

## Culture and Art: A Correspondence in Progress. Art's Ideal in Hegel, Corrections to an Established Interpretation

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**Abstract:** The art ideal is usually understood as an exemplary art that stands out in a formalist conception of the history of art, or as the art that matches the programmatic conception of a normative aesthetics. Hegel's conception is different in that it makes no emphatic command for ideal conditions of art or for it. Instead, and according to his notion of the ideal, which is none other than the idea of the true in history and its realities, the art ideal is art itself accomplishing this task of realization. It achieves this by way of intuition, and with relation to the culture of sensuality, whereby the demands for art transform themselves in concurrence with the ideas that brand culture in general. In agreement with this idea, art's efforts do not consist so much in rendering the idea sensual, as in raising the sensual to appearance. This conception is exemplified in how Hegel approaches painting in his *Lectures*. This paper criticizes the usual interpretation of Hegel as a classicist, and strives to show the current potential of his theory.

Perhaps the first thing we should keep in mind when boarding this matter in Hegel's philosophy of art is that the ideal is art itself; there is no ideal located historically outside of art, with regard to which the latter should adjust its production. By its very concept, the ideal is the realization of the Idea in history, the configuration through art of that which, to us, conforms the true in an absolute sense or, to say it otherwise, that even if they were contents of human culture that had their origin in a concrete and determined historical experience, their relevance would keep their meaning open to us despite historical changes, which also influence their conception and, in the case of art, their configurations and practices. Hegel's interest in art's ideal thus has nothing to do with a normative aesthetics or a formalist history of art seeking to establish the untimely and culminating forms of art. It will prove useful for us to advance this information, as the dominant idea about Hegel is that he was, in fact, a classicist. This would mean, in the first place, that art in general peaked for Hegel with the beauty accomplished by Greek sculpture, and secondly, that art preceding this was but

an aspiration to that beauty, whereas later art –including ours- is nothing but its decadence. The fact is, Hegel’s theory of the ideal is adjusted to the fundamental conception of his philosophy of art, the interest of which weighs emphatically on the historical-cultural function of art, so that art should be art “for us”<sup>1</sup>. Hegel had furbished himself with this conception of art in his youth and, without deserting it, he allowed it to ripen until the time of his *Lessons on Aesthetics* in Berlin, which he taught on four occasions between 1820 and 1829. His persistent interest in the historic function of art is a good showcase of his conception of art at the horizon of human praxis; a concern he shared with his contemporaries the Romantics, even if, unlike them, he did not commit to the re-sacralization of art that a number of them undertook, to the extreme of demanding an aesthetization of politics in a sort of consecration of the nation to the graces of art and its presumed revivifying powers for social life<sup>2</sup>. Hegel preserved his practical interest in art in terms of an art “for us” today, with which he meant to say, for us the moderns, for those with our mentality, our formation and secular culture<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> “As pertains to the representation of the ideal, art must take unto itself all the references to the effective external reality mentioned here and integrate the subjectivity of character with the external. But, even as it can configure a congruent and well-rounded world unto itself; as an effectively real and singularized object, art is not *for itself*, but *for us*, for an audience that beholds and enjoys the work of art. In the representation of a play, for example, the actors not only talk amongst themselves, but also to us, and they must make themselves understood to both sides. And because of this, every work of art is a dialogue with whoever is presented to it. Now, the true ideal in the universal interests and passions of the gods and their men is certainly intelligible; but, given that it leads its individuals to this intuition within a determined outer world of customs, uses and other such particularities, a new demand is drawn so that this externality is congruent, and not just with the characters represented, but *with us too*” (Hegel, G.W.F., *Lecciones sobre la estética* (according to the second edition by Heinrich Gustav Hotho (1842)), translation by A. Brotóns, Madrid: Akal, 1989, pp. 191ss).

<sup>2</sup> Two representative texts frame this Romantic aspiration, the first being Novalis’ 1799 *Christianity or Europe*, published by F. Schlegel in 1826, in: Novalis, *Los apéndices de Sais. Cuento simbólico. La cristiandad o Europa*, Lima: PUCP, 2004, pp. 97-120. The second is J. F. Overbeck’s “The Triumph of the Religion of the Arts”, conceived between 1830 and 1840, in parallel to the execution and submission of the great painting by the same name, in the city of Frankfurt a. M., in 1840. The text is featured in: *La religión de la pintura. Escritos de filosofía romántica del arte*, P. D’Angelo and F. Duque (eds.), Madrid: Akal, 1999, pp. 164-172.

<sup>3</sup>In the broad numeral 3 of the first part of the *Lessons on Aesthetics*, dedicated to “The Beauty of Art or the Ideal”, Hegel occupies himself expressly with “The externality of the ideal work of art with relation to the public” (cf. note 1), a topic he returns to in his lessons on poetry, and more precisely in the segment on dramatic poetry and under the title “Relation of the dramatic work with the audience”, followed by “The external execution of the dramatic work of art” Cf. Hegel, G.W.F., *Lecciones sobre la estética*, pp. 191-203, pp. 842-846, pp. 846-854.

According to Hegel's main thesis, art fully realizes its possibility once it transmits a historical self-consciousness to man, when, as far as it is an intuitive conception of the world, art gives man an answer to his need for sense and guidance in it. This historical and culturally all-embracing function was only accomplished by the art of the past in the Orient, and, most outstandingly, in the classical Greek world, before the rationalist qualm emerged as sophistry among the Greeks, the decisive consequences of which were reflected in politics, religion, education and philosophy. It was art or, as Herodotus had it, the poets Homer and Hesiod, who gave the Greeks their gods<sup>4</sup>, their religion and with it, their ethical lead and tradition. Hegel designates this historical function of art *Kunstreligion*, "Art-Religion", or, as is more frequent in translation, as the "Religion of Art". The religion of art was the world of an historical humanity where art, worship and culture in general served as the basis for an entire form of life. After Christianity and the culture it forged during the Middle Ages, especially in the modern world, where Christianity secularized into its institutions, art could no longer fulfill this guiding, all-embracing purpose, nor could it aspire to it with its earlier immediacy. It did not lose its relevance because of this, and even if from the vantage of the *ethos* of culture its importance has become quite more restricted, art gains grounds in a cultural dimension as significant as the aesthetic, which lacked autonomy for other cultures; undercutting the legitimacy of a culture such as that of sensuality, the emancipation from which is so characteristically modern. In the modern world's mentality, the legitimating necessity of reason is understood, and an intuitive mode of thinking, such as art, cannot impose itself all on its own. Reflection, morality and legality are what pilot human action now, and if art aspires to them, it can no longer ignore the critical mediation of autonomous, reflexive judgment. According to Hegel, the mediation of art's meaning for modern man requires "scientific knowledge", and by this he refers both to History and the artistic sciences, such as philosophy and the theory and criticism of art, disciplines and practices which the philosopher himself

