

INTRODUCTION

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But what *we* want to consider is art which
is *free* alike in its ends and its means.
—Hegel

Hegel was preeminently a *systematic philosopher*. His work addresses its subjects in a manner markedly informed by their location in and relation to his whole project and the conception of philosophy it articulates. So, understanding and evaluating his aesthetics require that we pay attention to his idea of a system. In addition, Hegel was deeply involved with freedom and with what has come to be known as the problem of modernity. His aesthetics need to be located within the field of these concerns as well. In this introduction I shall present a brief overview of Hegel's aesthetics, followed by considerations of his systematic approach and its treatment of freedom and modernity (I). Next I shall address the location and understanding of art in this systematic orbit (II), the contemporary significance of his aesthetics (III), and give an overview of the collected essays (IV).

In his *Lectures on Aesthetics*, Hegel presents art not only as capable of rational comprehension, but as being an embodiment of our free rationality in the sensible. As free rational beings—as Spiritual—humans strive to objectify, express, and comprehend ourselves. Art is one way in which we do this. In art the outer world of objective reality is shaped in accordance with human subjectivity, imbued with meaning and purpose, rendered intelligible, and thereby transfigured with beauty. Like religion and philosophy, art is centrally concerned with ultimate truth. Its business is to realize and to bring to consciousness who and what we are as creatures engaged in attaining our freedom. Thus, rather than being ephemeral, ethereal, or otherworldly, art according to Hegel addresses the very core of our being. In art fundamental truths about humanity are discovered and brought to understanding.

As comprehended philosophically, art appears as a manifestation of Spirit's historical development toward freedom. The philosophy of art is a grand historical narrative depicting the stages of the development and transformation of the forms and styles of art, with changes in art reflecting

the progress in humanity's realization and understanding of its freedom. The narrative ends with Spirit's completion in modernity, revealing, not only that art is subordinate to religion and philosophy, but that the time of art's greatest glory is past. According to Hegel, art no longer occupies the central place it once did in human experience in that it is no longer the paramount medium through which we display the essential truths of the human condition. In this sense, Hegel's philosophy of art proclaims, not the death, but the diminution of art's role in our self-understanding. While still pursued and appreciated, art in the modern world has become secondary to other human endeavors.

What are we to make of Hegel's view of art in today's posteverything era where the culture of high theory has rejected, not only the legitimacy of grand narratives, but also the fundamental conceptions of reason, truth, modernity, freedom, and philosophy from out of which Hegel's aesthetics emerge? In a variety of ways, the essays collected here address this central question. But before considering the issue of the contemporary location and significance of Hegel's philosophy of art, and how these essays deal with it, it is crucial first to locate the aesthetics in the context of his philosophical project. What was Hegel up to in his systematic philosophy?

I. System and Modernity

Hegel's overriding concern was to attempt to comprehend and critically legitimate modernity as the historical triumph of Spirit, the human self-creation of freedom. Modernity and its institutions emerge as the culmination of humanity's realizing the truth of its being as freedom to the extent to which the modern world is one in which we can be at home because we have succeeded in creating and understanding the conditions for our freedom. Thus, Hegel sought to articulate the definitive features of all the central aspects of the modern world insofar as they are required by and accord with rationally intelligible freedom. His philosophy asks the twofold question: can we comprehend freedom as rationally legitimate and humanly attainable, and if we can, what various institutions and activities are necessary in order that humans can fully attain freedom? So the Hegelian project is both normative and descriptive.

It is fundamentally normative in that its conceptual presentation of freedom is articulated and defended on strictly rational, a priori grounds. Taking an important step beyond his predecessors Kant and Fichte, Hegel realized that neither the legitimacy nor the normative authority of freedom can be presupposed as given. According to Hegel, if freedom is to be defended and understood as the norm against which the given world is to be judged, our normative concept of freedom must be articulated independent of any determinative foundation in any given (and irreducibly arbitrary)

conditions whatsoever: even the notion of a spontaneous subjectivity cannot be assumed as paradigmatic. To begin with such a notion, even in the transcendently purified versions of Kant and Fichte, is to commence with an ungrounded given and thereby also with an acknowledgment of the authority of givenness in a project which would reject the heteronomy of the given in the name of the supreme authority of autonomy.

When Hegel rejects this approach of grounding or founding freedom in something antecedently given and other than itself, freedom—autonomy—emerges in a new light. Most distinctive about Hegel's conception of foundationless freedom is that it is consummately rational, neither a groundless spontaneity nor an arbitrary caprice. Both of these contemporary, purportedly postfoundational notions of an ungrounded freedom revert to foundationalism by using subjectivity as a given, determinative, model for freedom: only if human willing is taken as an ineliminable model can postmodernists confidently assert that an ungrounded freedom must reduce to a capricious, irrational, agency. Abjuring these and *all* such models altogether, and holding that freedom must and can determine itself in a non-arbitrary fashion, Hegel presents foundationless freedom as irreducibly rational. The Hegelian link between freedom and reason is twofold.

First (as Hegel argues in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the *Science of Logic*) reason requires freedom. Philosophically critical rationality and its demand for a thorough account of truth are themselves incoherent except insofar as reason is thoroughly constituted in an autonomous fashion: rationality and autonomy must coincide in the conceptual self-determination of an autonomous reason which all attempts at rational justification finally demand. For, if reason is grounded in some given—if it is heteronomous—that given must always remain unjustified, compromising reason's claim to establish unconditional truth. The only thing that may legitimately condition or determine reason is what reason itself establishes.

