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Hegel and Gombrich on the Particular Forms of Art and their Persistence

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Hegel's aesthetics is not only organized around a developed account of the differing artistic *genres* (from architecture to poetry) but also articulates the importance of the particular *forms* of art (i.e., the symbolic, classical and romantic). The oppositions involved in Hegel's treatment of the particular forms of art – particularly that between the symbolic and the classical – also have an importance for the twentieth-century art historian E. H. Gombrich, who frames their relation as an opposition between what he called the "incarnational" side of art and the "challenge to the senses" that he thought the symbolic art form posed. This paper compares Gombrich's and Hegel's views of these art forms and turns in a final section to an exploration of the post-Hegelian, post-Gombrichian legacy of these issues.

Keywords: artistic form – Hegel – Gombrich – Moritz – symbol – beauty – absolute spirit

Hegel claims in the Introduction to the *Aesthetics* lectures that art must "proceed from a higher impulse [*Trieb*] and...*satisfy higher needs* [*Bedürfnisse*] – at times the highest and absolute needs – since it is bound up with the most universal views of life and the religious interests of whole epochs and peoples" (Hegel 1975, I.30; Hegel 1970, 13.49). There are a number of important elements to notice in this claim. First, of course, is the language of "absolute needs" – a term that raises a number of questions about the general realm of absolute spirit and the type of metaphysics Hegel means to be doing within it. Second (and frequently overlooked when it comes to what makes art specifically a mode of satisfying such needs) is its *pluralism*: art may be in many ways a singular and distinctive (even in some relevant sense autonomous) *phenomenon*

in Hegel's view, but he claims that the *needs* which give rise to it are plural. Interestingly, this formulation matches the also pluralistic language he uses in the *Encyclopedia Logic* about the "*forms* of the beautiful" (Hegel 1991, 127, § 80 Addition). Third (and also frequently overlooked) is the connection of the practice of art to the consideration of other practices in Hegel's systematic philosophy: in this case Hegel seems concerned to link it to the other narratives in Absolute Spirit, particularly that of religion, which follows it, and the broader narrative of the development of culture in his philosophy of history more generally.

This discussion of needs and pluralism opens to a further question about what persists in Hegel's legacy for us in the current philosophical and artistic world. If we look, for example, at what we might think of as Hegel's "executive summary" of the development of art as a form of Absolute Spirit – the tight eight paragraphs on art in the *Encyclopedia* (Hegel 1971, §§ 556 – 563) – it is striking what is emphasized: a central claim about *beauty and the human form* (Hegel 1971, §§ 556 – 558), followed by an account of the development of the particular *art forms* (symbolic, classical and romantic (Hegel 1971, §§ 561 – 563)). These are important summary paragraphs, since – unlike the edited lectures or transcriptions – we are confident that they come entirely from Hegel's hand and were revised up until a year before his death, so one would expect them to capture in brief form his systematic thought on art. And one might also have expected, perhaps, particularly given the contemporary emphasis on this topic, to find in such a précis of Hegel's thought on art also a brief treatment of the pluralism inherent in the various artistic *genres*. But despite the fact that Hegel's contributions to genre theory form the incredibly rich and overwhelmingly largest of the three major sections of Hegel's aesthetics, Hegel does not mention his account of the five genres in these paragraphs on art in Absolute Spirit. What is it that matters about the distinction of the particular forms of art in relation to Hegel's central claims about beauty and what about that distinction might persist in contemporary/post-Hegelian discussions of aesthetics?

This essay will begin with one perspective on the role that the particular forms of art play within Hegel's legacy, from the critic E. H. Gombrich, and use that as a pivot to look both back at the emergence of some of the most famous claims in Hegel's aesthetics and then to look forward to the terrain of contemporary construals. I will be emphasizing an opposition that Gombrich discusses between the *incarnational* character of Winckelmannian beauty that informs Hegel's aesthetics and what he calls a more *Neoplatonic or conceptual*

element within it, one that I'll link to the process of artistic and conceptual transformation that is important to Hegel's account. This opposition between *transparency* and *transformation* within Hegel's aesthetics touches on a number of oppositions that are also central in contemporary work on Hegel, including the relations between life and self-consciousness, nature and art, and the perceptual and conceptual. In what follows, I will begin with a look at how Gombrich frames the opposition between these two sides of art (Section I), then turn to the historical context of Hegel's own treatment of them, with a consideration both of the historical context of their relation within Hegel's time (II) and of the role they play in his narrative of the particular art forms (III). The final section will return to the question of the post-Hegelian, post-Gombrichian legacy of these issues (IV).