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<sup>4</sup> Herodotus, *Histories*, Book II, 53, quoted by Hegel in various passages of the *Lessons* (cf. Hegel, G.W.F., *Lecciones sobre la estética*, p. 327). This Herodotean motif was of special relevance from Herder in the *Sturm und Drang*, to F. Schlegel and the earlier Jena Romantics. More concretely, it stimulated in them the desire for a *new mythology* to serve as an ethical-aesthetical corrective of the rationalist culture of the Enlightenment. This form of thinking, common to both German Romanticism and Idealism at their very start, sees itself modified with the increase of historical reflection and the political situation, and ends up by opposing Hegel to the Romantics. As a proposal for modern culture, Hegel abandons it completely and quickly, as it is no longer reconciled with the constitution of civil society and its institutions.

cultivated with the utmost competence. The purpose of these sciences is to “escort” the “intuition” that is art, to become involved in its sensual culture and in its historicity, to think along with it. As Hegel sees it, for the human life-world, art will always have the upper hand when confronted with philosophy, because the latter, like the sciences, belongs to the culture of understanding. A great difference lies between this culture and that of art, particularly in its poetic guise: what befits a poetic or artistic conception is to detain itself in the particular, whereas the prosaic culture of understanding, on the other hand, is pressed to sustain a universal and generic gait. The philosophy of art cannot renounce to thought, but it must unhurriedly escort art’s delay on the particular<sup>5</sup>.

The reason for philosophy’s interest in art involves the historical-cultural function that art serves; the History of art thus acquires a signal importance for philosophy, even if the relationship with art differs between the two<sup>6</sup>. The History of art is a scientific discipline of investigative profile, and even if for Hegel it comprises a necessary knowledge, in light of its objectivity, the History of art maintains a descriptive character that differs from philosophy’s interest in art. For the philosophy of art, such as we

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Hegel, G.W.F. *Lecciones sobre la estética*, pp. 708-713.

<sup>6</sup> Hegel’s philosophy of art coincides in time with the consolidation of a history of art in the XIXth century Romantic vein, and with the “Berlin School” –one of whose founders was H. G. Hotho, the editor of Hegel’s *Lessons on Aesthetics*– especially. This is also the time for the consolidation of museums with a historicist conception of exposition for collections, a debate of which Hegel himself partook, at least for the case of the Royal Museum of Berlin, built by F. Schinkel and inaugurated in 1830. Even as Hegel places his position regarding the conception of art between the “erudite” concept of the History of art, and the speculative one of the Idea –if not in its Platonic sense, but in his own– the History art was still far closer to his own philosophy of art than it is today. Hegel can still congratulate a discipline that no longer meets the current standards of his methodology. He thus formulates the praise and justification of the History of art: “every work of art belongs to *its time*, to *its people*, to its environment, and depends on particular ideas and to historical and other ends, which is the reason why artistic erudition calls for a great amount of *historical* –while at the same time, *specific*– knowledge, as the individual nature of the work of art refers precisely to the singular and requires of the specific for its comprehension and elucidation. In the end, this erudition accounts not only, as all others, for the recollection of this knowledge, but also for a sharp imagination when it comes to retaining the images of the artistic configurations in all their myriad features, primordially to keep them present in the comparison with other works of art” (*ibid.*, p. 16). Artistic cultivation is also needed because the aesthetic judgment of taste falls ever shorter of the cosmopolitanism that the sciences of art demand per se. Befitting this mentality is not the abandonment of the beautiful as a criterion for art, but its internal distinction from the notion of the characteristic. There is an important acknowledgement of the caricaturesque and the ugly as authentic aesthetic categories (*ibid.* pp. 18ss). Positions such as these, which were so outstanding in Hegel, subtract authority from the usual characterization that is made of his aesthetics as “classicist” and, hence, dated.

know it from his *Lessons on Aesthetics*, the history of art is the history of the repercussion of the works of art in the consciousness of men in determined times and cultures. The philosophy of art does not, thus, approach the works with the objectivity of historiography, but rather as someone who was answering a question or a plea for attention from the art of the past, or of other cultures, from the present vantage. The place and exposition of the works, their representation or execution, their interpretation, even the art criticism that busies itself with them and which proves so crucial to the receptive process, must bolster historical knowledge in benefit of an actuality of art for us. Hegel's philosophy of art is art reception, an active agent in the process of formation or cultural assimilation in which the works preserve actuality and relevance; in this sense, his interest in art distinguishes itself from the objectifying interest of historiographical investigation, to which it resorts but does not prescribe. The brunt of his interest in art is to achieve the articulation of the meaning of the works in the knowledge we can share, and which legitimizes them as tokens of their own, as intuitive achievements the worth of which is in themselves. This is not an alienating speculation, but rather a sort of exposition to the experience of artworks, to the application of its pretences before an audience, an epoch and oneself, which is why it must secure itself on what, in Hegel's time, was called "the system", and in ours, the discourse of philosophy.

