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Rethinking Hegel's last lectures on aesthetics in and for the 21st century

Abstract

This essay aims at evaluating the legacy of Hegel's aesthetics, in particular of the last course held by Hegel in Berlin on aesthetics or philosophy of art during the winter semester 1828-29, and at highlighting the relevance of the student notebooks (Nachschriften) to better contextualize Hegel's aesthetic framework.

Keywords

Hegel, Aesthetics, Student notebooks

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Introduction

An important anniversary inevitably brings with it the need to take stock in Hegel's legacy. So it was in 1970, the bicentennial of G.W.F. Hegel's birth and so it is nowadays, fifty years later, with many conferences and events organized around our globalized world¹. The year 2020 offers us important opportunities for reflection from several points of view and according, at least, to three different perspectives which can be conveniently labeled as (a) generalist, (b) aesthetic and (c) political. In addition to the main anniversary of Hegel's birth that (a) encourages us to wonder, first of all, what remains of his systematic philosophy for our fluid, hyper-connected and social era, there are at least two other bicentenaries for Hegel scholarship b) in the aesthetic and c) in the political-practical field, that cannot be overlooked: two hundred years have passed since the first Berlin lecture on philosophy of art was held in 1820-21. This occasion invites us to ask ourselves 200 years later the relevancy of Hegel's theory of art and what surprises it may hold for the future. Trying to respond to and to deal with this challenging task is the main aim of this essay as well as of the monographic section of the present issue of "Studi di Estetica". Another important bicentenary in the year 2020 urges us to consider, two centuries after the publication of the *Foundations of philosophy of right* (1820), how contemporary practical discussions or sustainable development goals could benefit from Hegel's political thought².

Let us return now to the heart of our essay and to the challenge of grasping the still unexpressed and latent potentials hidden in the aesthetics lectures, in particular in the last one. Hegel's aesthetics has continued to generate new debates and new discoveries in the field of philosophy in the early 21st century as can be seen in studies by Geulen (2002), Danto (2003), Henrich (2003), Gethmann-Siefert (2005), Malabou (2005),

¹ For the bicentennial see Gadamer 1974 and Rauh, Gerlach 2009. Numerous are the academic and cultural initiatives organized for the 250th anniversary of Hegel's birth in every part of the world. There are even artistic events planned dedicated to remembering Hegel, i.e. *Hegel und seine Freunde*, an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Literature in Marbach (Gfrereis, Richter 2019); *Abenteuer Denken. Der Jenaer Hegel*, an exhibition in the Romantikerhaus in Jena and *With Hegel in the XXI century - A philosophical exhibition* in Rome (see Iannelli et al. 2020, forthcoming).

² The special double issue of the "Hegel-Studien" 53-54 is dedicated to this practical-political anniversary. It is clearly not possible here to mention all the most significant publications in the last few years; therefore, we refer to the important and exemplary contribution in this respect made by Vieweg 2012, Honneth 2015, Brooks, Stein 2017, Schmidt am Busch 2017, Quante 2018.

Pippin (2013), Rancière (2013) and D'Angelo (2019). The wind of renewal that has profoundly shaken Hegel scholarship in the aesthetic field has provoked a "recent return to Hegel" (Aldouri 2018: 1), even by art historians. Hegel's aesthetics is also discussed in various fields of human sciences, like archeology, psychoanalysis or the theory of contemporary art (Squire, Kottmann 2018), and its dialectical frame remains an inspiration for philosophical education and for artistic practice (Iannelli et al. 2020, forthcoming) as well. This is particularly the case in France, Germany and Italy in the last decade³. But this is also the case in the English-language literature, even if the tradition of analytic philosophy was originally built as an alternative to German Idealism⁴.

In the context of the international renaissance in research on Hegel's philosophy of art, not only the structure of the aesthetics, but also the contents should be brought to the fore in the coming years. This includes: the relationship between art and history, beauty of nature and beauty of art, romantic aesthetics and modern art, theory of imagination and pictorial turn, beauty and ugliness in modern art, Hegel's thesis of the end of art as the beginning of free art and the future of art, and of course the theory of the different arts: architecture, sculpture, painting, music and poetry (from an historical and a contemporary perspective). Parts of Hegel's speculation which have long been neglected, like his theory of symbol and oriental art, find a new actuality in the context of globalization, whereby the renewed interest for the classical conception of the beautiful can open new connections with anthropology and raise the question of the body and the animal.

But the interest in Hegel's philosophy of art is also connected with new discoveries and new publications concerning the sources of his lectures. One problem of Hegel's aesthetics since the 19th century has been the fact that he never published his lectures on aesthetics. We could consider with good reason that the posthumous texts edited by his disciples and friends did not have the same consistency as the works published by Hegel himself in his lifetime. This is particularly the case with regard to the aesthetics. In recent decades, scholars are in fact publishing the original lectures based upon various manuscript notebooks of the students.

³ See Olivier, Weisser-Lohmann 2010; Siani 2010; Farina, Siani 2014; Vieweg, Iannelli, Vercellone 2015; Farina 2015; Campana, Illetterati 2016; Iannelli, Garelli, Vercellone, Vieweg 2016; Farina 2016; Siani 2017; Olivier 2017; Sandkaulen 2018; Vieweg 2018; Campana 2019; Iannelli, Vercellone, Vieweg 2019.

⁴ James 2009, Moland 2019, Peters 2015, Pinkard 2007, Pippin 2008, Pippin 2013.

