1797 Hegel had joined his friend Hölderlin in Frankfurt and the two engaged in particularly intense philosophical discussions. The author — probably Hegel, the text is in his handwriting, although Hölderlin and Schelling have also been suggested — speaking in the first person, begins with the idea of "myself" as a "free absolute being"; in Fichtean fashion he turns next to the world, which is said to appear together with this I. This leads to the demand for a physics guided by ideas generated by the question: "how does the world have to be for a moral being?" The fragment turns then to the political sphere, where it calls for an abolition of the state as a mechanism incompatible with genuine freedom; it culminates in an appeal to the idea of beauty, taken "in its highest

Platonic sense," as to the idea which joins truth and goodness: the highest act of reason is said to be an aesthetic act. "Our philosophers, who cling to the letter, lack an aesthetic sense. The philosophy of the spirit is an aesthetic philosophy." With this turn to the aesthetic, poetry "gains a higher dignity. Poetry will become in the end what she was in the beginning — *the teacher of humanity*; for then there will be no philosophy, no history any longer. The art of poetry alone will survive all the other sciences and arts"¹⁰⁵ — the dependence on Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, where beauty is thought as the mediation of sense and spirit, is evident,¹⁰⁶ and it is worth noting that it was in this connection that Schiller used for the first time the word *aufheben* to mean both: "to abolish *and* to preserve"; here Hegel found this key term of his dialectic¹⁰⁷: in Schiller's *Letters* German idealism has an obvious root.

In the "Systemprogramm," not only the masses, but the philosopher, too, is said accordingly to be in need of a *sinnliche Religion*, a sensible — or should it be sensuous — religion, where the paradigmatic example of such a religion, not named in the programme, but surely present, is provided by the Greeks. "Monotheism of reason and heart, polytheism of imagination and art, this is what we need."¹⁰⁸ The fragment proceeds to call for "a new mythology, but this mythology must stand in the service of the ideas, must be a mythology of reason. Before we make the ideas aesthetic, i. e. mythological, they hold no interest for the people; and, the other way around, before mythology is reasonable, the philosopher has to be ashamed of it."¹⁰⁹ "A higher spirit, sent by heaven, has to found this new religion among us; it will be humanity's last, greatest work."¹¹⁰ This higher spirit presumably will not be a pure philosopher, but a philosophizing poet such as Hölderlin. Sensing the presence of the divine in the world, such a poet would have to find the strength to once again name the gods. It is difficult not to think of Heidegger in this connection.

¹⁰⁴ Hegel, *Werke* I, pp. 234 - 236.

¹⁰⁵ Hegel, *Werke* I, p. 235.

¹⁰⁶ See Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, ed. and trans. with an introduction, commentary, and glossary of term by Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 304 - 305.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 304 - 305.

¹⁰⁸ Hegel, *Werke* I, pp. 235 - 236.

¹⁰⁹ Hegel, *Werke* I, p. 236.

¹¹⁰ Hegel, *Werke* I, p. 236.

The fragment thus looks forward to a synthesis of the monotheism of spirit and reason and the polytheism of the imagination, that is to say to a synthesis of an enlightened Christianity and Paganism. Such remarks make it tempting to claim the entire text, with its extravagant praise for poetry, for Hölderlin.¹¹¹ That Hölderlin, if not the author of the programme, yet had a profound influence at least on its aesthetic second part seems difficult to deny. Hölderlin certainly was thinking along these lines, as is shown by his letter to Schiller of September 4, 1795: "I seek to develop for myself the idea of an infinite progress of philosophy, I want to show, that the persistent demand which must be made of every system, the unification of subject and object in an absolute — I, or whatever one wants to call it, can indeed be achieved aesthetically, in intellectual intuition, but theoretically only through an infinite approximation, like the approximation of the square to the circle, and that to realize such a system of thought, an infinity is just as necessary, as it is for a system of acting."¹¹² Theory's claim to lay hold of reality in a system is as vain as the attempt to square the circle.

That such an elevation of aesthetic intuition above theory, with its attendant suggestion of an elevation of poetry above philosophy, is profoundly incompatible with the philosophy of the mature Hegel requires no comment. Clear also is the danger such enthusiastic praise of aesthetic intuition poses to philosophical reflection.

The "Earliest System Programme of German Idealism" invites us to think of German Idealism as product of an attempt to arrive at a synthesis of a rationalized Christianity and Pagan polytheism. The felt need for such a synthesis, which rules out any simple repetition of what the ancients achieved, presupposes the then widely shared experience of the age as what Hölderlin in the hymn "Brot und Wein" calls *die dürftige Zeit*, "the destitute age," an experience bound up with a conviction that Christianity, with its onesided emphasis on inwardness and spirit was somehow responsible for the poverty of the modern age — just this lay behind Schiller's argument for the moral and political significance of an aesthetic education — bound up also with idealizations of ancient Greece as the unsurpassed exemplar of beauty and full humanity. Consider, for example, Schiller's "Die Götter Griechenlands" (1788, 1793), which nostalgically looks back to a

¹¹¹ As suggested by Wilhelm Böhm (1926), refuted by Ludwig Strauß. For a brief summary of the controversy, see the editorial comment in Hegel, *Werke* I, p. 628.

¹¹² Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, vol. 2, p. 667.

beautiful, loving world, joyfully presided over by the gods, which the poem significantly calls

Schöne Wesen aus dem Fabelland!
Beautiful beings from the realm of fable!¹¹³

Schiller contrasts an image of nature, when Helios guided his golden chariot across the sky, when oreads filled the heights, a dryad lived in every tree, and streams sprang from the urns of naiads, when death did not threaten as a gruesome, scythe-rattling skeleton, but life ended gently with a kiss, with the soulless, death-obsessed world of today.

Schiller also names the power that destroyed this world, whose trace only is preserved in the *Feenland der Lieder*, the fairy-land of songs.\

Einen zu bereichern unter allen,
Mußte diese Götterwelt vergehn.

To enrich *one* among all,
This world of gods had to perish.

The Christian God who suffers no other gods besides himself is here blamed for *Die entgötterte Natur*, for nature denied divinity.

Hölderlin addresses this same theme in one of his late hymns, "Der Einzige," which also begins with an invocation of a Greece full with the presence of the gods, but only to call for Christ:

Viel hab' ich schönes gesehen,
Und gesungen Gottes Bild,
Hab' ich, das lebet unter
Den Menschen, aber dennoch
Ihr alten Götter und all
Ihr tapfern Söhne der Götter
Noch Einen such ich, den
Ich liebe unter euch,
Wo ihr den letzten eures Geschlechts,
Des Haußes Kleinod mir
Dem fremden Gaste verberget. (Erste Fassung)

[I] Have looked upon much that is lovely
And sung the image of God

¹¹³ Where a translator is not given, the translation is my own.

As here among human kind
 It lives, and yet, and yet,
 You ancient gods and all
 You valiant sons of the gods,
 One other I look for whom
 Within your ranks I love,
 Where hidden from the alien guest, from me,
 You keep the last of your kind,
 The treasured gem of the house.¹¹⁴

The Greek world is visible. Christ, however, remains hidden. And yet this hidden Christ, said to be of one race with the gods and the sons of the gods, although unique precisely as the last, the god to end all gods, is the object of the poet's special love. Hölderlin speaks of his love for the invisible Christ, but at the same time considers this love a fault that needs to be remedied

Es hänget aber an Einem
 Die Liebe. Diesesmal
 Ist nemlich vom eigenen Herzen
 Zu sehr gegangen der Gesang,
 Gut machen will ich den Fehl
 Wenn ich noch andere singe (Erste Fassung)

To One alone, however,
 Love clings. For this time too much
 From my own heart the song
 Has come; if other songs follow
 I'll make amends for the fault

Hölderlin speaks of the guilt incurred by such love:

Ich weiß es aber, eigene Schuld
 Ists! Denn zu sehr,
 O Christus! häng' ich an dir,

¹¹⁴ The English translation of "Der Einzige" by Michael Hamburger, in *Poems and Fragments*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961), pp. 446 - 461.

Wiewohl Herakles Bruder.
 Und kühn bekenn' ich, du
 Bist Bruder auch des Eviars, der
 An die Wagen spannte
 Die Tyger ... (Erste Fassung)

And yet, I know, it is my
 Own fault! For too greatly,
 O Christ, I'm attached to you,
 Although Heracles' brother.
 And boldly I confess,
 You are the brother also of Evius
 Who to his chariot harnessed
 The tigers...

Daringly the poet proclaims Christ the brother of Heracles and Dionysus, but one of the sons of the highest, but one manifestation of the divine. A polytheistic pantheism is announced, reminiscent of the call of the "Systemprogramm" for a synthesis of a "monotheism of reason and heart" and a "polytheism of imagination and art."¹¹⁵ Yet the poem also insists on a decisive difference between Christ, on the one hand, Heracles and Dionysus, on the other:

Es hindert aber eine Schaam
 Mich dir zu vergleichen
 Die weltlichen Männer....(Erste Fassung)

And yet a shame forbids me
 To associate with you
 The worldly men....

Hölderlin's spiritual development makes him ashamed to compare the other-worldly Christ to the worldly gods of Greece. But that very shame is called into question by the poet's profession of guilt, which suggests that Hölderlin feels that he should not thus feel ashamed, that he needs to outgrow such shame.

This charge of personal guilt is underscored by one of Hölderlin's epigrams

Wurzel alles Übels

Einig zu sein ist göttlich und gut; woher die Sucht denn

Unter den Menschen, daß nur *einer* und *eines* nur sei?

Root of All Evil

To be at one is divine and good; whence then the rage

Among human beings, that *only one* and *one thing* should be?

It is tempting to answer Hölderlin's question with the epigram's own word: isn't it precisely because "To be at one is divine and good" that we seek to raise one thing, person, or god, above all others and thus to gather what is fragmented into a whole?¹¹⁶ And yet the epigram calls the desire to thus single out one as the only one a *Sucht*, a disease, which the title terms the root of all evil. Evil here is said to have its origin in the idolatrous idealization of some particular person or being so that it becomes the only one and tolerates no equals. Such idealization freezes the heart, prevents it from remaining open to contrary claims.

But the fragment gestures not only backwards, to the pluralism of the Greek gods in which the invisible Godhead is thought to manifest itself, but also forward to a unity no longer based on any particular, to the universal as the only adequate realization of the divine spirit. From this vantage point Christ and the Greek gods are recognized as brothers: at the same time it allows for a recognition of the epochal significance of Christ's death¹¹⁷: Christ mediated the divine in a way that left no room for other divine mediators, indeed left no room finally even for himself as a visible presence. His death thus issues in the age of the dead, the absent God: as Hölderlin writes in a later version of the elegy "Brot und Wein":

¹¹⁵ See Jochen Schmidt, *Hölderlins geschichtsphilosophische Hymnen: "Friedensfeier" - "Der Einzige" -- "Patmos"* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1990), pp. 109 - 115.

¹¹⁶ See also Karsten Harries, "The Root of All Evil: Lessons of an Epigram," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1 (March 1993), pp. 1 - 20.

¹¹⁷ Schmidt, *Hölderlins geschichtsphilosophische Hymnen*, p. 106.

In Ephesus ein Aergerniß aber ist Tempel und Bild.¹¹⁸

But in Ephesus temple and image are a scandal.