As philosophy, its role before art is determined by the need to articulate it in a systematic and historic way. The basic plan of Hegel's *Lessons on Aesthetics* –or, as he preferred to call them, his Philosophy of art– responds to this need: a first part is dedicated to the conceptual investigation of the essence of art, at the centre of which is the determination of its ideal; a second part concerns itself with the characterization of art as a determinant of culture, and at its heart is the doctrine of the universal forms of art –the Symbolic, Classic, and Romantic. These art forms are not stylistic categories as much as they are intuitive conceptions of the world, historic rationalities which determined the contents and forms of all the art that they respectively contained. Hegel maintains this twofold division until 1826, but his attention to the development of the particular arts (architecture, sculpture, painting, music and poetry) gained such relevance and extension in his expositions, that by the last time he imparted his *Lessons in Aesthetics* in 1828/29, this thematic came to conform a whole third part of the plan, and was edited as such by Hotho in the text which we have come to know as Hegel's *Lessons*; the first edition of which was published between 1835 and 1838, with a second and definitive version issued in 1842. Even as this

edition was criticized by some of Hegel's other listeners, it prevailed, and it is only today that its fidelity to Hegel has been brought to discussion in a documented manner, thanks to the publication of Hotho's own notes, corresponding to the year 1823, and to that of notes by other listeners of the *Lessons* during 1820/21, 1826 and 1828/29<sup>7</sup>.

The attempt to update Hegel's philosophy of art is not a merely academic strategy to compensate for the efforts of new researchers that has yielded an enormous critical and archival apparatus for his *Lessons on Aesthetics*<sup>8</sup>. It is true that these materials, unpublished until recently, diminished the exclusivity of Hotho's edition, which had been acknowledged as a direct source for Hegel's teachings since 1842, when Hotho considered the editorial work he set out to do with his notes as a listener to the master as definitive. Faced with the unalterable fact of lacking a direct text by Hegel and not counting with the notes of another listener that had the orderliness and depth of those edited by Hotho, his edition will, like it or not, remain a referential source, whether it be to mark differences or strengthen the expositions and appreciations that he put in Hegel's words. This mere aspect in current revision itself involves the critical-philological interest that comprises the scientific discipline demanded by the philosophical culture in the interpretative work of its texts. What is crucial to the matter is that, in the philosophical debate on aesthetics, Hegel has never been excluded and that, when confronted with current issues in the philosophy of art, his position reaffirms its importance. The theory of the ideal, as a subject of polar-

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<sup>7</sup> The notes by Hegel's listeners that have been published to date are the following: 1) W. von Ascheberg: Hegel, G.W.F., *Vorlesungen über Philosophie der Kunst. Berlin 1820/21. Eine Nachschrift. I. Textbestand*, edited by H. Schneider, Frankfurt: Peter Lang/Europäischer Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1995; 2) H. G. Hotho: Hegel, G.W.F., *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Kunst. Berlin 1823. Nachgeschrieben von Heinrich Gustav Hotho*, edited by A. Gethmann-Siefert, Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1998; 3) P. von der Pfordten: Hegel, G.W.F., *Philosophie der Kunst. 1826*, edited by A. Gethmann-Siefert y J.I. Kwon, Frankfurt: 2004; 4) F.C.H.V. von Kehler: Hegel, G.W.F., *Philosophie der Kunst oder Ästhetik. Nach Hegel. Im Sommer 1826. Mitschrift FC.H.V. von Kehler*, edited by A. Gethmann-Siefert and B. Collenberg-Plonikov, Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2004. Different archives contain 10 numerated manuscripts by other listeners of Hegel's lessons on aesthetics. Two books currently compile the information of this survey and integrate it in their expositions of Hegel's philosophy of art: W. Jaeschke. *Hegel Handbuch. Leben, Werk, Schule*, Stuttgart/Weimar, J. B. Metzler, 2003, and the most important and specialized work on his aesthetics, A. Gethmann-Siefert, *Einführung in Hegels Ästhetik*, Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2005.

<sup>8</sup> This is R. Bubner's appreciation, which represents one of the established interpretations of Hegel's aesthetics. According to him, historical judgment has already been passed on Hegel, and nothing substantially new can change this; retouches serve to stimulate juvenile expectations to help justify careers in academics, but not the more experienced knowledge of their elders. Cf. Bubner, R., "Überlegungen zur Situation der Hegel Forschung", in: *Hegel-Studien*, 36 (2001), pp. 43-60.

ized debates which for the most part run against Hegel, represents one of these aspects.

The pluralism of current art seems to instantly place a question such as that of the ideal in the past. The immediate association that is made when faced with such notion is to try to prescribe a normative practice for art, as if that pluralism were an obfuscation pending amendment. But that is not the sense of the matter, nor was it Hegel's interest in his time, when he put the question of the ideal at the core of his philosophy of art. In a time of political polarizations and religious mystifications with art, such as the German Romantic period notably, to which even the philosophy of art – as distinguished from aesthetics, of a more Enlightened inclination– owes its existence, Hegel's contribution consisted in determining the place and function of art in the knowledge and expectations of his time and culture. The current pluralism of art responds to the needs of the age, among them some of art itself; taking another glance at Hegel does not seek to rectify the realities of art today, but rather, to help us prepare for the ways in which art intends to stay relevant. But as Hegel's doctrine has been so disfigured by the interpretive tradition that based itself on the Hotho edition, and now we count with other references that question it from many angles, a depuration of his doctrine of the ideal presents us with a Hegel renewed.

Taking into account that, for Hegel, the ideal is art itself in its historical realities, the frame for the *Lessons on Aesthetics* turns out to be the final stage in a philosophical conception that Hegel had been developing since his youth. The realization of reason and freedom in history was his constant concern, a disquiet for which the political dimension of social and institutional renovation implied by the French Revolution served as a juvenile stimulus; the philosophical incentive and artistic examples of which came from Kant and Schiller, respectively. The first was the Kantian notion of beauty as a symbol of morality, as exposed in § 59 of the *Critique of Pure Reason*; to which the Schillerian spin is added with his conversion of Kant's conception of the ideal of beauty in the human figure as *morality* in the external (§ 17) into *freedom* in appearance<sup>9</sup>, on the one hand; while on the other, he elevated this idea to the historical goal of a formative process in freedom and for it, that is, into the project for an ideal humanity which Schiller outlined in his *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*<sup>10</sup>. The final

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<sup>9</sup> Schiller, Friedrich, *Kallias. Cartas sobre la educación estética del hombre*, Madrid: Anthropos, 1990. "Beauty is nothing other than the freedom of appearance" (cf. *ibid.*, pp. 19 y 21)