An important step in this process is now the publication of Hegel's last lectures on aesthetics (Heimann 1828-9). The presentation of the discussions relating this last version is the topic of the present paper. A range of philosophical and aesthetic questions is namely connected with this last step in the publication of the sources. Shall we speak about "aesthetics" or about "philosophy of art"? Does the last lecture provide a different conception of art and the arts? Is the content new or organized differently in the last version? Do original perspectives arise on the senses involved in the aesthetic fruition, or does the last course confirm the division between higher theoretical senses and lower practical ones⁵? Do we find elements for a more metaphysical perspective – Platonic or an idealist option – or a more positive, scientific and historical approach to art? Does this last course help to better contextualize the Hegelian rejection of the principle of imitation⁶? Is the controversial thesis of the end of art present, emphasized or diminished? Did Hegel say that art was dead or that any human thought is more sublime than all nature? Do we find the definition of the beautiful as the appearance of the idea? Is there any modification in the conception of art due to new presentation of the general system in the second edition of Hegel's *Enzyklopädie* (GW 19)? Are the lectures an application of the systematic and dialectical philosophical conception of this whole system, which would ignore the singularity of the work of arts and the aesthetic experience or which would approach the arts in a perspective of an overhang? Or is the system built on the immanent and prior encounter with the arts? Shall we highlight the sensible texture of his thinking relating to the arts and not only the rigorous dimension of his deduction⁷? Did Hegel change his appreciation of the arts and the works of art, like instrumental music, romantic painting or symbolic poetry that could explain some contradictions present in the traditional edition? Does this last aesthetics course enrich and integrate other Hegelian reflections, presented in other published works or in other Berlin lectures, on the tragic action and guilt⁸? Did he follow a more enlight-

⁵ On this topic, see Paul Kottman's *Noli tangere: On the limits of seeing and touching in Hegel's philosophy of art* in this issue.

⁶ See in this sense, Francesco Valagussa's contribution *Tramonto dell'imitazione e filosofia dell'arte nella Vorlesungsmitschrift di Adolf Heimann* in the present issue.

⁷ See Jacques Rancière's contribution *Les vertus de l'imparfait* in the present issue of "Studi di Estetica".

⁸ On the different intersections and overlaps between the various courses held by Hegel on aesthetics and philosophy of right in Berlin, and in particular on the tragic

ened and cosmopolitan conception of the aesthetic than the national and Christian-theological oriented text published by Hotho? Shall we speak of a monarchic, a bourgeois or a more democratic conception of art? And could Hegel's lectures finally be an inspiration for the arts today?

Of course, we have to take into account that Hegel was a philosopher of the late 18th century and early 19th century. He defined the role of philosophy to capture its time in form of the thought. But did this aesthetics provide at least a relevant theory of the arts of that time? Do we find any specific mention of the most important artists of his time, like Karl Friedrich Schinkel, Caspar David Friedrich, Ludwig van Beethoven or Friedrich Hölderlin? What was then the reception of Hegel's last lecture on aesthetics? Who were the listeners and how did they relate to the lectures? What was Hegel's relationship to his students Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, Heinrich Heine, or Bruno Bauer, for example? How much did this last lecture, directly or indirectly, influence the Young Hegelians debate on the complex relationship between art, religion and philosophy?

All these questions are historical as well as epistemological regarding the aesthetics as philosophy of art, since some scholars have criticized Hegel's pernicious speculative or metaphysical conception of art, which could be replaced by a more empirical conception of aesthetic experience, where even the romantic concept of art could disappear.

We cannot – and will not – answer all these questions in the present paper; many topics will be covered in detail in some articles collected in the monographic part of this issue, but in any case the sources of Hegel's last lectures of 1828-29 give the opportunity to formulate new answers and a new appreciation of Hegel's aesthetics. In what follows, we will focus on historical questions regarding (i) the state of the sources, (ii) the background of the aesthetics and (iii) the artistic events that the lectures were connected with, in order to make explicit the connection between philosophical speculation, aesthetic experience and art history and in order to highlight the development and coherent logical structure as well as the extremely dense and various content of the different texts documenting Hegel's last lecture on aesthetics in Berlin.

action, see G. Battistoni's *Azione e coscienza in Hegel: tra filosofia dell'arte e filosofia del diritto* in this issue of "Studi di Estetica".

1. *Some remarks on the status of research on Hegel's aesthetics today*

It is nowadays well known that Hegel never published a work of his own systematically dedicated to aesthetics. However, he gave five lectures on *Aestheticam sive philosophiam artis* (aesthetics or philosophy of art) at the University of Heidelberg in 1818 and then at the University of Berlin in 1820-21; 1823, 1826 and 1828-29. We have not received any transcript from the Heidelberg course, while at least one transcript has survived for all other courses. Such testimonies have long remained on the sidelines of research. For nearly two centuries, Hegel's aesthetics in fact has been passed down through the posthumous edition procured by Hegel's pupil and successor Heinrich Gustav Hotho (1835-38; 1842), in which the editor's own positions were unfortunately incorporated and the various lectures of the different years compiled in one book. György Lukács (1951), for example, criticized the fact that Hotho's edition did not enable the reader to follow the progression of Hegel's thought regarding the aesthetics. The first attempt to provide a critical edition (Lasson 1931) did not change the situation, given that the edition was not finished and actually did not take into account the last Berlin lecture from 1828-29. Since the 1980s the situation has changed. Annemarie Gethmann-Siefert had placed Hotho in contradiction with himself by publishing his own notebook for the year 1823, which is very different from the text of his own posthumous edition (see Brown 2014).

