

FORUM

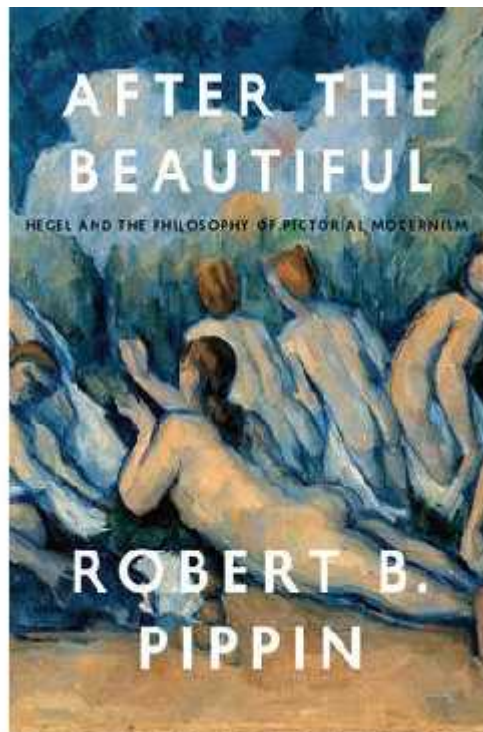
ROBERT B. PIPPIN

After the beautiful. Hegel and the philosophy of pictorial modernism
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INTRODUCTION

1. Hegel-renaissance

Contemporary English-speaking philosophy, as is well known, has never been very keen on German idealism, especially, Hegel's¹. Still in 1945, Bertrand Russell – among the main actors of that foundational movement of analytic philosophy known as *linguistic turn* – mocked heavily Hegel's dialectics playing with the sentence «Absolute is an uncle»². The same year, Popper's famous work, *The open society and its enemies*, despite its clearly less humorous approach, radicalised Russell's position and defined Hegel's retrieval of classical philosophy as a «perennial revolt against freedom and reason»³. In this regard, Hegel would be the heir, and somehow also the peak, of that tradition of metaphysical philosophy, which parasitically borrows the structure of religious ideas and mysticism, while simultaneously rejecting their ultramundane features. Liberal criticism, in brief, articulates the belief that, being the apex of the attempted conceptualization of the mysticism scheme, Hegel's strain of thought can be fruitfully employed in order to justify whatever state of affairs, especially in the political realm.

This interpretation has actually spread significantly also among those keener on continental philosophy, as it can be easily proven by reading the words of positivist sociologist, Ernst Topitsch, who defines Hegel's dialectics as «the drama of fall and redemption»⁴. As brightly pointed out by Claudio Cesa, the strong echo of the debate on secularization clearly affects this kind of position. More precisely, the whole issue of the reliability, within the scientific approach to the world, of forms of thought stemming out of mythical thinking is here heavily

¹ Concerning the initial and troubled reception of Hegel's philosophy in America, see the «Introduction» to the recent work by L. Corti, *Ritratti hegeliani. Un capitolo della filosofia americana contemporanea*, Roma, Carocci, 2014, in particular pp. 15-17

² B. Russell, *History of western philosophy*, London-New York, Routledge, 1996, p. 663.

³ K.R. Popper, *The open society and its enemies*, London-New York, Routledge, 2011, p. 272.

⁴ E. Topitsch, *Die Sozialphilosophie Hegels als Heilslehre und Herrschaftsideologie*, Neuwied-Berlin, Luchterhand, 1967, p. 19.

influential⁵. Walking on the thin thread connecting Hegel's philosophy and the beginning of the secularization process, Hegel's ultra-liberal interpreter, Friedrich von Hayek, claims to have «little to add to the masterly analysis of this historicism by my friend Karl Popper»⁶, while attempting to argue in favour of a strong affinity between Hegel's philosophy and Comte's positivism⁷. As the highest representative of the philosophical attempt to make mystical, religious, and, generally speaking, mythical inherited modes of thinking into a rational, hence reasonable stance, it is not surprising that the English-speaking analytic philosophy, originally close to liberal thinking, has more or less categorically rejected Hegel.

In Italy, to the contrary, Hegel has always been warmly welcome. This is so not only within the framework of Marxism, as obvious, within Gentile's idealism, Croce's historicism, and hermeneutics, which somehow owe something to Hegel, but also and more interestingly in the realm of liberal thinking. Norberto Bobbio's definition of Hegel's political philosophy as «dissolution and fulfilment» of natural law theories confirms this claim⁸. Differently, in 1940 England, Knox and Carritt discussed on the journal pages of the British Institute of Philosophy the explicit connections between Hegel's thought and «Prussianism», as well as the implicit ones with «present-day National-Socialism»⁹.

One may then wonder what are the reasons behind the *Hegel-renaissance* in the English-speaking world? When exactly did it occur?

In the research published in 2005, Frederick Beiser, important historian of German idealism, connects the Marxist movement of the 1960s and 1970s to the English-speaking retrieval of Hegel, and remarks that «in the 1970s and 1980s Hegel became, at least in the Anglophone world, the rallying figure for the reaction against analytic philosophy»¹⁰. It is certainly not surprising that the several streams of

⁵ C. Cesa, *Introduzione*, in C. Cesa (ed.), *Il pensiero politico di Hegel*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1979, pp. XLII-XLIII.

⁶ F.A. von Hayek, *The counter-revolution of science. Studies on the abuse of reason*, London, Collier-Macmillan, 1964, p. 199.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 200 ss.

⁸ N. Bobbio, *Hegel e il giusnaturalismo*, in C. Cesa (ed.), *Il pensiero politico di Hegel* cit., p. 5.

⁹ T.M. Knox, *Hegel and Prussianism*, «Philosophy» 16 (1940), p. 51; concerning the discussion with Carritt, see in the same issue: pp. 190-196 and pp. 313-317.

¹⁰ F. Beiser, *Hegel*, New York, Routledge, 2005, p. 2.

American Marxism, whose common ground is often a political and literary reinterpretation of post-modernism, extensively employ Hegel-inspired concepts. In this respect, some authors, such as Frederic Jameson, are clearly keen on picking up Hegel's philosophy¹¹. More interesting, in my opinion, is instead the subsequent assimilation of Hegel's thinking, originated and developed within analytic philosophy, which is, at first sight, problematic in its outline. The analytic retrieval, for instance, of Kant's philosophy, as anticipated in the realm of ethics by such authors as William David Ross, can be taken as somehow more predictable, while Hegel's reception is remarkably less obvious.

In brief, the analytic retrieval of Hegel takes place within some streams of American pragmatism. The names of Sellars and Rorty are often mentioned in this regard. To Rorty we arguably owe the myth of a Hegelian Sellars, who is actually not particularly generous in quotes from Hegel¹². Already, at the origins of the early American pragmatism, such authors as Dewey and James show at least some interest for, if not adhesion to, Hegel's principles¹³. And in the '90s of the last century, thanks to John McDowell's and Robert Brandom's work, Hegel's concepts are fully accepted within the American philosophical agenda, especially in its analytic sections. What is at stake, all in all, is an elaboration of pragmatism favourably including categories such as that of holism. Such a concise description is, however, better suited to Brandom's philosophical project, than to McDowell's questions, this latter rejecting all together the «Pittsburgh neo-Hegelian» label¹⁴. Notably, some key concepts of Wittgenstein's late philosophical elaborations are developed in this context. More specifically Wittgenstein's unpublished works have, possibly unsurprisingly, a greater echo than his *Tractatus*. Thus, the notion of rule, as presented in the *Philosophical investigations*, is absorbed within the pragmatist perspective and eagerly applied to the problem of normativity.

¹¹ See the early 1970s book by F. Jameson, *Marxism and form. Twentieth-century dialectical theories of literature*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1971.

¹² On this matter, see again L. Corti, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-21

¹³ R.J. Bernstein, *Hegel in America. La tradizione del pragmatismo*, in L. Ruggiu - I. Testa (eds.), *Hegel contemporaneo. La ricezione americana di Hegel a confronto con la tradizione europea*, Milano, Guerini, 2003; in the same volume, concerning James' reserve judgement on Hegel, see: S. Poggi, *Naturalismo e pluralismo vs. idealismo e monismo, ovvero William James vs. Hegel*.

¹⁴ As it is remarked by L. Corti, *op. cit.*, p. 20, with direct quote from J. McDowell, *The engaged intellect. Philosophical essays*, Cambridge (MA), Harvard University Press, 2009, p. 279.

Our behaviour is now described as a practical attitude linked to the habit of following rules, instead of as being based upon pre-established rightful norms. However, any normativity concept, as Hegel points out several times, always entails a major drawback, as it comes to the abstract nature of the authority bestowing its binding value upon the rule itself. The abstract 'must', the rule for itself, normativity for itself, require to be somehow legitimated. In one of the most famous pages of the *Philosophical investigations*, Wittgenstein formulates this very issue and asks what exactly, for instance, in chess makes a King a King. His answer is arguably ostensive, as he points to how the piece can move, i.e. its rule¹⁵. In order to understand the behaviour of a given element, then, it is necessary to observe it, to observe how it behaves; in brief, it is necessary to follow the rule. Nevertheless, an obstacle to the full equation of Wittgenstein's stance to a full-blown sceptical approach to the rule, as attempted for instance by Saul Kripke¹⁶, is the distinctive defiance when it comes to thematisation of the rule itself. The sceptical applies scepticism to something, for instance the world, which is at least virtually the object of thematisation. The rule, on the contrary, especially in Wittgenstein's theory is never as such. What establishes the relation between customary behaviours, the so-called games, is precisely the presence of the rule. This latter, however, is supposed to just emerge. What is at stake, along Wittgenstein's lines, are family resemblances. While drawing on Weber's metaphor – borrowed from Goethe – of elective affinities, as applied to the relation between protestant ethics and the spirit of capitalism, Wittgenstein asks the reader to just 'watch' the games. One should just watch what they have in common, that is to say the rule. The legitimation of the normative power of rules should not, then, be investigated outside rules themselves, but rather in their practical display, within the strict realm of their use. This is how concepts such as Sellars' space of reasons have emerged, to describe the realm within

¹⁵ L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1953, 31, p. 15 (Eng. tr. by G.E.M. Anscombe, *Philosophical investigations*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1953, 31, p. 15^e).