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* "The philosopher and the man of the world direct expectant looks to the political scene, where in this moment, it would seem, the great destiny of humanity is

and immediate stimulus involved a thought ushered in by the earliest Romanticism, belonging to a generation to which Hegel himself belonged. This thought is that of a *mythology of reason*, as suggested by Herder and embraced as a program, with the utmost enthusiasm, by F.Schlegel's circle of young Romantics at Jena. Hegel places his own youthful conception in this very frame: "we need to have a new mythology, but this mythology must be at the service of ideas, it needs to be transformed into a mythology of *reason*"<sup>11</sup>. This "monotheism of reason and the heart, this polytheism of the imagination and of art", would have the configuration of a sensible religion –that would reunite the philosopher with the people once again– as its objective, and transform "aesthetic ideas...into mythological ones", so that the enlightened and the unenlightened alike might at last lock hands in common destiny<sup>12</sup>. This is the first conception of the ideal as an Idea of the concrete and existence for Hegel: the Idea realized in history, reality as a satisfactory mediation between reason and liberty. It is a conception anchored in a great trust in the joint powers of religion and art for the *education of the people*, a matter which Hegel still conceived in a communitarian and highly idealized manner; but it is a thought that Hegel won't desert, but will actually mature until his *Lessons on Aesthetics*. This maturation involves a rational and progressive distinction of the concepts of knowledge and history. The more important changes with regard to the ideal concern the conception of knowledge as a system, and the location of art and religion within it, in confrontation with the conception of Schelling's philosophical system. Hegel completed this phase in 1807, with the *Phenomenology of Mind*. The historical reflection that accompanies the thought of a philosophical system also drives Hegel to separate the guiding power of religion and art within the life-world into the great change that is experienced between Ancient culture, medieval culture- ensconced as it was in its Christian mentality- and the worldly rationality that characterizes modern culture. This phase includes the situation of art within the system, as described in the first edition of the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* of 1817, until the schism of the reciprocity between art and religion comes about with modern culture, in favour of the preeminence of philosophy as the definitive ration-

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being settled...That I resist this temptation, and place beauty before freedom, I do not think I should apologize for on account of inclination only... I hope to be able to do it by appealing to principles...to solve this political problem in experience, one must take the aesthetic path, because it is through beauty that freedom is reached" (Letter III, pp. 119 and 121).

<sup>11</sup> Hegel, G.W.F., "Primer programa de un sistema del idealismo alemán", in: *Escritos de juventud*, México: FCE, 1984, p. 220.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*



ale for the epoch. Hegel is late to work this thought into his system. As a knowledge of synthesis, the preeminence of philosophy does not imply a superiority that bastardizes forms of knowledge such as art and religion, which continue to please the spirit; instead, and given the liberty of the concept, philosophical knowledge must justify the true with explanations that are more binding with the universality of reason than those provided by art and religion, based as these are on the immediacy of intuition and sensuality, on representation and belief. The truth of art and religion is catered to, in fact, by the knowledge of synthesis that is philosophy, but it does not because of this forgo its liberty of thought.

The *Lessons on Aesthetics* of 1826 represent a considerable contribution to the discovery not only of the separation of art and religion in the life-world of the modern individual, but also of the loss of substantiality in the reach both have as guiding powers for culture. As axes for the common *ethos*, art and religion pass, as in previous times, to the realm of formation or the *Bildung*, which is to say they can sustain their pretences in the private sphere of consciousness, even if legality is placed above them in the public sphere. In this sense, these 1826 *Lessons* serve as preparation for the corrections Hegel will undertake with the reedition of the *Encyclopedia* in 1827, where he modifies the part corresponding to the doctrine of the absolute spirit (§§ 556-563), which he then applies with all propriety to the 1828/29 *Lessons*. In them, the reciprocity between the work of art (*Kunst-Werk*) and the State (*Staat-Werk*), which was a resonance of the youthful representation of the ideal as a mythology of reason for the education of the people, is made to disappear completely. In modern culture, community life is replaced by society proper, that is, a more abstract organization, the configuration of which is unimaginable without the State and its institutions. The substantiality of art in the determination of culture under such conditions is unsustainable, as is the pretence that the power of art could be strengthened if it was placed at the service of religion. This is the position Hegel ripens and defends in his *Lessons on Aesthetics* against the cultural politics advanced by the Romantics, and represented, at the University of Berlin, by his colleague, the theologian F. Schleiermacher, who also lectured on aesthetics and was of the persuasion that was vitally and publicly defended by F. Schlegel, among others. Hegel's sober and lucid position on the ideal of art is that its task for culture and society, while indispensable, is both historical and finite, as it is always referred to a changing historical context, and ideal, because, as art of the present, it itself changes and has to change. Art would lose its cultural relevance, and

its critical and educational importance for the judgment of individuals especially, if, as Hegel thought –following Schiller– it gave the times what they applauded, but did not need<sup>13</sup>. Neither Germany nor Europe was in favor of the restoration of the old political and religious order. This is why Hegel's silence was owed, firstly, to the devoted painting of the Nazarenes, which represented “national, Christian and patriotic art” celebrating the Germany of the time; and secondly, to the painting of an artist as opposed to them and distant from the spheres of power they occupied, with a religious symbolism as profound as C. D. Friedrich's. This contrasts with Hegel's enthusiasm for an apparently dated past, such as that of the recently discovered Dutch primitives. Hegel found it to be a far more actual and current art because, for one, it placed the ideals, the common *ethos*, in quotidian bourgeois life, deserting the coactions of meaning that were so pressing to the art of the Romantics, as if art could still be a profession of nationality. It also occupied itself with painting itself as an art, in that aesthetic relish Dutch artists displayed in the dominion of their media, especially when it came to colour. This was, to Hegel, an art that was conscious of being one, an indisputable feature of modernity that was far closer to the current expectations for an art that was polarized by the cultural politics of the German Romantics, which Hegel confronted head-on in his *Lessons on Aesthetics*. This polemic is one of Hegel's motivations for his much debated thesis that art in its maximal determination was something of the past for us, today. He did not mean by this that art in general had come to an end for us, but rather, that what had come to an end was that culture in which a substantial art could determine its orientation, legitimacy and self-worth. That art and that culture were not ours anymore; art for us was something else, and its functions were different<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Schiller, F., o.c. Cf. Letter IX, p. 179, where Schiller speaks of the artist's and his art's commitment to their present: “And so that reality does not impose a model on you that you are to give it, do not risk accepting its suspect company until you are not sure that you lodge an ideal in your heart that will escort you. Live with your century, but do not be its work; give your contemporaries what they require, not what they applaud...Think how they should be if you must influence them, but think on how they are if you intend to do something for them. Seek their praise by appealing to their dignity, but rank their happiness by its insignificance”.