Various manuscripts were published, documenting the first three Berlin courses on philosophy of art⁹. In 2015, the same or different manuscripts of the first two courses were published or reprinted in the critical edition *Historisch-Kritische Gesamtausgabe G.W.F. Hegels* (GW 28,1). A second volume followed, including the 1826 lectures in 2018 (GW 28,2) and a third volume is in preparation with the 1828-29 lectures. With the publication of Adolf Heimann's transcript (Olivier, Gethmann-Siefert 2017), a very important desideratum of international Hegel scholarship finally comes true. Up to 2017 it had been impossible to reconstruct with any accuracy the development of Hegel's Berlin aesthetics, let alone to trace the individual nuances that proved to be characteristic in the course of the lectures from the winter semester of 1820-21 to both the summers of 1823 and 1826, and finally in the last college from the winter semester of 1828-29.

⁹ Schneider 1995; Gethmann-Siefert 1998 (= Brown 2014); Gethmann-Siefert, Collenberg, Iannelli, Berr 2004; Gethmann-Siefert, Kwon, Berr 2004; Olivier 2005.

Since the fourth aesthetics lecture held 1828-29 by Hegel in Berlin was the last one before his sudden death in November 1831, the sources arouse great interest for purely historical-cultural reasons. The lecture in fact was a considerable success. Among the impressive number of 86 students were such prominent listeners as the young Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, Bruno Bauer, Heinrich Heine, as we have already mentioned, as well as Franz Theodor Kugler, Wilhelm Vatke or Johann Gustav Droysen. Moreover, the lecture took place between the second (1827) and third (1830) editions of the *Encyclopedia*. Hegel introduced the threefold structure, which was to become familiar through the print version Hotho procured from 1835 to 1838. It reflects the systematic new version of the philosophy of art, which Hegel only arrived at toward the end of the Berlin period and which had no equivalent in the three preceding aesthetic colleges. But what makes this text so significant is not only its documentary value, but also the important innovations that appear here, proving that Hegel's aesthetics should not be considered a closed work, as Hotho's traditional edition suggests. It can be seen that Hegel used his various lectures like an open construction site, which provided him with the material for the constant expansion, revision and progression of his thought processes.

With the publication of the sources for the four Berlin lectures, it is now possible to understand how Hegel was working and to take into account the processual character of his aesthetics and its openness to new materials, facts and ideas which had been neglected by Hotho. It makes it possible as well to make a precise relationship between Hegel's experiences and the artistic events on one hand, and the philosophical conception developed in these lectures on the other, which had not been possible until now. We are able to date every lecture and to establish a comparison with the actual life of the arts in Berlin at the time of the lectures, i.e., between 27 October 1828 and 2 April 1829. The last lectures on aesthetics took place five times a week in that period, and the duration of this one-semester lecture is approximately 95 hours. This enabled Hegel to develop a rich conception of the aesthetics even if the content cannot be compared with the three volumes of Hotho's compilation full of extrapolations.

We have access today to four different notebooks from students who attended the lectures and wrote down the content of them. They made their manuscript either during the lectures (*Mitschriften*), or after the lectures, sometimes by comparing various texts (*Ausarbeitungen*). The first kind of texts are immediate, and in that extent are more reliable sources;

whereas other texts are often well written, providing a synthesis, but with sometimes less extensive content and without the same level of authenticity. Regarding the lectures on aesthetics of 1828-29, three texts belong to the first kind of manuscripts (Heimann 1828-9; Libelt 1828-9; Rolin 1828-9) and one to the second (Anonymous 1828-9). The comparison with other notebooks related to the 1828 lectures shows that Heimann provided the most truthful information and most complete text even if he was not a philosopher and a dialectician, but rather a philologist¹⁰. Karol Libelt was a profound philosopher, but his notebook is not so exhaustive, precise and well formulated. Hippolyte Rolin was a Belgian student whose manuscript is written in rough German with some French marginalia, but which ends at the beginning of the third part of the lectures. We can notice incidentally that both Libelt and Rolin were involved in the Revolution in 1830. The anonymous manuscript from the Staatsbibliothek Berlin is a clear and synthetic work clearly written after the time of the lecture (*Ausarbeitung*), probably for other students, as was often the case.

The last lecture of the winter semester 1828-29 was already partially documented, since the *Introduction* and the “General part” of Karol Libelt’s notebook have been published (Schneider 2004-05; Schneider 2010) as well as the music chapter (Olivier, Gethmann-Siefert, Espina 1996). Therefore, the publication of a notebook – like Heimann’s notebook – documenting the entire fourth cycle of lectures on aesthetics held by Hegel during the winter semester 1828-29 has been expected for a very long time, and now it is finally time to rethink and reinterpret Hegel’s aesthetics in a new perspective¹¹.

Some scholars have already taken notice of the notebooks and transcriptions of the various lectures. Gethmann-Siefert referred systematically to the students’ notebooks in order to clearly demonstrate the distortions made by H. G. Hotho in his edition. She referred very often to the manuscript of Karol Libelt in the Introduction of her edition to the Hotho transcript, as well as in her various studies on Hegel’s aesthetics, on the end of art, of Goethe’s *Diwan*, on the Düsseldorf painters, on the Dutch paintings, or on the opera as *Gesamtkunstwerk* (Gethmann-Siefert 2014:

¹⁰ Adolf Heimann (1809-74) received his doctoral degree in 1833 in Berlin with the thesis *De Thucydidis orationibus* and later taught German at University College London.

¹¹ Heimann’s notebook will also be the basis for the last volume of Hegel’s lecture on aesthetics to be printed in the German edition of the *Gesammelte Werke* (28.3) using another transcript made by Niklas Hebing. This transcript has already been discussed by some scholars in Sandkaulen in Hegel 2018.