Second, freedom requires reason. From its own side, freedom is inseparable from reason because (as he argues in the philosophy of Spirit) attempts to sever it from rationality, from autonomous self-determination, end up reducing freedom to domination. The detachment of freedom from rational self-determination leads to the collapse of autonomy into some form of heteronomy. For, (paralleling what we saw with reason) if freedom is understood as grounded in some antecedently given condition, that given must then determine—rule—freedom. However, the state of being determined by an other is not freedom, but heteronomy. The only thing that may legitimately condition or determine freedom is what freedom itself requires. So both rationality *and* freedom require the renunciation of the determinative authority of the given. Thus, reason and freedom alike are only finally intelligible as self-determination. At the core of Hegel's whole philosophical project are the crucial insights that philosophical rationality can only give an account of itself insofar as it is autonomous, and that only au-

tonomous reason can comprehend and legitimate the normative authority of freedom. Put differently, both truth and justice need to be construed non-foundationally, in terms of autonomous self-determination.

Hegel realized then that, rather than precluding philosophical rationality and objectivity altogether, it is precisely the absence of foundations, and the discovery of what that means, which makes philosophy possible as the knowledge of objective truth in which normative conditions for truth and justice are set forth. So what postmodernists present as the fatal flaw of modernity and its philosophy—their lack of any final given or postulatable foundations in subjectivity, nature, language, being, etc.—Hegel recognized and proclaimed as the initial key to, and the first step in understanding, modernity's and philosophy's triumph. In Hegelian terms, it is only postmodernists' tacit foundationalism, their obdurate and otiose attachment to the belief that freedom and reason must be grounded in some givens, that leads them to the illicit conclusion that the absence of such given foundations must result in the nihilistic victory of arbitrary caprice and irrational subjectivism. (Of course, if Hegel is right—if freedom is not a given, if it is not guaranteed, and if its attainment presupposes understanding its nature as such—the persistence of such philosophical misunderstandings could have consequences that threaten freedom.)

Looked at in historical terms, modernity's practical assertion of the normative authority of freedom makes possible philosophy's theoretical completion by opening the way for philosophy's discovery that freedom—as autonomous conceptual self-determination—is the basis for attaining a philosophical discourse capable of legitimating itself because it is not founded on heteronomous givens incapable of final justification. Correlatively, the fact of modernity's assertion of the right of freedom calls for a philosophical legitimation of that right—a legitimation which can establish the unprecedented normative authority of freedom unfounded in anything given. Philosophy and freedom are inseparable co-conspirators in the project of modernity. As even modernity's harshest critics recognize (albeit inchoately), just this sort of foundationless freedom is presupposed by modern institutions and practices in their rejection of given customs and traditions in the name of the rightful authority of individual self-determination. Unlike Hegel, what those critics fail to see is that the absence of foundations for modernity's freedom need not necessarily lead to a nihilistic will-to-power as some sort of "postfoundational foundation." Paradoxically endorsing some version of Nietzsche's cryptofoundationalism, they miss, or ignore, Hegel's discovery that the conceptual and practical legitimacy of modernity can be demonstrated by a systematic philosophy that originates in the liberating discovery that the foundational assumption is itself without foundations.

Hegel's philosophy of freedom is secondarily (but necessarily) descriptive in that its idea of rational freedom insists that a rational freedom must be a thoroughly attainable one. A freedom that cannot be realized is

incoherent, it is not freedom at all. Thus, Hegel endeavors to indicate just what actual features of the world may satisfy the requirements of a rational, actualizable freedom, a freedom that is not a utopian ideal whose perpetually postponed realization demands a striving incapable of satisfaction. This descriptive component does not compromise the normative one. It is absolutely crucial to understand that Hegel's concept of freedom does not entail that freedom has been fully actualized, but only that it be actualizable. Were freedom vouchsafed to us of historical necessity it would not be freedom at all, as Hegel understands freedom: as a free human creation. Thus, Hegel's descriptive account of those features of the modern world that enable freedom does not amount to surrendering the authority of autonomous reason to judge this world in its givenness. On the contrary.

For one thing, and as the continuing debates about modernity which have marked post-Hegelian history show, far from being a given, the legitimacy of modernity stands in need of a philosophical accounting. The unprecedented character of its claims means that the sheer fact of modernity, its givenness, is not enough to establish its legitimacy. (Hegel appreciated that this legitimation must be one of the most radical sort, that is, one that rejects the authority of givenness thoroughly and completely.) The widespread (albeit still contended) acceptance of modern institutions and practices implicitly presupposes a philosophical account capable of demonstrating the normative legitimacy of the rational freedom they may embody. So Hegel's conception of the nature of freedom, of modernity, and of philosophy are all predicated on recognizing the normative authority of freedom over facticity. Thus, while the descriptive component of his philosophy attends to given facts, this in no way indicates that facticity grounds normativity.

For another thing, it is Hegel's oft-repeated dictum that the mere existence of something, its factual givenness, neither guarantees, nor is, as such, evidence of its rationality. What is rational must be actualizable (and *may* have been actualized) but to comprehend this philosophically—to grasp what rational freedom is and requires—is not proof that the rational has been actualized. Making the rational actual requires more than philosophical thought. It requires human action in which philosophical, conceptual labor is only one part.

Thus, Hegel was neither a right-wing nor a left-wing Hegelian. He demands that we reject equally the conservative propensity to endorse the given, just because it is given, as well as the radical propensity to reject the given, just because it is given. Only autonomous reason can determine what is to be accepted and rejected in the world we find given. Hegel's philosophy is not a Panglossian theodicy or a quietistic endorsement of the status quo. Nor, at the opposite extreme, does it afford a dystopian view in which freedom is always denied by the present. Hegel rejects both postmodernist visions of freedom: the neo-Marxist view, where freedom is an ever-evanescent hope, demanding perpetual rebellion against the status quo (but for-

ever projected into a never-attainable and indeterminate future state) and the neo-Nietzschean view, where freedom is relegated to the private, asocial interiority of an egotistic subjectivism of self-referential self-discovery. Rather, by demanding both that the given world accord with self-determining reason and that what reason conceives must be actualizable, achievable through human self-determination, Hegel's is the critical philosophy par excellence.