<sup>14</sup> “Art has ceased seeking that satisfaction of spiritual needs that only ancient times and peoples sought and found in it, a satisfaction which, at least as far as religion is concerned, was very intimately linked to art. The lovely days of Greek art have gone by, as have the golden times of the lower Middle Ages. The reflexive culture of our current life generates the need, regarding both the will and judgment, of establishing general points of views and of regulating the particular from them, so that manners, laws, duties, rights and universal maxims serve as determining foundations and become the main directing agencies” (cf. Hegel, G.W.F., *Lessons on Aesthetics*, p. 13).

### *A Rereading of the Lessons on Aesthetics*

Such as we know them in the state that Hotho left them to us in his second edition of 1842, Hegel's *Lessons on Aesthetics* –and the doctrine of the ideal in particular– should be reread. Even as it does not counter Hegel's arguments, it places the emphases where they should not be, weakening him as a philosopher of art by drawing him closer to a classicist aesthetic and critique of taste and making him seem dated.

The art ideal is always consigned in the way Hegel defined art's task, which also comprises its substantial and superior purpose in history, and in the resolution of which art is and has been free: "art is called to unveil the *truth* in the form of sensual artistic configuration, to represent that reconciled opposition [the human world of needs and finitude, and the world of thought and freedom], and thus has itself as its ultimate end, in this very representation and unveiling"<sup>15</sup>. In the times of Hegel and Romanticism, the ideal was the idea of beauty in art. We must not be led astray by this presence of the beautiful in the immediate representation of art, for the occurrence of the term is more related to the inertia of Enlightenment aesthetics –which did focus on the beauty of forms– than to the purpose of artists or the public's expectation of the beautiful as such, which were now understood in a more internal fashion that was less dependent on external form<sup>16</sup>. Hegel himself also notes the logic that befits art as a form of knowledge. It is a logic within the particularity of intuition and representation or, to be yet more precise, it is the logic of a culture of sensuality, different from the metaphysical logic of the idea in the discursive universality of the

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"It can doubtlessly be expected for art to ascend and perfect itself more; but (for our time) its form has ceased to be the supreme necessity of the spirit" (*ibid.* p. 79). Attention has not been duly paid to the fact that Hegel forewords the first part of his *Lessons*, dedicated to the Ideal, with the following consideration: *Position of art with relation to the finite reality and to religion and philosophy*. This is a diagnostic of modern society, institutions and culture which, despite being prosaic, count with an artistic realm to influence them. The art Ideal and the limitations for art are distinctive to modern culture (*cf. ibid.*, pp. 71-80).

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>16</sup> Hegel observes a train of thinking that no longer conceives art from the beautiful, but the beautiful from art. Art is so diverse in times and cultures, that the conception of the beautiful tolerates internal and external distinctions. Nor is a foundation of art from the beautiful found anywhere in Hegel's philosophy of art; instead, the need for art hails from the very nature of the spirit as self-conscience: "The universal necessity for art is, thus, the rational one...The need for spiritual freedom" (*ibid.* pp. 27ss). For an erudite analysis of this issue, *cf. Jaeschke, W.*, "Selbstbewusstsein des Geistes und Schönheit", in: Jaeschke, W., *o. c.*, pp. 422-429.

culture of understanding. According to Hegel, “the idea of the beautiful in art is not the idea as such that a metaphysical logic must apprehend as the absolute, but the idea as progressively configured as, and with relation to, this effective reality, in an immediately corresponding unity. Because the *idea as such* is certainly what is true in and for itself, but it is true only in terms of its as yet unobjectified universality; but the *idea* insofar as the *beauty of art* is an idea with the more precise determination of being an essentially individual effective reality, quite like an individual configuration of effective reality with the determination of allowing the idea to manifest essentially unto itself. With this, the demand to completely adjust the idea and its configuration as a concrete effective reality is established. Thus conceived, the idea as effective reality configured in compliance with its concept is the *ideal*”<sup>17</sup>. This conception of the ideal as existence of the idea, as an idea that is vivid and fulfilled in the *sensual* as its appearance for the spirit, is what loses definition in the Hotho edition, where the ideal or the artistic beautiful are presented as the “sensual *appearance* of the idea”<sup>18</sup>. But the most drastic loss this formulation invites, to the extent that it disfigures Hegel’s original thinking and stands amongst the heaviest taxes to weigh on his philosophy of art, is that Hotho’s formulation emphasizes the direction of the idea to appearance, posing a Platonizing hierarchy between idea and appearance which is unsustainable in Hegel, and curtails the novelty of his thinking on art, the most authentic work on which does not consist so much on the sensualization of the idea as in rendering the sensual as appearance so as to make the appearance true via the sensual.