125, 131, 155, 164). Other scholars – like Gadamer (1986) – have published, thanks to Gethmann-Siefert, various studies on Hegel's aesthetics, which take into account notebooks relating to the different years of Hegel's teaching at the Berlin University and already quoted the 1828-29 transcripts in their studies on Hegel's aesthetics. These studies concerned the whole lecture (Rutter 2010; Sandkaulen 2018) as well as different topics, such as the beautiful, the idea and the ideal (Hilmer 1997; De Vos 2008; Iannelli 2013; Peters 2015), ugliness (Iannelli 2007), the end of art (Gethmann-Siefert 2013; Vieweg, Iannelli, Vercellone 2015; Iannelli 2015), symbolic art (Kwon 2001; Olivier 2010; Farina 2015; Ventura 2018), garden art (Berr 2010), painting (Collenberg 1992; Collenberg 2008; Olivier 2016; Pinna 2005; Schneider 1998-99), music (Olivier 2003) and literature (Hebing 2015; James 2009).

2. Cultural and artistic background

Another clear sign of the desire to take stock in the last 250 years of Hegel's legacy, and at the same time to encourage a new interpretation of the philosopher, is the publication of an extensive biography written by one of the contributors of the present article (Vieweg 2019), which offers an overall presentation of Hegel's life and work and shows how connected the speculative element in the philosophy is with the very material element of his life and time. The biographical context is in fact essential to better situate Hegel's aesthetic theories. Therefore, in order to comprehend the cultural and artistic milieu in which Hegel's Berlin lectures on aesthetics took place, a quick reconstruction of some of the most important artistic stimuli that Hegel had in the thirteen years he spent in Berlin is indispensable. Berlin was a vibrant city where art offered a powerful compensation for political life inhibited by censorship under Friedrich Wilhelm III (1770-1840), King of Prussia (Vieweg 2019: 545-56). The last lecture of 1828-29 was held after about 10 years of intense, passionate and tireless cultural life in Berlin, to which precious and unforgettable artistic journeys in Germany (Munich 1815; Dresden 1820, 1821 and 1824; Cologne 1822), Holland (1822), Vienna (1824) and Paris (1827) were added.

In addition, in the previous years spent in Nuremberg (1808-16) and Heidelberg (1816-18), Hegel had already dedicated himself extensively to artistic fruition. The extremely rich art collections in Nuremberg, and in the Weißenstein Castle in Pommersfelden, where he could view numer-

ous masterpieces of painting, refined his pictorial sensibility (see Vieweg 2019: 356-9). Then, in Heidelberg the musical evenings at Anton Thibaut's house and the acquaintances with the jurist and musicologist would be the birthplace of some famous theses of the Hegelian lectures on aesthetics as the primacy of the human voice over any instrument, or the appreciation of early Italian church music as expression of the ideal and not only as a first step in the history of music (Heimann 1828-9: 121). At the same time, the exchanges with his university colleague and philologist Friedrich Creuzer will broaden his aesthetic reflection on symbolic as well as classical art, just as his acquaintances with the Boisserée brothers will offer Hegel a revelation on the power of medieval art through the fruition of an excellent collection of paintings (see Vieweg 2019: 429-32).

However, it was only during the Berlin period (1818-31) that his artistic thirst was not only satiated, but also piqued, stimulated and sublimated into a refined theory. The reception of a large number of works of art and the exchange with some leading figures of the culture of the time was a decisive prerequisite for Hegel's legendary lectures at the Berlin University on the philosophy of art. Hegel was a member of two scientific associations, the *Kunstverein* and the *Wissenschaftlicher Kunstverein*, which were encouraging the development of the arts as well as a scientific and critical approach of art. He knew the studios of the important sculptors Christian Daniel Rauch, Johann Gottfried Schadow and Christian Friedrich Tieck, as well as the Giustiani and Solly collection.

This was the period in which the first public Museum opened in Berlin in 1830. The project had been planned since the 1790s, as the King of Prussia, Friedrich Wilhelm II (1744-97) asked Aloys Hirt to organize the institution. Hirt, professor of archeology and theoretician, influenced Hegel in his conception of the beautiful since that time and even beyond, so much so that Hegel quotes his article *Versuch über das Kunstschöne* from 1797 in his last lectures¹². The museum had an educational purpose like the University and had to be built after a scientific model, actually the same scientific model of an art history that is found in Hegel's lectures on aesthetics. There is therefore a close connection between Schinkel's architecture of the museum and Hegel's conception of aesthetics as a speculative art history (Wyss 2008). Hegel's student F. Waagen, an art historian, became director of the Museum. Hegel probably alluded to the Museum project as he stated in his lecture on painting of 18 February

¹² For a better contextualization, see Donougho's contribution *Hegel's "characteristic" (die Charakteristik) in 1828-9*, in this issue of "Studi di Estetica".

1829: "Die geschichtliche Behandlung ist deshalb das Beste für die Zeit, der sie angehört. Die Ausstellung einer geschichtlichen Sammlung wird unschätzbar sein" (Heimann 1828-9: 108)¹³.

Another major event in spring 1829 was the revival of Johann Sebastian Bach's *Matthäus Passion* as a concert under the direction of Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, which was not only a musical event, but also questioned the new place of religion and religious content in a secularized context. Hegel frequented the Mendelssohn family in that period and attended the concerts given by the young Felix and his sister Fanny. Felix became his student and frequented the lectures on aesthetics in the winter semester of 1828-29. Hegel, in turn, attempted the revival of Bach's oratorio on 11 and 23 March 1829 performed by the Berlin *Singakademie* and conducted by Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, but there is not any proof that he really had the grandiloquent judgment that Hotho attributed him in his edition of the *aesthetics*. According to his friend Zelter, he would have considered, on the contrary, that Bach was not authentic music, or that music had progressed since that time. In his lecture of 18 March 1829 devoted to music, Hegel speaks about Protestant oratorios without mentioning the composer (Heimann 1828-9: 122).