¹⁶ «The sceptical argument, then, remains unanswered. There can be no such thing as meaning anything by any word. Each new application we make is a leap in the dark; any present intention could be interpreted so as to accord with anything we may choose to do. So there can be neither accord, nor conflict. This is what Wittgenstein said in § 202» (S. Kripke, *Wittgenstein or rules and private language. An elementary exposition*, London, Blackwell, 1982, p. 55).

which – the reasons according to which – an actor gains (in Brandom’s language) *entitlements* in order to make some *moves* and, simultaneously, displays *commitments* to the respect of the very normativity he/she relies on in order to act¹⁷. The space of reasons, i.e. the normativity of the rule, thus appears to perform that very action that is forbidden to logical thinking, and as Baron Münchhausen, it pulls itself out of a swamp by its bootstraps (*bootstrapping*). The result is a closed system legitimised in its existence by the interrelation of its own elements within a common, unitary, then also holistic, perspective. It should not be surprising, therefore, that a so articulated pragmatism looks first at Kant’s idea of reason, self-assigning to itself its own rules, and then to what is taken to be building up on this perspective, that is the concept of *Geist*. Based on the concept of *Geist*, each element gains its place and specific role according to the sustainability of its behaviour. The *Geist* is progressively composed of figures, which, based on the practical test of their sustainability, leave the place to other figures, whose action proves to be more conform. In rough terms, this is precisely Hegel’s outline of *Geist*.

2. From Hegel to Hegel

Besides Brandom and McDowell, the American retrieval of Hegel has two other representatives, who have attempted something different, Robert Pippin and Terry Pinkard. Whereas the formers aim to employ Hegel’s concepts to develop the internal positions of pragmatism, the latter interpreters attempt to verify the consistency of that kind of readings from within Hegel’s line of thought. The result is an endeavour which allows a smother dialogue with the realm of European studies, in particular the Italian school, traditionally devoted to the historical examination of texts. The discussion accounted for in this Forum belongs precisely to this attempted dialogue.

Pippin’s and Pinkard’s main goal, already since the 1980s, is to restore Hegel’s credentials face to the American scientific community.

¹⁷ «The fundamental normative concept required is the notion of *commitment*. Being committed is a normative status – more specifically a *deontic* status. [...] Coordinated with the notion of *commitment* is that of *entitlement*. Doing what one is committed to do is appropriate in one sense, while doing what one is entitled to do is appropriate in another» (R. Brandom, *Making it explicit. Reasoning, representing, and discursive commitment*, Cambridge (MA) - London, Harvard University Press, 1997, p. 159).

Understandably, Hegel was and still is taken as a genuinely metaphysical thinker, who philosophically would have made a step back from Kant's critique of metaphysics. Paradoxically, the American public image of Hegel is that of a pre-critical philosopher, to some extent even that of a pre-Kantian one. The retrieval of Plato's notion of ideal, the close dialogue with Aristotle's metaphysics, the keen eye on Spinoza's substance – all elements clearly present in Hegel's texts – shape the image of a reactionary Hegel. After the great leap forward of the Enlightenment and of Kant's critical philosophy, Hegel would have but pushed back the clock of the history of philosophy.

Against this very image of Hegel, Pinkard and Pippin fight in their works. The previous incorporation of the basic concepts of Sellars' and Rorty's pragmatism allows, to some extent, to cut the sharpest edges of Hegel's perspective and present an image of him which can be more favourably admitted within the context of the American studies. The main idea is, to put it bluntly, to understand Hegel's philosophy of *Geist* as a long-term project for the legitimation of global normativity. As a result, a non-metaphysical Hegel emerges, who does not aim at the restoration of pre-critical and pre-Kantian metaphysics, but rather pursues the – technically understood – justification of reality. In more explicit terms, a form of thought is required which is able to account for the state of affairs, to legitimise the world order, radicalising and drawing the strongest possible consequences from the premises laid down by Kant and his critiques. Thus, a new reading of the concept of *Geist* is provided. Both Pippin and Pinkard are reluctant to translate the term as 'spirit' and prefer to leave it in German, or at best to use the English 'mindedness'. As a result, Sellars' space of reasons is envisaged, within which the moves of each actor are justified based on commitments and entitlements to action. In this sense, the interpretation of Hegel's philosophy drifts naturally towards social and political connotations.

For the benefit of the Italian reader, little accustomed to this approach to Hegel, it could be useful to mention few factual examples. In the volume *German philosophy (1760-1860)*, Pinkard introduces the questions of German philosophy through an historical account. The still fragmented and politically underdeveloped Germany of the second half of the eighteenth century is the background of the birth of that very philosophical line of thought to which we owe the previously

described concept of normativity. The educated youth of the time, grown under the wing of German Enlightenment, was perennially dissatisfied. The surrounding world and its old and decadent institutions were unable to make display of the authority necessary to their preservation. Furthermore, from an intellectual point of view,

the dominant philosophy of the time, Wolffianism as a codified and almost legalistically organized form of Leibnizian thought, drove the message home that the current order was not simply the way the ruling powers had decreed things, but was itself the way the world in-itself necessarily had to be.¹⁸

In this context, an approach was required that could account for autonomy claims and the need for «liv(ing) one's 'own' life»¹⁹. This line of thinking was, as matter of fact, identified as Kant's, given its motto according to which «'we' moderns have to depend on ourselves and our own critical powers to figure things out»²⁰. It was thus initiated that line of thought whose development led to Hegel's concept of *Geist*, as normative justification within the space of reasons:

answering that question in turn required a history of 'social space', that is, an account of how the history of the demands we have put on each other required us to develop a determinate type of modern 'social space', such that the modern, Kantian interpretation of the claims of reason on us would come to be seen not as merely contingent, and perhaps self-defeating, features of European history, but as something itself actually required by the history of that 'social space', or *Geist*.

Moreover:

what gives objectivity to a judgment about an object does not lie in any kind of one-on-one correspondence of judgments to objects, but in the way in which the judgment about the object is located within a pattern of reasoning that is not itself determined by the object but by the way in which spirit, *Geist*, has socially and historically come to determine itself as necessarily taking the object.²¹

¹⁸ T. Pinkard, *German philosophy (1760-1860). The legacy of idealism*, Cambridge-New York, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 12.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

²¹ *Ibid.*, respectively p. 233 and p. 258.

According to a similar direction, argues Pippin. The inheritance of Sellars' critique of the myth of the given, developed by Brandom concerning the normative understanding of knowledge, is adopted by Pippin in order to account for Hegel's both non-naturalistic and non-metaphysical theory of *Geist*. Being a rational actor, therefore, is not something resulting from the human DNA, nor from the human physical form, nor from any other element that can be inferred regardless of the actor's behaviour. Being rational stems from the so-to-speak artificial construction of a legitimate realm of justified actions. And the historical deduction of this construction of rules, according to Pippin, coincides with Hegel's *Geist*; while commenting a passage from Hegel's texts, Pippin claims that «one is a free individual only as a 'result', an element of a collectively achieved mindedness; or in being taken to be one in a certain way. [...] The notion functions as a normative constraint in Hegel's account of spirit, constructed and held to as a social norm; it is not a metaphysical or natural kind»²².

This is then the non-metaphysical image of Hegel, rendered through the interpretative lens manufactured by analytic philosophy. The following movement is then paradoxically displayed: American pragmatism, in order to justify its position, finds a useful support in the revision of some Hegel-derived concepts. After that, the same concepts are again played against their source in order to test their consistency within Hegel's texts. The outcome is a movement *From Hegel to Hegel*, which, after exploiting it as a tool to an end, goes back to the original source to assess the overall consistency of its own project.

3. After the beautiful What aesthetics?

Here we come to the specific focus of this Forum. *After the beautiful* is a text published by Robert Pippin in 2014, which is the first genuine monographic attempt to deal with the outcome of Hegel's aesthetics in the light of the normative interpretation. What is at stake, however, is not simply the investigation of Hegel's enquiries. Pippin's objective is to overcome Hegel through Hegel himself. As the book's subtitle, *Hegel and the philosophy of pictorial modernism*, suggests, the aim is to

²² R. Pippin, *Hegel's practical philosophy. Rational agency as ethical life*, Cambridge-New York, Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 198.

investigate the widely discussed movement of modernism through the conceptual apparatus of an author who died thirty years before modernism itself. While avoiding to give a summary of the book, I shall simply say that the whole discussion revolves around Manet's figure, and in particular his famous paintings, *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe* and *Olympia*, painted between 1862 and 1863. The scandal features of these works are the focus of a great amount of studies, despite the fact that the main structure of Manet's revolutionary contribution is still under discussion. Pippin attempts an understanding of modernism based upon Hegel's concepts, in particular the conceptual toolbox of the normative Hegel elaborated by the American debate.