It should not be overlooked that, in other passages of the Introduction to the *Lessons*, prior to the formulation of the artistic beautiful as the sensible appearance of the idea, Hegel has already defended the true nature of the appearance in art, of the appearance that is art. Hegel conducts this defense to respond to an objection that was still made at the time to the philosophy of art, by referring to the alleged indignity of art as an object worthy of philosophical consideration; because if, as it was claimed, appearance was the medium of art, philosophy –the highest occupation of which was the pure, unchecked, uncensored truth– could not abase itself to being philosophy *of* art. Countering this Platonic, moralistic scruple in the conception of truth, Hegel vindicates the need of appearance for essence, emphasizing the peculiarity of the appearance in art as an appearance that is, itself, the byproduct of a spiritual activity. When art reaches its maxi-

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 56ss

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* p. 85

imum determination in a given culture, when it imprints its seal on its *ethos* and on the self-worth of its people as self-conscience, it is only in such a circumstance of the world and culture that Hegel will equate art to philosophy and religion, the other superior forms of knowledge of the spirit<sup>19</sup>. It should be underscored, as well, that Hotho's edition faithfully reproduces the Hegelian thought that, in the appearance of art, the spirit's alienation in the sensual is not a negative, but a positive, thing; because the spirit in is in its own stuff, and, to the extent that it's a thinking spirit, it can tell itself apart from the sensual and not be distorted by it<sup>20</sup>. Finally, the spirit's sensuality in the appearance of art also becomes evident there where Hegel praises the particular works of art in which this elevation of the sensual to pure appearance is accomplished, so that it fills one's spirit and makes it delay by the work of art, even while acknowledging –with no misgivings– that the seriousness of the meanings pass onto a second plane, as happens frequently in painting<sup>21</sup>, in the autonomy that is attained by instrumental music, singing and the world of opera<sup>22</sup>, or in the artistic execution of musicians and dramatic actors<sup>23</sup>. That said, and its importance notwithstanding, these genuine Hegelian aspects, which are in such fine agreement with the modern, altogether less doctrinarian and more aesthetic modern disposition to art, have been overlooked due to the burden of the definition of the artistic beautiful as the sensual appearance of the idea. This formulation, which is Hotho's but not Hegel's, has determined the mistrust and standard criticism to his philosophy of art: as the sensual appearance of the idea, art is at immediate disadvantage with philosophy; the superiority of philosophy is not met until it submits art's intuition to the discursiveness of concept; and, for the same reason, the necessity of art becomes distorted, when for Hegel art is an irreducible need, has its roots in the rationality of man itself, and both freedom and fancy constitutionally appertain to it<sup>24</sup>.

The revision of Hegel's aesthetics being carried out today has returned the focus to the conception of the ideal as the reality, existence and the vitality of the idea, or as the idea in its historical concretion. It has furthermore recovered the Hegelian position according to which art itself, in its changing historical scenarios, has been an ideal in action, that is to say, that such an event has not been reduced uniquely to the classical form of

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 9-14.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 607

<sup>22</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 688ss

<sup>23</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 691-693, pp. 846ss

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 31ss, p. 233ss

the Greeks, another of the persistent disfigurements suffered by Hegel<sup>25</sup>. The necessity for these corrections has become patent when confronting the notes kept by Hegel's listeners, the most important of which are those taken down by Hotho himself, from the master, in his 1823 *Lessons*, which proved referential for his conception of the ulterior edition. If one adheres to such notes, instead of to the formula of the artistic beautiful as the "sensual appearance of the idea" that Hotho notes in his 1835 edition (a formula that also fails to appear in any of the other listener's notes), what is emphasized is the exposition Hegel grants to the *form of appearing of pure sensual appearance* in art. Hegel develops this position in the exposition he commits to the destiny of the sensual nature of art: the work of art exists for man, but specifically for his sense, that is, for his interior, for the sensuality of his spirit, subjectivity or mind, which is in fact the sensuality thanks to which he can find himself in the human world as a man, and not just as a thing in the series of objects or things. This "sense" man has could not be stimulated or respond with any degree of subjectivity if the work of art were not itself a perceptible, distinguishable thing, and if it did not appear with such singularity and individuality that it overwhelmed the mere sense-perceptual response and demanded that of "sense". The sensual presence ensures the demand for an answer catering "essentially to the spirit; it must find its satisfaction by way of this sensual matter"<sup>26</sup>. Before the sensual in art, we do not respond with desire, with the need to consume or to transform it –as would be the case with a particular and concrete object: we respond as thinking beings. The interest of art impinges on the interest of intelligence; in the consideration of its objects, art lets them be freely, but not with the purpose of knowing what's universal to sensual things, as in the case of theory: "Art –says Hegel– does not do this, it does not override the sensual that is offered it, rather, it has as its object this sensual as it immediately exists"<sup>27</sup>. And it is here, at this point, that Hegel synthesizes what must strictly be rescued in his doctrine of the ideal and the sensual nature of art: "We can do no more than say that the sensual surface, *the*

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<sup>25</sup> A. Gethmann-Siefert's *Introduction to Hegel's Aesthetics* is the most representative panoramic survey in this direction that's available to us today (see note 6), the product of a lengthy and intense scientific collaboration, the details of which cannot be mentioned here. Federico Vercellone affords us with a Spanish language primer on this new way of addressing the philosophy of art in Hegel, in: Vercellone, Federico, *Estética del siglo XIX*, Madrid: A. Machado Libros, 2004; cf. "La estética del idealismo alemán: Schelling y Hegel", pp. 15-19.

<sup>26</sup> Hegel, G.W.F. *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Kunst. Berlin 1823. Nachgeschrieben von Heinrich Gustav Hotho*, p. 18.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20

*appearance of the sensual as such*, is the object of art, whereas the externally sensual distribution of concrete materiality is for desire. But, on the other hand, the spirit does not crave thought, the general, the structuring of the sensible; instead, it wants the sensual as particular, abstracted from the framework of materiality. The spirit only craves the surface of the sensual. In this way, *the sensual is elevated to appearance* through art, and art is thus caught between the sensual as such and pure thought; what's sensual in it is not the immediate unto itself, autonomous of the material, such as rock, or plant, or organic life, rather; the sensible is for something ideal, but it is not quite the abstract ideal of thought. It is *pure sensual appearance* and, more approximately, configuration"<sup>28</sup>. From Hotho's 1823 notes to Hegel's 1835 *Lessons*, adjustments have certainly been demanded by the editorial craft. However, this position on the task of art of rendering the sensual as pure appearance remains just as forceful. The fact is due attention was never brought to the matter, and instead, the emphasis always fell on the definition of art as the sensual appearance of the idea. Perhaps the location of the passage in the context of the survey Hegel makes of what we should use and revise when we set out to establish the concept of art, subtracts importance to how it should have been taken, because –given its reach when it comes to understanding what art is, and how it proceeds as a form of the sensual consciousness– the discussion is at the level of his doctrine of the ideal. It is not, thus, excusable that such a decisive notion has been overlooked for so long by established readings<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 20ss. The cursives are mine.