The reference is to Paul's visit to Ephesus, which caused people to say that "gods made with hands are not gods" and deposed "the great goddess Artemis ... from her significance."¹¹⁹ Precisely the death of Christ allows him to be reborn in the spirit in each individual, a thought familiar also to Schelling and Hegel: the plastic principle of the Greeks had to yield to the Christian pneumatic principle. Hölderlin, to be sure, unlike Hegel, finds it difficult to accept the loss of the Greek plastic principle, even if preserved, *aufgehoben*, in memory, in song, art history, and philosophy.

¹¹⁸ See Schmidt, p. 135.

¹¹⁹ Acts, 19: 26, 27.

10. Hegel and his Predecessors

1

Let me begin by reviewing briefly our last session. We began by returning to the question: what is **the end of art**? We saw that Hegel, too, attributes something like an ethical function of art. But how does art satisfy that function? A first answer: art serves that function simply by placing the passions at a distance. So understood art plays an important part in man's self-elevation above the merely natural.

But it is not just that art distances us from our passions. Such distance faces us with the task of entering into what Hegel terms "an ideal relation" with these passions. But how is this to be understood? In this connection Hegel appeals to the concept of purity. How then are we to understand **purity**? Once again the invocation of purity remains disappointingly general and abstract. Clear is that art here is given something like a teaching function. But just what is art to teach? One obvious answer is moral values. Earlier Hegel had demanded of art that it speak to humanities deepest interests. Are these adequately captured by, say, Kant's categorical imperative? Are nature and duty not placed here in an opposition that seems incompatible with the kind of reconciliation of spirit and nature that we so deeply long for? And is art not uniquely equipped to offer what is here demanded? For art is more than just an instrument of moral education:

It is from this point of view [that art has the vocation of revealing *the truth* in the form of the sensuous], into which reflective consideration of the matter resolves itself, that we have to apprehend the idea of art in its inner necessity, as indeed it was from this point of view, historically speaking, that the true appreciation and understanding of art took its origin. For that antithesis, of which we spoke, made itself felt, not only within general reflective culture, but no less in philosophy as such, and it was not till philosophy discovered how to overcome the antithesis absolutely that it grasped its own conception and, just in so far as it did so, the conception of nature and art.

Hence this point of view, as it is the awakening of philosophy in general, so also it is the awakening of the science of art; and indeed it is this reawakening to which alone aesthetic as a science owes its true origin, and art its higher estimation. (61)

But would this not lead one to expect that it is art rather than philosophy that should be placed highest?

This was indeed a common thought at the time, a thought that the young Hegel would seem to have shared. I thus concluded the last session with a brief consideration of what has come to be called the "Earliest System Programme of German Idealism,"¹²⁰ which expresses such a conviction.

2

Hegel had concluded the last section by speaking of a reawakening of philosophy, a reawakening that for the first time had placed aesthetics on a firm foundation. That invites a look at the history of philosophy and at the place of aesthetics within that history.

I shall touch briefly upon the historical side of the transition above alluded to, partly out of historical interest, partly because, in doing so, we shall more clearly indicate the critical points which are important, and on the foundation of which we mean to continue our structure. In its most general formulation, this basis consists in recognizing artistic beauty as one of the means which resolve and reduce to unity the above antithesis and contradiction between the abstract self-concentrated mind and actual nature, whether that of external phenomena, or the inner subjective feeling and emotions. (62)

Earlier Hegel had called art's highest task that of revealing, along with philosophy and religion, "the Divine Nature (*das Göttliche*), the deepest interests of humanity and the most comprehensive truths of the mind." How does the present formulation fit in with that? All three, philosophy, religion, and art, it would seem, depend on a mediation between the sensuous and the spiritual, where Hegel thinks of this as an *Aufhebung*, a transfiguring sublation of the sensuous in the spirit, as opposed to an **incarnation** of the spirit in the sensuous, where the former theology student Hegel would have been very much aware of the theological background of such notions. It is such a reconciliation that we lack and most profoundly desire. There is a sense then in which Hegel may be thought to repeat Plato's *Symposium* in thinking beauty as the object of eros and eros as a desire for the whole.

Hegel however points, not to Plato, but to Kant as to the thinker who allowed us for the first time to think this lack and what it demands with any precision:

The Kantian philosophy led the way by not merely feeling the lack of this point of union, but attaining definite knowledge of it, and bringing it within the range of our ideas. In general, Kant created as his foundation for the intelligence as for the will, the self-related

¹²⁰ Hegel, *Werke* I, , pp. 234 - 236.

rationality or freedom, the self-consciousness that finds and knows itself as infinite. This knowledge of the absoluteness of reason in itself, which has brought philosophy to its turning-point in modern times, this absolute beginning, deserves recognition even if we pronounce Kant's philosophy inadequate, and is an element in it, which cannot be refuted. (62)

This turning point finds a first expression already in Descartes' *cogito*: I think myself thinking. Already with Descartes such thinking reveals the pure thinking self to be unbounded by any finite content, as infinite. In pure thought I retreat into this infinite empty self. Hegel suggests that this remains the foundation (*Grundlage*) of Kant's understanding of intelligence (*Intelligenz*) and will. Does Hegel here do justice to Kant? To the way the self has always already been cast into the finite by his sensibility?

Hegel of course recognizes the tension between such stress on the infinite and Kant's recognition of human finitude and dependence on the given.

But, in as far as Kant fell back again into the fixed antithesis of subjective thought and objective things, of the abstract universality and the sensuous individuality of the will, it was he more especially who strained to the highest possible pitch the above-mentioned contradiction called morality [*Gegensatz der Moralität*], seeing that he moreover exalted the practical side of the mind above the theoretical. (62)

Hegel objects to the Kantian oppositions of understanding to sensibility, appearances to things in themselves, our sensuous nature and the desires connected with it to the demands placed on us by pure reason, nature to freedom. To be sure, according to Kant, too, reason can think of an overcoming of such oppositions, can think the unity demanded, but it cannot demonstrate that there is a reality that corresponds to what it thus thinks.

In presence of this fixed antithesis, with its fixity acknowledged by the understanding, he had no course open but to propound the unity merely in the form of subjective ideas of the reason to which no adequate reality could be shown to correspond, or again, to treat it as consisting in postulates which might indeed be deduced from the practical reason, but whose essential nature was not for him knowable by thought, and whose practical accomplishments remained a mere ought deferred to infinity. Thus, then, Kant no doubt brought the reconciled contradiction within the range of our ideas, but he succeeded neither in scientifically unfolding its genuine essence nor in presenting it as the true and sole reality. (62-63)

According to Kant reason must postulate freedom, God, and immortality, but it cannot scientifically prove their reality. And yet especially freedom seems to be more than just such a postulate, as Kant will himself point out in the *Critique of Judgment*. If your

freedom were not in some sense given to me, how could I recognize you as a person deserving respect. Without such recognition, all ethics would idle. As Hegel recognizes, Kant has a problem with such an experience of the other as a person: it does not have a place in the first *Critique* and is a presupposition of the second. But what experience do we have of persons? And how do I get from the *First Critique* to the *Second*? Here it would be of interest to take a longer look at Kant's predecessors Wolff and Baumgarten. For both the experience of a person would be an example of a clear, but not distinct perception, analogous to the perception of the beauty of a work of art. The latter Baumgarten thinks in the image of such perception of persons, as a similarly clear, but not distinct, perception of perfection.

Kant recognized indeed the need for such an intuitive understanding, as Hegel suggests. Just this need is addressed by the *Critique of Judgment*.

Kant indeed pressed on still further as he recognized the required unity in what he called the intuitive understanding; but here, again, he comes to a standstill in the contradiction of subjectivity and objectivity, so that, although he suggests in the abstract a solution of the contradiction of concept and reality, universality and particularity, understanding and sense, and thereby points to the idea, yet, on the other hand, he makes this solution and reconciliation itself a purely *subjective* one, not one which is true and actual in its nature and on its own merits. (63)

Hegel's criticism here is not altogether justified. It is thus of interest that he elides Kant's discussion of art, including of genius, in which nature is said to give the rule to art. Nor does he do justice to the complexities of Kant's account of the reflective judgment. The inadequacy of Hegel's discussion is shown by his focus on the discussion of the four moments of the beautiful. Both the introduction and the role there ascribed to the imagination and the discussion of the productive imagination that gives rise to art deserve more attention than Hegel gives them. This productive imagination again has to be thought in relation to nature, which in the imagination of the genius is said to give art its rule.

Hegel's discussion of the four moments is not unexpected. His characterization of Kant's understanding of the aesthetic judgment captures Kant's position:

Similarly, Kant understands the aesthetic judgment as neither proceeding from the understanding as such qua the faculty of ideas, nor from the sensuous perception as such with its manifold variety, but from the free play of the understanding and of the imagination. It is in this free agreement of the faculties of knowledge that the thing is

related to the subject or person, and to his feeling of pleasure and complacency
[*Wohlgefallen*] (64)

Like Hegel, let me briefly consider each of the four moments.

a. "Complacency" strikes me as an unfortunate translation of "Wohlgefallen." "Delight" might do better. Kant in his first moment insists on the **disinterested** character of this delight, where Kant is thinking both of moral interest and of natural desire. Aesthetic appreciation has nothing to do with a desire to consume the object. It is placed outside the economy of consumption, we might say, outside a concern with existence. And on this point, as we already saw, Hegel appears to agree with Kant. Implied is, among other things, a divorce of aesthetic appreciation and sexual desire. Hegel's previously mentioned bridegroom was unable to divorce the two and therefore presumably misunderstood the true meaning of beauty.

b. The second moment defines the beautiful as object of a **universal** delight. Hegel here misunderstands Kant. Kant does not insist that appreciation of the beautiful requires a cultivated mind, although he does say something of the sort about the sublime. That Hegel wants to claim this for the beautiful is understandable, for he wants to fit the beautiful into his account of the progress of spirit. According to Kant, however, we are all capable of judging something beautiful because the relevant faculties are necessary conditions of the very possibility of experience. Kant's understanding of beauty here tends to a formalism that Hegel, with his emphasis on content, has to reject. The distinction between these two ways of understanding beauty, one aesthetic, the other ontological, deserves further discussion.

c. The third moment understands the beautiful as **purposive without a purpose**. I already pointed out that this formulation is directed against Baumgarten, also that it finally cannot do justice to artificial, but only to natural beauties.

d. Hegel's discussion of the fourth moment, which insists that the beautiful is object of a **necessary** delight, is similarly sketchy.

What Hegel is really interested here is the way the usual oppositions are overcome by the aesthetic judgment.

Now what we find in all these Kantian laws is a non-severance of that which in all the other cases is presupposed in our consciousness to be distinct. In the beautiful this severance finds itself cancelled, inasmuch as universal and particular, end and means, conception and object, thoroughly interpenetrate one another. (66)

A work of art presents itself to us as being as we would want it to be.

And thus, again, Kant regards the beautiful in art as an agreement in which the particular itself is in accordance with the conception. Particulars, as such, are *prima facie* contingent, both as regards one another and as regards the universal, and this very contingent element, sense, feeling, temper, inclination, is now in the beauty of art not merely *subsumed* under universal categories of the understanding and controlled by the conception of freedom in its abstract universality, but so united with the universal that it reveals itself as inwardly and in its nature and realization adequate thereto. (66)

Once again we should note that while Kant is thinking first of all of the beauty of nature Hegel turns to art. We should also note how Hegel emphasizes the control exerted by the artist and his freedom.