But how could Hegel – the theoretician of the end of art – be ever useful to understand an artistic form that is posterior to such alleged death? Pippin's answer is remarkably convincing. The death of art, in Hegel's perspective, would be the offspring of a solid form of philosophical optimism, developed also on the basis of systemic requirements. In other words, given that art is that discipline which allows a sensible and still incomplete knowledge of spirit, and given that spirit has reached the recognized level of conciliation, then art has no more reasons to exist. According to Pippin, this interpretation of Hegel's words moves from the premises of an achieved conciliation and thereby from some historical pacification accomplished by the spirit. Hence Hegel's optimism. What, instead, the modernist style makes clear is, precisely, that such a conciliation has never taken place. On the ground of the structural analogy between action and work of art in their signifying action²³, Pippin formulates his proposal. Social action, or better, the interpretation of social action by the observer is analogous to the interpretation of the work of art. In both cases, it is the sensible *embodiment* of a spiritual meaning, according again to the above outlined understanding of *Geist*. In art, as in action, a path of legitimation is undertaken, which claims its credentials of existence in the concrete elaboration of meaning. Also in this case, the normative reading is arguably very efficient. As the action has to account for its commitments within the realm of a regulated and legitimated space of reasons, similarly the work of art is called to sensibly mirror the rational whole from which it arises. In this regard, Hegel's theory of

²³ Id., *After the beautiful* cit., in particular pp. 47-52.

art as mode of knowledge is fully consistent. To put it bluntly, the scandal element of modernism would then be the demonstration of the unsustainability of a given way to make art, face to its historical and spiritual context. In the defying look *Olympia* sends to the observer, in her detached despise of the audience, one can see the need for a form of art which is able to account for a non-pacified and non-conciliated reality: «if one can understand the persistence of the kind of conflicting commitments in intellectual, cultural, and political life required by rapidly modernizing European societies, the kind Hegel thought had been overcome, one will be in a better position to begin to understand the aesthetic experimentation that seemed to begin with Manet»; the deal is, therefore, to understand on Hegel's basis what Hegel himself could not understand due to a conciliated understanding of modernity. Thus Hegel «may be the theorist of modernism, *malgré lui* and *avant la lettre*»²⁴. Along these lines, modernism, with its provoking and scandal-oriented approach, instead of being what Stendhal asked from the beautiful, that is to say a 'promise of happiness', is transformed into something beyond the beautiful and becomes a «*promise of meaning*»²⁵.

In strictly normative terms, pictorial modernism shows in the clearest possible way the unsustainability of the traditional understanding of art. It is necessary to go after the beautiful precisely because the requirements, the commitments faced by modernity do not allow any longer a legitimation through harmony. The space of reasons impose new *entitlements*, which are able to account for the bewilderment of the industrial society.

Anyone familiar with the great classics of twentieth century aesthetics may perceive, in these last remarks, a strong echo of Adorno's and Lukács' theories. Notably the latter, thanks to the theory of art's *Wiederspiegelung* (mirroring) of social dynamics, comes here more or less immediately to mind. Adorno would be no less appropriately mentioned here, as he understands art as the explicit expression of the unreconciled features of reality, as the expression of objective contradictions. It is not surprising, furthermore, that Pippin mentions

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

two other authors, who he describes as «left-Hegelian»²⁶, Michael Fried and Timothy Clark, and who have attempted an interpretation of pictorial modernism based on the criticism of society. Clark's idea of social test, and of the sustainability of the social test when it comes to works of art, together with Fried's theory of modern art failure in its attempt to avoid theatricality, are then clearly helpful for Pippin's elaboration of his position. In this regard, Pippin, finally, attempts a new incursion in contemporary philosophy and discusses Heidegger's position. In particular, his focus is on the relation between the moment of revelation and that of concealment which, according to Heidegger, is a key feature of any successful work of art. Also in this case, Hegel's inspiration is consistent with the premises outlined at the beginning of the volume. The issue is to show some sort of persistency of the problems outlined by Hegel also within more recent readings, which Hegel himself could not formulate due to his systemic optimism. The amphibian nature of man, torn between a signifying and a sensible component, as well as the social conflicts, on which action and institutions are based, instead of being solved, still require that distinctive form of aesthetic intelligibility made available by art. Half natural and half signifying, half voluntary and half unaware, half revealing and half concealing, art is still operational in the contemporary era, and it is so in strictly Hegelian terms: Hegel's

characterization of art as wedded to a sensible-affective mode of intelligibility that has been rendered superfluous by the achievements of speculative philosophy was a claim at odds with the deeper insights of his own project, as well as with the simple fact that we had not in modernity become somehow less the sensible, finite creatures we always have been, nor is modern capitalist society the realization of human freedom.²⁷

The main aim of this Forum is to take up the challenge of Pippin's work. The American interpretation of a non-metaphysical Hegel, on which still sometimes European continental scholars stick up their noses, undoubtedly presents a challenge. The weight of tradition has been burdening, since a long time, the shoulders of continental scholars. We are reluctant to accept interpretations which defy those

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

decrees we have in the meanwhile internalized, despite the fact that the very project of a non-metaphysical Hegel comes originally from the continent, and precisely from the group of Left Hegelians, already in the '40s of the nineteenth century. American philosophers such as Pippin and Pinkard have shown to be eager to open a dialogue with European interpreters, as the numerous quotes from Rüdiger Bubner, Dieter Henrich, Otto Pöggeler and Viellard-Baron in their texts are able to prove. Pippin had a Humboldt scholarship already in 1977/78 and then, twenty years later, for another year. The same applies to Pinkard, who was awarded scholarships by Humboldt and DAAD for several years. Clearly, also a discussion in the reverse direction may indeed yield interesting results.

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In his book *After the beautiful*, Robert Pippin brings to a renewed attention the long debated issue concerning how to understand some events of the history of art after Hegel with a Hegelian perspective. In particular, throughout an interpretation of the *Lectures on fine arts*, he proposes a rereading of the Hegelian philosophy of art. He delineates an approach that aims at explaining the radical turn in the history of European and American Visual Art, commonly recognized under the general label of 'modernism'. Pippin's starting point is an analysis of Hegel's texts on art, especially from the version edited by Hotho in 1835-38 and again in a second edition in 1842. He consequently moves on to the examination of the art world in the second part of the nineteenth-century, looking for elements of the Hegelian thought still relevant for that period.

In his interpretation, the Hegelian achievement regarding the understanding of the historicity of the meaning and normative status of art is central. The historical dimension of the normative aspect appears clear with respect to the relation between the artwork and the audience, the critic or the philosopher. After all, the connection to the historic framework is, of course, one of the core points of the Hegelian philosophy in general and of the constitution of his thought. Pippin often underlines this point, when he recalls that for Hegel, philosophy is 'its own time comprehended in thought'. Moving on from

this point, he identifies some elements – e.g. the image of the amphibian or that of the thousand-eyed Argus – which constitute the general Hegelian approach. This approach is then compared to the contemporary art-historical positions of T.J. Clark and M. Fried and confronted with the later philosophy of art of M. Heidegger.

Nevertheless, in Pippin's interpretation Hegel's diagnosis of the historical, social and political situation seems to be the most important resource of his approach. And it is also the place, where we can run into a «blind spot»²⁸ of his treatment of modernity, where Hegel would have committed a «cardinal error»²⁹ in his narrative. The historicity of the normative in Hegel's insight is the core of his approach, but right at this point he seems to fall into a misunderstanding of the conditions of the historical context. He seems to misinterpret his own time, because he anticipates in an optimistic way what represents the leading thread at the heart of his thought: the achievement of human freedom. Indeed, this task would not even be realized during the later development of the capitalistic society. And precisely Hegel's «greatest failure»³⁰ in comprehending the course of history, makes possible for Pippin's reading to render the Hegelian thought fruitful to explain the uncertainty, the bewilderment and the disorientation of the art of the Impressionists. For this reason, Pippin tries to elaborate an interpretation «all hopefully in a way true to the spirit of Hegel's basic position»³¹. At the same time, he also states that we should «take into account his project as a whole and appreciate the limitations of his diagnosis of the state of modern society»³².

In this way, the profile of Hegel as theorist of an artistic event that takes place some decades after him, turns out to be modified and revised or updated in some – even fundamental – features: «He may be – Pippin writes – *the* theorist of modernism, *malgré lui* and *avant la lettre*»³³.

Pippin seems to be deeply conscious of the problems that such an adaptation of the thought of a philosopher of the past can bring

²⁸ Id., *After the beautiful* cit., p. 46.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 53.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

about. He often highlights this kind of difficulties, particularly when talking about Hegel, a thinker whose commitment to his era is so rooted and for whom philosophy – as one reads in the *Philosophy of history* – can not be conceived as prophecy (Pippin talks about «the admittedly debatable value of such an attempt to time-travel with a philosopher, especially one whose work is self-consciously tied to his own age»³⁴).

In Chapter Three, «Politics and Ontology: Clark and Fried», Pippin briefly refers to a contemporary author, Arthur C. Danto. Danto affirms several times with respect to his art theory to have drawn inspiration from Hegel's *Lecture on the fine arts*, even to the point to call himself «a born again Hegelian». Danto was not someone who can be identified as a Hegelian scholar and he never dedicated a long and specific work to Hegel. He took some notions from Hegel – primarily, the so-called 'end of art thesis' – and tried to apply this 'Hegelian' vision to the art phenomena after Hegel's life – in particular, the art after Andy Warhol and the Sixties. Therefore, Danto aims at understanding his present throughout Hegelian arguments. He tries to bring the spirit of the Hegelian thought alive again.

Several critics – among others, Stephen Houlgate in a recent essay entitled *Hegel, Danto and the 'end of art'* – have noticed, with good reasons, the difficulties and the limits of Danto's recall to Hegel. Pippin himself remarks that it is «so hard to understand what he could mean when he calls himself a 'born again Hegelian'» and underlines «how cautious and self-consciously limited is his 'Hegelianism'»³⁵.