<sup>29</sup> In the edition of the *Lessons*, the text is thus reformulated: "Now, it follows from this that the sensual must of course occur in the work of art, but it must only manifest itself as surface and *appearance* of the sensual. For the spirit does not seek the internal completion and empirical extension of the organism that desire demands from the work of art or concrete materiality; nor does it look to find the universal, exclusively ideal, thought in them. Instead, it wants sensual presence which must, of course, continue to be sensual, but which must also free itself of the scaffoldings of mere materiality. This is why, in the work of art, the sensual, as compared with the immediate being-there of natural things, is raised to mere *appearance*, and the work of art is found to be *halfway* between immediate sensuality and ideal thought. *It is not yet* pure thought, but, despite its sensuality, it is *not just* mere material being-there, as in the case of rocks and of organic life. In the work of art, the sensual is at once something ideal but which, not being the ideal in thought, also occurs exteriorly as a thing. Now, if the spirit allows the objects be free without descending to their own inner essential (with which they should cease to exist for it entirely as singulars), then this appearance of the sensual is presented to it outwardly as figure, as the visible aspect or sound of things... For these sensual shapes and sounds appear in art not just by themselves and their immediate figure, but with the end of seeking the satisfaction of superior spiritual interests, as they have the power of stirring in the spirit, an assonance and resonance from the very depths of con-

The clue to understanding Hegel's emphasis on the manner of appearance of the sensible in art is the conception of art as the representation of a representation. The need to render it concrete is what commits art and the artist alike to perceptibly representing the appearance of vitality, especially when it comes to the spiritual or significant vitality that craves an answer or interpretation on behalf of its receivers, so as to make the sensible appearance match the concept, thus tracing back the shortages of nature to the truth, to what impinges on the spirit's unrest, or, in other words, that –when faced with the representations that are offered to us by artistic products– the spirit is of its own<sup>30</sup>. The outstanding thing about Hegel's genuine thinking on art is that, thanks to its sensual form of knowledge, the artist can resolve this task of art within a mode of thinking and proceeding that never abandons sensuality, and which, for that very reason, moves from the sensual to the appearance of the sensual, and not in that –descending, educational– direction of the idea to its sensualization or exemplification in sensual appearance. We are far enough from Platonic metaphysics to ponder on the appearance of art as the existence of the idea, as the active and influential idea in history, as art with cultural acknowledgement and influence. Because if art is a form of knowing, and insofar as it cannot occur sans other, each of which has its own culture and evolution, the culture of sensuality to which art belongs changes with the others and adjusts without losing currency. Right here, in this very spot, is where the spiritual profile of the artist proves decisive for the reception, production and transmission of the contents and forms of art. This complex process of the interplay of knowledges in the history of culture is the authentic ground for explanation on which Hegel stands in order to explain the history of the universal forms of art –the Symbolic, Classic, and Romantic–as forms of the Ideal<sup>31</sup>.

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sciousness. This is how in art the sensual becomes *spiritualized*, for the *spiritual* appears as sensualized" (Hegel, G.W.F. *Lecciones sobre la estética*, p. 32).

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 69ss.

<sup>31</sup> The idea that the truth can be known in many ways, and that the modes of knowledge should be considered only as forms, is developed by Hegel in the *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences*, § 24, note 3 (cf. Hegel, G.W.F., *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften I*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970, vol. 8, pp. 86-91). Hegel refers to this same idea of art in his 1826 *Lessons*: art is "merely a form (among others), by means of which the spirit brings itself into appearance", and its characteristic is to bring itself into appearance, to the world and the life of the mind, as appearance. Cf. G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophie der Kunst oder Ästhetik. Nach Hegel. Im Sommer 1826. Mitschrift F.C.H.V. von Kehler*, p. 3.



*Hegel's lessons on painting and its conception of the ideal*

Contained amongst the lessons Hegel dedicates to the particular arts, those on painting are a notable example when it comes to illustrating his conception of art as ideal. They not only help draw Hegel's attention to art's task of rendering the sensual as appearance, but also engage their constant updating to the time and culture so that they may keep their relevance as art. Their historical development refines painting as an art so much that, for modern culture, where –according to Hegel– its site par excellence is a public institution such as the Museum, “what is most in agreement with the study and full enjoyment of its meaning will thus be an *historical* location”<sup>32</sup>. Today, this criterion of museum exposition has lost its primacy, but for Hegel, its interest consisted in that, in 1830, when the Royal Museum of Berlin was opened, this was the vanguard's criterion, and Hegel had partaken in debates about it before the opening of the Museum to the public. His conviction was that, for the greater aesthetic enjoyment of the collection, it should be displayed with scientific criteria that were intimately linked to the notion that the history of painting, as an art, was, above all, a history of culture itself, that is, a history that could be appreciated, on the one hand, as the changing function of painting in society, on the other, as the modern liberation of painting towards an art with a conscience of its own; something quite like what occurred, during the XXth century, with pure painting, when it was reduced to its basic media –colour and plane– with representation and figuration becoming secondary. Hegel's criterion for the exposition of the collection at the Royal Museum, but also for the exposition of the historical development of painting in his *Lessons*, was the following: “one starts with religious themes in an as yet *typical* conception, with a simple, architectural order, and uncomplicated colouring. Then, the present, individuality, the vivid beauty of the figures, the depth of intimacy, the charm and the magic of colour start penetrating more and more into religious situations, until art becomes its worldly affluent, capturing nature, ordinary daily life or historically important national events, both past and

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<sup>32</sup> Hegel, G.W.F. *Lecciones sobre la estética*, p. 632. In referring to Hegel, James J. Sheehan contrives to formulate a handsome synthesis of the difference there is between art as factor of cultura in the Greek world and the modern one: for the Greeks, art was religion while for us, art is unthinkable without the mediation of science and philosophy; the Greeks approached their statues with offerings, while we board them with monographs and handbooks; for art, the Ancients built art, whereas we build museums. Cf. Sheehan, James J., *Geschichte der deutschen Kunstmuseen. Von der fürstlichen Kunstkammer zur modernen Sammlung*, Munich: C. H. Beck, 2002, pp. 135-137.

present, portraits and such things up to the smallest and most trivial ones, with the same zeal which would have been devoted to the ideal religious content, and in this same sphere especially, it reaches not only the most extreme pictorial perfection, but also the most vivid conception, and the most individual manner, of execution”<sup>33</sup>.