II. Freedom and Art Systematically Conceived

In his philosophy of Spirit where he treats aesthetics, Hegel works to demonstrate which types of human activity and which institutions are required for the actualization of Spirit, the full human self-realization of freedom. His approach is systematic, which is to say it looks at freedom developmentally, multidimensionally, and comprehensively.

Hegel conceptualizes freedom in historically developmental fashion by examining how different stages and different forms of freedom emerge over time. He articulates freedom in a conceptually developmental fashion by indicating how the abstract and incomplete character of one mode of freedom logically requires ever more concrete and fully developed modes. (For example, the abstract freedom of property right is inherently unstable and unrealizable without the institution of civil society which incorporates and complements the freedom of property.)

Additionally his approach is multidimensional in that assessing how one form of freedom requires another for its fulfillment means seeing that freedom has diverse dimensions. (For example, the freedom realized in the market is not the same as political freedom and yet requires the latter in order both to secure economic freedom and to have its limitations ameliorated.) And finally, Hegel's systematic conception of freedom is comprehensive in that thinking through the interdependent and interrelated aspects of differing forms of freedom which are incomplete in their own right makes possible a thorough consideration of the topic. An important feature of the Hegelian understanding of freedom is the comprehensive and multidimensional account he provides. Unlike the conception of freedom as liberty, which still predominates in the anglophone world, Hegel does not restrict freedom to the political and economic realms. Nor does he conceive it solely in negative terms, as a matter of the minimum of humanly imposed restrictions on a solitary individual who would be fully free in a state of nature if only others were absent. He refuses to regard human plurality as leading to the "necessary evil" of societies and states which compromise a purportedly ideal liberty attainable only in the fictional isolation of a Robinson Crusoe. While Hegel acknowledges the importance of this sort of "freedom from," he refuses to absolutize it. For him, freedom encompasses the full range of human modes of self-realization. It is not a gift of nature

but requires development and education. And freedom importantly includes positive, cooperative interactions with others.

So the basic Hegelian outlook is that we can best render the human condition, human history, and our contemporary place in it intelligible when they are considered from the point of view of rational freedom, *sub specie libertatis*. As freedom is not a natural given but a human attainment, our understanding of freedom plays a crucial role in its realization. Philosophy, religion, and art are decisive as distinctive achievements through which we both realize and come to understand different aspects of our freedom. In what ways is freedom central to art in Hegel's view?

Art is a product of Spirit, it is part of the effort to craft our freedom, and in contemplating works of art we also come to understand something distinctive about that effort and its realization. Through art we attain a particular kind of freedom and we also learn about what we are as creatures capable of striving to realize our humanness as autonomous beings. As involving both creative thought and the material world, art is a way of resolving the immediate, restrictive opposition between the inner, private domain and the outer, initially alien domain of nature. In that works of art are transformations of given, sensible materials in accordance with a free play of individual imagination which finds harmonious expression in those materials, art both is and celebrates an independence from nature and natural necessity even while recognizing and affirming our sensible and sensuous nature. And since artworks are appreciated for what they are, allowed to stand free, in their own right, art is also liberatory in that through art we rise above merely consumptive and desirous relations to material things. Thus the human capacity for realizing a distinctive type of freedom—the pleasing, uncoerced unity of an inner subjectivity with an outer world of material objectivity—is both attained and proclaimed in works of art.

Yet true art, beautiful art, is not merely the sensible manifestation of a free subjective creativity. In genuine art something universally true about humanity is expressed in and radiates itself through the unique features and details of the particular artwork. Beautiful art speaks to and about the human condition. Since for Hegel “to be” in the fullest sense is to be individual, since the highest truth is the synthesis of the particular and the universal in individuality, beautiful artworks are a distinctive mode in which this reality and this truth are actualized and made comprehensible. Successful works of art stand alone in an individuality of form as well as content. In terms of form, each is a unique creation in which a particular artist has made universal truths manifest in the manifold particulars of the specific materials and styles of the artwork. Artworks also attain a distinctive mode of individuality in their content: successful works of art depict the ways in which universal features of our humanness are individuated in an endless variety of particular human circumstances, conditions, times, and places.

Thus, because art resonates a sensuous intelligibility, because in art we engage in sensorially meaningful acts of fashioning, discovering, and un-

derstanding ourselves and our world, art is fundamentally capable of rational comprehension. This is the case according to Hegel even though works of art are unique and are the expression of particular artists, styles, times, and places, and even though philosophical, conceptual intelligibility is of a different order than the sensuous intelligibility of art. Art can be rendered conceptually intelligible in philosophy while not being reduced to a mere adjunct of philosophical rationality and without having its uniqueness—its freedom—compromised, because of Hegel's distinctive notion of rationality. For Hegel, philosophically rational comprehension is nonreductive (and does not succumb to panlogicism) because it is not a matter of purging concrete particulars from a given subject in order to reach the formal husk of abstract generality in an empty universal. Rather, Hegelian conceptualizing (*Begreifen*) is a matter of thinking through the manifold nature of autonomous self-determination, the attainment of individuality, in all its guises and modes. Rational comprehension according to Hegel involves seeing how universality may concretize itself in a variety of substantive individualities. Each of these will be distinctive and self-subsistent, irreducible, just because it is an individual. To paraphrase Aristotle, individuality may be said in many ways. But each is still philosophically intelligible because we have come to understand the general features of individuality, including how it attains its irreducible character through a relation of self-identification and self-differentiation with other individuals: individuals are all alike in being individual through the fact that each attains its self-determination in a different way.

And yet, while for Hegel art is an expression of the deepest truths about human being and human beings, he is opposed to and critical of views of art that regard it from a predominantly pragmatic or utilitarian perspective, as intelligible and worthwhile because it serves some end outside of itself. Like science, indeed, like thought, art may well serve other ends, but the true understanding of art must allow art to stand free, a unique activity with its own ends. Hegel's philosophy of art allows art this freedom by explaining art not just as manifesting truth in a particular way, but also as having its *own* unique truth to express; art is not just a means for, or a manifestation of, something other than itself which could be articulated or communicated in another fashion. It is insofar as Hegel's aesthetics succeeds in doing this—bringing to philosophical, conceptual clarity what is genuinely essential and distinctive about art as art—that it lays claim to being *the* philosophy of art.