I. Gombrich on the Legacy of Hegel's Account of the Particular Forms of Art

E. H. Gombrich is well-known for his critique of Hegel, but he was also admittedly shaped in a number of ways by the structure of Hegel's approach to aesthetics – a fact which has not gotten sufficient attention. In a 1964 address to the American Psychological Association entitled "The Use of Art for the Study of Symbols," Gombrich makes clear his skepticism about the "progressivist" tendency in Hegel's history of art, but thinks that the narrative of particular forms of art in the *Lectures on Aesthetics* nonetheless successfully differentiates an opposition between two crucial polarities – one that Gombrich called an "incarnational" view of artistic beauty (which is perhaps most often associated with Hegel) and the other that he calls a "challenge" to the "world of the senses" that takes us in what he calls a more conceptual, even Neoplatonic direction:

> In Hegel's view of history as a dialectical progress upwards, the Egyptian sphinx represents the enigmatic and inadequate symbol of the mystics, the Greek god the true consonance of form and meaning, while the Christian faith leads again to a divorce between the two. I am not known as a particular friend of Hegel's constructions, but I happen to think that there is something interesting in this distinction. Not that the images of the ancient Orient really correspond to Hegel's Romantic conception of the inadequate symbol, but it is true, I believe, that *the classic conception of art* is incompatible with the *mystical symbol*, its aim being the consonance of meanings (Gombrich 1965, 48).

As Gombrich explains the contrast between these two sides, "a statue such as the Apollo Belvedere…is more than a symbol of the sun god; it is a manifestation

or realization of the god in human shape," whereas the *ouroboros* (the symbolic image of the snake consuming its own tail, thought by Renaissance iconographers like Ficino to be a symbol of time (Volkmann 2018; Boas 1993)) was something that contained an element that could be "abstruse, dissonant, and perhaps even repellent" because "it is not a sensuous analogue, but a challenge to leave the world of the senses" (Gombrich 1965, 48 – 49).

Hegel is often thought of as the great Winckelmannian defender of the ideal of Greek sculpture that lies at the heart of the *Aesthetics*, but Gombrich is right also to emphasize the symbolic side of Hegel's story – and the need to consider the relationship between the two. Gombrich makes both an historical and a contemporary claim in exploring that relationship: the historical claim is the influence on Hegel of his Heidelberg friend, the philologist Georg Friedrich Creuzer, whose work on pre-Greek art (so Gombrich argues) led him to frame a clearer and more inclusive account of the role of the symbol and its relation to figurative art than earlier theorists had. On the contemporary side, the Hegelian opposition between symbolic and classical art, as will be seen below, is an important precursor for Gombrich's own opposition between the *stylistic* and the *naturalistic*.

Hegel's interests in the realm of symbolic art opened up a way for him to incorporate a wide range of phenomena in the ever-expanding back-history of pre-Greek art – the Egyptian artefacts, for example, that Hegel was able to see in Berlin during the 1820's as he updated his *Aesthetics* lectures (Stewart 2018, 173 – 174), as well as ongoing discoveries about civilizations like India and Persia. Gombrich is right, I will argue, about the contemporary importance of exploring the Hegelian concern with the symbolic – as well as the tension between it and classical Greek art. Before looking at Gombrich's account, however, it is important to explore further the context for the opposition between these two sides that Gombrich marks in the *Lectures on Aesthetics*.

II. The "Self-Signifying" Character of Beauty

In a familiar passage at the beginning of his treatment of classical art, Hegel gives the following account of what he calls the "center" (*Mittelpunkt*) of his aesthetics:

> For classical beauty has for its inner being the free independent meaning, i.e., not a meaning *of* this or that but *what means itself* [*das sich selbst Bedeutende*] and therefore *intimates itself* [*und damit auch sich selber Deutende*]. *This is spirit, which in general makes itself into an object to itself*. In this objectivity [*Gegenständlichkeit*] of itself it then has the form of *externality* [*Äusserlichkeit*] which, as identical with its own inner being, is therefore on its side the

> meaning of its own self [*die Bedeutung ihrer selbst*] and, *in knowing itself, it points to itself* [*indem sie sich weiß, sich weist*] (Hegel 1975, I.427; Hegel 1970, 14.13; emphases mine).