It is well attested that Hegel listened to Beethoven's music, at least in private houses, when not at the concert hall or at the opera house¹⁴. The cult for Beethoven was extremely vivid at that time in Berlin, especially under Hegel's friends such as Mendelssohn Bartholdy. Musicologists at that time, like Adolf Bernhard Marx, made use of Hegel's conception of dialectic, of the philosophy of history if not the thesis of the end of art, in order to legitimate the assumption of the instrumental music as a form of "absolute music". Hegel would have written to Mendelssohn in June 1829 (i.e. after the musician attempted his lectures on aesthetics) about what we could call a "logic" in music belong to the problems opened by the modern conception of musical autonomy (the letter is unfortunately lost).

Hegel is an enthusiastic follower of the opera, in which various art forms, music with the poetic of the libretto and the stage design as a combination of the painterly and the architectural merge. The philosopher sees the human voice as the main instrument, his special interest lies in

¹³ "The historical treatment is therefore the best for the time to which it belongs. The exhibition of a historical collection will be invaluable".

¹⁴ For example, at his publisher's place, in the Nicolai Bookstore, in Berlin, in 1822, see Olivier 2003: 84, and Parthey 1926: 211.

the works of Mozart, Gluck and Rossini, as well as in the legendary Italian opera singers he had heard in Vienna and Paris like Giovanni Battista Rubini, Luigi Lablache (but not Maria Malibran). His statement in 1828-29, "the very clear, simple Italian voice is also just the clear" (Heimann 1828-9: 119), is only understandable against the backdrop of his artistic-musical journeys.

However, there is also a particularly close connection with Pauline Anna Milder and with the soprano Henriette Sontag. In addition to this, in Amalie Beer's salon Hegel established close contacts with Amalie's son Heinrich Beer and also met his brother, the composer Giacomo Meyerbeer (see Vieweg 2019: 552 f.). Carl Maria von Weber lives with Heinrich Beer while he conducts the Opera *Euryanthe* that Hegel attended in December 1825. With the names Spontini and Weber, the tensions in Berlin's musical life come to the fore, expressed as the conflict between the German-Romantic opera and the Italian opera. Weber's *Freischütz* was first performed in Berlin in 1821. Like Zelter, Hegel criticized the torn, the faked, the sought-after and attacks in his last lecture that taste for the fantastic and diabolical, typical of the German romantic Opera (Heimann 1828-9: 123-4), in contrast to the Italian melody.

In the debate for or against Rossini, Hegel was therefore in favor of the Italian "genial" composer (Heimann 1828-9: 125), unlike his student and future editor Hotho (Olivier 2019). The fact that Hegel's musical aesthetics are still considered philosophically profound today can be demonstrated above all by his interpretation of the humor of Rossini's characters and by his interest in the new figures that emerge in the opera buffa as the cynical barber. Particularly explosive for Hegel's conception of free Romantic art is the freedom of movement which Rossini gave to the singers, the possibilities of free development of the voices: the interpreters can create coloraturas on their own and are themselves "composers". The central theme of Rossini's production is in fact the impotence of the human being in dealing with the events and the tricks in which he (or she) is unwittingly involved (see Welsch 2019).

In the field of literature, Hegel's fondness for the ancient tragedian poets and for Shakespeare continues unabated in the Berlin period. The high esteem for humor that had existed since his school days remains unbroken and finds its expression in the conception of aesthetics in the treatment of the comic: from Aristophanes Cloud-Cuckoo Land to Lucian's mockery of the gods, from Shakespeare's comic hero Falstaff to the humorous one of the *Commedia dell'arte*, from Laurence Sterne to von Hippel and Jean Paul.

As lover of art in all its forms, his interest in Raphael's masterpieces, Correggio, Leonardo and Titian appreciated in the long corridors of the Louvre in the company of his friend Victor Cousin, as well as for French, English and Italian theatre and contemporary opera, was very much alive. Letters to his wife abound with detailed accounts on the vision of works of art, architectural structures, theatrical pieces and operas appreciated during his stay in Paris and on the return trip to Berlin with stops in Bruges and Brussels. There is no shortage of accurate descriptions and passionate judgments about actors and performers from all over Europe, among them admiration for the qualities of Italian singer Rosmunda Benedetta Pisaroni in Rossini's *Semiramide*. She made her debut in the Théâtre Italien in Paris, just in 1827, when Hegel heard it (Olivier 2003: 127-9). In Paris, Hegel attended at the same time not only an English performance of Shakespeare with the actors Charles Kemble and Harriet Smithson, but also performances of Molière in French with the actress Mademoiselle Mars.

Paris also offered the opportunity to further expand its aesthetic sensibility toward the East. In Paris, Hegel met one of the most important sinologists of the time, Jean Pierre Abel Rémusat. He makes notes on Rémusat's French version of the Chinese novel *lu-kiao-li, ou les deux cousins*, one of the first Chinese novels known and translated in Europe¹⁵. Rémusat's preface to the novel witnesses a first clear effort of comparative analysis that Hegel basically shares so much that another work by Rémusat on Lao Tseu (1823) will inspire him in his comparative interpretation of the similarities between Tao (dao), Logos and Vernunft in his *Vorlesungen über die Weltgeschichte* (see Vieweg 2019: 561).