But while Hegel appreciates art as a distinctive expression of humanness, his understanding of *ars gratia artis* is not one which precludes objective critical judgments. Hegel's conception of "art which is *free* alike in its ends and its means" leads neither to a hermeticism in which art is so radically self-contained and self-sufficient that no external criteria or standpoints for judgment are attainable, nor to a subjectivism in which art is nothing but the expression of individual creative genius where anything goes. Because

art in general is a distinctive expression of Spirit, free rationality, we can judge the adequacy of works of art in terms of how well the universally rational is individuated by being given sensuous configuration in them. Furthermore, because Spirit, the process of the realization of freedom, is historically developmental, we can understand art's mode of realizing Spirit not only as having a history, but as having one period in which art is the pre-eminent mode in which truth is made manifest. According to Hegel, that period has gone by. First religion, and now philosophy have superseded art as the best means through which Spirit can now comprehend itself. So for Hegel, the essence of what we moderns are is no longer best rendered comprehensible in art.

III. Hegel's Aesthetics Today

What are we to make of his views in our contemporary context? At first glance it seems that Hegel presents a view of art that appears to have been thoroughly refuted by the received view of post-Hegelian history. The contemporary posture on such matters asserts an ironic reversal of the key Hegelian notions which link rationality, freedom, truth, and modernity in a philosophical grand narrative ending with the ascension of philosophy over art. The postmodern condition has long since proclaimed rationality and its pretensions toward understanding as illusory masks of an omnipresent drive, not toward freedom, but domination and terror. Religion and philosophy have been disclosed as false idols. And rather than art's waning, postmodernism heralds an arational artistic creativity, not only as the essence of art, but as the only possible hope for liberation and an authentic existence; a groundless and capricious creativity is touted as the ultimate ground and the final truth of all human activity, including philosophy. In their correction of Hegel, postmodernists tell us that "reason" does not underlie, emerge in, render comprehensible, and validate art. Rather, a khthonic drive whose model is art underlies, emerges in, renders incomprehensible, and invalidates "reason." "Art," it would seem, has triumphed to proclaim the death of philosophy. If then, in the spirit of Croce, we are to ask "What is living and what is dead in Hegel," may we confidently assert that certainly his aesthetics are dead? Before we sign the death certificate, let us take a closer look at the alleged corpse.

A key feature of what postmodernism regards as its post-Hegelian displacement of philosophy by art is the proclamation of an ironic detachment which questions the reality of the objective world even as it calls attention to and mocks the authority of the subject; a displacing which continually moves to displace itself, lest it be caught in a foundational move. As many of the essays here point out, rather than being ignorant of this mode of subjective self-understanding, Hegel was among the first to analyze this posture as reflective of art in the modern world. Further inspection of the postmodern

situation discloses other ironies that may lead us to wonder just how post-Hegelian postmodernity really is. A further irony of the postmodernist reversal of Hegel is that the proclamation of “the death of philosophy in the spirit of art” is everywhere made by philosophers, or by self-styled “post-philosophical thinkers” (some of whom labor in philosophy departments). The purported triumph of arational art is announced in discourses that are for the most part conventionally “rational” and nonartistic. Whether it is called “philosophy” or not, something very like it remains regnant even while proclaiming its own dethronement.

And it is in such discourses (where theses are put forward, arguments made, and evidence adduced) that disputes about the nature of art continue to take place. The activity of art criticism proceeds apace and often challenges the centrality and importance of its subject, art, in the name of its own philosophical authority. When everything is a text, it is not the artist, but the philosophical critic (who knows everything knowable about textuality) who attains prominence: in postmodernity interpretation is *the* point, and the object of interpretation becomes secondary to what the all-knowing interpreter makes of it, so much grist for the playful interpretive act smugly intimating its own superior consciousness by its pseudo-self-deprecation. If works of art (like everything else) are truly what postmodernist post-philosophers assert, just instances of subjective self-expression, then a curious dialectic seems to have ensued: a shift of the locus of attention from the art object and the artist to the theorizing critic who reaches a higher level of subjective self-expression—a higher level of art, that is—in creative criticism. If everything is a creative fiction, then acts of self-consciously creative fiction about creative fiction are the highest expression of “truth,” as Nietzsche observed. So the post-Hegelian theories that purport to glorify art (or certain models of artistic creativity) may actually end up confirming Hegel’s contention that ours is an age when philosophy, not art, is prominent.

When we consider, then, that the postmodern glorification of artistic discovery which is found everywhere has brought into question traditional distinctions between what is and is not art, and bids fair to raise theorizing itself to the level of a purported art form, Hegel’s questioning of the end of art, and his notion that ours is an age in which philosophical theory dominates, take on a new resonance. The recent publication of Arthur Danto’s unabashedly neo-Hegelian *Art After the End of Art* may herald a reconsideration of Hegelian themes and approaches. Is philosophy dead? Is art dead? Is Hegel’s philosophy of art dead? In a variety of ways and from different perspectives, the essays collected here are concerned with these questions. Some offer an overview of Hegel’s aesthetic project. Others focus on his treatment of particular art forms, such as poetry, music, painting, and architecture. Still others concern themselves with the relation between Hegel’s views on art and those of his contemporaries. If the authors do not arrive at a consensus about how these questions are to be answered, they do

concur that Hegel's philosophy of art is important, relevant, unjustly ignored, and deserving of a voice in contemporary debates.