It is important to examine the linguistic and philosophical context in which Hegel sets this account of "that which means itself" or "intimates itself" – that is to say, the *self-signifying sign* – as the manifestation or embodiment of beauty. Perhaps the first thing to notice is that Hegel does not appeal in the first instance to an ancient Greek source for its description – classical beauty is not classically *described* here in this crucial moment of introduction, in other words – but rather to a notion of signification that, it becomes quickly evident, depends on a set of late eighteenth century revisions of notions of sign and symbol, art and nature that are employed in the interpretation of Greek art and mythology.

The situation is actually quite similar at the very start of the lectures, too – for example, in a section Hotho entitled "The Historical Deduction of the True Concept of Art," where Hegel addresses the historical task of finding the *standpoint* of the Absolute in art. Hegel argues that although art has a long and continually expanding history, the *philosophy of art* – our construal of the proper meaning and significance of art – does not. Hegel makes clear that in his view the philosophy of art in the proper sense can be said to begin only with the *Critique of Judgment* (and not with anything we would say about Plato's ancient quarrel between poetry and philosophy or Aristotle's account of imitation in the *Poetics* (Hegel 1975, I.58). Hegel's position about the history of art in the proper sense is in many ways consonant with that of Paul Oskar Kristeller, who claimed that the ancients did not have a concept of the "fine arts" in the sense that develops after Batteux and the middle of the eighteenth century (Kristeller 1951 – 1952).

Just as we have to understand the "true concept of art" as contextualized within the rather short history of philosophy since 1790, so we also need to look at the specific historiographical context of the term "what means or signifies itself" that heralds the philosophy of art's consideration of the Classical. As Todorov (1977) and Sørensen (1963) have argued, the notion of self-signification emerges within a larger history of the development of the notion of the symbol – one that involves, on Todorov's view, a crucial shift in and around the year 1790. There are many figures who play a role in this narrative – Kant, Goethe, Schiller, Schelling, Schlegel, Novalis and numerous other Romantics – but for Todorov, the figure who most completely captures the new notion of "self-signification" is Goethe's friend Karl Philipp Moritz, whom he thinks

foreshadows just about all of the Romantic developments of this notion and its connection to other key terms of freedom, inner purposiveness and organicity.[1] If we look, for example, at Moritz's language about beauty in his essay "Über die Allegorie," his account is set up in exactly the same terms as Hegel's about the "self-signifying" character of the beautiful. For Moritz, the opposition is one between beauty and what he calls the "allegorical," which he paints as beauty's "other" using similar points of cultural reference as Hegel's back to the symbolic (in this case to Egyptian obelisks and hieroglyphs):

> The truly beautiful consists in the fact that a thing *means purely itself, refers to itself, contains itself [and] is completely whole in itself* [*bloss sich selbst bedeute, sich selbst bezeichne, sich selbst umfasse, ein in sich vollendetes Ganzes sey*]…. An obelisk means – the hieroglyphs on it mean – something outside itself, that are not itself and receive their worth purely through this meaning (Moritz 1962, 113).

It's not hard, if we compare them, to see how Moritz' contrast between the beautiful and the allegorical is a forerunner of Hegel's contrast between classical beauty and the symbolic. The beautiful means itself, points to itself and is complete and self-comprehending – all claims we see in Hegel's introduction to classical beauty; meanwhile it seems beauty's "dark shadow," the allegorical, essentially points elsewhere (Moritz stresses the etymological connection of *allo-* or "other"), and is linked characteristically to Egyptian obelisks and hieroglyphs, something which is also true of Hegel's realm of the symbolic, where beauty's fusion of meaning (*Bedeutung*) and expression or shape (*Ausdruck*/*Gestalt*) are still separated.