These few hints alone testify to Hegel's thirst in the Berlin period for art, literature and music and to his interest in having a picture as global and intercultural as possible, as is also shown by the catalogue of the works he owned in his library, which includes, for example, another Chinese novel *Hao Qiu Zhuan*, also in French. (GW 22, 123ff, 593 ff.) The Berlin poet Heinrich Wilhelm Stieglitz gave important impulses for the study of oriental poetry, especially with his work *Bilder des Orients*. Hegel, for his part, motivates Friedrich Rückert, one of the fathers of oriental studies,

¹⁵ The French translation was quickly re-translated in German (*Ju-Kiao-Li, oder die beiden Basen: ein chinesischer Roman. Mit einer Vergleichung der chinesischen und europäischen Romane als Vorrede*; übersetzt aus dem Französischen von Abel Rémusat. Zwei Bände. Stuttgart, Gebrüder Franckh, 1827) and in English (*lu-kiao-li: or the two fair cousins. A chinese novel*. From the French version of Abel-Remusat, London, Hunt and Clarke, 1827).

to undertake a poetic treatment of the *Shi-King*, which is only published in 1833 after Hegel's death under the title *Schi-King; Das Buch der Lieder. Hundert Gedichte, dem Deutschen angeeignet nach Friedrich Rückert*. This recommendation to Rückert presupposes knowledge of the translation *Confucii Chi-King* (HBZ: 669) provided by Julius Mohl. With Rückert, Hegel has contact with a connoisseur who is very familiar with oriental literature. Examples of his extraordinary linguistic and expert knowledge are translations of Rumi (GW 22, 121 f. and 589 ff.), of the *Makamen des Hariri*, of episodes from *Mahabharata* and also the *Koran*.

Hegel also quotes the works of the British Indologists Charles Wilkins, William Jones and Thomas Colebrooke, of the latter *On the Ve'das, or Sacred Writings of the Hindus*. The philosopher was particularly inspired by Franz Bopp, professor of Sanskrit in Berlin from 1825 (GW 16, 49), considered a co-founder of the new scientific discipline of comparative (Indo-European) linguistics with whom F. Schlegel and W. von Humboldt learned Sanskrit. Bopp publishes excerpts from the *Ramayana* epic, which Hegel in turn reads in an English version. Of course, Hegel is also familiar with the Indological works of the Schlegel brothers, with Friedrich Schlegel's study *Weisheit der Indier* (1808), which contains excerpts from the *Ramayana*, *Bhagavadgita*, *Mahabharata* and *Sakuntala*, and with August Wilhelm's transmission of the *Bhagavadgita* and the partial translations of the *Ramayana*. Detailed evidence of Hegel's proficiency in this field is of course provided by his critical review of Wilhelm von Humboldt's *Über die unter dem Namen Bhagavad-Gita bekannte Episode des Mahabharata*, printed in the *Jahrbücher* (see Vieweg 2019: 608 f.). This immense amount of artistic suggestions constitutes the background, but also inspires and transfigures his aesthetic theory, as the last Aesthetic lecture very well testifies.

3. *Hegel's last lesson in context*

The transcript and the publication of Heimann's notebook of the aesthetic course of 1828-29 finally enables us to connect with precision the content of the lectures with the artistic and cultural milieu, as well as with the evolution of Hegel's philosophical conception of the beautiful, of the arts and with his philosophical system in general.

The last lectures are a direct preliminary work for the few paragraphs on art in Hegel's *Encyclopedia* of 1830 (GW 20, §§ 556-63). It provides a starting point for overcoming many biases of previous interpretations. For

example, Hegel's *Aesthetics* edited by Hotho (1842) is divided into three large sections. In the *Introduction*, Hegel takes a position both with respect to the usual ways of understanding the artistic phenomenon and with respect to the very history of the discipline. We find afterward (i) a first general part on the idea of beauty, followed by two parts dedicated respectively (ii) to symbolic, classical and romantic art forms and (iii) to the system of individual arts, from architecture to poetry. Nevertheless, Hegel arrived at this tripartition very late, namely only in the last Berlin course of aesthetics, that of 1828-29, and not before. Consequently, the last course bears witness to a more advanced state of reflection on the aesthetic material.

As another interesting example of the changes introduced by the last lecture, we can mention the reflections on the ideal, in which he on one hand takes up again already anticipated themes – such as the vitality or the bliss of the ideal – but on the other hand for the first time explicitly places under the three provisions of the ideal (see Heimann 1828-9: 22) the irony that he describes as a noble principle of aesthetics (see Heimann 1828-9: 23). In the lecture of 1828-29 we thus find a significant extension of the ideality of art, which is not, as in classical sculpture, mere conformity with itself. Negativity becomes a precious component of the work of art, especially in literature. But this does not mean that Hegel agreed with the position of the Romantic school regarding the irony. He repeated in his lectures of November 1828 (Heimann 1828: 23-4) the same critique he already formulated in his previous lecture of summer 1826 (GW 28.2, 544-7; Kehler 1826: 20-4) and in the recension of Solger's works published a few months earlier (GW 16: 77-128). However, in the last course, Hegel distinguishes the practical irony (*praktische Ironie*) of the *Frühromantik*, coined by Friedrich Schlegel (Heimann 1828:24), from a purely aesthetic irony that is considered fundamental even for the concept of ideal and of artistic beauty¹⁶.

The critique of the Romantic school includes the painting as well. In October 1828, the Düsseldorf School exhibited paintings inspired by Romantic literature, or more precisely by the Romantic interpretation of literature. In his lecture, Hegel discussed this exhibition – and probably as well the articles published in the *Berliner Kunst-Blatt* – by comparing the modern German paintings with the Italian Renaissance paintings. Hegel

¹⁶ On the developments in the Hegelian theory of irony during the Berlin period and on the unusual reflections of the last Aesthetic course, see F. Campana's article *La concezione hegeliana dell'ironia e il corso berlinese del 1828-9* in the present issue.

concentrated his critiques on Schadow's *Mignon* as well as on the other painters in the same school, like Julius Hübner and Karl Ferdinand Sohn (Heimann 1828-9: 107). But his criticism is aimed above all at the domination of the principle of irony that is manifested in them, the Romantic conception of poetry, so that the criticism of painting is ultimately reduced to a criticism of the literary absolute and its conception of subjectivity.