The reconciliation achieved by the beautiful, so understood, is, according to Hegel, merely subjective.

Thus feeling, pleasure, and enjoyment are justified and sanctified, so that nature and freedom, sensuousness and the idea, find their warrant and their satisfaction all in *one*. Yet even this apparently complete reconciliation is ultimately inferred to be, nevertheless, merely subjective in respect of our appreciation and in respect of our production, and not to be the naturally and completely true and real. (66)

We have here an only aesthetic redemption, we might say, one that substitutes beautiful semblance (*Schein*) for reality. Our natural being here is not so much reconciled with the demands of reason as it is left behind.

Kant, thus, according to Hegel, provides us with an indispensable starting point, but not with more.

These we may take as the main results of the Kantian Criticism, so far as they have interest for us in our present inquiry. This criticism forms the starting-point for the true conception of artistic beauty. Yet this conception had to overcome the Kantian defects before it could assert itself as the highest grasp of the true unity of necessity and freedom, of the particular and the universal, of the sensuous and the rational. (66)

3

The next decisive step Hegel attributes to Schiller, who insisted on a fuller mediation of human nature and its desires and the demands of morality than Kant's moral formalism could provide. Art answers to what is here demanded:

Schiller must be credited with the great merit of having broken through the Kantian subjectivity and abstractness of thought, and having dared the attempt to transcend these

limits by intellectually grasping the principles of unity and reconciliation as the truth, and realizing them in art. (67)

A philosophical bent is evident in Schiller's poetic activity. This, Hegel points out, became a ground of censure and led to unfavorable comparisons with "Goethe's agreeable straightforwardness and objectivity." Hegel, however, defends him:

But in this respect Schiller, as poet, did but pay the debt of his time; and the reason lay in a perplexity which turned out only to the honor of that sublime soul and profound character, and to the profit of science and cognition (67)

Interesting if not unexpected is the juxtaposition of Schiller and Goethe, the moralist and the naturalist.

At the same epoch the same scientific stimulus withdrew Goethe, too, from poetry, his proper sphere. Yet just as Schiller immersed himself in the study of the inner depths of the mind, so Goethe's idiosyncrasy led him to the physical side of art, to external nature, to animal and vegetable organisms, to crystals, to cloud formation, and to color. To such scientific research Goethe brought the power of his great mind [*Sinn*], which in these regions put to rout the science of mere understanding with its errors, just as Schiller, on the other side, succeeded in asserting the idea of the free totality of beauty against the understanding's science of volition and thought. (67-68)

"Mind" in the quote translates "Sinn." I take it that Hegel meant us to hear the connotations of the term, which suggest an intuitive understanding. But while Goethe was focused on nature in all its variety, Schiller asserted the idea of reconciliation. And it is Schiller rather than Goethe who here interests Hegel, especially the Schiller of the *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*. It is this work to which Hegel, as I pointed out last time, owed the term *Aufhebung*. this key to his dialectic. Schiller's motivation in that work is first of all political, where the French revolution shadows the discussion.

In these letters the central point from which Schiller starts is that every individual human being has within him the capacity of an ideal humanity. This genuine human being, he says, is represented by the State, which he takes to be the objective, universal, or, so to speak, normal form in which the diversity of particular subjects or persons aims at aggregating and combining itself into a unity. (68)

The state, however, Schiller points out, can all too easily turn into a cold machine, forcing the individual to submit to its laws, or, on the other hand, the individual can transform himself in such a way that on the affective level he feels more and more not just as this individual, but as a citizen. The conflict between nature and reason would have been healed in such a person.

In presence of the conflict between these antagonistic elements, aesthetic education simply consists in realizing the requirements of mediation and reconciliation between them. For the aim of this education is, according to Schiller, to give such form to inclination, sensuousness, impulse, and heart, that they may become rational in themselves. And by the same process reason, freedom, and spirituality may come forward out of their abstraction and uniting with the natural element, now rationalized throughout, may in it be invested with flesh and blood. Beauty is thus pronounced to be the unification of the rational and the sensuous, and this unification to be the genuinely real. (68)

Interesting is the way Schiller, as Hegel points out, links this position to the praise of women.

This notion of Schiller's may be readily recognized in the general views of *Anmuth und Würde*, and in his poems more particularly from the fact that he makes the praise of women his subject matter because it was in their character that he recognized and held up to notice the spontaneously present combination of the spiritual and natural. (68)

4

Last time I already hinted at the enormous influence that Schiller's *Letters* had on Schelling (January 27, 1775 – August 20, 1854), Hölderlin (20 March 1770 – 6 June 1843), and Hegel (August 27, 1770 – November 14, 1831) when they were friends, indeed roommates in Tübingen. And it was the precocious five years younger Schelling, Hegel suggests, who first seized on what Schiller had given them and discovered the true notion (*Begriff*) of art.

Now, this *Unity* of the universal and particular, of freedom and necessity, of the spiritual and the natural, which Schiller grasped from a scientific point of view as the principle and essence of art, and labored indefatigably to evoke into actual existence by help of art and aesthetic culture, was considered by a further advance, as the *Idea itself*, and was thus constituted the principle of knowledge and of existence, while the Idea in this sense was recognized as the sole truth and reality. By means of this recognition, science, in Schelling's philosophy, attained its absolute standpoint, and although art had previously begun to assert its peculiar nature and dignity in relation to the highest interests of humanity, yet it was now that the actual *notion* [*Begriff*] of art and its place in scientific theory was discovered. Art was now accepted, even if erroneously in one respect, which this is not the place to discuss, yet in its highest and genuine vocation. (69)

Schelling, to be sure, assigned to art a higher place than philosophy. This is a place Hegel was not willing to give it. Religion and philosophy had to be placed above art.

5

The section concludes with a brief reference to Winckelmann:

No doubt, before this time so early a writer as Winckelmann has been inspired by his observation of the ideals of the ancients in a way that led him to develop a new sense for the contemplation of art, to rescue it from the notions of commonplace aims and of mere mimicry of nature, and to exert an immense influence in favor of searching out the idea of art in the works of art and its history. For Winckelmann should be regarded as one of the men who have succeeded in furnishing the mind with a new organ and new methods of study in the field of art. On the theory, however, and the scientific knowledge of art his view had less influence. (69)

Next time I shall turn to romantic irony.

11. Irony

1

Last time we saw that Hegel places his own philosophy of art in the context of a reawakening of philosophy that is said to have placed philosophy on a firm foundation for the first time. If Hegel earlier had called art's highest task that of revealing, along with philosophy and religion, the deepest interests of humanity, he now speaks of it as achieving a mediation between the sensuous and the spiritual, where Hegel points to Kant as to the thinker who allowed us for the first time to think this lack and what it demands with any precision. Not that Hegel finds Kant's discussion convincing, and it would indeed be surprising if he did, given the way the understanding of beauty Kant develops in the four moments of the *Critique of Judgment* invites a formalist aesthetics. Kant's discussion would seem to leave little room for what most interests Hegel, i. e. the content of art.

Hegel of course recognized that there is tension between his position and that of Kant; tension, especially between Kant's insistence on human finitude and dependence on the given and Hegel's own refusal to accept the finality of Kant's distinction between phenomena and noumena. But all the same, Hegel is right to emphasize the importance of Kant's understanding of the beautiful as mediating between nature and the demands of practical reason. But neither art nor reason, according to Kant, as Hegel understands him, really achieves such mediation. Reason can only think it, but cannot demonstrate that there is a reality that corresponds to what it thus thinks. And beauty offers us only the semblance of such a mediation, a semblance purchased at the price of reality. Beauty is only a *Schein*. Reality here is not so much reconciled with the demands of reason as left behind. Kant thus, according to Hegel, provides us an indispensable starting point, but nothing more.

It was Schiller, who, according to Hegel, took a decisive step beyond Kant, insisting on a fuller mediation of human nature and its desires and the demands of morality. To the *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* Hegel owed the term *Aufhebung*, this key to his dialectic. Earlier I pointed to the enormous influence that Schiller's *Letters* had on Schelling, Hölderlin, and Hegel, and it was the precocious

Schelling, Hegel suggests, who first seized on what Schiller had given them and discovered the true notion (*Begriff*) of art.

2

Interesting is the discussion of **irony** that follows. Hegel here takes up a topic that had become important somewhat in the way deconstruction has become important today. In this connection it would be interesting to supplement what Hegel has to say about irony in these few pages with Kierkegaard's *The Concept of Irony*, especially with the chapter "Irony after Fichte."

Hegel begins his discussion with a rather disparaging reference to the brothers **Schlegel**, where **Friedrich**, especially, is associated not just with the concept of **irony**, but also with that of the **interesting**, both **key concepts for an understanding of a distinctly modernist aesthetics**.

To touch briefly on the further course of the subject: A. W. and Friedrich von Schlegel, in proximity to the renaissance of philosophy, being covetous of novelty and with a thirst for what was striking and extraordinary, appropriated as much of the philosophical idea as their natures, which were anything but philosophical, and essentially of the critical stamp, were capable of absorbing. (69)

The Schlegels are said to have been "covetous of novelty," which could be translated to mean, they wanted to be interesting. They wanted to be "striking and extraordinary," and this led them to absorb as much philosophy as they were capable of. Philosophers, they were not, in Hegel's opinion, and yet they did have importance as critics, critics that liked to blur the boundary between criticism and philosophy, as they also liked to blur the boundary between criticism and poetry. The remark invites application to the present state of criticism and philosophy and to their relationship.

Neither of them can claim the reputation of a speculative thinker. But It was they, who, armed with their critical understanding, set themselves somewhere near the standpoint of the Idea, and with great plainness of speech and audacity of innovation, though with but a poor admixture of philosophy, directed a clever polemic against the traditional views (69)

One senses Hegel's distaste for this sort of philosophizing.

Let me here just sketch the position of Friedrich Schlegel very briefly by reading you four fragments from his *Ideen* of 1800.

55. To versatility belongs not just a comprehensive system, but also a sense for the **chaos** outside that system, just as a sense for **what lies beyond humanity** belongs to humanity.

It is this emphasis on what lies beyond reason that was profoundly at odds with Hegel's faith in reason and systematic thinking.

69. **Irony** is the clear consciousness of **eternal agility**, of the **infinitely full chaos**.

71. Only that confusion is a **chaos that can give birth to a world**.

151. The secret meaning of the **sacrifice** is the **destruction of the finite, because it is finite**. In order to show that it happens only because of this, the most noble and beautiful must be chosen; especially the human being, the flower of the earth. Human sacrifices are the most natural sacrifices. But the human being is more than a flower of the earth; he is reasonable and reason is free and itself nothing other than an eternal self-determination into infinity. Thus the human being can only sacrifice himself; and just this he does in the all present sanctuary that the masses do not see. All artists are Decians [three members of the family of Decius Mus are supposed to have ensured Roman victories by sacrificing themselves], and **to be an artist means** nothing other than **to consecrate oneself to the subterranean deities**. In the enthusiasm of destruction the meaning of divine creation first reveals itself. Only in the middle of death does the lightning of eternal life ignite itself. (my emphases)

That such **celebration of infinite chaos** directed against every system could not have pleased Hegel requires no comment. Hegel is willing to grant that the Schlegels brought a welcome openness to other cultures, including to Indian poetry and mythology, but Hegel also accuses them of a lack of judgment.