IV. The Essays

In "Art and the Absolute Revisited: The Neglect of Hegel's Aesthetics," William Desmond explores the contemporary neglect of Hegel's aesthetics, asking why it is ignored, and whether the disdain is justified. Hegel is not much regarded in contemporary aesthetic considerations, Desmond explains, because he subordinates art to philosophy and intimately associates it with religion. This runs counter to the prevailing post-Nietzschean orthodoxy which disparages religion and, in its place, absolutizes artistic creativity as an end-in-itself, relegating philosophy to a subordinate position as a merely derivative form of artistic creation. Much of contemporary thought deifies artists and artworks: in the godlike originality of genius, art appears as the embodiment of absolute power; it is in artworks that transcendence is said to emerge in immanence.

Hegel is neglected, not only because he rejects this aestheticism and refuses to make art absolute, but because his notions of the supersession of art and his critique of romantic genius are tellingly applicable to contemporary attempts to absolutize art. As Desmond presents the Hegelian perspective, the absolutization of art in the romantic cult of subjective creativity makes art incomprehensible and impotent by making everything into art and rendering everything permissible: if everything is permitted in art and as art, art loses all distinctiveness and becomes trivial, rather than absolute. Yet if Desmond sees an important place for Hegel's aesthetics today, his is by no means an unequivocal endorsement. He is somewhat sympathetic to the postmodernist charge that Hegel tends to absorb everything into rationally self-determining thought. Thus Hegel is partly to blame for his neglect. But if absolutizing thought is an erroneous move which Hegel may not have thoroughly avoided, the contemporary absolutization of art is not a proper corrective. Despite its failings, Desmond feels that Hegel's approach is more nuanced than aestheticism and offers us more prospects for further questioning.

If Desmond is concerned with explaining why Hegel's aesthetics are largely, but unjustly ignored today, Carl Rapp makes a further case for the relevance of these aesthetics for diagnosing and criticizing the same post-Nietzschean condition which rejects them. In "Hegel's Concept of the Disolution of Art," Rapp argues provocatively that Hegel's conception of romantic art proleptically grasps the central motifs of the post-Hegelian, postromantic movements of realism, symbolism, and abstractionism. Discussing Eliot, Stevens, Bloom, Derrida, Foucault, and Rorty, Rapp argues for the continuing relevance of Hegel's insight that art in modernity is over-

come in a romantic irony which proclaims itself triumphant over all cultural productions.

As Rapp explains, much of contemporary art and philosophy exhibit precisely the condition associated with what Hegel described as the self-dissolution of art: a central focus on subjectivity itself as the creative source of all meaning and truth. In Hegel's diagnosis of romantic irony, this triumphant subjectivity moves even to question its own supremacy, continually displacing itself. This leads to art in a state of self-dissolution because (echoing Desmond) no artwork can ever adequately express the ever-mutating creative genius which is now the sole legitimate subject of art. The artwork becomes secondary to the artist's personality in the face of which all fixities of form and content dissolve. Anything and everything can be used to express the truth of radical subjectivity. Deconstruction too, with its notion that truth is fiction and that neither art nor philosophy have any truth to reflect, is modeled after romantic subjectivity. Now the thinker adopts the stance of destabilizing all fixed notions, even including the notion of the thinker. According to Rapp, Hegel has provided a telling vision of modernity after his own time. Art and philosophy modeled after art occupy themselves with a ceaseless self-dissolution which has no goal or conceivable endpoint.

Brian K. Etter's essay, "Hegel's Aesthetic and the Possibility of Art Criticism," also takes up a broad consideration of the contemporary relevance of Hegelian approaches to art. In Etter's view the prevailing post-Nietzschean orthodoxy is fundamentally historicist and thus endorses a presentism according to which there are no transcendent truths or values beyond those of an ever-changing now which continually consumes the past. The predominant aesthetic theories glimmering in today's post-Nietzschean twilight reflect this stance and preclude critical assessment. When art is understood as the expression of the self it stands in need of no justification, and as long as art is of the moment there is no basis for criticism of it.

But while he agrees with the broader features of Desmond's and Rapp's analysis of the contemporary situation, Etter's view of Hegel's relation to it is rather different from both, although certainly closer to Desmond's than Rapp's. According to Etter, Hegel's endorsement of modernity as the end of history involves a sort of presentism, and the stress he places on subjectivity and individuality prefigure the contemporary glorification of self-expression. Yet Hegel's aesthetics are critical of this situation, and Etter wants to know how this is possible. Hegel can maintain a critical stance toward art in modernity, despite his historicist and presentist endorsement of modernity generally, because of ambiguities in his heterodox conception of the divine. What enables Hegel to sustain a critical perspective is what Etter sees as his equivocation about Spirit: it is the fulfillment of the divine without fully incorporating it. Thus Hegel's endorsement of the present and of subjectivity are equivocal because, even as the triumph

of Spirit, there is still something transcendent present as a basis for his critique of the spiritual poverty of the modern world. In disagreement with Rapp, and taking a more explicit position than Desmond, Etter holds however that an orthodox conception of the divinely transcendent is needed to overcome what he regards as Hegel's confusion on this point.

Jere Surber takes up the topic of the contemporary relevance of Hegel's aesthetics from yet another vantage point. "Art as a Mode of Thought: Hegel's Aesthetics and the Origins of Modernism" directly challenges recent readings that see Hegel's treatment as thoroughly locked in the past, incapable of being meaningfully applied to the arts beyond his own time. Surber disputes the notion that his work merely completes a tradition from which the present is radically cut off, arguing that Hegel can do more than help us understand and appreciate art of the past. Like Rapp, Surber applies Hegel's aesthetics to modernist art, contending that Hegel managed to anticipate later developments.