Admittedly, Pippin's project greatly diverges from Danto's one. The kind of rereading that Pippin conceives is completely different in his formulation: he builds on a careful examination of the Hegelian work and, identifying its internal limitations, states the relevance of a 'Hegelian approach' for a later age, even at the cost of some relevant modifications of the original account. Danto, instead, starts from the observation of his contemporary art situation and finds in Hegel some general attitudes he borrows for his own interpretation of the present. Both of them refer to Hegel and both, in a certain way, have a 'Hegelian approach' to the art of the time after Hegel. Nevertheless, it

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 72 and note.

is possible to recognize a radical difference in the orientation of their 'Hegelian' perspectives.

Danto's view provides the occasion to ask which elements should be part of a 'Hegelian approach', in order to be called such. This becomes especially complex with respect to a challenging field of Hegel's thought, such as the philosophy of art. The question of the reference to the textual editions and to the authentic Hegelian dictate, for example, is in and of itself problematic. Moreover, the analysis of the concrete artworks of Hegel's time plays a central role in the general implications of his thought. It is hard to conceive an application of this to a different panorama. How far from Hegel can an interpreter go in reading with Hegel a more recent episode of the art world? In other words, which are the limitations and the boundary lines of the Pippinian expression «*malgré lui* and *avant la lettre*», in order to call our approach still 'Hegelian'?

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Der Versuch, durch die Brille Hegels, dessen Philosophie der Kunst einige Jahrzehnte zuvor entstanden war, zu blicken, um die Neuerungen in der anti-idealisierten und selbstreflexiven Malerei Manets, wie auch die leeren, fragenden Blicke seiner Frauen, insbesondere der *Olympia* zu begreifen, mag absonderlich und gewagt erscheinen. Es handelt sich dabei jedoch um eine mutige, faszinierende Zeitreise, die Robert Pippin in *After the beautiful meisterhaft* unternimmt. Er hat sich nämlich auf das unwegsame Gelände der ästhetischen Theorie, wo die Entthronung der Schönheit stattgefunden hat, gewagt und hat somit die der anticlassizistischen Ästhetik Hegels innewohnende latente Deutungskraft, die sich mehrere Jahrzehnte nach dem 1831 plötzlich erfolgten Tod des großen Philosophen entfaltet, gezeigt. Diese Fähigkeit, sich in die Zukunft zu projizieren, liegt aber nach meiner Ansicht nicht daran, dass die Hegelsche (Kunst) Philosophie - ungewollt - orakelhafte Züge besessen hätte, noch daran, dass Hegel ein Prophet gewesen wäre, der eine kulturelle Trauer vorhersagen konnte, die sich über dem Westen ausbreiten sollte, sondern vielmehr an den bedeutungsvollen perspektivischen Linien, Rissen gera-

dezu, die seine Philosophie durchziehen und die einen Blick auf zukünftige Himmel freigeben, sogar auf den unsrigen.

Sicher war Hegel nicht in der Lage, die Schwächen der Philosophie einer fortschreitenden Geschichte vorauszusehen³⁶, noch hat er die Verbreitung neuer Medien geahnt, die die Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts wiederbeleben sollten³⁷, aber er hat mit großer Klarheit wichtige »Auflösungen«³⁸ und epochale Knotenpunkte mit jahrhundertelangen Nachwirkungen erkannt: die einschneidenden Veränderungen in der Gestalt des Künstlers, der immer freier, individueller und anarchistischer wurde (man denke an Hegels Reflexionen über Jean Paul); den Todeskampf der auf anachronistische Weise immer noch der Religion unterstellten Kunst, die neue Rolle des Rezipienten, der nachdenklich und meditativ wurde³⁹, sowie die zunehmende Ausgrenzung der Kunst in einer intellektbetonten Gesellschaft⁴⁰, die aber kein radikales Aussterben bedeutete⁴¹.

Warum sollte man also nicht wagen, die Interpretationsmöglichkeiten, die in der Hegelschen Ästhetik angelegt waren, auszudehnen und über die zeitlichen Grenzen des 19. Jahrhunderts, in dem Hegel lebte und wirkte, hinauszugehen, um bis zu unserer dissonanten Zeit zu vorzudringen: zum Beispiel zu den »Bildern in Bewegung« des Videokünstlers Bill Viola, im Sinne Hegels Kunst des »Humanus«⁴² in höchster Potenz, fließende, un stabile Kunst, die sich von jeglichem ästhetischen Imperativ befreit hat, in der die Flächigkeit des Videos buchstäblich zu einem tausendäugigen Argus wird und der Blick des Betrachters nicht nur vorausgesetzt (wie bei Manet),

³⁶ Id., *After the beautiful* cit., p. 136.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

³⁸ Für einen weiteren Zusammenhang der verschiedenen »Auflösungen«, auf die Hegel in den einzelnen Ästhetikvorlesungen Bezug nimmt, möchte ich aus verweisen auf F. Iannelli, *Tod, Ende, Auflösung der Kunst? Überlegungen über Hegel und Danto*, »Hegel-Jahrbuch« 2 (2015), forthcoming.

³⁹ G.W.G. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Kunst. Berlin 1823*, Nachgeschrieben von Heinrich Gustav Hotho, hrsg. von A. Gethmann-Siefert, Hamburg, Meiner, 1998, p. 6.

⁴⁰ G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophie der Kunst oder Ästhetik. Im Sommer 1826. Mitschrift von Kehler*, hrsg. von A. Gethmann-Siefert - B. Collenberg-Plotnikov, unter Mitwirkung von F. Iannelli - K. Berr, München, Fink, 2004, p. 8.

⁴¹ *Aus Raumgründen* kann hier auf die umstrittene These des Ende der Kunst nicht näher eingegangen werden. Es sei mir daher erlaubt auf den Band K. Vieweg - F. Iannelli - F. Vercellone, *Das Ende der Kunst als Anfang freier Kunst*, München, Fink, 2015, verweisen zu können.

⁴² G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophie der Kunst (1823)* cit., p. 115.

sondern geradezu gefordert wird, wie es allgemein im Schaffen Violas der Fall ist, ganz besonders aber in *Observance*. In dieser mehrstimmigen *Video installation* aus dem Jahr 2002 wird die soziale Funktion der Kunst als kollektiver Versuch der Selbsterkenntnis angesichts der Katastrophen der Geschichte (mit großer Wahrscheinlichkeit spielt Viola auf den 11. September 2001 an) nachdrücklich betont. Es geht aber auch um den »amphibischen« Status des Menschen, um seine Zugehörigkeit zur sinnlichen Dimension, aber auch deren Überschreitung, um das labile Gleichgewicht, das weiterhin jedes Kunstwerk von Bedeutung charakterisiert.

TERRY PINKARD
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1. In reviewing Constable's painting, *The hay wrain* in 1824, Stendhal praised it for its beauty, claiming famously it indeed held up a mirror to nature. In the same breath, Stendhal also took his praise back by also saying that, all told, he still wished the mirror had reflected a more important and weighty subject. A delightful painting thus might be true to nature, and it might be beautiful, but still might be missing something. Pippin's book is in effect a reply about what might be missing. However, he also rejects something Stendhal said in another context, namely, that beauty is the promise of happiness. However, from Kant we are supposed to have learned that what gives agency its dignity is not in fact happiness but freedom, which Kant identified (more or less and with lots of qualifications) with following the moral law. Promising happiness is not enough, and, as Pippin puts it, «the modernist equivalent to beauty as the promise of happiness is this promise of meaning»⁴³. So Pippin argues, something like a Hegelian social and historical theory is best equipped to guide us through the ups and downs of this promise.

Once the problem is put in that way, then one of the issues confronting the moderns is therefore the one already foreshadowed by F. H. Jacobi in his critiques of all Enlightenment (and of Kant in particular), namely, that modern thought runs the risk of 'nihilism' (a term that Jacobi seems to have coined himself). Reason can destroy

⁴³ R.B. Pippin, *After the beautiful* cit., p. 59.

the old edifices of thought and life, but it cannot build up any new edifices to take their place. Kant's three critiques tried to deliver the scaffolding for the new edifice, Hegel thought he had delivered the sense of what was up, and modernist art, on Pippin's view, steps into this space to aesthetically investigate the promise of meaning.

The «promise of meaning» wasn't kept, and in our recent history, we became more problematic to ourselves, and art correspondingly also became more problematic to itself. We had thought that art at its best imitated nature because we had thought that at our best we imitated nature. After Kant, we could no longer think that. We were, as it were, giving the law to ourselves, not reading it off the cosmos. But where does that self-given law get its determinacy? In particular, what of the indeterminacy that is present when the self-given laws are at odds with each other?

Hegel had obviously thrown his lot in with the idea that modern rational institutions could resolve or at least tame those conflicts and resolve the indeterminacy problem, but he had also argued that that such an activity was social and historical and always up for grabs about its own putative success. Pippin argues that the stresses within his own views meant that part of what Hegel was after was bound to fall apart. Thus, «Hegel in his greatest failure was not concerned about this potential instability in the modern world, about losing so much common ground so that a general irresolvability in any of these possible conflicts becomes ever more apparent»⁴⁴.

However, there are problems of meaninglessness and problems of conflict, and the two are not the same. One of the major features of liberal thought since 1815 has been its deep commitment to the idea that in social life, conflict is unavoidable and political institutions have to be devised to deal with that modern but now inescapable fact. Anti-liberal thought has always looked at conflict as something to be overcome, either in some future where the final struggle is fought and finally won, or in some authoritarian rule of some overall. But that doesn't mean that liberals think the whole is meaningless. (Or is that the conclusion to which they are committed, whether they think that or not?)