And thus they undoubtedly introduced in several branches of art a new standard of judgment in conformity with notions which were higher than those they attacked. As, however, their criticism was not accompanied by the thorough philosophical comprehension of their standard, this standard retained a character of indefiniteness and vacillation, with the result that they sometimes did too much and sometimes too little. No doubt they are to be credited with the merit of bringing afresh to light and extolling in a loving spirit much that was held obsolete and was inadequately esteemed by their age, e. g. the work of the older painters of Italy and the Netherlands, the 'Nibelungen Lied', etc.; and, again, they endeavored with zeal to learn and to teach subjects that were little known, such as the Indian poetry and mythology. Nevertheless, they attributed too high a value to the production of such epochs, and sometimes themselves fell into the blunder of admitting what was but mediocre, e. g. Holberg's comedies, and attaching a universal importance to what had only relative value, or even boldly showing themselves

enthusiasts for a perverse tendency and subordinate standpoint as if it were supreme.
(69-70)

Hegel links Schlegel's understanding of irony to Fichte:

This idea had its deeper root, if we take it in one of its aspects, in Fichte's philosophy, in so far as the principles of his philosophy were applied to art. Fried. von Schlegel, as also Schelling, started from Fichte's point of view: Schelling to pass wholly beyond it, Fried. von Schlegel to develop it in a peculiar fashion, and to tear himself loose from it. As regards the intimate connection of Fichte's principles with one tendency (among others) of the irony, we need only lay stress on the following point, that Fichte establishes the I as the absolute principle of all knowledge, of all reason and cognition; and that in the sense of the I which is, and is no more than, utterly abstract and formal. For this reason, in the second place, this I is in itself absolutely simple, and, on the one hand, every characteristic, every attribute, every content is negated therein — for every positive matter is annihilated by absorption in to this abstract freedom and unity; on the other side, every content which is to be of value for the I is given position and recognition only by favor of the I. Whatever is, is only by favor of the I, and what is by my favor I am able in turn to annihilate. (70)

Hegel emphasizes the absolute formality of this "I." It is not anything, in this sense nothing, infinite abstract unity and freedom. Some such understanding of the I is already implicit in the Cartesian cogito. But this is therefore not an "I" that can be distinguished from a "you." And just this forbids the identification of this "I" with the "I" that I am. Such an identification would elevate the individual self to a godlike status, and if, as Sartre claims, the fundamental project of is the project to be God, then irony answers to something fundamental in all human beings.

Now if we abide by these utterly empty forms which have their origin in the absoluteness of the abstract I, then nothing has value in its real and actual nature, and regarded in itself, but only as produced by the subjectivity of the I. But if so, it follows that the I is able to remain lord and master of everything, and in no sphere of morality or legality, of things human or divine, profane or sacred, is there anything that would not have to begin by being given position by the I, and that might, therefore, just as well be in turn annihilated thereby. This amounts to making all that is actual in its own right a mere *semblance*, not true and real for its own sake and by its own means, but a mere appearance due to the I, within whose power and caprice it remains, and at its free disposal. To admit it or to annihilate it stands purely in the pleasure of the I which has attained absoluteness itself and simply as I. (70 – 71)

Crucial here is the term semblance, *Schein*. Reality here becomes an artistic illusion. In this connection it would be interesting to look at Nietzsche's substitution of *Schein* for

Erscheinung in *The Birth of Tragedy*, where I should note that Nietzsche himself does not mention here Friedrich Schlegel.

To the extent that I identify myself with this I, reality has to become for me a mere *Schein*. This is the life-style Kierkegaard tried to represent in volume I of *Either/Or*. Hegel emphasizes the lack of earnestness in such a life:

For genuine earnest comes into being only by means of a substantial interest, a matter that has something in it, truth, morality, and so forth; by means of a content which, as such (without my help) is enough to have value for me as something essential, so that I myself only become essential in my own eyes in as far as I have immersed myself in such a matter and have come to be in conformity with it in my whole knowledge and action.
(71)

3

The Fichtean philosopher reappears transformed in a well known type of modern artist:

At the standpoint according to which the artist is the I that binds and looses of its own power, for whom no content of consciousness counts as absolute and as essentially real, but only as itself an artificial and dissoluble semblance, such earnest can never come into being, as nothing has validity ascribed to it but the formalism of the I. By others, indeed, my self-display in which I present myself to them may be taken seriously, inasmuch as they interpret me as though I were really concerned about the matter in hand; but therein they are simply deceived, poor borné [*borniert*] creatures, without talent and capacity to apprehend and to attain my standpoint. And this shows me that not everyone is so free (formally free, that is) as to see in all that usually has value, dignity, and sanctity for mankind, simply a product of his own power of caprice, whereby he is able to set his seal on the value of such matters, and to determine himself and obtain a content by their means, or not. (71-72)

Whatever presents itself to such an artist can have no significance in itself. All significance appears as something constructed by the godlike artist. Once again one may want to think of Kierkegaard's aesthete in *Either/Or* or of Sartre's understanding of authenticity. Or of Nietzsche or Heidegger. Let me read you one more fragment from Schlegel's *Ideen*:

47. An artist is someone who has his center within himself. Someone lacking in this respect has to choose a definite leader (*Führer*) and mediator beyond himself, of course

not for ever, but only for the time being. For without a living center the human being cannot exist, and if he does not carry it within himself, he may seek it only in another human being, and only a human being and that being's center can stimulate and awaken his own.

Hegel points to the narcissistic character of irony so understood. He also calls attention to the implicit nihilism:

And then this skill in living an ironical artist life apprehends itself as *God-like geniality*, for which every possible thing is a mere dead creature, to which the free creator, knowing himself to be wholly unattached, feels in no way bound, seeing that he can annihilate as well as create it. He who has attained such a standpoint of God-like geniality looks down in superiority on all mankind besides, for they are pronounced *borné* and dull in as far as law, morality, and so forth retain for them their fixed, obligatory, and essential validity. And the individual who thus lives his artist life assigns himself indeed relation to others, lives with friends, mistresses, etc., but as genius he sets no value on this relation to his determinate reality and particular actions, or to what is universal in its own right; that is, he assumes an ironical attitude towards it. (72)

The inverse is that **beautiful soul (schöne Seele)** which retreats into an abstract inwardness to keep itself pure.

But on the other hand, the reverse may happen, and the I may also find itself unsatisfied in its enjoyment of itself, and prove insufficient to itself, so as in consequence to feel a craving for the solid and substantial, for determinate and essential interests. Out of this there arises misfortune and antinomy, in that the subject desires to penetrate into truth and has a craving for objectivity, but is unable to abandon its isolation and retirement into itself, and so strip itself free of this abstract inwardness (of mind), and so has a seizure of sickly yearning which we have also seen emanate from Fichte's school. The discontent of this quiescence and feebleness — which does not like to act or touch anything for fear of surrendering its inward harmony, and for all its craving after the absolute, remains none the less unreal and empty, even though pure in itself — is the source of morbid saintliness and yearning. For a true saintly soul acts and is a reality. But all that craving is the feeling of the nullity of the empty futile subject or person, which lacks the strength to escape this its futility, and to fill itself with something of substantial value. (72-73)

4

Irony has to turn against all supposed essences, supposedly binding givens.

This implies, not merely that we are not to be serious about the right, the moral, and the true, but that the highest and best of all has nothing in it, inasmuch as in its exhibition through individuals, characters, and actions, it refutes and annihilates itself, and so is irony at its own expense. (73)

In this connection Hegel draws a distinction between the **ironic** and the **comic**.

For the comic must be limited to bringing to nothing what is in itself null, a false and self-contradictory phenomenon; for instance, a whim, a perversity, or particular caprice, set over against a mighty passion; or even a supposed reliable principle or rigid maxim may be shown to be null. But it is quite another thing when what is in reality moral and true, any substantial content as such, exhibits itself as null in an individual and by his means. Such an individual is then null and despicable in character, and weakness and want of character are thus introduced into the representation. (73-74)

Romantic irony tends towards an increasingly **unbearable lightness** or fluffiness.

Fortunately, Hegel thinks, common sense takes little pleasure in such creations:

That is to say, the public does not like all this mediocrity, half grotesque and half characterless. And it is well that these unsubstantial languishing natures afford no pleasure; it is a comfort that such insincerity and hypocrisy are not approved, and that, on the contrary, man has a desire no less for full and genuine interests than for characters which remain true to the weighty purposes of their lives. (74)

Hegel concludes XCI with brief notes on two other writers prominently associated with the concept of irony.

The first is the philosopher **Karl Wilhelm Ferdinand Solger**¹²¹, whose also posthumously published *Vorlesungen über Aesthetik* (1829, given 1819) invite comparison with Hegel's. Hegel leaves no doubt about his high opinion of Solger. Indeed, in this notes Michael Inwood offers a reading of Hegel's text that would make Solger's position a perhaps sketchy anticipation of Hegel's own (Pp. 162 - 163). But let us look at Hegel's statement:

And therein he hit upon the dialectical element of the idea in that it negates itself as the infinite and universal, so as to become finiteness and particularity, and just as really cancels this negation in turn, establishing thereby the universal and infinite in the finite and particular. Solger got no further than this negativity, and it is no doubt an element in the speculative idea, but yet, when conceived as this mere dialectic unrest and dissolution both of finite and of infinite, *no more than* an element: not, as Solger maintains *the entire Idea*. (75)

Solger, too, begins with the opposition of individual appearance and something universal, or essential, the concept in that appearance (*Ästhetik*, 48). The understanding is said to be characterized by the infinite striving to join the two. The idea represents such a joining. Note that so understood it has to remind us of God's creative word. To attempt to

comprehend this idea is, if Solger is right, much like attempting to square the circle. From this perspective Hegel's thinking of the absolute idea might be considered an attempt to square the circle. And yet something like such a squaring of the circle would seem to be achieved by the beautiful, indeed for Solger, too, something like this identity would seem to be presupposed by our experience.

The idea, according to Solger, is not comprehended, but glimpsed only in intuition (55). The divine *logos* negates itself as the infinite and universal in particulars. But in the artwork that particularity is cancelled in turn, as the particular is presented in the light of the Idea, which is made manifest, to use Hegel's words, "in the finite and particular." But the work of art remains a thing, a particular, and we perceive, Solger writes, the presence of the idea in the work of art, *als ein Nichtiges*, as if it were nothing, in that in the reality of the art work the idea *sich aufreißt und vernichtet*, exhausts and destroys itself. For this reason the art work is said to be only the "veil of an inner secret." (243) Irony as Solger understands it is marked by this awareness of the insignificance of the thing, which is only "the veil of an inner secret, the appearance of an essence. (243) The work of art is at one and the same time divine and yet nothing. In this sense every genuine artist is said by Solger to look down at his creations.

Artistic consolation resides in the intuition that even what is greatest, most splendid, but also what is most horrifying, is as nothing, compared to the idea. In this sense the artist must stand above his work and see the same, in so far as it is real, in the depth below him. This sublime standpoint shows itself especially in the way the artist, fully aware of the nothingness of his creations, yet completes them with such love, because he consecrates them as sacrifices to destruction. One need think only of Homer and Achilles, of the *Lied der Nibelungen* and of Siegfried (244-45).