Considering Hegel's musical aesthetics and a variety of modernist composers, Surber's thesis is that, rather than failing to understand art's philosophical potential, Hegel's treatment of art helped to make it possible for subsequent art to address philosophical issues directly and to take philosophical positions. Hegel allows for art as a mode of philosophical thought and, by doing so, offers the first theory of modern art. Hegel's linkage of art, religion, and philosophy in Absolute Spirit shows that they share an absolute content, thus philosophy can be represented in art and art can have philosophical import. Hegel's assertion of the supremacy of philosophy over art does mean that art can no longer be autonomous, but the Hegelian joining of philosophy and art may be seen to relate positively to modern and post-modern efforts to eliminate traditional distinctions between art and philosophy. Considering some disputed issues in modernist music through Hegel's musical aesthetics, Surber argues that his rational and linguistic approach fits post-Hegelian music by providing an appropriately postromantic and nonemotivist understanding of what music is about and what it can accomplish.

In his Presidential Address, "Hegel and the Art of Painting," Stephen Houlgate directs our attention to Hegel's treatment of another art form, arguing vigorously for the importance of Hegel's analysis of painting in spite of the general indifference with which it has been met. Again, a case is made for the continuing worth of Hegel's treatment. Houlgate contends that Hegel may be said not only to have grasped the nature of painting as such, but that this treatment can help us to understand and criticize post-Hegelian developments in painting. According to Houlgate, Hegel sees painting as the artistic medium in which our inner subjectivity is first adequately expressed materially. What is crucial to and distinctive of painting as an expression of this aspect of spirituality is its artificial and illusory character. The immediate and real spaciality and materiality of the objective world, which sculpture directly manifests, is transformed in painting, subjectivized, by

being rendered two-dimensional and artificial. The inescapably illusory character of painting's representation of the real makes possible the expression of the inwardness of subjectivity and of its primacy: everything in painting is manifestly an artifice, a human product in which the natural objects represented have been transformed in accordance with the free spirit of the artist. Thus inner freedom becomes directly and concretely visible in representational paintings which manifest the larger human capacity to transform objectivity according to its own lights.

What about abstract art then? Houlgate argues that the primary justifications for it do not stand up to Hegelian analysis. On the one hand, abstract art does not succeed in being the best expression of the inner subjectivity and freedom of the artist. Its abandonment of representation cannot really make the inner life intelligibly manifest to another. And sheer abstraction misses the essence of freedom because it turns its back on the real world, rather than displaying the transformative capturing of objectivity by the subject which is evident in representation. On the other hand, neither does abstract art realize the true essence of art by making the materiality of painting its sole focus. Doing that actually brings art closer to sculpture, rather than articulating its unique character as painting. What painting can do better than any other art form is to be honestly illusory: naturalistic illusion manifests Spirit as capable of expressively transforming the world in its own guise.

Turning to yet another art form, David Kolb's "The Spirit of Gravity: Architecture and Externality" offers a detailed consideration of the Hegelian notion that architecture is the art of the external, probing into the specific ways in which architecture works with, in, through, and as the external. Holding that art is a way in which Spirit moves from inwardness to express itself in objectivity, Hegel regards architecture as essential because it deals directly and transformatively with what is manifestly other than Spirit: inorganic nature as ruled by gravity and devoid of inherent meaning and purpose. As Kolb explains, in architectural construction sheer externality is overcome in and through its own nature and domain. Architecture works in and with spaciality and in and with materials that occupy space; and in building, these modes of externality are used to effect a transformation of externality. Externality is effused with Spirit but in such a way that its own nonspiritual character is not eradicated, but illuminated. In buildings, gravity is defied by being obeyed in ways that manifest its nature, and inert materials take on form and meaning in ways that still disclose their resistance to them. In architecture, even in being transformed, externality is displayed as what it is. Although other art forms are better expressions of Spirit, architecture is art, and an essential art because architecture makes art out of what is most unartistic and spacializes Spirit in a way no other art can.

Yet as the most basic expression of Spirit, Hegel sees architecture as limited, incapable of adequately expressing in a fully reflective way its own fundamental character of being the art of the external. As functional, build-

ings have their meaning and purpose outside themselves, another dimension of the externality of architecture. Kolb asks whether this self-externality can actually be asserted *in* architecture? From Hegel's perspective it would seem that the meaning unique to architecture, that its meaning lies external to itself, is something architecture cannot convey. It can never fully articulate the truth of its own nature as an art, and would thus appear to be inadequate according to Hegel's demand that Spirit, and art, reflexively postulate—be and also *say*—what they are.

Raising again the question of the relevance of Hegel's aesthetics today, Kolb doubts, though, whether this Hegelian stricture can capture contemporary developments. Looking at the work of various contemporary architects who try to make architecture's own externality their subject, Kolb asks whether they may not have moved toward doing what Hegel ruled out. Might architecture work through the Hegelian conceptions of its own limits to transcend those limits, and Hegel's philosophy of architecture as well? In Kolb's view, architecture may be able to do what Hegel wanted better than he understood. The tensions immanent in Hegel's treatment of architecture take us beyond that treatment.

Richard Dien Winfield also treats the question of the artistic status of architecture raised by the externality of its meaning and function. Can an aesthetics which stresses the self-sufficiency of art and art's role in providing human self-understanding comprehend architecture, with its distinctively functional and nonrepresentational character? Locating architecture is especially a problem for Hegel's aesthetics because of its insistence that artworks radiate and realize human individuality and freedom while attaining their own individuality and freedom independent of externally imposed meanings and goals. Architecture does not seem capable of depicting anything and appears locked into a utilitarian servitude to other ends. Winfield surveys Hegel's treatment of symbolic, classical, and romantic architecture to show how he goes about resolving these problems and providing a coherent understanding of architecture as an art.

Crucial to Hegel's approach is the historically differentiated and developmental view he takes both of Spirit and of art as a medium for spiritual self-realization and self-understanding. Different historical periods are marked by different ways in which subjective autonomy is understood and appreciated. Winfield argues that the particular, historically located understandings of form, function, and of their relation to one another which are manifested in symbolic, classic, and romantic architecture are convincingly linked to the spiritual development and self-understandings of subjectivity found in the ancient, classical, and modern eras. In each period we find a different perception of the nature and value of autonomous subjectivity, and correlatively different ways of realizing how subjective inwardness may be related to and expressed in the external world of space and materiality which is architecture's medium and milieu.