This condemnation of contemporary German romanticism belongs to his general philosophical and aesthetic position that can be described as a systematic critique of Romanticism (Pöggeler 1999). The same position can be found in his lectures concerning the music of Carl Maria von Weber mentioned above (*Der Freischütz*). The passages Hegel devotes to Novalis (Heimann 1828-9: 24) may give a rough account of Hölderlin, since the first edition of his poems appeared at the same time as Solger's writings (1826). Tieck and Schlegel have meanwhile recognized in Hölderlin "the greatest genius of modern poetry" (see Jamme 1978: 52). Conversely, Hegel remains silent regarding the poetry of his former friend in his lectures on aesthetics as in the *Jahrbücher*. Only what he says concerning Novalis may perhaps be extended to Hölderlin as well.

However, it is not only the echo of the important artistic and cultural events of the time that we have mentioned which prompted Hegel to expand and rethink the philosophy of art in his last lecture, but also the new book publications and the discussion with his contemporaries. Hegel is measuring himself here once again, but in a new light, with some of the intellectual greats he always preferred, such as Kant.

In his last lectures, Hegel provides a new empirical approach of the beautiful, compared to the metaphysical and Platonic approach in his previous lectures. He wants to follow the classical definition given by his colleagues and friends Hirt, Meyer and Goethe because they based their interpretations on a more concrete intuition. Hirt's definition of the beautiful as "characteristic" is not contradictory according to him with Meyer's description of the antique sculpture and with Goethe's equation between the "beautiful" and the "significant" (Heimann 1828-9: 6-7).

This leads Hegel to examine Kant's *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (Heimann 1828-9: 7-9). The pages of the Introduction dedicated to Kant, while not an absolute innovation, are of considerable importance in comparison with the previous lectures on aesthetics, where the thoughts of the Königsberg philosopher on the beautiful (or the sublime) are mentioned in very brief form (GW 28.1, 8; 28-9; GW 28.2 530; 539-41; Kehler 1826: 28-31) or are missing altogether (SS 1823). The broad treatise on Kant's

aesthetics, which characterizes the course of 1828-29, also testifies to how “vivid” the lectures were and how strongly they were adapted to the immediate theoretical needs of the moment. It was precisely the examination of Kant’s principle of the beautiful that was the subject of a competition announced by the Berlin Academy of Sciences, which Bruno Bauer won with the essay *De pulchri principiiis*, at Hegel’s suggestion (Bauer 1829)¹⁷.

The lecture of the winter semester of 1828-29 was permeable to enriching influences that testified to an open ear for the present. In fact, there is no lack of references to works fresh from the press. We have mentioned the first volume of Johann Heinrich Meyer’s *Geschichte der bildenden Kunst bei den Griechen* (Meyer 1824). Equally important is the reference to the *Italienische Forschungen* of Carl Friedrich von Rumohr, the first two volumes of which were published in 1827 (see Rumohr 1827). This volume, considered, along with Waagens Van Eyck’s book (Waagen 1822), was to be the founding document of the Berlin School of art historiography and an important source for getting to know Italian art in particular. Rumohr’s *Italienische Forschungen* were namely based on the experience of several Italian travels as well as on the works of Vasari and Winckelmann (see Espagne 2005). In his last lecture on aesthetics in 1828-29, Hegel dealt extensively with Rumohr’s work on Italian art (Heimann 1828-9: 19-20). He saw Rumohr as ‘one of the most learned art experts of our time, who has done the richest research and at the same time has made reflections on beauty in general. In his assessments of Italian art, Hegel succeeds in convincingly presenting his conception of Romantic art and the combination of its dominant forms of painting, music and poetry: intimacy, clarity and freedom are regarded as the defining characteristics of Italian painting (Giotto, Leonardo, Rafael, Titian), music (Rossini) and poetry (Dante, Petrarch, Ariosto).

Also the former Heidelberg student and close friend of Karl Rosenkranz, Franz Kugler – from whom a well-known Hegel drawing was made – attended the lectures on aesthetic in 1828-29 and probably made his famous drawing on this occasion, as well as Hotho, who can be counted among the main representatives of the Berlin School of Art History. Kugler would later become the author of a work on art history and the influential teacher of Jakob Burkhardt (see Espagne 2012 and Karge 2013). In this sense, Hegel is still considered the grey eminence in the genesis of art

¹⁷ See Bauer 1829 and Schimmenti’s contribution, *Bruno Bauer’s Critical Theory of Art and Hegel’s lectures of aesthetics in 1828-9*, in this issue of “Studi di Estetica”.

history, going beyond the cliché – raised by Gombrich – of the metaphysical Hegel. As is well known, it was Gombrich himself who crowned Hegel as the “father of Art History” for his effort to propose a “Universal history of art” (Gombrich 1984: 52) and then dethroned him and accused him of speculative historicism that swallowed up artists in the name of spirit and history.

An explicit section on the art of coinage is introduced exclusively in 1828-29, at the end of the treatment of sculpture, which should not be considered a curiosity for connoisseurs or a particularly refined addition (Heimann 1828-9: 102-3). It is highly probable that this innovation can be traced back to the contemporary debate that was ignited in 1827 by the publication of the *Verzeichnis der geschnittenen Steine im Museum zu Berlin* (a list of the cut stones in the Royal Museum of Antiquities in Berlin). This was the description of the Stosch Gem Collection, translated from French by Bolzenthal, which Winckelmann had written and dedicated to Cardinal Albani. In 1826, Carl Gottlieb Reinhardt made casts of the gems in question, which enabled contemporaries to see the 3442 stones as Winckelmann had described them for the first time. The inventory was reviewed by Goethe himself in 1827 and most likely aroused Hegel's interest, since the volume is in the catalogue of Hegel's library.