The difference between Hegel and Solger could be developed by comparing their different conceptions of tragedy. For Hegel every tragedy ends in a *Versöhnung*, a reconciliation, where the death of Socrates, this tragedy of the Greek spirit, provides a paradigm: communal *Sittlichkeit* and individual subjectivity here collide, but this collision prepares for a higher morality that joins individual and community; for the sake of that synthesis the "beautiful religion" of the Greeks had to perish.¹²² Similarly for

¹²¹ Karl Wilhelm Ferdinand Solger, *Vorlesungen über Aesthetik* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1969).

¹²² Hegel, "Das Verderben der griechischen Sittlichkeit," *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Georg Lasson, vol. 8, *Meiners philosophische Bibliothek*, vol. 171 c, pp. 638 - 647.

Hegel Antigone and Creon must perish because the colliding moralities they represent are one-sided, and thus must perish. Thus justice, thus the progress of morality demands it. According to Solger, who in this respect deserves comparison with Hegel's former friend, the by then insane Hölderlin, what collides in tragedy is the infinite and the finite. For Hölderlin tragic representation depends on the fact that "the immediate God is completely *one* with the human being (for the God of an apostle is mediated, is highest understanding in the highest spirit), so that *infinite* enthusiasm grasps itself *infinitely*, in oppositions, in consciousness that cancels and preserves (*aufhebt*) consciousness, grasps itself, departing in holiness, and God is present in the guise of death."¹²³ Hegel's absolute would cover up the abyss that opens up here.

¹²³ Hölderlin, "Anmerkungen zum Oedipus," p. 1064.

12. The Division of Art

1

Last time I focused on Hegel's critique of irony. His main target there is Friedrich Schlegel, who is said to be "covetous of novelty," *nach Neuem begierig*, which could be read as *neugierig*, curious, where curiosity looks for the interesting.

Hegel links Schlegel's understanding of irony to Fichte. The artist here understands himself in the image of Fichte's abstract "I." To the extent that he follows this ideal, he has to substitute for reality mere semblance, *Schein*. Romanticism here turns into nihilism and how close nihilism and romanticism are becomes clear when you read Jean Paul Richter's nightmare in his *Siebenkäs* (1796-1797), in which he has the dead Christ declare from the cross that there is no God, or the *Nachtwachen von Bonaventura* (1804), which have been ascribed to Clemens Brentano, E.T.A. Hoffmann, Karl Friedrich Gottlob Wetzell, Caroline Schelling, and Schelling himself. Today it seems pretty certain that the author was Ernst August Friedrich Klingemann. Nihilism is never very distant from romantic irony, as Kierkegaard suggests with his presentation of the aesthetic life in *Either/Or*.¹²⁴

Romantic irony, Hegel suggests, leads readily to an unbearably light or fluffy art. Fortunately, he observes, common sense takes little pleasure in such creations. But that his critique of irony requires further discussion is hinted at by what Hegel has to say about the philosopher Solger, who insists that the idea is not comprehended, as Hegel seeks to demonstrate, but only glimpsed in intuition. Last time I hinted briefly at the difference between Hegel and Solger by contrasting their different conceptions of tragedy. For Hegel every tragedy ends in a *Versöhnung*, a reconciliation. For Solger what collides in tragedy is the infinite and the finite.

2

Let me turn now to Hegel's division of Art. That Hegel should insist that such a division should be grounded in the concept of art that he has developed is to be expected.

¹²⁴ Cf. Karsten Harries, *Between Nihilism and Faith: A Commentary on Either/Or*, (Berlin and New York: DeGruyter, March 2010)

As, however, we have spoken of art as proceeding from the absolute Idea, and have even assigned as its end the sensuous representation of the absolute itself, we shall have to conduct this review in a way to show, at least in general, how the particular divisions of the subject spring from the conception of artistic beauty as the representation of the absolute. Therefore we must attempt to awaken a very general idea of this conception itself. (76)

As we discussed earlier, by "idea" Hegel means not only the concept, but the concept realized. By the absolute idea Hegel thus understands the self-realizing concept of the world. In the thinking mind that idea becomes conscious of itself. Art has to be placed in this context.

Let us continue:

It has already been said that the content of art is the Idea, and that its form lies in the plastic use of images accessible to sense. These two sides art has to reconcile into a full and accessible totality. The *first* attribution [*Bestimmung*, better "determination"] which this involves is the requirement that the content which is to be offered to artistic representation shall show itself to be in its nature worthy [*fähig*, better translated as "capable"] of such representation. Otherwise we only obtain a bad combination, whereby a content that will not submit to plasticity and to external presentation is forced into that form, and a matter which is in its nature prosaic is expected to find an appropriate mode of manifestation in the form antagonistic to its nature. (76)

As translated, this paragraph is difficult to understand. If the Idea is the content of art, what sense does it make to say that this content might not be worthy of representation? The German here is, however *fähig*, capable. If the artistic representation is to be adequate, that content must be such that it allows itself to be expressed by art. But how can this ever be said of the idea. Here it is important to keep in mind that by the absolute Idea Hegel understands the self-realizing concept of the world. The Idea realizes itself in history, has itself a history and that history is essential to it. The Idea manifests itself thus in stages. Some stages, as we shall see, are more susceptible to artistic representation than others.

To this first requirement, that the content of art be represented in images accessible to sense, Hegel adds a second:

The *second* requirement, which is derivable from the first, demands of the content of art that it should not be anything abstract in itself. This does not mean that it must be concrete as the sensuous is concrete in contrast to everything spiritual and intellectual, these being taken as in themselves simple and abstract. For everything that

has genuine truth in the mind as well as in nature is concrete in itself, and has, in spite of its universality, nevertheless both subjectivity and particularity within it. (76-77)

The content of art, in other words, must be concrete. But crucial here is the way Hegel draws a **distinction between concrete and sensuous**. Hegel offers as an example the Christian understanding of God.

If we say, e. g. of God that he is simply One, the supreme Being as such, we have only enunciated a lifeless abstraction of the irrational [*unvernünftig*] understanding [*Verstand*]. Such a God, as he himself is not apprehended in his concrete truth, can afford no material for art, least of all for plastic art. Hence the Jews and the Turks have not been able to represent their God, who does not even amount to such an abstraction for the understanding, in the positive way in which Christians have done so. For God in Christianity is conceived in His truth, and therefore, as in Himself thoroughly concrete, as a person, as a subject, and more closely determined, as mind or spirit. What He is as spirit, unfolds itself to the religious apprehension as the Trinity of Persons, which at the same time in relation with itself is One. Here is essentiality, universality, and particularity, together with their reconciled unity; and it is only such unity that constitutes the concrete. Now, as a content in order to possess truth at all must be of this concrete nature, art demands the same concreteness, because a mere abstract universal has not itself the vocation to advance to particularity and phenomenal manifestation and to unity with itself therein. (77)

To the Jews and Turks, Hegel claims, God remains a lifeless abstraction, if represented at all, represented, say, in the cloud that rose above the camps of the Israelites at Mt. Sinai (Exodus 16, 1). Given their understanding of God, it is only to be expected that they should not have been able to represent their God. To them every supposed representation of God threatened to become but another golden calf. But the Christian God is capable of representation, because God is here grasped concretely, as person, as subject, and as spirit, where we should wonder about this characterization of mind or spirit as just a closer determination of what it means to be a person. Hegel to be sure thinks so and must think so if he is to think the three persons of the Trinity, which are yet one. The trinitarian God is the unfolding of the abstract divinity of the Old Testament.

The question remains whether Hegel thinks the humanity of Christ, that is to say the incarnation, and that means also the resurrection, and that is to say the importance of the body, deeply enough. Christ was born of woman. But if we take the unity of the Trinity at all seriously then Mary is the mother of God. The mystery of the Incarnation

forces us to confront also the mystery of Mary. There is a profound connection between Hegel's devaluation of nature and his devaluation of Mary.

But let me return to the text: note to what extent Hegel's understanding of person as essentiality, universality, and particularity, together with their reconciled unity, suggests what has been said of the work of art, where we should keep in mind the relationship between Wolff's understanding of persons as known clearly, but not distinctly, and Baumgarten's related account of our perception of beauty. Hegel, to be sure, would refuse to tie particularity so closely to nature. That happens only in the second person of the Trinity, in the word become flesh. From this it follows that not all three persons are equally susceptible to artistic representation. Christ is a more suitable subject for art than God the Father or the Holy Spirit. Here you already have an anticipation of Hegel's understanding of the three types of art.

As these considerations suggest, Hegel's turn to God here is much more than just an example. With some justice Nietzsche writes:

One need only say 'Tübingen Seminary' to understand what German philosophy is at bottom, an insidious theology. The Swabians are the best liars in Germany: they lie innocently.¹²⁵

A Hegelian would no doubt reply that religion, and especially the Christian religion, is a thinking of the absolute. If Hegel's philosophy must be understood as a secularization of Christian theology, secularization need not mean illegitimate appropriation. It could also mean, and Hegel would insist on this, a distillation of what is essential.

The content of art, according to Hegel, must be concrete.

The character of concreteness as belonging to both elements of art, to the content as to the representation, is precisely the point in which both may coincide and correspond to one another; as, for instance, the natural shape of the human body is such a sensuous concrete as is capable of representing spirit, which is concrete in itself, and of displaying itself in conformity therewith. (77)

For Hegel, too, the paradigm is the human body, this incarnation of the spirit. This makes the human being meaningful in a way objects of nature are not. And in this respect a work of art is more like a person than like a work of nature. But the sensuous concrete is incapable of doing full justice to the spiritually concrete. This inadequacy becomes manifest when we consider the Christian God.

Although the artistic bestowal of sensuous form is in this respect not accidental, yet on the other hand it is not the highest mode of apprehending the spiritually concrete. Thought is a higher mode than representation by means of the sensuous concrete. Although in a relative sense abstract, yet it must not be one-sided but concrete thinking, in order to be true and rational. Whether a given content has sensuous artistic representation for its adequate form, or in virtue of its nature essentially demands a higher and more spiritual embodiment, is a distinction that displays itself at once, if, for instance, we compare the Greek gods with God as conceived according to Christian ideas. The Greek god is not abstract but individual, and is closely akin to the natural human shape; the Christian God is equally a concrete personality, but in the mode of pure spiritual existence, and is to be known as mind and in mind. His medium of existence is therefore essentially toward knowledge and not external natural form, by means of which He can only be represented imperfectly, and not in the whole depth of His idea. (78)

But what Hegel here calls, "the whole depth" of the divine idea, is not manifest from the very beginning. History may indeed be understood as the progress of the Idea's manifestation.

Thus the highest truth is spiritual being that has attained a shape adequate to the conception of spirit. This is what furnishes the principle of division for the science of art. For before the mind can attain the true notion of its absolute essence, it has to traverse a course of stages whose ground is in the idea itself; and to this evolution of the content with which it supplies itself, there corresponds an evolution, immediately connected therewith, of the plastic forms of art, under the shape of which the mind as artist presents to itself the consciousness of itself. (79)

The only adequate representation of spirit, adequate in that it does justice to its spirituality is thought. Only thought is finally adequate to reality, which presupposes that we capture the essence of reality when we thus spiritualize it.