Moritz also is taken (along with Herder and others) to be an important forerunner of another large and related shift in late eighteenth-century aesthetics that comes to shape the account of internal purposiveness in the *Critique of Judgment*: a move away from viewing art in terms of the *imitation of nature* (an external relationship) to looking at its *internal purposiveness*. As Todorov puts it, what the work of art has in common with nature is that each is a *closed totality*, whose harmony can be explored as that of a complete universe (Todorov 1977).

From Moritz's distinction between the self-signifying and the other-signifying to Hegel's, there are two different lines of development. Among Goethe and the Romantics, culminating in Schelling, the symbol is identified with beauty's self-signification and comes to be invested with almost the same

[1] See Sørensen (1963); Todorov (1977).

potential richness as art and beauty itself, while beauty's opposite, the allegorical, is left to the world of the dead letter. As we know, however, Hegel retains the equation between self-signification and beauty for the realm of the classical but instead makes "symbol" the other-directed part of the opposition. Hegel's shift away from the Romantic concept of the symbol derives especially from another of the figures in Todorov's history of the symbol: Creuzer, to whom, as we've seen, Gombrich gives credit for providing Hegel a particular template for use in the symbolic/classical relationship. Hegel had come to know Creuzer when both were colleagues at Heidelberg, and it was Creuzer's multi-volume *Symbolism and Mythology in Ancient Peoples, particularly the Greeks* in its first two editions (Creuzer 1810 – 1812, 1819 – 1821) that drew Hegel's attention to new research on the cultural world of Egypt and India (Stewart 2018, 32 – 41). Creuzer's contribution was to differentiate the modes of the "plastic" and the "mystical" – modes which correspond closely with Gombrich's distinction between the "incarnational" and that which provokes a "challenge to the senses." It's this distinction that influences Hegel's terminological differentiation, as he employs "symbolic" in the *Lectures on Aesthetics* to refer to Creuzer's "mystical" side while the plastic side of Creuzer's symbology becomes the classical for Hegel. The following section will take up this Hegelian appropriation and show the role it plays within the dialectical account of the particular forms of art in the *Aesthetics* lectures.

III. The Dialectical Context of Hegel's Winckelmannianism

What Gombrich calls the incarnational or Winckelmannian side of Hegelian aesthetics is sometimes taken to be a fairly straightforward and transparent moment. But the connection *of* this transparency to the conceptual side – the "challenge to the senses" that Gombrich mentions – is a crucial and not always well-understood element of Hegel's narrative of the particular art forms.

It is clear that one of Hegel's debts to Winckelmann concerns the importance of connection between the *freeing of the human form* and the shape of the ideal. This human-centeredness works its way through the *Aesthetics* at many junctures, in the praise of human flesh tone in painting, the human voice in music, the place of real human actors in the drama, and of course – especially in the sections that introduce the notion of classical beauty – the human shape of the divine in the sculptures of the Greek gods. In a passage which Julia Peters has linked carefully back to Hegel's claims in the Anthropology (Hegel 1971, § 411), Hegel insists that of all natural shapes "the human is the highest and true, because only in it can the spirit have its corporeity and thus its visible

expression" (Peters 2015). With this claim, Hegel's distinction valorizes not simply organic life (the connection Moritz emphasizes) but the *self-consciousness* visible in the human shape: unlike other animal forms (where the eyes are in the same plane as the forehead, for example) the human form exhibits a self-consciousness and potential for agency.

It is important to examine both the emergence and the decline of this moment in the light of the relation between transparency and the symbol. If we follow Hegel's narrative of the development of the symbolic, we can see a number of crucial steps to the emergence of beauty in his sense of the classical. Hegel's section on the Symbolic encompasses the widest cultural ambit of any section of the lectures – from Persia to India to Egypt. Just to focus on the Egyptian section for a moment: Hegel starts with the use of inorganic shapes (the pyramid), then moves to the use of organic animal shapes (deities with animal heads and human bodies) then to the "voice" of Memnon (which is not yet the voice of an internal self), the gods Isis / Osiris as images of human freedom, then finally to the Sphinx' riddle and Oedipus' response.[2] Only in Greek culture, Hegel claims, could the essential importance of the *human being* be realized in art as its supreme focal point of expression – a moment he understands in terms of a resolution of the "enigmatic" elements of the experience of Egyptian art. On Hegel's account – as he emphasizes in both the lectures and transcripts – the achievement of this awareness is symbolized precisely in Oedipus' ability to provide an answer to what could only be riddlingly asked by the sphinx:

> [T]he Egyptian works are enigmas…It is in this sense that the sphinx appears to the Greeks as this poser of riddles…As the Greek myth tells it, the sphinx posed this riddle: "Who or what goes on four legs in the morning, on two legs at mid-day, and on three legs in the evening?" Oedipus solved this riddle and shattered the sphinx (Hegel 2014, 299).

