

PENULTIMATE DRAFT

THE STUBBORNNESS OF NATURE IN ART *A READING OF §§556, 558 AND 560 OF HEGEL'S ENCYCLOPEDIA*

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<https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/hegels-encyclopedia-of-the-philosophical-sciences/4EA828B246822471E8F682E295E053C3>

[232] Speight (2019:235) has recently raised the question, which he himself leaves unanswered, of how naturalism relates to spirit in Hegel's philosophy of art.¹ 'Naturalism' denotes an explanation that invokes aspects of nature that are (allegedly) irreducible or resistant to thought. I call nature 'stubborn' insofar as it evinces resistance to its being formed *by thought* and hence to its being united with it. This paper argues that §§556, 558 and 560 of Hegel's *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (hereafter *Encyclopedia*) answer Speight's question by specifying three elements of nature that, first, are present in art and, second, are resistant to thought. These are *materiality*, *natural form*, and *genius*. They exhibit nature's stubbornness *in art*. This stubbornness, I argue, is what justifies Hegel's claim that art is absolute spirit *only implicitly* (§556), which leads to the claim that art needs to be *superseded* by religion and philosophy. In this way, Speight's question receives a precise answer.

I proceed as follows. *First*, I discuss the merit of the *Encyclopedia's* philosophy of art in contradistinction to Hegel's lectures on the same topic (Section 13.1). This discussion is propelled by the fact that the *Encyclopedia's* section on art has been largely overlooked in favour of these lectures, which, despite being sometimes helpful in deciphering some of the concepts and claims Hegel employs in the *Encyclopedia*, are not as reliable a guide to Hegel's own thinking about art's place in the *system* as the *Encyclopedia*. Even Gethmann-Siefert's (1991, 2000, 2005) celebrated work on Hegel's philosophy of art reads the *Encyclopedia's* section on art through the lenses furnished by the lectures. *Contra* standard practice, the present

¹ All in-text stand-alone paragraph numbers are to Enz. III. Most translations are mine; if they are taken from PHM, I indicate it accordingly. I refer only to the paragraph numbers (not to the pages) of the *Encyclopedia*.

paper advances an interpretation of Hegel's philosophy of art based entirely on the *Encyclopedia*.

[233] *Second*, since art is placed in the system and, more precisely, determined as absolute spirit, I sketch the basic picture of the system and absolute spirit's status in it (Section 13.2).

Third, I interpret §556 in terms of Hegel's understanding of intuition, the ideal and beauty. I argue that, for Hegel, there are moments in the *reception* of art when material givenness or sheer *materiality* (a manifestation of what Hegel calls "natural immediacy") nullifies the experience of the unity of thought and nature or "the idea" (Section 13.3).

Fourth, I analyze §558, arguing that, for Hegel, what is *received* in art is not only materiality but also a *natural form* which is distinct from the idea (and hence another manifestation of "natural immediacy"). *Pace* Peters (2015), I contend that this paragraph leaves the issue of whether this natural form is exclusively the human form unsettled (Section 13.4).

Fifth, I turn to §560, and argue that, for Hegel, there are moments in the *production* of art when the artist's *genius* (another manifestation of "natural immediacy") liquidates the idea's universality (Section 13.5).

These discussions are meant to reinforce the following two claims. First, *pace* Adorno (2002:61-78), natural immediacy or *sheer* nature (i.e. nature as being resistant to thought, nature's stubbornness) is, for Hegel, essential to art. Second, art's natural immediacy is the exact reason why art is *not fully* or *explicitly* absolute spirit: art is *only partially* or *implicitly* absolute spirit. Since nature does not yield completely to the idea (the unity of thought and nature) in art, thought must move on to religion and philosophy in order to *fully* become absolute spirit.

13.1. The Textual Locus of Hegel's Philosophy of Art

Comments about art occur in the whole of the Hegel corpus, but the main discussion transpires in two places: (a) in his various lectures on the philosophy of art (hereafter *Lectures*) and (b) in the "Philosophy of Spirit," the *Encyclopedia's* third part. Hegel delivered five lecture series on the philosophy of art, the first in Heidelberg in 1818 and the rest in Berlin: in 1820/21, 1823, 1826 and 1828/29. No lecture text penned by Hegel himself has survived (save a few fragments) but lengthy student manuscripts (transcripts and lecture notes) are available. Depending on the manuscript one surveys, one can enjoy detailed reflections on art's value, its historical development, and the individual arts.

In contrast to the *Lectures*' lengthy expositions, the *Encyclopedia*'s consideration of art is only a few pages long. Hegel published the *Encyclopedia* three times in his lifetime (1817, 1827, 1830) and each subsequent [234] version contains a modification of the section on art (see Gethmann-Siefert 2000 and Speight 2019 for details). I will concentrate on the 1830 version, which submits Hegel's final word on the philosophy of art.