But before this privilege of thought is adequately recognized, the spirit has to traverse a course of stages. Here we have the key to Hegel's division of the arts, to his understanding of the history of art, and also to his understanding of the death of art in its highest sense.

Hegel suggests that the development of art has two sides. We can first of all look at the evolution of art as a function of the evolution of *Weltanschauungen*, "conceptions of the world," where such a conception interprets the relationship of nature, man, and God.

¹²⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, 10, *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter

In the first place the development itself is a spiritual and universal one, in so far as the graduated series of definite conceptions of the world as the definite but comprehensive consciousness of nature, man, and God gives itself artistic shape. (79)

In art such a *Weltanschauung* is given shape. That is its content. This invites comparison with Heidegger's understanding of the world-establishing power of art, where the key difference is of course the way Hegel can rank *Weltanschauungen* as more, or less, adequate to the absolute idea.

But we can also look at the ways in which the several arts give shape to a *Weltanschauung*:

It is true, indeed, that the necessary kinds of artistic representation are on the one hand qua spiritual of a very general nature, and not restricted to any one material; while sensuous existence contains manifold varieties of matter. But as this latter, like the mind, has the idea potentially for its inner soul, it follows from this that particular sensuous materials have a close affinity and secret accord with the spiritual distinctions and types of art presentation. (79)

The content of art then is not simply the absolute idea, but that idea as grasped concretely, by a particular community, at a particular time and place. And if the way that content has been grasped is inadequate to the idea, art will share in that inadequacy, no matter how successful it may be as an embodiment of the idea as grasped by that community.

3

The adequacy of form to content is therefore insufficient to judge the quality of a work of art.

Defectiveness of form arises from defectiveness of content. So, for example, the Chinese, Indians, and Egyptians in their artistic shapes, their forms of deities, and their idols, never got beyond a formless phase, or one of vicious [*schlecht*] and false definiteness of form, and were unable to attain genuine beauty; because their mythological ideas, the content and thought of their works of art, were as yet indeterminate in themselves, or of vicious determinateness, and did not consist in the content that is absolute in itself. (80-81)

The content of art, too, must be adequate:

Only in the highest art are the idea and the representation genuinely adequate to one another, in the sense that the outward shape given to the Idea is in itself and actually the

true shape, because the content of the Idea, which that shape expresses, is itself the true and real content. (81)

But that demands that the Idea be grasped concretely, as a concrete totality, as happens in the Christian understanding of God as person.

For example, the Christian imagination will be able to represent God only in human form and with man's intellectual expression, because it is herein that God Himself is completely known in Himself as mind. Determinateness is, as it were, the bridge to phenomenal existence. Where this determinateness is not totally derived from the Idea itself, where the Idea is not conceived as self-determining and self-particularizing, the Idea remains abstract and has its determinateness, and therefore the principle that dictates its particular and exclusively appropriate mode of presentation, not in itself but external to it. Therefore, the Idea when still abstract has even its shape external, and not dictated by itself. (81)

We can thus rank the arts according to the profundity of the content expressed. Consider for example the way Christian art reveals the divine in human shape. But, to repeat, to grasp the idea thus concretely, the spirit had to evolve and the history of art must be placed in the context of this evolution. Here lies the key to the different types of art.

These forms find their genesis in the different modes of grasping the Idea as artistic content, whereby is conditioned a difference of the form in which it manifests itself. Hence the types of art are nothing but the different relations of content and shape, relations which emanate from the Idea itself, and furnish thereby the true basis of division for this sphere. (82)

4

The first of these types is the **symbolic**.

First, the Idea gives rise to the beginning of Art, when, being itself still in indistinctness and obscurity, or in vicious untrue determinateness, it is made the import of artistic creations. As indeterminate it does not yet possess in itself that individuality which the Ideal demands, its abstractness and one-sidedness leave its shape to be outwardly bizarre and defective. The first form of art is therefore rather a mere search after plastic portrayal than a capacity of genuine representation. The Idea has not yet found the true form even within itself and therefore continues to be merely the struggle and aspiration thereafter. In general terms we may call this form the *Symbolic* form of art. In it the abstract Idea has its outward shape external to itself in natural sensuous matter, with which the process of shaping begins, and from which, qua outward expression, it is inseparable. (82)

Such art turns to natural objects to express the Idea, even as the Idea remains foreign to all natural phenomena, despite all attempts to exaggerate natural forms to find more adequate expressions for the divine.

Then it proceeds to exaggerate the natural shapes and the phenomena of reality into indefiniteness and disproportion, to intoxicate itself in them, to seethe and ferment in them, to do violence to them, to distort and explode them into unnatural shapes, and strives by the variety, hugeness, and splendour of the forms employed to exalt the phenomenon to the level of the Idea. For the Idea is here still more or less indeterminate and non-plastic, but the natural objects are in their shape thoroughly determinate. (83)

This inadequacy of the artwork to what it symbolizes lets Hegel speak of the sublimity of this sort of art:

Hence, in view of the unsuitability of the two elements to each other, the relation of the Idea to objective reality becomes a negative one, for the former, as in its nature inward, is unsatisfied with such an externality, and as being its inner universal substance, persists in exaltation or Sublimity beyond and above all this inadequate abundance of shapes. In virtue of this sublimity the natural phenomena and the human shapes and incidents are accepted, and left as they were, though at the same time understood to be inadequate to their significance. Which is exalted far above every earthly content. (83)

The forms provided by art are experienced as inadequate to what art is trying to express. There is **tension between form and content**. But harmony between form and content has long been thought a mark of the beautiful. Symbolic art must lack beauty in that sense.

By this means it becomes bizarre, grotesque, and tasteless, or turns the infinite but abstract freedom of the substantive Idea disdainfully against all phenomenal being as null and evanescent. By such means the import cannot be completely embodied in the expression, and in spite of all aspiration and endeavour, the reciprocal inadequacy of shape and Idea remain insuperable. This may be taken as the first form of art — Symbolic art with its aspiration, its disquiet, its mystery and its sublimity. (83-84)

Hegel calls such art bizarre, grotesque, deficient in taste, where he is thinking of such examples as Indian deities with many hands. But just this lack of beauty invites us to ascend to a spiritual content, which resists artistic expression.

Hegel's account has to identify oriental art with this first stage, an identification which no doubt does violence to the heterogeneity of primitive and non-western art. I shall return this point, to what we can call Hegel's Eurocentrism, next time. But perhaps we should think of symbolic art as a transcultural moment in art.

5

The second stage, the **classical**, is said to solve the difficulties of the first.

In the second form of art, which we propose to call Classical, the double defect of symbolic art is cancelled. The plastic shape of symbolic art is imperfect, because, in the first place, the Idea in it only enters into consciousness in abstract determinateness or indeterminateness, and, in the second place, this must always make the conformity of shape to import defective, and in its turn merely abstract. The classical form of art is the solution of this double difficulty; it is the free and adequate embodiment of the Idea in the shape that, according to its conception, is peculiarly appropriate to the Idea itself. With it, therefore, the Idea is capable of entering into free and complete accord. Hence the classical type of art is the first to afford the production and intuition of the completed Ideal, and to establish it as a realized fact. (84)

Like Kant, and following Winckelmann, Hegel analyzes Greek art as the art of the ideal. If Hegel is right, the humanization of art is necessary. The human being is the only visible phenomenon adequate to Spirit. In this sense Hegel is avowedly anthropocentric, taking seriously the Biblical claim that God created man in his image.

Personification and anthropomorphism have often been decried as a degradation of the spiritual, but art, in as far as its end is to bring before perception the spiritual in sensuous form, must advance to such anthropomorphism, as it is only in its proper body that mind is adequately revealed to sense. The migration of souls is in this respect a false abstraction, and physiology ought to have made it one of its axioms that life had necessarily in its evolution to attain to the human shape, as the sole sensuous phenomenon that is appropriate to mind. (84-85)

But the synthesis achieved by classical art proves to be an unstable one. This lack of stability has its foundation in the fact that the spirit's essential transcendence over the sensible has not yet been grasped profoundly enough. Such a more profound grasp, Hegel tells us, is introduced only by Christianity. Corresponding to it we have the third type of art.

6

Romantic art, accordingly, is art that struggles against its own art character, art that would leave art behind, and in this respect has a certain similarity with symbolic art. Both invite to be discussed in terms of sublimity rather than beauty.

The romantic form of art destroys the completed union of the Idea and its reality, and recurs, though in a higher phase, to that difference and antagonism of two aspects which was left unvanquished in symbolic art. The classical type attained the highest excellence,

of which the sensuous embodiment of art is capable; and if this is in any way defective, the defect is in art as a whole, i. e. in the limitation of its sphere. (12)

The body cannot finally do full justice to spirit.

This limitation consists in the fact that art as such takes as its object Mind — the conception of which is infinite concrete universality — in the shape of sensuous concreteness, and in the classical phase sets up the perfect amalgamation of spiritual and sensuous existence as a Conformity of the two. (85)

What forces us to leave classical art behind is modern, and that for Hegel means also Christian, "inwardness" (*Innerlichkeit*). There is a sense in which Christ had to leave the world, had to sacrifice himself, had to die on the cross, so that he might be reborn within each human being. The death of Christ, as Hölderlin knew, ushers in a new world.

Christianity is the religion of the dead, the absent God.

Now, as a matter of fact, in such an amalgamation Mind cannot be represented according to its true notion. For mind is the infinite subjectivity of the Idea, which as absolute inwardness, is not capable of finding free expression in its true nature on condition of remaining transposed into a bodily medium as the existence appropriate to it. (85-86)

The Greek gods fail to be adequate to God as he is in truth.

Now, Christianity brings God before our intelligence as spirit, or mind — not as a particularized individual spirit, but as absolute, in *spirit* and in truth. And for this reason Christianity retires from the sensuousness of imagination into intellectual inwardness, and makes this, not bodily shape, the medium and actual existence of its significance. So, too, the unity of the human and divine nature is a conscious unity, only to be realized by *spiritual* knowledge and in *spirit*. Thus the new content, won by this unity, is not inseparable from sensuous representation, as if that were adequate to it, but is freed from this immediate existence, which has to be posited as negative, absorbed and reflected into the spiritual unity. In this way romantic art must be considered as art transcending itself, while remaining within the artistic sphere and in artistic form. (87)

Romantic art thus inevitably strains against its art character. It will be **dialectic** in a way in which classical art is not. In this connection we might want to take another look at the concept of **irony**. And in this respect there is a certain resemblance between romantic and symbolic art.

For this reason, the sensuous externality of concrete form is accepted and represented, as in symbolic art, as something transient and fugitive. And the same measure is dealt to the subjective finite mind and will, even including the peculiarity of caprice of the individual, of character, action, etc., or of incident and plot. The aspect of external existence is committed to contingency, and left at the mercy of freaks of imagination, whose caprice is no more likely to mirror what is given as it is given, than to throw the shapes of the

outer world into chance medley, or distort them into grotesqueness. For this external element no longer has its notion and significance, as in classical art, in its own sphere, and in its own medium. It has come to find them in the feelings, the display of which is *in themselves* instead of being in the external and *its* form of reality, and which have the power to preserve or to regain their state of reconciliation with themselves, in every accident, in every unessential circumstance that takes independent shape, in all misfortunes and grief, and even in crime. (87-88)

Romantic art is always on the verge of leaving art behind altogether. Characteristic is the turn towards reflection. The work of art becomes an occasion for thought. Romantic art thus leads easily to **concept art**. Hegel of course is not thinking of that. He is thinking of the **ironic, negative** moment of romantic art. Once again the traditional harmony of thought and content is sacrificed to expressive values.