Given the importance of the human form to Hegel's central moment of classical beauty, it's vital that we notice how he wants it to be contextualized as the product of an essentially symbolic "search" as framed in his use of the figure of Oedipus. Hegel's summary point is that it's precisely *the symbol itself* (i.e., the Greek mythological formulation of how the sphinx might be answered) that provides the resources for the transition *away from* the realm of the

[2] For accounts of Hegel's treatments of these topics see Stewart (2017); Stewart (2018, 168 – 197); Stewart (2019); Stewart (2020).

symbolic: "The transition to the classical world is portrayed for us in a *symbol of the symbolic* itself, in a Greek myth…. *This myth is the highest symbol* and constitutes the transition to self-clarity, to spirit as freedom" (Hegel 2014, 298 – 299). Two points about the role of the symbol in this transition are important to emphasize. First, notice that Hegel keeps Creuzer's terms of analysis, in that the "symbol of the symbolic" is precisely *discursive*: myth, which is not simply seen "in a glance" as a plastic form but unpacked in narrative shape. Gombrich makes a similar point in his account of why the Greek "miracle" in art was so distinctive in comparison with Egyptian art: Gombrich thought that it was precisely the Greeks' employment of *narrative structures* that generated their flourishing culture of *visual* art because it's narrative that allows us to see the "how" of representation and not just the "what" – thus also opening up the awareness of *illusion* and the illusory (Gombrich 2002). The transition, in other words, is one which has made use of resources that have emerged within the cultural practice of Egyptian art – an existing mythological structure (namely, the sphinx) – but one which the Greeks were able to take up and appropriate within a new mythological context (the narrative of the Oedipal solution to what had been a riddling enigma).

Secondly, viewing the beauty of Greek sculptural figures as a transition effected by the "symbol of the symbolic" that Greek mythology offers makes clear that we are dealing not just with some automatic shift to the superiority of what we regard as "naturalistic" or "transparently" beautiful: classical beauty arrives on the scene in Hegel's aesthetics not as though it were an instantaneous emanation but rather as an expression of the divine that has been shaped by prior expressions of the divine, that has emerged from *out* of symbolic culture and which must be understood as such. Hegel is clear that the achievement of beauty in Greek sculpture is not merely a coincidental matter aesthetically: the famous "Greek profile," he claims, is not "an external and fortuitous form; it belongs to the ideal of beauty in its own independent nature" (Hegel 1975, II.730). But that shape that we consider extraordinarily naturalistic is one that can't be completely understood without, for example, an account of how it serves a cultic purpose within an ongoing practice among the Greeks.

Summarizing these two points: in the first major transition within the particular forms of art, beauty, in its self-signifying and transparent nature, has emerged from within the resources of the symbolic, where art presents an inherently conceptual challenge in its relation to some other term. Let's compare what happens in the transition *from* classical beauty to the romantic, as well: in this case, we will again see a move in which the transparency of the

classical is not taken to be an independent figure somehow standing on its own but rather placed dialectically in the context of a key conceptual challenge or development. One way to think about this second transition is in terms of the *vulnerability* of the classical model of beauty itself – and it is again a moment in which Hegel seems especially to want to show how the resources of a particular form of art are part of what effects the transition away from itself. There are more important elements in this second transition than can fully be discussed here – the role of tragedy and comedy, the melding of late Greek and Christian conceptions of art and the new role that the sublime plays in art – but two passages are worth considering.

The first is Hegel's image of the tragic spirit in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* that broods over the shape of the disappearing classical form – a spirit that both "mourns over the loss of its world" and "creates its own essence which is raised above the real world" (Hegel 1977, § 701; Hegel 1952, § 701). What such a shape shows *as a transition* is of course visible only to it and to those of us who have, with the privilege of retrospectivity, a glimpse of the "challenge" to the initial plasticity involved. The cultural practice that produced the figures of Greek tragedy has moved on to a stance "above" its own culture – one it must mourn as a loss.