But there is no lack of innovations in the field of music either. In the summer semesters of 1823 and 1826, Hegel was still critical of the elitist demands of instrumental music, which met the expectations of the connoisseurs, but which, in a self-referential turn back to itself, made the audience forget about itself as it strove toward the heavens like an ivory tower with impetuous power. In contrast, the lecture of 20 March 1829 shows a remarkable openness to the virtuosity of the artist. This change of heart was probably due to the fact that in the same month, Niccolò Paganini came to Berlin and caused a great sensation during his three-month stay there, as he amazed the cultural elite of the time with his mastery of the violin to such an extent that some even thought he could conjure up the devil. Hegel, who was always rather reserved with regard to the artistic virtuosity which the individual places above the work, and which imposes its own seal on it to such an extent that only the artist himself is able to show it to advantage, goes so far in his lecture to state with recognition that the instrument – this is a “wonderful mystery” – becomes “a selfless, animated organ” and the “interior producing of the genial imagination” is then perceptible more than in other arts (Heimann 1828-9: 125).

We have not found until now any explicit mention of Beethoven's name in the different testimonies of Hegel's lectures on aesthetics, but there is, in the music lecture of 27 February 1829, a remark on the "theme" and its development, with the notions of "work", "liberty", "recall", "distance" and "return" to "unity" that can only refer to the thematic if not dialectical conception of the sonata-form that is historically connected to the Beethovenian conception of the musical work (Heimann 1828-9: 118). Many scholars since Theodor W. Adorno have emphasized the analogy between Hegel's dialectics and Beethoven's conception of the form-sonata, which Hotho had probably perceived as well.

Hegel stressed above all the importance of Goethe's *Divan* as a bridge between Western and Eastern culture. Goethe's work represents as such the ultimate work of art and not a minor work representing the decadence of the art. Oriental poetry appears in general as an alternative – or a remedy – to the emancipation from romantic subjectivity, it gives itself as the last moment of Romantic art or, paraphrasing Danto, as the ultimate form of art after the end of (Romantic) art. Rückert, Hafiz and Rumi rejoin Goethe, Klopstock and Petrarch (Heimann 1828-9: 81). Pure subjectivity – which knows itself to be absolute and infinite – is reconciled with substance.

Heimann's manuscript is also an important source with regard to the so-called "endless discussion" (Gethmann-Siefert 1981); namely, the controversial thesis of the end of art, even though Hegel did not say that art is dead or stone dead ("mausetot"). This "rumor" is due to his student Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy and refers actually to Hotho and not to Hegel. Hegel had spoken at length about its precarious state of health in intellectualist modernism. Hegel's epoch, namely that of classical German philosophy, is no longer the golden age for art, but rather for philosophy. A form of expression of the spirit, necessarily based on sensuality as art, is therefore no longer welcome in an age when, precisely on German soil, namely in Halle an der Saale, the philosophy of art was brought to life with Baumgarten, the philosophical-critical contemplation of art or, in other words, aesthetics. Thus, Hegel can claim that "the barrier of art lies not in it but in us" (Heimann 1828-9: 26). It is modern man who has become mental, theoretical, conceptual. This is both an achievement and inevitably a loss.

Henrich (2003) made the hypothesis of a possible change in Hegel's attitude toward art in his last lectures of 1828-29. Hegel would have given up with his thesis of the end of art by introducing a new conception of the "objective humor" to characterize art at the end of romantic art. Hegel

was indeed using this expression (Heimann 1828-9: 80), which can also be found in Libelt's notebook that Henrich quoted. But Henrich overlooked this, since this conception is already attested in the first Berlin lecture from 1820-21 (GW 28/1: 113)¹⁸. The fact is that Hegel is emphasizing the end of art thesis in this last version. He speaks from an "annihilation of the art" in the introduction (Heimann 1828-9: 15). And the lecture ends on 4 April 1829 with this sentence: "For us the philosophy of art is a necessity, because we are beyond art" (Heimann 1828-9: 141).

This does not exclude other interpretations of Hegel's aesthetics considering a future of the work of art. In his lecture of 18 November 1828, Hegel cited Murillo's and Rafael's paintings he had seen in Munich and at the Musée du Louvre in Paris the year before. His interpretation inspired Jacques Rancière for one of the *Scenes from the aesthetic regime of art*, namely the scene in which the professor is explaining to his students what is the "ideal" and the "artistically beautiful" (Rancière 2013: 22). It is not only about celebrating the little beggars, the "little gods of the street", but to introduce, according to Rancière, "a singular call to what is to come" (Rancière 2013: 36), a call to the future: "the future of the insouciant child thus reopens what philosophy declared closed" (Rancière 2013: 36). Hegel's aesthetics does indeed not only provide an account of the history of art, the history of philosophy, and the theories of the end of history – it also opens at the same time perspectives to ponder the future of history, the future of the arts, and the future of the philosophy of art.

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¹⁸ "Jean Paul ist der berühmteste Humorist, und hat wirklich einen genialen Humor; nur ist der Inhalt zu oft prosaisch und nähert sich dem platten; die Aeußerung soll als ein ganz zufälliges dastehn, und mit dieser höchsten Zufälligkeit wird das objective hineingelegt, Ausdruck hineingebracht; dies ist sehr schwer" (GW 28.1, Ms. 129: 113) ("Jean Paul is the most famous humorist and really has an outstanding sense of humor; only the content is too often prosaic and approaches the flat; the expression is supposed to be completely random, and with this highest randomness the objective is put in, expression is brought in; this is very difficult").

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