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

2. Manet is supposed to have gotten the post-Hegelian world right but not as a 'mirror' of the life of his times but as... what? Manet does not «promise meaning» but what is he promising? The «promise of meaning» appeared in art, Michael Fried's terms, as «facingness, instantaneousness and strikingness, refusal of absorptive closure» – the achievement of aesthetic meaningfulness in a world of increasing meaninglessness. In particular, the last one – absorptive closure – forms the strategy taken up by the new bourgeois in this disintegrating state of shared meaning. One simply 'refuses' to be so taken up, and the blank stares of Manet's subjects both display this and make it a topic of aesthetic criticism. Manet's paintings do not solve that problem – how could they? – but they exhibit the way in which painting in the 1860's could «compel conviction in the independence and genuineness of the painting as a painting»⁴⁵. Pippin replies that in fact our «Hegelian problem is not a 'problem' of the sort that will ever allow a 'solution' » and that «to face these issues, and, necessarily, to face them collectively, unavoidably, incessantly, is simply what it is, what it has come to be, to be 'Geist'».

Here are three questions, one about Hegel and Lukács, the other about Heidegger, the third more general. First, are we not therefore back to Stendhal's original point? The paintings that express absorptive closure, instantaneousness and the like are indeed what similar to what Stendhal called the 'mirrors' of nature. They are not moralistic tales telling us how far we have fallen but aesthetic achievements that express our unreconciled status in a powerful way. If so, then perhaps we do not have the opposition between imitation and art's achieving «some sort of achieved collective like-mindedness» such that it expresses Geist's «doubling itself»⁴⁶. Is Pippin thus in effect resuscitating Lukács theory of the realist bourgeois novel – that it accurately 'mirrored' the bourgeois society and its contradictions – for a theory of bourgeois painting? That Manet's art does in fact 'imitate' its world? Second, if we are not making Lukács our model, then is Pippin in effect conceding Hegel to Heidegger, even after his devastating critique of Heideggerian aesthetics? For Heidegger, we live in the age of consummate meaninglessness, there is a way in

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

which our sense-making activities always resist completion, but there is no dialectic driving us out of this, no deep contradiction pushing for reconciliation. Our world is both perfectly consistent and hollow. Does Pippin want either to accept Heidegger's description of our age – in which case «only a god can save us» – or to hold out the idea of reconciliation as an «infinite task» driven not just by conflict but by contradiction? Finally, how closely linked are social conflict and meaninglessness? Hegel, liberal in his acceptance of conflict and non-liberal in his all too trusting faith in the modern bureaucratic state, nonetheless accepted a kind of deep pluralist conflict in social life. In fact, there was nothing particularly new about the theatricality of modern life. The problem of 'theatricality' had arisen not recently from capitalism but from the older wars of religion, where disclosing one's true religious opinions could land you in deep trouble. For Hegel, the problem of theatricality was its deeply contradictory nature. For the Heideggerian, we may simply have made ourselves comfortable with being theatrical and now see it as part of the basic structure of life in the modern world. What does art do in this state? Pop art continues to promise happiness, which may still be possible in a flattened world. What does other art do? Just resist?

ITALO TESTA

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1. Robert Pippin's powerful and thought-provoking *After the beautiful* takes the negativist approach to artworks once developed by authors such as Adorno in relation to literary theory and modern music and extends it in an original way to pictorial modernism, reshaping it in a more Hegel-oriented fashion. According to Pippin, the founding fathers of modernist painting such as Manet not only negate previous pictorial conventions, but also put into question and address at a fundamental level the very possibility and legitimacy of art, and especially the «credibility, conviction, and integrity» of easel painting⁴⁷. Along with aesthetic negativism, it is not only the intelligibility of aesthetic meaning that is 'negated', but also social intelligibility itself, because modernism negates communication, that is, it addresses the possibility

⁴⁷ Id., *After the beautiful* cit., pp. 1-2.

of the failure of «mutual interpretability»⁴⁸ between social actors in the modern, alienated world.

The Hegelian principle of mutual recognition as a condition of modern social freedom sets, then, the normative context against which the philosophical import of modernist negativism can be framed. The ‘facingness’ of Manet’s paintings, i.e. the fact that (according to Michael Fried’s interpretation) they are turned toward the beholder with a sort of indifference to that beholder, as if they were invisible, or at least irrelevant, is taken by Pippin to suggest an indifference *to* (if not the impossibility *of*) mutual recognition⁴⁹. And this reading is combined in *After the beautiful* with an action-theoretical approach to aesthetic intelligibility. The sensible embodiment of aesthetic meaning is thus understood following the model of the embodiment of the agent’s intention in its bodily movements, such that they count as the deed I intend. This is a particular and original aspect of Pippin’s approach and deserves a detailed analysis of its implications. However here I would like to focus on only one aspect which seems to me to put some limits on the analogy between action-theoretical meaning and aesthetic meaning.

According to Pippin’s reconstruction of Hegel’s social theory of action and expressive freedom, a free action is one that fully expresses me, that is, «such that I can fully recognize myself in the deeds I bring about»⁵⁰. But the deeds «are truly mine and so free» – that is, I can have a «nonalienated» relation to myself – only if a crucial condition is fulfilled, that is, only if «the act description is one recognizable as such in the community in which I express and realize myself». A condition which cannot be satisfied by «*any* social arrangement of norms» but only by one that «has achieved some mutuality of recognition or mutuality of cognitive social statuses»⁵¹. Hence, only where the social community implements the norm of mutual recognition can individual and collective action be said to be ‘truly’ mine and thus free, that is, it can be said to realize a normative identity. When this condition is not met – and this is, according to Pippin, the case of the post-Hegelian world, which makes modernist art relevant – every action is

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

somehow an alienated one. Of course agents can still identify psychologically with their actions, but these are not truly (normatively) their own. As a consequence, they are alienated from themselves and not free, or not fully free (depending on whether social freedom is understood as an all-or-nothing matter or as something that may come in degrees). Here I do not want to go into the details of this very demanding theory of freedom which, combining the social theoretical notion of alienation with a normative understanding of recognition, could lead to the consequence that freedom (or full freedom) may never be possible until the norms of reciprocal recognition are successfully institutionally realized; (which is nevertheless a conclusion that, under different premises, also 20th century dialectical negativism has committed itself to). My point is rather that here there is a manifest asymmetry with aesthetical experience. In fact, if the analogy between the meaning of social action and the meaning of aesthetic works were to be followed through to its logical conclusion, then one would expect that all the while that the normative conditions of recognition aren't institutionally satisfied, then not only social freedom but also aesthetic experience would not be 'truly' possible: that is, there could not be authentic, true, full embodiment of sensible aesthetic meanings in artworks and this could not be experienced as such. But this contradicts the very understanding of aesthetic experience that Pippin, following Hegel and Fried, attributes to modernism. The point is, that contrary to social freedom, aesthetic experience can be truly realized (in its most perfected form) even when such conditions aren't met. Moreover, modernist art, as Pippin himself argues, can be said to consist exactly in *the* experience that such conditions aren't satisfied. The authentic modernist artwork is such that it manifests the alienated state of social action, the difference between mutuality of recognition and a social practice which does not implement it. If this is the case, does it not reveal that such an understanding of artworks cannot be wholly captured within an action-theoretical framework?

2. According to Pippin's interpretation, Hegel's misconceived thesis on the end of art is heavily based on the overly optimistic expectation that a mutual cognitive status could be historically achieved and

institutionally stabilized⁵². In such a reconciled social condition where institutions are basically rational, a sensible aesthetic embodiment of meaning (which anticipates that reconciliation is lacking in social reality), would cease to be world-historically necessary, and art would lose its crucial meaning for human experience. But the fact that this expectation has been defeated, is what (according to Pippin) liberates the potential of Hegel's understanding of the critical, negative role of art from his limits, and makes him «*the* theorist of modernism, *malgré lui* and *avant la lettre*»⁵³. But here a question arises: if this expectation had been realized, or if it will at some point be realized, what should become of art according to Pippin? Should we then somehow subscribe to the thesis of the end of art? If we answer affirmatively, then we are in some sense back to Hegel's position, and, while making space for the authentic experience of modernism, we have only historically postponed (maybe ad infinitum) Hegel's diagnosis on the forthcoming end of art. If we answer negatively to that question, then some important modification of Hegel's original account has taken place, but a bunch of further questions arises. As we'll see, some sort of ambivalence can be detected in Pippin's position, but I would guess that he should be more inclined to answer negatively. If so, how come that art would still be (world-historically) relevant? What could make it a still-necessary experience?

3. When one comes to the question of the ultimate grounds for Pippin's criticism of Hegel's thesis of the end of art, and of what justifies the enduring relevance of modernist art for the contemporary world – in fact, an alienated world – two argumentative strategies can be found. On the surface there is an historicist account, according to which, if we subscribe to Hegel's anti-essentialist understanding of spirit as social practice, then there are no reasons to exclude, as he seemed to do, that art practice could not change its meaning and adapt to different historical situations (where normative expectations could have gone wild, or even – why not? – been realized). But this line is always connected with, and distinguishable from another, different one. Pippin repeatedly criticizes here the idea he attributes to Hegel

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 60.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

that in aesthetic experience at its peak we could somehow break free from the prison of our bodily naturalness, and that philosophy, radicalizing this tendency, could offer a form of the spirit's reconciliation «of itself with itself» that would no longer need the medium of corporeal sensible embodiment⁵⁴. Pippin qualifies this expectation of being «wholly liberated» from naturalness as a «nondialectical notion»⁵⁵. Here seems to be found the ultimate grounds as to why, according to Pippin, Hegel's expectation that art will be transcended is misconceived, and a form of sensible embodiment is still needed. But this argument seems, at least *prima facie*, to be placed on a different level than the historicist one, because it relies on a structural, one may say metaphysical account of the relation between nature and spirit. But what about the enduring necessity of sensible embodiment? This can be read in a weaker sense, compatible with a factual historicist account (and with the affirmative answer to the question posed in paragraph one), according to which this holds until a rational, reconciled modernity is finally implemented. But a stronger reading is also possible, according to which sensible embodiment is somehow *a priori* (even in an historical, retrospective sense of a *a priori* necessity) unavoidable (which could ultimately ground the affirmative answer to the question of the previous paragraph, according to which art could still be relevant in a reconciled world). Here there is again some ambivalence in Pippin's position, but it seems to me that the reading most consistent with the text is the second one. Otherwise, what would Pippin mean when, referring to this «basic tension» between mindedness and naturalness, he uses terms such as «inevitability», «inherently or perennial character»⁵⁶, labelling this tension as a «now-unending problem»⁵⁷ – not a problem «of the sort that will ever allow a solution»⁵⁸ – and such that we will have to face such an issue 'unavoidably, incessantly'?