The second passage is one of the clearest statements Hegel offers of the complexity of this transition from classical to romantic forms of art in the summary paragraphs of the *Encyclopedia* mentioned earlier:

> The advent of art, in a religion still in the bonds of sensuous externality, shows that such religion is on the decline. At the very time it seems to give religion the supreme transfiguration [*Verklärung*], expression [*Ausdruck*] and brilliancy [*Glanz*], it has lifted the religion away over its limitation. In the sublime divinity to which the work of art succeeds in giving expression the artistic genius and the spectator find themselves at home, with their personal sense and feeling, satisfied and liberated; to them the vision and the consciousness of free spirit has been vouchsafed and attained (Hegel 1971, § 562).

There are a number of important elements in this passage, but the connection Hegel emphasizes between *transfiguration* (on the one hand) and *expression or brilliance* (on the other hand) makes clear that it is art *in* its beauty and transparency which has resources to move toward sublimity. The transparent or beautiful form itself transfigures the religious content and moves to a stance beyond the transparency.

Bringing together these last several passages: we've seen (in the case of the transition from symbolic to classical forms) that it's from a consideration of the symbol itself that the possibility of a criterion for beauty emerges; and (in the case of the transition from classical to romantic) that it's from beauty itself and its vulnerability that the sublime and the romantic emerge. Hegel's consideration of beauty's emergence and fall is clearly a view that art involves *its own self-critique* (in the one case, it has the resources to produce a symbol of the symbolic and in the other case, the transfiguration of the beautiful). As Hegel makes clear in summarizing these moves: "beautiful art, from its side, has… performed the same service as philosophy: it has *purified* the spirit" (Hegel 1971, § 562). Art itself thus effects a *liberation* (*Befreiung*) using its own resources – a liberation that admittedly is only "one level of liberation" (*Befreiungsstuffe*) since it is limited with what it can do with its own resources in comparison with the more complete liberation by philosophy, but it is liberation, nonetheless. These moments of key conceptual transformation within the particular forms of art are, I believe, also part of the spirit of what Gombrich sees on the "challenge to the senses" side of Hegel's aesthetics, which will be explored in the following section.

IV. Transparency and Transformation in Contemporary Aesthetics: Post-Hegelian and Post-Gombrichian Reflections

This final section will return to Gombrich's question about Hegel's contemporary legacy. Gombrich's meditation on the essentially oppositional relation between a Winckelmannian "incarnational" side of Hegel and a conceptual side that offers a "challenge to the senses" is linked to the key opposition that Gombrich works out in the larger context of his study *Art and Illusion*, where he is concerned to trace the opposition between the *naturalistic* and the *stylistic* (Gombrich 2022). Using these two terms, Gombrich sketched a larger view of the history of art, distinguishing what he called a "sea" of stylistic art with the conventional and conceptual requirements for appreciating it, punctuated by naturalistic moments. (Like Hegel, Gombrich (2002) took classical Greek art to be an example of the "naturalistic" side of art but also added Chinese painting as a moment of naturalism in world art history as well.)

Despite his disagreements with Hegel, it's striking that Gombrich nonetheless developed his accounts of the naturalistic and the stylistic in ways that draw further on Hegelian arguments. On the transparency side, while Gombrich explored the immediate visual "openness" of many facial expressions

and made use of Konrad Lorenz's research on animal psychology to examine biological response to certain other stimuli, he pursued a Hegelian-style critique of such immediacy as well: "[T]here is indeed such a thing as 'physiognomic perception,' which carries strong and immediate conviction. We all experience this immediacy when we look into a human face. We see its cheerfulness or gloom, its kindliness or harshness, without being aware of reading 'signs'" (Gombrich 1985). Gombrich's critique of physiognomic expression specifically looked back to Hegel's criticism of Lavater in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*: Winckelmann succumbed to the "physiognomic fallacy," Gombrich says, because he thought he could discern directly a "noble simplicity and quiet grandeur" in the Greeks (Gombrich 1985).