Owing to this, the characteristics of symbolic art, in difference, discrepancy, and severance of Idea and plastic shape, are here reproduced, but with an essential difference. In the sphere of the romantic, the Idea, whose defectiveness in the case of the symbol produced the defect of external shape, has to reveal itself in the medium of spirit and feelings as perfected in itself. And it is because of this higher perfection that it withdraws itself from any adequate union with the external element, inasmuch as it can seek and achieve its true reality and revelation nowhere but in itself. (88)

13. Conclusion: The History and End of Art

1

Last time I turned to Hegel's division of Art. That division, as we saw, is grounded in the concept of art. The content of art is said to be the Idea, the self-realizing concept of the world. But the Idea realizes itself in history. The whole depth of the Idea is thus not manifest from the very beginning. History may indeed be understood as the progress of the Idea's manifestation, where the only fully adequate representation of the Idea in its spirituality is thought. But before this privilege of thought is adequately recognized the spirit has to traverse a course of stages. Here we have the key to Hegel's **division of the arts**, to his understanding of the **history of art**, and also to his understanding of the **death of art** in its highest sense.

The first of these stages of art is the **symbolic**. The inadequacy of the artwork to what it symbolizes lets Hegel speak of the sublimity of this sort of art. Since harmony between form and content has long been thought a mark of the beautiful, symbolic art must lack beauty in that sense.

The second stage, the **classical**, is said to solve the difficulties of the first. Like Kant, Hegel analyzes Greek art as the art of the ideal. But the synthesis achieved by classical art proves to be an unstable one. This lack of stability has its foundation in the fact that the spirit's essential transcendence over the sensible has not yet been grasped profoundly enough.

This leads to the third type of art. **Romantic art**, accordingly, is art that struggles against its own art character, art that would leave art behind and in this respect has a certain similarity with symbolic art. Both invite to be discussed in terms of sublimity rather than beauty. What forces us to leave classical art behind is modern and that for Hegel means also Christian "inwardness" (*Innerlichkeit*). Romantic art thus inevitably strains against its art character. Increasingly the work of art becomes an occasion for thought.

2

I pointed out that the history of art, according to Hegel, has to be placed within the history of ideas and, more broadly, of history. History then, as Hegel understands it,

is not just a sequence of events, without rhyme or reason. It must rather be understood as having a direction, as progressing, tending towards an end. Hegel's understanding of history is **eschatological**. The eschaton or end is provided by Hegel's understanding of history as the progress of spirit. Here a passage from the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*:

All that happens in heaven and on earth — eternally happens — the life of God and all that is done in time, only strives for this: that the spirit know itself, make itself into an object for itself, find itself, become for itself, and join itself to itself.¹²⁶

The life of the individual is part of this drama of estrangement and return. It is as part of this drama that art and its history have to be understood.

Earlier I read you a passage in which Hegel sums up his understanding of art as part of our attempt to appropriate an initially alien other. Let me reread the relevant lines:

The universal and absolute need out of which art, on its formal side, arises, has its source in the fact that man is a thinking consciousness, i. e. that he draws out of himself, and makes explicit for himself, that which he is, and, generally, whatever is. The things of nature are only *immediate and single*, but man as mind *reduplicates* himself, inasmuch as *prima facie* he is like the things of nature, but in the second place just as really is *for* himself, perceives himself, has ideas of himself, thinks himself, and only thus is active self-realizedness. (35)

This reduplication of mind aims at the appropriation of the other until it loses its otherness and becomes completely spiritualized. Art is one form that this attempt at appropriation takes. Its goal is the overcoming of otherness, the identity of subject and object, the absolute idea, in which spirit becomes objective and transparent to itself.

The driving power of this development is the human power of self-recognition and self-realization.

First, we think of the earthly natural life in its finiteness as standing on one side; but, then, *secondly*, consciousness makes God its object, in which the distinction of objectivity and subjectivity is done away, And at last, *thirdly*, we advance from God as such to the devotion of the community, that is to God as living and present in the subjective consciousness. Just so these three chief modifications present themselves in the world of art in independent development. (90)

¹²⁶ Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie, Jubiläumsausgabe*, ed. Hermann Glockner (Stuttgart: Frommann, 1937), vol. 17, 52.

To understand history as the progress of human self-realization is to understand it also as the **progress of freedom**. Increasingly human beings gain mastery of nature and of themselves.

This understanding of history as the progress of freedom lets Hegel divide history into three great periods: at first only one person is free. Hegel associates this stage with the God-kings of the oriental world. In the Greek and Roman world some are free. Christianity, finally, is said by Hegel to recognize the essential equality of all human beings, to liberate all human beings, leading each individual to recognize himself as possessed of an infinite freedom.

This understanding of Christianity implies also that an understanding of God as an alien other, dwelling without or beyond man, dictating, rather like an oriental despot, his law to human beings, is finally incompatible with Christianity. God has to assume human shape, as he does most fully in Christ. But the essence of Christianity is realized only when the divinity is born within each individual, when Christ ceases to be external. **The death of God**, as I pointed out, **is demanded by Christianity itself**. The death of all gods, all quasi gods, is demanded by the progress of spirit, where we may have to say that **nihilism** is demanded by the progress of spirit, **unless** we can somehow show how freedom that has come into its own. i. e., having descended into the individual members of a community, possesses enough content to bind itself by the power of reason. It is in this context that Hegel places and interprets the history of art.

3

Hegel relates the division of the arts into three basic types to his classification of the arts according to their different media.

For each type finds its definite character in some one definite external material, and its adequate actuality in the mode of portrayal which that prescribes. But, moreover, these types of art, being for all their determinateness its *universal* forms, break the bounds of *particular* realization by a determinate form of art, and achieve existence in other arts as well, although in subordinate fashion. Therefore the particular arts belong each of them specifically to *one* of the general types of art, and constitute *its* adequate external actuality; and also they represent, each of them after its own mode of external plasticity, the totality of the types of art (89)

At the center of this classification is placed classical sculpture:

the true beautiful, as we saw, is spiritual being in concrete shape, the Ideal; or, more closely looked at, the absolute mind, and the truth itself. This region, that of divine truth artistically represented to perception and to feeling, forms the centre of the whole world of art. It is the independent, free, and divine plasticity, which has thoroughly mastered the external elements of form and of medium, and wears them simply as a means to manifestation of itself. (89)

The extremes, as we shall see in more detail, are occupied by architecture and poetry.

4

In **architecture** Hegel finds an obvious expression of the **symbolic**.

It is architecture that pioneers the way for the adequate realization of the God, and in this its service bestows hard toil upon existing nature, in order to disentangle it from the jungle of finitude and the abortiveness of chance. By this means it levels a space for the God, gives form to his external surroundings, and builds him his temple as a fit place for concentration of spirit, and for its direction to the mind's absolute objects. It raises an enclosure round the assembly of those gathered together, as a defense against the threatening of the storm, against rain, the hurricane, and wild beasts, and reveals the will to assemble, although externally, yet in conformance with the principles of art, (90-91)

Much of this is taken up by Heidegger's description of the Greek temple as establishing a world, but the Hegelian account has been radically rewritten. Most importantly: nothing in Hegel's description answers to what Heidegger points to when he insists that "*The Work lets the earth be an earth*."¹²⁷ Hegel has a more oppositional understanding of art and especially of architecture: the temple's builders impose a spiritual, and that means for Hegel a truly human order on a recalcitrant material; human beings assert and celebrate their humanity in the face of an initially indifferent environment when they level the ground, break the stone, raise walls and columns: they defend themselves against nature, not only or even primarily against its physical threats — such defense is the task of more modest building — , but against its contingency. In this struggle they rely on and exhibit the power of the universal. That is why architecture is in its very essence not the work of isolated individuals, but of the spirit, and that means of the community: the spirit breaks down the walls that separate individuals.

¹²⁷ Martin Heidegger, "Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes," *Holzwege* (1935–1946), *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 5 (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1977). p.32; "The Origin of the Work of Art," trans. Albert Hofstadter, *Language, Thought* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 46.

Architecture, however, as we have seen, has purified the external world, and endowed it with symmetrical order and with affinity to mind; and the temple of God, the house of his community, stands ready. Into this temple, then, in the *second* place, the God enters in the lightning-flash of individuality which strikes and permeates the inert mass, while the infinite and no longer merely symmetrical form belonging to mind itself concentrates and gives shape to the corresponding bodily existence. This is the task of Sculpture. (91)

The necessity of this turn to **sculpture** lies in what Hegel above had called "the limit of architecture":

For the limit of architecture lies precisely in this point, that it retains the spiritual as an inward existence over against the external forms of the art, and consequently must refer to what has soul only as to something other than its own creations. (91)

Consider the way Greek or Christian architecture turns to sculpture: the statue of the God in the temple's cella, the crucifix on the high altar. It is the former rather than the latter that Hegel, who in his conception of sculpture remains very much in the orbit of Winckelmann's noble simplicity and quiet grandeur, here has in mind.

Sculpture should place the spirit before us in its bodily form and in immediate unity therewith at rest and in peace; and the form should be animated by the content of spiritual individuality. And so the external sensuous matter is here no longer manipulated, either in conformity with its mechanical quality alone, as a mass possessing weight, nor in shapes belonging to the inorganic world, nor as indifferent to color, etc.; but it is wrought in ideal forms of the human figure, and, it must be remarked in all three spatial dimensions. (91-92)

Temple and statue of the god demand the worshipping community:

Now, after architecture has erected the temple, and the hand of sculpture has supplied it with the statue of the God, then, in the third place, this god present to sense is confronted in the spacious halls of his house by the *community*. The community is the spiritual reflection into itself of such sensuous existence, and is the animating subjectivity and inner life which brings about the result that the determining principle for the content of art, as well as for the medium which represents it in outward form, comes to be particularization [dispersion into various shapes, attributes, incidents, etc.], individualization, and the subjectivity which they require. The solid unity which the God has in the sculpture breaks up into multitudinous inner lives of individuals, whose unity is not sensuous, but purely ideal. (92)

To become truly Himself God requires man.

It is only at this stage that God Himself comes to be really and truly spirit in His [God's] community; for He here begins to be a to- and fro, an alternation between His unity within himself and his realization in the individual's knowledge and in its separate being, as also in the common nature and union of the multitude. In the community, God is released from the abstractness of unexpanded self-identity, as well as from the simple absorption in a bodily medium, by which Sculpture represents Him. And He is thus exalted into spiritual existence and into knowledge, into the reflected appearance [*Gegenschein*] which essentially displays itself as inward and as subjectivity. (92-93)

That is to say, for Hegel, God, to become truly Himself, requires the world and the community, to truly live, God as an external being has to die to live in the individuals that make up the community. Note, how close Hegel here comes, despite his enormous debt to theology, to what many would consider atheism.

With this turn to the community we have come to the third type of art: the **romantic**.