4. These expressions all seem to address a sort of structural problem which finally is connected with what Pippin defines as the «una-

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

voidably amphibian status of the human»⁵⁹. Such an amphibian status consists in the fact that we are both corporeal and normative, natural and spiritual beings, or, in the words of Robert Brandom (which Pippin alludes to), that «we have both natures and histories»⁶⁰. Of course, such a status can take different historical shapes in different social contexts – and as such includes the tension between social objectivity and subjective freedom, social necessity and individual freedom, causality and normativity – and there can be historical practices that, such as modernist art, better express it at a given historical point. But still, the claim of the unavoidability of this status is set at a meta-level which cannot be reduced to its historical determination. And even if we were to accept Pippin’s interpretation of Hegel’s passage on this ‘amphibian status’ in his *Lectures on fine arts*, according to which this has to be understood as an historical phenomenon of the «modern intellect»⁶¹, this would hardly be consistent with Pippin’s use of this notion as having a «perennial character».

Here the question arises as to whether Pippin’s insistence on the amphibian status of human beings finally introduces some alteration to his previous «bootstrapping» account of spirit. Not only does Pippin’s approach in *After the beautiful* seem (more or less implicitly) to distance itself from inferentialist interpretations of Hegel such as Brandom’s, vindicating aesthetic intelligibility as some sort of not inferential, and not assertoric access to conceptual content. But he also seems to distance himself from the strong bootstrapping account of spirit he has previously defended, for instance in his disagreement with McDowell. Pippin previously endorsed an account of the spirit’s self-constitution understood as a radical bootstrapping process⁶², and on this basis he disputed the idea that the spirit is bound to natural dependency. But Pippin’s current criticism of the supposedly Hegelian pretence that the spirit breaks free from naturalness seems to rely on aesthetic experience in order to put at least a limit to the self-constitution thesis he has been supporting elsewhere. And this is reflected also in the way that Pippin in this book combines a phenomenological

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 92. See R.B. Brandom, *Selbstbewusstsein und Selbst-Konstitution*, in C. Halbig - M. Quante - L. Siep (eds.), *Hegels Erbe*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 2004, pp. 46-77.

⁶¹ R.B. Pippin, *After the beautiful* cit., p. 46.

⁶² *Id.*, *Hegel’s practical philosophy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 202.

approach – modelled on Fried –of aesthetic representation as self-constituting experience, with T.J. Clark’s objectivist approach to the material conditions of art. It is worth noting here that Pippin’s use of the radical bootstrapping model was connected with a criticism of McDowell’s notion of ‘second nature’. Now the adoption of the ‘amphibian status’ picture seems to reproduce at least some traits of a negativist model of second nature – what is this amphibian status if not another word to address the phenomenon of second naturalness? – which, if we follow for instance Adorno’s account of it⁶³, is a notion whose structure reflects the intrinsic tension, the ambivalent mirroring between our natures and histories, and hence is not identical to the notion of ‘spirit’, and cannot be exhausted by an historicist account of it.

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RESPONSES

I am very grateful to Mario Farina and to the journal *Lebenswelt* for organizing this discussion, and especially grateful for the thoughtful and challenging questions posed by the commentators. Each of their remarks requires considerably more discussion than is here possible, so the following can only count as initial, preliminary responses.

1. Dr. Campana expresses a reasonable skepticism that Hegel’s understanding of art, especially the historical situation of romantic or modern art, can be used as any basis for extrapolating Hegel’s analysis to future art. The suggestion is that Hegel’s understanding of art itself is *essentially time-bound*, and so any extrapolation is bound to be much more a complete re-invention or loose variation of a *very* generally Hegelian approach (one that locates aesthetic meaning in the interchange between work and beholder/audience), rather than anything like an extension of Hegel’s position. And Campana notes a

⁶³ See T.W. Adorno, *Die Idee der Naturgeschichte*, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. 1, hrsg. v. R. Tiedemann, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1973 (Eng. tr. by R. Hullot-Kentor, «Telos 60» (1984), p. 111-124).

contrast with another use of Hegel, Arthur Danto's emphasis on the «the end of art» thesis. The implication seems to be that, at the level of abstraction necessary to bring Hegel's position to bear on later art, all sorts of other, even very different, variations on Hegelian themes are possible.

It is true that the approach I argue for detaches Hegel's position, even though a strongly historicist one, from the specific analysis of what was for him modern, that is romantic, art. (Not entirely, for Hegel says that in this historical phase, art transcends itself, but as art; already a modernist credo.) But my use of Hegel does not seem to me nearly abstract enough to court comparison with Danto's only very faintly Hegelian interpretation. Hegel never suggested that the art/non-art distinction would be transcended, and his famous thesis did not hold that art, or the art category was over, defunct or irrelevant, and in that sense a thing of the past, *ein Vergangenes*. Rather the claim was that fine art could no longer be a significant vehicle of human self-knowledge, or as significant as it had been in the ancient and Renaissance world. (To some degree, I accept the latter claim, but argue that it should count as an indictment of the form of life coming into view in Hegel's time). The features of Hegel's account that do not tie his position essentially to romantic or modern art are (i) that art should be understood as a distinct form (a sensible-affective form) of intelligibility, especially of collective self-knowledge, achievable in no other way than aesthetically (in simpler terms, that art is a form of truth), (ii) that Hegel has a general theory about how material objects and bodily movements can be said to bear meaning, and that, especially, his understanding of how bodily movements count as intentional actions can be of great use in understanding his approach to art works. That use stems from his understanding of the public, performative, and socially contestable character of such actions. And (iii) given the importance of sociality in (ii), the emergence of failed forms of sociality or the failure of attempts at complete mutuality of recognitive status in modern societies, will require, on Hegelian terms, art works responsive to this failure, made in the light of it. I argue that this is going on in Manet and in Cézanne. This all seems to me much more deeply Hegelian in spirit than Danto's superficial appropriation of the «the end of art» thesis, an appropriation that

has all the virtues of theft over hard work.

2. In his remarks, Professor Iannelli takes up the spirit of the time-travel I attempt with Hegel and applies his own version to the video art of Bill Viola, who, Iannelli suggests, embodies several key, aesthetic, historically responsive features, all in a Hegelian spirit. The art work is free of aesthetic imperatives, self-defining, very clearly a kind of thousand-eyed Argus, evokes our «amphibian» status, realizes the Hegelian goal of considering art as a means of collective, historical self-knowledge (now in the face of the catastrophe of history, after 9/11 especially), an art which demands a thoughtful, meditative response, not mere sensual enjoyment.

I am of course in sympathy with the goal of reflecting on contemporary art with these Hegelian notions in mind, but the embodiment of such broadly similar ideas alone does not establish an artist as a great artist (or even as an artist), and that is the question that comes to mind in considering an artist like Viola (or much conceptual art for that matter). If the aesthetic is to be a distinct mode of intelligibility, and not a mere vehicle for 'ideas', then that sensuous modality must involve a realization of intentionality that demands a distinctly aesthetic reaction. It must not serve as something like the mere 'base' for a 'thought' to be expressed, or a mere occasion for a beholder's 'experience'. This is vague of course, but I find techniques like Viola's super slow motion, and fixation on dualities, obvious and trite, an expression that does not provoke multiple interpretations, or a sustained, absorbed, distinct form of attentiveness. The effects also seem to me trite, bordering on the decorative and commercial (and gratingly self-important, pompous); something like a mere stimulus for the viewer, not a work with the authority to compel attention to it and conviction in it. (These are notions of Michael Fried's that I discuss in the third chapter of *After the beautiful*). This is, I know, unfair to Iannelli (and to Viola), and could only be fair with a longer discussion of this distinctive aesthetic modality, the social meaning of art works, and what could count in the post-Hegelian world as the 'greatness' of art. Without such a discussion, these are just mere counter-assertions, but I hope they are enough to count as the beginning of a possible dialogue and debate.

3. Professor Pinkard presses on the question of the status of modernity and its relation to modern art works in my account. He asks: Is the claim for the ‘doubling’ of ourselves in art works all that different from a claim like Lukács’s about how art works can ‘mirror’ their age? And: what does the critique of Heidegger in the fourth chapter imply about his claim of «consummate meaninglessness» in modernity? Does a Hegelian account still hold out some hope for reconciliation, even if as an infinitely postponed but still meaningful goal? And what is the relation between a society in such chaos that it counts as ‘meaningless’, and a more typical picture of modernity as involving endless, unavoidable conflict and compromise.

The idea of modernism in the arts (let us stipulate for the sake of argument; there are many ways of posing his problem) assumes that the form of life coming into view as the realization of early enlightenment ideas – the supreme cognitive authority of modern natural science, a new market economy based on the accumulation of private capital, rapid urbanization and industrialization, the privatization of religion and so the secularization of the public sphere – was so unprecedented in human history that art’s very purpose or rationale, its mode of address to an audience, had to be fundamentally rethought. These conditions were so extreme in their uniqueness that a self-conscious art, in any way tied to past assumptions, would now have to exist under some threat to its very possibility. A response to such a development was taken to require a novelty, experimentation and formal radicality so extreme as to seem unintelligible to its ‘first responders’ (as such works almost always were).