On the stylistic side, Gombrich argues for the *return* of the hieroglyphic in modern art: "Art has increasingly shied away from the consonant and satisfying to exploit the challenge of the enigmatic, the contradictory and unresolved for its own psychological ends," Gombrich claimed in his address on the symbolic (Gombrich 1965). And while Gombrich's reference to "the enigmatic hieroglyphs of our contemporary art" involves examples of twentieth-century artworks that Hegel could never have known, his overall position – of the new interest that symbolic forms can provoke in modernity – involves similarities with Hegel's own view of the commonality that symbolic and romantic art share in contrast to the melding of form and content in the classical (Hegel 1975, I.517 – 518).

With Gombrich and the contextualization of Hegel's own account in mind, I want to return to the question raised at the start: what is the persistence and legacy of Hegel's achievements with respect to aesthetics? One familiar answer often suggested looks to Hegel's seemingly singular praise of classical beauty in a way that would seem to exclude a plurality of aesthetic value: beauty is the manifestation of human freedom and our contemporary task is one that must always be engaged in looking (back) at it. But if there is reason to look in Hegel also for a modern notion of beauty, it seems a concern with a larger pluralism might be in order (Peters 2015).

The line I've suggested, drawing on Gombrich's understanding of the oscillation between claims for the symbolic and transparent sides of Hegel's aesthetics, might be thought to have its own problems. Doesn't Hegel himself criticize the "stolidity and dullness" of symbolic art, and the "deadness" of its forms (Hegel 1971, § 562)? Isn't Gombrich's line about the importance of the symbolic to Hegel more in keeping with someone like Creuzer, who more

actively affirms a "mystical" side to art than Hegel, the quintessential critic of bad infinity and *unendliche Annäherung*?

It does not risk a "bad infinity" argument, however, to emphasize as I have the ways in which Hegel himself dialectically places the transparent in a context where it must be seen as emerging from an engagement with the symbolic and disappearing into romantic and post-romantic aesthetic contexts where transparency tends to recede from view. This dialectical context is important for a broader case for a view that might link aesthetic value to pluralist accounts, say, in Hegel's broader value theory. If we focus just on the aesthetic questions for the moment, however, one way of getting clearer about this might be to think about examples of art we might find it hard for Hegel's aesthetic legacy *not* to be concerned with. We certainly do not want to construe Hegel's account as tasked with giving an account that includes everything that is called "art": many works of art (and today perhaps even entire genres) fall short of Hegel's concern with the "highest needs" and interests of humanity. But it is worth asking what elements of art Hegel's legacy ought to touch in the world of art we encounter in the contemporary world. I want to mention three that relate especially to the "challenge to the senses" that Gombrich places beside Winckelmannian transparency:

1) The first is a question about the earliest art – from Paleolithic times forward. Although Hegel himself speaks about the "dead" forms of the symbolic, could there be an "Hegelian" approach to bringing the earliest art closer to us? It seems not unreasonable that if Hegel could be transposed to our time, the philosopher who made his way over to the museum across the canal from his house to see the newest discoveries of artefacts brought back from Egyptian archeological expeditions would likewise have had an interest in, say, the remarkable diversity of animal shapes that have come to light over the last century in places like the caves of Pech-Merle and Chauvet. As has been suggested, part of Hegel's exploration of the history of art was a direct engagement precisely with the changing notions of how that history understands itself to *begin*.

One possibility here might be to detach the linkage that Hegel himself drew between specific cultural forms (Egyptian, Persian, Indian) and the "symbolic" and instead to focus on the *systematic* place the symbolic opens up within the space of art. Gombrich faced some similar issues in his late appeal to the notion of the "primitive" (Gombrich 2006), but it's worth considering the recent work of Whitney Davis (2018a), for example, who moves from Gombrich's naturalistic/stylistic duality toward a duality within space that is

"apparently continuous" and "apparently discontinuous." Davis draws on his own work on ancient Egyptian art to make the claim that these two sides in fact appear *side by side* from the earliest periods. As we've seen, it is not utterly foreign to Hegel's essentially dialectical approach to examine the direct connection between the claims that symbolic and representational elements of art present and the ways in which they relate from the birth of art forward.[3]

2) The second concerns Gombrich's sense of the "contemporary hieroglyphic." We can consider a number of objects in this light, but one that comes immediately to mind is Picasso's *The Gas of Venus* (1945), one of the stars of a recent Pompidou Centre exhibit challenging the notion of the "primitive" (Debray, Labrusse and Stavrinaki 2019). Picasso's inspiration was to treat the burner of a gas furnace as though it were a "found object" of early art in the shape of a cult of fertility. Picasso's piece probes not only our expectations about the "primitive," but also our post-Holocaust sensitivities: and while it might be a stretch to consider it a "complete manifestation of human freedom" in Hegel's sense, a thoughtful appreciation of its place in modern art would notice the ways in which an engagement with it involves elements of "highest human needs," even if these are not fully present in the piece itself.