And hence, in the phase we have reached, all the manifold subjectivity in its living movement and operation — as human passion, action, and incident, and in general, the wide realm of human feeling, will, and its negation — is for its own sake the object of artistic representation. In conformity with this content, the sensuous element of art has at once to show itself as made particular in itself and as adapted to subjective inwardness. Media that fulfill this requirement we have in color, in musical sound, and finally in sound as the mere indication of inward perceptions and ideas; and as modes of realizing the import in question by help of these media we obtain painting, music, and poetry. (93)

Painting, music, and poetry are the romantic arts. Hegel's attitude to these arts is somewhat ambivalent. There is a sense in which spirit finds more adequate expression in these arts than in sculpture. In this sense they stand higher than classical art.

In this region the sensuous medium displays itself as subdivided in its own being and universally set down as ideal. Thus it has the highest degree of conformity with the content of art, which, as such, is spiritual, and the connection of intelligible import and sensuous medium develops into closer intimacy than was possible in the case of architecture and sculpture. (93)

And yet, more and more, art here becomes an occasion for the subject's meditation and devotion. The work of art becomes less important. No longer is there the kind of adequacy of the work of art and its content that marked classical art.

The unity attained, however, is a more inward unity, the weight of which is thrown wholly on the subjective side, and which, in as far as form and content are compelled to particularize themselves and give themselves merely ideal existence, can only come to

pass at the expense of the objective universality of the content and also of its amalgamation with the immediately sensuous element. (93)

What art forms do the greatest justice to the romantic spirit? Key here is the turn away from the materiality of the medium — that is what “ideal” here implies. Hegel mentions painting, music, and poetry. A **progressive derealization of physical reality** can be observed here.

4

First comes **painting**:

The *first* art in it, which comes next to sculpture, is painting. It employs as a medium for its content and for the plastic embodiment of that content visibility as such in so far as it is specialized in its own nature, i. e. as developed into color. It is true that the material employed in architecture and sculpture is also visible and colored; but it is not, as in painting, visibility as such, not the simple light which differentiating itself in virtue of its contrast with darkness, and in combination with the latter, gives rise to color. This quality of visibility, made subjective in itself and treated as ideal, needs neither, like architecture, the abstractly mechanical attribute of mass, as operative in the principles of heavy matter. Nor, like sculpture, the complete sensuous attributes of space, even though concentrated into organic shapes. This visibility and the rendering visible which belong to painting have their differences in a more ideal form, in the several kinds of color, and they liberate art from the sensuous completeness in space which attaches to material things, by restricting themselves to a plane surface. (94)

Striving for opticality, painting denies its thingliness. And as it leaves material reality behind, settles for beautiful appearance, it allows for an enormous variety in content:

On the other hand, the content also attains the most comprehensive specification. Whatever can find room in the human heart, as feeling, idea, and purpose; whatever is capable of shaping into act — all this diversity of material is capable of entering into the varied content of painting. The whole, realm of particular existence, from the highest embodiment of mind down to the most isolated object of nature finds a place here. For it is possible even for finite nature, in its particular scenes and phenomena, to make its appearance in the realm of art, if only some allusion to an element of mind endows it with affinity to thought and feeling. (94)

Music leaves matter behind still more decisively.

The *second* art in which the romantic type realizes itself is contrasted with painting, and is music. Its medium, though still sensuous, yet develops into still more thorough subjectivity and particularization. Music, too, treats the sensuous as ideal, and does so by negating and idealizing into the individual isolation of a single point, the

indifferent externality of space, whose complete semblance is accepted and imitated by painting. The single point, qua such a negativity (excluding space) is in itself concrete and active process of positive negation within the attributes of matter, in the shape of a motion and tremor of the material body within itself in its relation to itself. Such an inchoate ideality of matter, which appears no longer as under the form of space, but as temporal ideality, is sound, the sensuous set down as negated, with its abstract visibility converted into audibility, inasmuch as sound, so to speak, liberates the ideal content from its immersion in matter. (94-95)

Music is said to form the center of the romantic arts:

Thus music forms the center of the romantic arts, just as sculpture represents the central point between architecture and the arts of romantic subjectivity. Thus, too, it forms the point of transition between abstract spatial sensuousness, such as painting employs, and the abstract spirituality of poetry. Music has within itself, like architecture, a relation to quantity conformable to the understanding, as the antithesis to emotion and inwardness; and has also as its basis a solid conformity to law on the part of the tones, of their conjunction and of their succession. (95)

The development of art culminates in **poetry**. Here what remains of matter has become a mere sign. Materiality has lost its importance.

As regards the third and most spiritual mode of representation of the romantic art-type, we must look for it in *poetry*. Its characteristic peculiarity lies in the power with which it subjects to the mind and to its ideas the sensuous element from which music and painting in their degree began to liberate art. For sound, the only external matter which poetry retains, is in it no longer the feeling of the sonorous itself, but is a sign which has become concrete in itself, and not merely of indefinite feeling and of nuances and grades. (95)

The sensuous element has now become separated from the content of consciousness, where we may well wonder whether such a view does justice to the function of the musical side of poetry. If Hegel is right, **in poetry art is on the threshold of leaving art behind altogether.**

The merely negative point up to which music had developed now makes its appearance as the completely concrete point, the point which is mind, the self-conscious individual, which producing out of itself the infinite space of its ideas, unites it with the temporal character of sound. Yet this sensuous element, which in music was still immediately one with inward feeling, is in poetry separated from the content of consciousness. In poetry the mind determines this content for its own sake, and apart from all else, into the shape of ideas, and though it employs sound to express them, yet treats it solely as a symbol [*Zeichen*, sign] without value or import. (96)

If poetry is thus the highest and last art it is nonetheless also the art that may be called the soul of all the arts, a claim that has its analogue in Heidegger's *The Origin of the Work of Art*. For if poetry is the work of "the poetical imagination and intellectual portrayal" itself, as Hegel claims, then, since imagination is required in all the arts, poetry can indeed be said to be their soul, the common thread that unites them all.

Hegel reminds us not to take such classifications too seriously. There is of course romantic sculpture and architecture; and poetry arches over all these divisions. And yet there is, on his view, a natural affinity between the various periods of history and specific media. Following the guiding thread provided by the idea of art as the progressive epiphany of the absolute in a particular sensible shape Hegel is able to construe both the history of art and the division of the arts. That art, so understood, should come to an end is inseparably bound up with this construction.

And therefore, what the particular arts realize in individual works of art are according to their abstract conception simply the universal types which constitute the self-unfolding Idea of beauty. It is as the external realization of this Idea that the wide Pantheon of art is being erected, whose architect and builder is the spirit of beauty as it awakens to self-knowledge, and to complete which the history of the world will needs its evolution of ages. (97)

How adequate is Hegel's construction? Does art progress, as Hegel would have it? Is there a logic to the history of art? For example, if we trace the development from medieval to renaissance art, from renaissance to modern art, is that development reversible? If not, why not?

I would agree with Hegel that it is not and that this does have something to do with the increase in self-consciousness. That is to say, I find it difficult not to agree with Hegel when he insists that the history of art be interpreted with reference to the increasing freedom and spiritualization of the human being. I would consider this a far more ambiguous process, but that there is such a progress, it seems to me, cannot be denied. Hegel does help us to understand the development leading up to modern art and the end of this art.

Can all history be interpreted in this way? Does all art fit into Hegel's scheme? I have already suggested that a weak part of Hegel's construction of the history of art is the account he gives of non-western art. But it also seems clear to me, to repeat a point I made before, that nowhere, notwithstanding the resurgence of religion, especially in the

Islamic word, does there seem to be a force strong enough to seriously challenge the progress of spirit in the form of Western science and technology and the various liberations that it must carry in its wake. But I also would insist that Hegel's absolute lacks the concreteness that he insists on. I would want to question his opposition of a spiritual concreteness, exemplified by the Christian God, to a sensuous concreteness. The more resolutely the individual turns within, I would suggest, the more his or her God threatens to evaporate. The origin of value, I would suggest, must be sought, not just in spirit, but also in the sensuous concrete, in logos become flesh, and that means first of all in the individual encountering another person. Hegel would point not to the other person, but to the way the free spirit is able to bind itself. This is essentially the answer given by Kant which remains in the background of Hegel's philosophy: that spirit, once it has come into its own, is able to bind itself and a multitude into a genuine community. Here we need no contribution from the sensuous, from nature, from body-based affects. I find this part of Hegel quite unconvincing and I would remind you once again about what I had to say about Hegel's devaluation of nature. Kierkegaard is right in this: Hegel would sublimate (*aufheben*), but that means lose, cancel rather than preserve, **the existing individual** in the process of the spirit's homecoming.

In this connection and in conclusion I would like to return one more time to Hegel's old roommate, the poet Hölderlin. Hölderlin could not follow Hegel when the latter **transformed the Holy Spirit into the at one and the same time human and divine world spirit** and understood nature as spirit alienated from itself, present first of all as an obstacle on the spirit's path, as initially obscure, mute matter to be subdued and comprehended until in the end no longer experienced as a mute given, let alone as a gift coming from without, but as itself the product of spirit, *aufgehoben* in the spirit — an understanding in which, severed from its in Hegel still theological foundation, that is severed from his absolute, we can recognize the understanding of nature that guides our modern science and technology. Logic here triumphs over reality. *Aufhebung* in its more spiritual, Hegelian sense, triumphs over *Aufhebung* in its original, aesthetic, Schillerian sense. Hölderlin cannot follow Hegel in his devaluating *Aufhebung* of the particular, both of the sensuous and the individual, of life, in the name of the "absolute spirit," whose throne's "reality, truth, and certainty" the end of the *Phenomenology* identifies with its "recollection and golphatha," with "comprehended history." But if Hölderlin

cannot follow Hegel, he also is unable to return to Schiller. He is too aware of the tensions that stand in the way of such an aesthetic synthesis. His then is a more profoundly tragic understanding of history than that of Hegel, for whom every tragedy would seem to end in a *Versöhnung*, a reconciliation.

I suspect that here the poet Hölderlin is more nearly right: we have to renounce dreams of such a reconciliation. One task of art, as Nietzsche or Heidegger recognized, is to recall us to the earth as to the ultimate ground of all values. But Hegel is also right when he insists that such an appeal to the earth remains an unilluminating abstraction as long as more is not said about just how the earth claims and calls us.

We are still not quite done with the young Hegel, when in the "Earliest System Programme of German Idealism," if he was indeed the author, he accused philosophers, who cling to the letter, of lacking an aesthetic sense. "The philosophy of the spirit is an aesthetic philosophy." In the "Systemprogramm," not only the masses, but the philosopher, too, is said to be in need of a *sinnliche Religion*, a sensuous religion. "Monotheism of reason and heart, polytheism of imagination and art, this is what we need."¹²⁸ The fragment proceeds to call for "a new mythology, but this mythology must stand in the service of the ideas, must be a mythology of reason. Before we make the ideas aesthetic, i. e. mythological, they hold no interest for the people; and, the other way around, before mythology is reasonable, the philosopher has to be ashamed of it."¹²⁹ I do not think that the tension between poetry and philosophy either can or should be resolved. But to preserve that tension we may not allow Hegel's understanding of art and, bound up with it, his thesis of the death of art in its highest sense to have the last word.

¹²⁸ Hegel, *Werke* I, pp. 235 - 236.

¹²⁹ Hegel, *Werke* I, p. 236.