It is in this context that Pinkard’s questions must be addressed. First, I identify a specific problem in such a social world – the possibility of some successful circulation of meaning in the putatively shared act descriptions and appraisals of human agency, and a similar kind of issue in the production and reception of material art works. Nothing about this sharability being under and new and intense pressure, though, entails any complete ‘meaninglessness’. By and large that is not a Hegelian or my term. It is Heidegger’s and, I tried to show, is subject to a Hegelian critique. Being under pressure or threat is only salient if things haven’t completely broken down. (It would be hard to know what «*completely* broken down» could mean.) Manet and Cézanne are not treated as avatars of meaninglessness. Even the

mystery and opacity of *The great bathers* is determinate, even if determinately disturbing. And there is a specific Hegelian issue at stake – the achievability of genuine mutuality of recognitive status. The incompleteness of such a collective project does not mean that all the successes of liberal democratic society are called into question; just their sufficiency. What it would be for art to be made and appreciated in such a context – incomplete or depressingly ‘stalled’ ethical modernization – is the question being raised with a Hegelian framework.

So the prospect of reconciliation is just the promise of full social justice, something Hegel understands as the realization of a collective form of rationality, or mutual justifiability. This notion of ‘realization’ is also an answer to Pinkard on ‘imitation’. The presuppositions of that notion are rejected by Hegel. I treat as one of the most important passages in Hegel’s art lectures the following: «And it was not as if these ideas and doctrines were already there, *in advance* of poetry... on the contrary, the mode of artistic production was such that what fermented in these poets they could work out *only* in this form of art». ⁶⁴ So the very notion of «what there is to imitate» is in the process of becoming what it is; and in part becomes what it is also in the realization of ‘worked out’ art works.

On the issue of endless conflict: it is true that modern, liberal democratic societies presume what has been called the plurality of different and incommensurable concepts of the good; they promote a toleration of this condition, and so they accept the inevitability of conflict, and, accordingly, hope for a politics of fair debate and eventual compromise. But the situation I describe, in Hegel’s name, remains far ‘below’ the level of such a liberal-democratic picture. That ideal presumes some sort of equal democratic citizenship and its attainment and we are far, far away from anything remotely resembling that. We have not reached the level where the notions of conflict of this sort could apply. The influence of power and money, not reason, have prevented the attainment of such a condition. Hierarchical relations are sustained by domination, often disguised, veiled, as forms of reason, but those veils are pretty thin. The radicality of that situation is

⁶⁴ G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, in *Werke in zwanzig Bänden*, Bd. 13, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1970, p. 141 (Eng. tr. by T.M. Knox, *Aesthetics. Lessons on fine art*, vol. 1, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1975, p. 102).

manifest in several forms of modernist art.

4. Professor Testa very helpfully focuses on the link established in the book between Hegel's 'action-theoretic' account of meaning (understanding deeds, mine or others) and aesthetic meaning, and he poses several difficult questions about the implications of insisting on this link. He rightly notes that this general account of how material being, bodily movements and painted canvases, could bear meaning is not *itself* a moment in some historical development that will likely be superseded in some future moment. Its status seems metaphysical, of trans-historical significance. This relation between the a priori or philosophical level and the historicism of Hegel's accounts of art, religion and political life, is the source of the possible tensions he notices in the position I ascribe to Hegel.

The first tension is derived from what Testa sees as an implication of my claim that Hegel's optimism about the implicit, full rationality of modern institutions is misplaced. If such putative claims to rational sufficiency are actually breaking down, then our mutual intelligibility to each other would seem to be under some threat. But if I want to explain modernist art in terms of such breakdowns, how is it that a form of *aesthetic* intelligibility *is* possible, in a world where something fundamental in social intelligibility (defined as it is by the 'action-theoretical' theory) is supposed under great pressure?

The first thing to notice is that social intelligibility being under threat (because of unequal recognitive social positions) is not at all a claim about *utter* unintelligibility or *complete* alienation. (See Testa's remark, which I was not at all trying to defend, that in the position sketched, «every action is somehow an alienated one»). He notes the qualification I will insist on, but he does not pursue it in raising his question. Recognitive mutuality comes in possible degrees, and the lack of full mutuality of recognitive status in bourgeois civil and political society is intelligible *as precisely that*. Bourgeois society exists in contradiction to itself (it systematically violates its own norms) but that fact regularly manifests itself as such a fact, properly understood. Correspondingly, art works can *both* illuminate this 'threat' and itself manifest its characteristic implications. That manifestation is of a piece with the social manifestations of normative dissonance, comprehensible as such. The aesthetic expression will have to avoid falling

into the ideologically distorted self-representation of a 'wrong life', and that can put great pressure on possible modes of expression, requiring extreme innovation. But, after all, one of the responses most made about modernist art is that it is 'difficult', its possible audience seems ever more restricted to those willing to work out such novel, difficult forms. In short, the situation is hardly one of a complete breakdown in social intelligibility, and a contrasting pocket of meaningfulness in modernist art.

Second, another good question: Testa asks about the implications of my linking Hegel's precipitous declaration about «the end of art» with his precipitous declaration of the implicit full rationality of modern institutions. Quite rightly, Testa asks: do I mean to suggest that the full realization of a rational form of life in some ideal future would, on Hegel's terms, still mean «the end of art»? He thinks I appear committed to this, and notes what he thinks is an overall tension in my position between a radically historicist conception of the 'subject' of art, Geist, and the ahistorical picture of a naturally embodied «amphibian», living permanently in the world of both nature and spirit. (It is this duality which in principle would always require a sensible-affective modality of intelligibility).

However, Testa also appears to acknowledge that my criticism of Hegel here is double-edged. Hegel's assessment of the institutional life of modern societies was clearly hasty. But his assumption that there *could* in principle be the sort of resolution and reconciliation assumed by that assessment is also rejected in *After the beautiful*. Testa cites the passages where this revision of Hegel is suggested⁶⁵. Understanding the implications of such a post-Hegelian insistence on, basically, human finitude, would require a lengthy, independent discussion, but it is a feature of the proper assessment of modernity that I have insisted on since my 1991 book, *Modernism as a philosophical problem* («unending modernity», «the end of epochality», etc.)⁶⁶.

According, when I characterized Hegel's «amphibian» metaphor as characteristic of a specific modern self-understanding, I meant to be referring to his notion of such a being 'wandering' between two worlds, divided against itself in an irreconcilable way in such a self-

⁶⁵ R.B. Pippin, *After the beautiful* cit., pp. 65, 95, 142.

⁶⁶ Id., *Modernism as a philosophical problem*, Cambridge (MA), Blackwell, 1991.

understanding. *That* sense of our «amphibian» character is historically distinctive and not one that follows necessarily from noting the unavoidably «natural» and «geistig» character of human being, a characterization that I agree is a philosophical claim, or even, to use a word that must be used cautiously in Hegel, ‘metaphysical’ (I pointed out that there are, after all, amphibians, animals who do live in both worlds).

Is this inconsistent with the radically historical character of Geist that I insist on in, for example, the several exchanges with McDowell? I don’t think so. In those exchanges a major point of contention is the appropriateness of the McDowellian notion of «second nature» as a gloss on Hegelian Geist. The point was not that it is not appropriate, but that the shape of any such collectively self-formed set of dispositional and habitual traits is far more open-ended than McDowell seems to allow, and requires us, if we are attempting to understand what has become of us, a far more ambitious attempt at a narrative of how we got to be ‘us’, than McDowell wants to allow. That will ultimately involved a historical account of rationality that McDowell resists. But this discussion of the «self-constituting» (or «bootstrapping») nature of Geist is independent of the question of whether any *complete* ‘liberation’ from natural bonds is possible or not, or what the content of a collective self-understanding, especially in the era of highly developed natural sciences, should now look like. These are not necessarily two different questions, but two distinct aspects of the same question.

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AFTERWORD SOME OPEN QUESTIONS

«The art of painting is an art of thinking». This quote, although from Magritte, serves well (taken with a different spirit) as a starting point to understand the Hegelian views presented in Pippin’s book, *After the beautiful*.

In the book, Pippin distinctly shows what it means, for a Hegelian philosopher, to say that figurative art is a way of, if not properly ‘thinking’, at least making certain features of ourselves intelligibly available to us. But the book offers the reader much more: Pippin not only provides an interesting reconstruction of the Hegelian approach to aesthetic intelligibility – both in its connection with Kant and in relation to other competing approaches.⁶⁷ He also makes clear why we should still care about such a Hegelian approach: it helps us to understand much of the fate of visual art after Hegel, firstly *modernist* figurative art but also more contemporary forms of visual art⁶⁸. In an interesting philosophical «back to the future» attempt, Pippin projects Hegel’s account forward about half a century, in order to look at *modernism* painting *sub specie Hegelii*. In order to do so, he draws on the views of M. Fried and J. Clark, fleshing out a possible Hegelian view of what happened in pictorial art after 1860.

In this book, Pippin puts to work many of the conceptual and interpretative Hegelian tools he has been developing over the course of his career. This makes the book extremely rich and inspiring, and it would be desperate to attempt to do justice to all its details here⁶⁹. I will therefore focus on just the question of aesthetic intelligibility, and, more particularly, the distinctive *historical* turn that Hegel gives to the possibility of aesthetic intelligibility itself. Stressing this point requires a small *tour the force* of the basic elements of Pippin’s reading⁷⁰.

⁶⁷ Schiller, for instance, as well as Heidegger, to which Pippin devotes the last chapter of the book.

⁶⁸ See R.B. Pippin, *What was abstract art? (From the point of view of Hegel)*, «Critical Inquiry» 29 (2002), for a sketch of a Hegelian take on abstract art.