While Kolb sees contemporary architecture as pushing beyond a

Hegelian limit prescribed by architecture's restriction to working in and with externality, Winfield's view of today's architecture finds its inventive restlessness congruent with the larger Hegelian schema of modernity. On this issue of a Hegelian overview of contemporary art, he is more in agreement with Surber and Rapp in reading Hegel as providing a conciliatory comprehension of these movements, than with Desmond and Etter, who are uncomfortable with the subjectivism they find in these movements and, ambiguously, in Hegel as well. In Winfield's reading of Hegel, modernity seeks to express the truth of a subjective autonomy that recognizes only self-imposed limits, not limits imposed by nature or the past. Appropriately, and like abstract art and atonal music, modernist minimalist architecture expresses a self-understanding that focuses on subjective creativity beyond those confines, displaying how both nature and tradition can be transcended. Postmodernist architecture takes this spiritual development another step by showing how past styles can be playthings for the unbounded creative self which can never be reduced to any external embodiment. In the anything goes spirit of contemporary architecture where any style serves as well as another and in which no particular sensuous configuration has ultimate meaning, Winfield sees a recognition of Hegel's modernist assertion of the universal validity of free agency.

Stephen C. Law returns to the contentious issue of the overcoming of art, exploring the reasoning behind Hegel's assertion that comedy is the ultimate aesthetic experience and the self-dissolution of art, the art that transcends the limits of artistic expression.

Comedy is the art in which pleasure is derived by negation, through seeing things come apart. This is appropriate, freedom is served according to Hegel, when what gets undone in comedy are things antithetical to Spirit. But comedy is also capable of exercising its dissolutive force on any number of worthy things; it can be destructive rather than transcendent. Comedy emerges to prominence in the last, romantic stage of art when art has passed its empyrean and turned more away from its proper sphere of the outer sensuous world, to the inwardness of subjectivity, the domain of ideas. Comedy is a subset of poetry, whose linguistic medium is ideal for the fabrication of a thoroughly subjective world released from the confines of objectivity. As Law presents Hegel's historical overview, art progresses as the development of the sensuous expression of our increased realization of our nature as free, culminating in comedy: while tragedy represents a struggle between freedom and necessity, in comedy, restraints and constraints are set aside as inessential and the objective world emerges as a subjective creation; freedom is asserted through our ability to laugh at that world as something which cannot really threaten us. In comedy human beings, rather than natural or divine necessity, determine the outcome; we become the gods who dispense justice; and failure is punished only by laughter. The ability to laugh at circumstances that thwart our hopes and expectations, and at oneself, indicates a spirit who is autonomous in taking nothing too seriously.

Law argues that important in Hegel's appreciation of comedy is the distinction he draws between the comic and the ironic. In irony even the noble and worthwhile are nullified by a radical subjectivity. What he calls subjective comedy is criticized by Hegel because it heralds a subjectivity that has become quasi-divine, intent on dissolving the world without proffering any replacement.

If Desmond, Rapp, and Etter endorse the core of Hegel's critique of the romantics and romantic irony, and see his views as remaining applicable today, Judith Norman's dissection of Hegel's critique of Schlegel offers a defense of the romantics and their notion of the fusion of art and philosophy. In "Squaring the Romantic Circle: Hegel's Critique of Schlegel's Theories of Art," she questions, not the connection between the romantics and the present, but the force of a Hegelian critique of both.

According to Norman, Hegel has failed to understand Schlegel and the romantics. He wrongly read Schlegel's notion of genius as rooted in Fichte's absolute ego and thus failed to see that irony in Schlegel is not simply self-conscious value positing. Schlegel in fact recognizes something independent of artistic genius as informing the artist, so Hegel is wrong in attacking his notion of genius as willful, unrestrained self-expression. In fact, Norman argues, Schlegel recognized a link between art and philosophy which Hegel missed. Schlegel's elevation of art over philosophy is rooted in a conception of art as capable of completing the whole project of critical philosophy in a way not open to philosophy proper. Critique calls for a critique of itself, but this leads to philosophical paradoxes which a reflective or philosophical art can avoid by its notion of irony. Irony recognizes the subjective, fabricated character of reality, but unlike philosophy, it also discloses the ungrounded, incomprehensible nature of the world-making subject presupposed by critique. Art is thereby raised to philosophy, or unified with it.

While Hegel was right in attributing to Schlegel the notion that the world is subjective and illusory, Norman argues, he was wrong in seeing this irony as rooted in the subject. In fact, irony is that whereby the object indicates its illusory status. In sharp disagreement with Surber, Norman sees romanticism and its effort to unify art and philosophy providing possibilities Hegel missed owing to the incompatible roles he assigned to art and philosophy.

If Desmond and Etter question what they regard as Hegel's overly conceptual approach to and ambiguous position on the divine, and if Norman defends, against Hegel, romantic (and by implication, postromantic) attempts to synthesize philosophy and art, Martin Gammon explores the young Hegel's preoccupation with both these issues. At stake in "Modernity and the Crisis of Aesthetic Representation in Hegel's Early Writings" is the still disputed authorship of "The Earliest *Systemprogramm* of German Idealism."

That work postulates an aesthetic philosophy in which reason and the sensible are synthesized in the presentation of divinity. Looking closely at

works of the period known to have come from Hegel's pen, Gammon disputes the attribution of the *Systemprogramm* to him. His richly detailed consideration of Hegel's earliest views on art offers insights into how Hegel came to the position that art in the modern world could not achieve what many of his contemporaries believed it could, the mediation of truth by beauty in an aestheticized philosophy. For Hegel, Gammon argues, art was now unable to perform this central function for two reasons. On the one hand, the contemporary ethical truth of Christianity is too intellectual for art; the infinite Christian God cannot be adequately captured in readily accessible images. On the other hand, art too has become overly intellectualized, subservient to the conceptual nature of Spirit in modernity. Thus, the synthesis of art and philosophy proclaimed in the *Systemprogramm's* call for a new mythology of reason ought not to be attributed to Hegel. The early Hegel had already moved beyond seeking an aesthetic solution to the spiritual problems of modernity.