But besides the praise of the sensual appearance of art, the case for painting also illustrates how art, insofar as it is itself the ideal, and as it shifts its appearance according to the general culture and to the culture of sensuality in it, has snugly come to fulfill its historical function by putting itself on par with the present culture, precisely. The fact that, in a modern culture, the optimal place for its function as a cultural factor is the public institution of the museum, and not the palace or the temple, clearly shows that the guiding power of art in the common *ethos* has not dispelled: it has been modified. When painting passes from the havens of political and religious power to a public place for the general enjoyment of the cultural patrimony, the guiding power of art has ceased to be determinant and content-oriented; but even as its function has become restricted, art gains a new place in the modern niches of freedom, aesthetic enjoyment and reflective judgment. Hegel defines the historical function of art in the modern world as a *formal formation (formelle Bildung)*, a forger of culture, in two senses: as culture, the modern world is unconceivable without art, while at the same time, art can no longer demand the decisive guiding function it once had, and was acknowledged as having. It is no longer a matter of whether art, in modern culture, serves as a speaker or receiver of the contents of historical direction that should govern the praxis of the modern or enlightened citizen; however, and because of its availability –which is, on principle, open to anyone–, and in a sense that comes close to the Schillerian conception of the aesthetic education of man, art continues to be an essential medium for the formation of reason and freedom. Art’s restriction, its passing from being culture-determinant to being but an element in its formation, consists in that the reception of art by modern man is no longer all-

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<sup>33</sup> Hegel, G.F.W., *Lessons on Aesthetics*, p. 632. The fact aside that, for the museum’s exposition, Hegel is for the historical criterion; his explanation differs from the strictly exemplary and educational *historical* criterion defended by Alois Hirt. Hegel was on the side of K. F. von Rumohr’s, G. Waagen’s and W. von Humboldt’s conception, for whom the exposition should combine the historical and the aesthetic. This becomes very clear in Hegel’s exposition; his order refers to Byzantine, Italian, Netherlandish and German painting, respectively. Cf. Sheehan, James J., “Das Berliner Museum Schinkels”, in: Sheehan, James J., *o.c.*, pp. 113-128. Cf. Pöggeler, Otto, “Hegels Ästhetik und die Konzeption der Berliner Gemäldegalerie”, in: *Hegel-Studien*, 31 (1996), pp. 9-26.

embracing, undisputed and related to identification, lacking in reflection and appreciation, but rather in that the proposals for the guidance, conception and intuition of the world that are featured in the works of art pass through autonomous, judgmental, free and rational engagement. Their function is to motivate reflection, not inhibit it, as occurs when art, the artist and their audiences are forced to annex themselves to a dictatorial cultural policy with no other choice than the proclamation of fixed forms. These are jarring situations precisely because the idea of Enlightenment itself, entailing a modern conception of society and the State, struggles against the imposition of a undertaking of such breadth for art, where, as is the opposite case in modern culture, the arts can recur to every possibility of configuration, and art can be met with the perils of failure<sup>34</sup>. The sublime and the beautiful distinguished the art ideal in the Symbolic and Classical forms respectively; in the art of the Romantic form, which, for Hegel, includes what we currently designate as the art of modern culture, the art ideal remains open and is a chancy venture. Hegel had already spoken of this art as the dissolution of the ideal, but not because it lacked one, but rather, because from the very start this art is the artist's free subjectivity, so that the determination of its forms and contents are left at his will, at the disposition of humanity with itself; the sublime, the beautiful, the ugly, are all options now. Hegel criticized the principle of Romantic irony, which, especially as pertained to the literary arts, was the poetics and aesthetics of the time in Germany, but he did not criticize it because of irony per se, which life –much less art– cannot do without. What he charged against was the irony underlying some contemporary art theoreticians, such as the brothers Schlegel, for advancing it as *the* artistic program. For the fact is that, as a program, irony not only engages art in a suicide affair, insofar as a programmatic irony trivializes irony itself, but also, and as a programmatic hermeneutic principle, its strategy proved questionable when it came to understanding and interpreting works of art the uniqueness of which called for a different disposition, in which irony is often out of place. Hegel verified this by resorting to the interpretations of literary critic and translator L. Tieck, who practically discovered Cervantes and Shakespeare for the Germans. Tieck had initially adopted the Schlegel's principle of irony, but he himself failed to apply it in his interpretations of Shakespeare. Hegel, on the other hand, defended an art of *objective humour*, because, even if the modern principle of the artist's subjectivity were to reign, this subjectivity of *objective humour* is not sovereign, nor does it put itself above humanity: if

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<sup>34</sup> Gethmann-Siefert, A. *Einführung in Hegels Ästhetik*, pp. 352ss.

anything, it partakes of it<sup>35</sup>. A debate such as this corresponds to Hegel's genuine concern with an art capable of facing its time both critically and affirmatively. This conception cannot be deemed to be historically overridden; its great force consists, more aptly, in keeping as the art ideal that solidarity with the spiritual demands of every present time, and in conceiving a culture of sensuality, an genuine artistic culture thanks to which artists may intelligently and inventively assume the contents and the forms of art, to best address its mentality and spiritual concerns.

(Translated from Spanish by Monica Belevan)

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<sup>35</sup> For Hegel's critique of the ironic principle of the Romantics, cf. *Lessons on Aesthetics*, pp. 49-53. For his position on Romantic art as the dissolution of the Ideal, as referred to the art of his time, cf. *ibid.* pp. 435-447. Near the end of the same aside, Hegel makes his praise of the art of *objective humour*. Refer to the passage on "The end of the Romantic art form" in: *ibid.* pp. 441-447.