⁶⁹ One could even see the book as fulfilling part a ‘Hegelian’ project Pippin sketches at the end of his 2008 book *Hegel’s practical philosophy*, where he looks with favor to an possible Hegelian retrospective philosophical consideration of modernity, taking into account «the nineteenth-century and modernist novel, modernism in the visual arts, the emergence of powerful new technologies and growing technological dependence in social and political life, the development of unimaginably influential new media, especially film and television» (R.B. Pippin, *Hegel’s practical philosophy: rational agency as ethical life*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 280).

⁷⁰ In order to get a grip on Hegel’s views, as Pippin himself writes, «we need some big picture [...] of the Hegelian project» (R.B. Pippin, *After the beautiful* cit., p. 19).

Hegel's overarching notion of *Geist* is, no surprise, Pippin's starting point. For Pippin, «*Geist* is understood as a collective subject, a communal or common like-mindedness inheriting the aspirations of a distinct artistic, religious, and philosophical tradition»⁷¹. Visual art, for Hegel, is a peculiar kind of *practice* belonging to a *Geist's* activities. As any norm governed practice, it confers a certain significance to the elements involved in it. Norms concerning figurative art are numerous and various in kind⁷²: they regard both the production, fruition, and assessment of artworks⁷³. Art, however, is a particular kind of practice, in that it is a *reflective* practice: there is something about art that makes *Geist* reflective of itself, bringing to light features of a particular society *at a certain time*. We learn from art something about what it means to be member of a particular community.

Although very controversial, these are not difficult to recognize as basic Hegelian claims, and are at the core of Pippin's approach.

The idea is to follow Hegel in seeing artworks as elements in such a collective attempt at self-knowledge across historical time, and to see such self-knowledge as essential element in the struggle for the realization of freedom.⁷⁴

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁷² In order to appreciate fine arts, we still go to museums, pay a ticket we are entitled to have a stroll among artworks and look at Manets, Courbets or Magrittes. As beholders, we have certain expectations, depending on many factors: the tradition we have been educated in, past pictorial norms in that tradition, etc., including some basic overarching features of the social context we live in. That makes us able to recognize and understand certain features of the object, for instance, as certain actions (represented on a canvas) or as a particular style, or finally, the object itself as an artwork.

⁷³ Pippin has something distinctive to say about the peculiar kind of «intelligibility» proper to artworks. To explain it, he puts in play his previous reflection on Hegel's theory of action and rational agency, that we have no space to follow here in detail. The basic structure of aesthetic intelligibility is for him «parasitic» to the structure of the intelligibility of intentional content (R.B. Pippin, *After the beautiful* cit., p. 137). Under some relevant points of view, artworks are like deeds: deeds are not only human bodily movements, but are acts with a meaning, which is dependent on the larger social and historical normative context in which acts are performed. That very context plays a relevant role in making the deed the *kind* of deed it is. In a very similar way, artworks are not simply *material objects*, but have a distinct kind of intelligibility, *aesthetic intelligibility* - a non-discursive yet conceptual (or better, conceptualizable) mode of sense-making - largely dependent on features regarding communal *Geist*. Art is «embodied meaning», reflecting what Hegel would call the dialectic between inner and outer (R.B. Pippin, *After the beautiful* cit., p. 20). For Pippin's ideas about Hegel's expressive theory of rational agency, see R.B. Pippin, *Hegel's practical philosophy* cit.

⁷⁴ *Id.*, *After the beautiful* cit., p. 25, see also p. 7.

However, linking the conditions of aesthetic intelligibility to a bigger social and normative context evolving in time, broadens the scope of one's considerations. In order to fully appreciate the significance of art (and certain artworks), one has to look into shifts and breakdowns in normative contexts or self-conceptions of a community. In a word: one has essentially to look at *history*. This, for Pippin, is among the «most important innovation[s] in his [Hegel's] treatment of art». According to Hegel

The meaning and the normative status of any of the fine arts [...] were necessarily historical, [...] no aspect of whatever it was that fine arts rendered intelligible could be made out properly without a correct appreciation of that aspect *then*, both in the course of art history itself and, even more ambitiously, within some proper understanding of the long historical struggle of *Geist* to understand itself.⁷⁵

The possibility of a historical take on aesthetic significance is linked with the possibility of having a «narrative» available, and Pippin's discourse seems to acknowledge it: «we need some narrative or another»⁷⁶. The question, then, becomes: *what kind* of historical narrative do we need and *why* should we prefer it to others? Pippin takes some effort to specify what a Hegelian kind of narrative is *not*: it is not a purely vulgar Marxist narrative that makes artworks just epiphenomenal nor a merely sociological, psychological or simply descriptive narrative. An authentic Hegelian view must *not* take into account art as the expression of some *contingent* needs – for instance, as the response to the emergence of new competitors, like photography or motion-picture, or to the discovery of new, non-figurative art, like the Japanese print⁷⁷.

There is another notion of «historical narrative» that Pippin seems to have in mind, which defines a *distinctive* Hegelian approach. We need a broad, historically sensitive, inclusive story that pays attention not only to the material conditions underlying the life of a certain community but is also capable of focusing on social roles *and* how these roles are lived in that community. We need to pay atten-

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 18, see also pp. 70-71, 79 ss., 134-135.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

tion to the ways people *both* materially organize their lives and make sense of themselves.

All this is very demanding, but Pippin – by carefully relying on Fried’s and Clark’s approach – works to show the concrete possibility of such an account, at least for the emergence of *modernist painting*.

The idea of a narrative that is not «causal» or does not appeal to any «contingent» fact, however, as Pippin describes it, seems *per se* not to exclude the possibility of having other narratives available that are similar in *kind*. The reader might then be tempted to ask: how many narratives *of this kind* can we have? Not causal-sociological narratives, but rather alternative attempts to take into account self-conceptions and basic beliefs, as well as social organization of labor, etc. (some «philosophical art history», we can imagine, making use of elements, for instance, both from the history of economics and *histoire des mentalités*).

In his book, Pippin often seems to reduce the problem to a two-fold choice: either we have a *descriptive* narrative, which sends us back to a *contingent* or *chance* approach to art history (as a consequence, «all changes in art practice might ultimately have to look like shifts in fashion, of no more significance of hemline or tie widths»⁷⁸), or we try to develop a Hegelian narrative, which will put us on track for understanding necessary breakdowns and tensions in our conception of ourselves, the way we organize our collective life, and finally, our art-practices.

The importance of having just *one correct* narrative concerning the realization of freedom is certainly essential for Hegel, and it is part of his project. It is not clear, however, how important this aspect is for Pippin’s Hegelian approach, and *whether* Pippin’s explanation would allow for multiple narratives concerning the realization of freedom (and *a fortiori* the status of modernist art). Pippin sometimes gives the impression that there is only *one narrative explanation* open to us, which is a continuation of the Hegelian one. Sometimes he writes as he accepts «the common Hegelian narrative», except for the «prematurely optimistic» conclusion that Hegel draws

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p. 133.

from it⁷⁹. Hegel simply made a «bad bet»⁸⁰, or drew the wrong conclusion from a good historical argument⁸¹.

On the other hand, however, Pippin tends to underscore that any Hegelian story about how we came to be us -- and to develop such artistic forms as *modernist painting* -- is not only «retrospective» but also «provisional» and «highly controversial». This might be understood to open up the possibility for *different* narratives to be told as *alternatives* to Hegel's. This is something Hegel certainly would have some difficulty accepting. The simple possibility of *multiple narratives* – not the concurrence of other *causal, descriptive, sociological* or vulgar Marxist approaches – might be a potential threat for the explanatory potential of our Hegelian story (one could say «it's just a narrative among the others, after all»). And this might open up a further question: what would then be the grounds for accepting Pippin's Hegelian narrative instead of another? What makes one narrative more «compelling» than another?⁸² An Hegelian approach, Pippin tells us, is «more fruitful than competing accounts of the philosophical significance of pictorial art»⁸³, but its fruitfulness depends largely on how we understand the *status* of the narrative upon which the Hegelian account is based.

That being said, Pippin's attempt to demonstrate that the Hegelian approach is still provocative and helpful for us today remains successful, despite the 'weak' reading of the historical argument he is proposing. Though Hegel's opinion about non-figurative art would have been closer to Magritte's (according to whom «*l'art dit non figuratif n'a pas plus de sens que l'école non enseignante, que la cuisine non alimentaire*») than Pippin's account allows, Pippin's Hegel give us the

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 132, and p. 61.

⁸⁰ *Id.*, *What was abstract art?* cit., p. 15.

⁸¹ In this case, I am not sure again to what extent, according to Pippin, we have to agree with Hegel's analysis of figurative art, and in particular whether we have to follow him in his appreciation of his contemporaries. For instance, do we have to agree when he says - in his notes - that a good «modern portrait» should be worked out in detail, so that the face of the subject must look as reflecting, i.e. carry the sign of a «thinking, active, differentiated life»? (G.W.F. Hegel, *Schriften und Entwürfe I*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. 15, hrsg. v. F. Hogemann - C. Jamme, Hamburg, Meiner, 1990, pp. 204-205).

⁸² Pippin's story that has Manet playing the role of the protagonist, and Cezanne the role of deuteragonist, as some reviewers have underlines, would have to be defended against *alternative* stories of the same *kind*, locating the appearance of modernism somewhere else.

⁸³ R.B. Pippin, *After the beautiful* cit., p. 26.

resources for rendering more complex phenomena, like abstract and contemporary art, intelligible. In this way, his is a reading that extends beyond the expectations of the historical Hegel, bringing what Pippin elsewhere calls “the eternal Hegel” to bear on the complex and rich body of things and practices that the modern world knows as “art”.