3) Going beyond examples of the ancient or modern hieroglyphic, there is an even broader sense of "challenge to the senses" that one can find in recent claims about what is *resistant* within art. Robert Pippin and Michael Fried have discussed this in terms of the resistant gaze in Manet and Cézanne. For Pippin, the "refusal" on the part of a painting like Manet's *Olympia* to be a "mere object for the beholder" is not mimetically a *representation* of this fact but rather an exemplification of it (Pippin 2013, 61). Pippin takes up also in this light Cézanne's bathers paintings as a manifestation of lowered shareability in the condition of "worldlessness" – "isolated or bizarrely merging…figures who look more like flesh sacks" in their indistinguishability and enigmaticalness (Pippin 2013, 126).

This last category especially raises a question about Hegel's view of the ontology of artworks. It is true that, along with Schelling, he makes the *artwork* itself newly important within the new study of the philosophy of art. But it

[3] Suggestively, but perhaps more contentiously for some Hegelians, Davis also appeals to contemporary anthropological research to argue for ways in which we might understand the dominance of theriomorphic shapes in Paleolithic art as part of a larger seeking-of-the-human than the official human/animal binary in Hegel's account initially seems to allow (Davis 2018b).

would be wrong to assume that for Hegel the only point of reference is individual artworks. As his internal narrative makes clear, he certainly does not see them as isolated from other works, and it may be that his notion of the "manifestation of freedom" may be tied less to an individual-work ontology and more to a reconceived notion of *practice and engagement* in a wider sense (Bertram 2019). It is not that there cease being striking individual works of art that are remarkable, perhaps even perfect, manifestations of human freedom in the context in which they emerge. But I have been arguing that perhaps also Gombrich's account of the oscillation between incarnation and "challenge" gives us a way of seeing, next to Hegel's overall narrative, a sense of dialectical/critical tension *within* our experience of art itself. This is perhaps most clearly visible in "post-romantic" (playful) engagement with many forms/genres/media (it is playful for artist but also for spectator). While it's important to remember how different Arthur Danto's conception of the "end of art" is from Hegel's, the notion of *engagement* and cross-genre inclusion that emerges in Danto's late work is one that is worth hanging on to as not utterly removed from whatever we take to be Hegel's aesthetic legacy.

Part of what is involved here is to acknowledge the tension we all cope with in Hegel's aesthetics, moving between art as a phenomenon with a kind of autonomy in itself and the philosophical/conceptual pull toward its construal in broader narratives of practice (both the history of religion and philosophy). And if we return for just a moment to the summary passages in the *Encyclopedia*, we'll notice that Hegel has made clear this role: art is *already* in itself a kind of *Befreiung* (although, admittedly, only a *Stufe* of such *Befreiung*). For all the sensual wonder of Hegel's aesthetics – the incarnational beauty of the appeal of great classical works and the shimmering light he sees in Dutch painting – there is, glinting *within* that sensuality, another element that opens for its spectators a continuing conceptual challenge, one that has purpose both within the practice of art and the practice of philosophy. That pull is nicely captured in one of the oft-quoted summaries Hegel offered concerning what he takes art's task to be and which emphasizes transparent and transfigurative tasks together: "Art's vocation is to unveil [*enthüllen*] the truth in the form of sensuous artistic configuration" (Hegel 1975, I.55; Hegel 1970, 13.130). Although it's the latter part of this quotation – with its emphasis on adequate sensuous artistic configuration – that is most often stressed, a comparison of Hegel and Gombrich's approaches suggests that a consideration of the challenging and often veiled side of art remains crucial to the task of aesthetics in the wake of Hegel's legacy.

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