Like all the authors, Andrew G. Fiala examines the related issues of the appropriate character of an aesthetic response to modernity and the proper relation between art and philosophy. In "Aesthetic Education and the Aesthetic State: Hegel's Response to Schiller," Fiala focuses on Hegel's response to Schiller, whose *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* influenced Hegel and have recently received renewed attention from those critical of modernity's allegedly dehumanizing, logocentric rationalization of the life-world and the political.

What is at stake for Schiller is how social alienation may be ameliorated by an aesthetics that can serve both as a means to mediate divisions, and as an end in itself in which aesthetic experience effects the unity of sensuousness and rationality, thereby overcoming alienation altogether. For Schiller, attaining the latter goal would consist in the attainment of an aesthetic state of absolute freedom. Beauty will lead to political freedom and thus art is subservient to political goals. Art can make this possible because it synthesizes the two seeming opposing poles of humanity, the rational and the sensuous. Art reconciles the intellect to the sensual world while it also lifts us out of our immediate immersion in the sensible.

Fiala points out that Hegel is sympathetic to the basic features of this conception of art as a synthesis of sensuality and spirituality, to Schiller's notion that art can have a positive educative function, and to his association of art with freedom. Yet, Hegel's aesthetics refuses to accept the idea of art as a mere tool, arguing that whatever its instrumental value, aesthetic experience is fundamentally an end in itself. But the real disagreement between Schiller and Hegel according to Fiala concerns the issue of a utopian aesthetic state, conceived by Schiller as one in which humans interact in free play, governed by the natural harmony of beauty. Here the highest freedom is attained and humans' alienation from one another and from the state is overcome. So for Schiller aesthetic experience is both means and ultimate end, and the harmonious play realized in aesthetic experience becomes the

determinative model for freedom and ideal humanness; art triumphs over all. For Hegel however, art and the political are and ought to be decidedly distinct spheres of human experience; while politics and art are both modes of human freedom, they are nonetheless different.

Furthermore, Fiala indicates, Hegel is opposed to Schiller's collapse of the ethical into the aesthetic. Art cannot be a substitute for the forms of ethical activity; and the ethical state, with its own distinctive type of freedom, is not to be overcome in an aesthetic state. In Hegelian terms, Schiller has misunderstood the character of the political and its relation to aesthetics. Politics, located in the sphere of objective Spirit, involves interaction to create a world. By contrast, art, located in the sphere of Absolute Spirit, involves attaining freedom from and in the natural and social worlds, a freedom realized in art's sensuous comprehension and representation of the truths of those worlds. And, Fiala points out, Hegel is adamantly opposed to utopian projections, which he regards as resulting from the displacement of subjective imagining into an arena where objective truth is needed. According to Fiala, Hegel is a refreshing contrast to Schiller's utopianism, realizing that problems of political and social alienation require political and social, not aesthetic solutions. Yet he feels Hegel's systematic approach precludes him from saying anything about how art might play a role in transforming politics.

In "The Logic of Art: Beauty and Nature," Edward Halper presents a schematic overview of the location of the aesthetics in Hegel's system. His aim is to elucidate the nature of aesthetic categories and the transitions between them by showing how they relate to and depend upon the systematic logic that Hegel presents as the scientific foundation of his philosophy.

According to Halper, a crucial issue for Hegel, as for Plato, is the problem of the reality of art: both philosophers assign the highest being to thought and thus for both, art, as sensuous, becomes problematic. The Hegelian solution is to disclose art's rational dimension, to comprehend it as participating in the rational. Philosophically, this means grasping its location in the rational totality of systematic philosophy, seeing it as a manifestation of the Absolute. Yet this means that we also must differentiate art from the other entities considered in the system. Thus Halper asks what the distinctive nature of aesthetic reality is, what sort of conceptual category art is, how the categories of aesthetics are different from the others', and how the categorial transitions in aesthetics are different from those of logic.

The basis for Halper's answers to these questions is rooted in his claim that Hegel's is a panlogistic idealism which forbids him from introducing new, nonlogical categories, and commits him to reusing logical categories. As his system enters into its consideration of reality beyond logic, this development is effected by what Halper describes as the addition of earlier logical categories to later ones. His view is that, for Hegel, everything is literally an idea. Thus he analyzes the concept of art in terms of the Absolute Idea with an added logical concept of actuality. Halper contends that the appro-

priate concept to be added is that of Life, as the type of self-contained unity Hegel ascribes to Life is most appropriate for understanding the distinctive synthetic unity of parts in a whole that belongs with artistic beauty. Yet art, artistic beauty, must be distinguished from natural life, and is so in virtue of being animated by a higher unifying principle than that simply found everywhere in organic nature.

How are conceptual transitions brought about in aesthetics? Referring to different modes of categorial transition in different parts of the system, Halper analyzes the transitions in the opening of the aesthetics as variations on those in the *Philosophy of Right*. His goal is to demonstrate both that the conceptual content of Hegel's opening aesthetic categories and their mode of transition are based in and consistent with concepts and modes of development presented at the end of the *Logic*.

In recent years more and more scholars have contributed to a resurgence of interest in Hegel. The essays collected here serve to call attention to the coherence, power, and relevance of Hegel's philosophy of art. They can help to give his voice the role it deserves in contemporary debates. The essays were first presented at the Fourteenth Biennial Meeting of the Hegel Society of America, held at Keystone Colorado, October 18–20, 1996. I would like to thank Jere Surber for handling the local arrangements for that meeting and the University of Denver for its generous support.