Length is not the sole difference between the *Encyclopedia*'s and the *Lectures*' philosophy of art. Whereas the *Encyclopedia* spotlights art's systematic relation to thought, nature, and spirit, the *Lectures* focus instead on unsystematic questions concerning art's value, its relation to morality, its historical development, and the individual arts. But despite these variations there is no discrepancy between them. They are rather complementary, each shedding light both on the same and on different aspects of art. The *Lectures* can be helpful in unravelling some of the concepts and claims Hegel utilizes in the *Encyclopedia*.

Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that we cannot fathom Hegel's conception of art by staying only within the *Lectures*, for art's *systematic* character is addressed properly only in the *Encyclopedia*. Thus, I find Gethmann-Siefert's take of the relation between the *Lectures* and the *Encyclopedia* somewhat precarious. She advocates that each edition of the *Encyclopedia*'s philosophy of art is *nothing but* a summary of "the essential thoughts" of the preceding lecture series (Gethmann-Siefert 2000:317). She does not, however, make a compelling case for such a strong claim (Gethmann-Siefert 2000:322-329). In my view, the *Encyclopedia*'s section on art tends toward a systematic exposition that is foreign to the *Lectures*.

It is true that the *Encyclopedia* was meant to operate as a textbook for Hegel's lectures, but does not hold, as Gethmann-Siefert conjectures, that it was meant as a textbook for his lectures on the philosophy of art. The *Encyclopedia*'s goal was to give a concise presentation of Hegel's *system*, not of his philosophy of art. Because she takes the *Encyclopedia*'s section on art to be a summary of Hegel's lectures on the philosophy of art, Gethmann-Siefert makes no effort to decipher that cryptic section *on its own terms*. Relying heavily on the *Lectures*, the early Jena writings, and the 1807 *Phenomenology of Spirit*, she ends up paying only minimal attention to the *Encyclopedia*'s passages and, especially, *their own* systematic interconnection. She certainly does not perceive them as *fundamental* for understanding Hegel's philosophy of art. *Contra* Gethmann-Siefert's work, the present paper focuses exclusively on the *Encyclopedia*'s philosophy of art, hence on Hegel's concern about art's role in the *system*. *This is why I will make only scarce use of the Lectures and illuminate the Encyclopedia's section on art by drawing thickly on preceding sections of the Encyclopedia.*

Finally, it should be mentioned that, in the English-speaking world, the bulk of scholarly work on Hegel's philosophy of art is based almost [235] uniquely on H. G. Hotho's posthumous three-volume edition of Hegel's lectures on the philosophy of art (Hotho 1842). A translation in exquisite English was published by T. M. Knox in 1975 under the title *Hegel's Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*. Aside from a few notable exceptions (see especially James 2009, Peters 2015, Speight 2015, and Speight 2015, 2019), the *Encyclopedia's* section on art has almost never been given central place in accounts of Hegel's philosophy of art in the English-speaking world. As Gaiger (2006:160) observes, Hotho's 1842 edition and the Knox translation have long been treated as "the standard edition" by Pippin, Houlgate, and other leading Hegel scholars.

Since well-grounded doubts about the validity of Hotho's work were raised by Gethmann-Siefert as early as 1991, the continued usage of Hotho's edition in the English-speaking world is problematic. For instance, Hotho approached the student manuscripts of these lectures as nothing but "sketches and observations" requiring expansion and re-organization. In his *Vorrede* he writes that his goal is to restore the *Lectures'* "animating inner life" by "structuring the whole," adding missing "dialectical transitions," tightening up "loose connections," and increasing the number of examples (Gaiger 2006:162-163, Gethmann-Siefert 1991:93). Hotho also augmented the text with thoughts that were meant "to demonstrate the superiority of Hegel's aesthetics in face of [...] rival systems" (Gaiger 2006:163). The outcome of this "restoration" was a massive expansion of the student manuscripts, the most detailed of which does not exceed 300 pages; Hotho's edition, by contrast, runs nearly 1,600 pages. As Gaiger (2006:163) notes, "it is now almost impossible to work out exactly what belongs to Hegel and what was introduced by Hotho" and hence Hotho's edition belongs to the corpus of the reception history of Hegel's ideas rather than to the Hegel corpus itself (cf. Speight 2019:226 n. 4). Given these reasons and that English-speaking scholarship on Hegel's aesthetics has in the main treated Hotho's edition as "the standard text," it would not be an exaggeration to suggest that this scholarship should seek a new beginning.

13.2. The System

The *Encyclopedia* gives a comprehensive, but terse, presentation of Hegel's account of "the absolute." The absolute is the whole of being and has three fundamental dimensions: "thought," "nature," and "spirit." Thought is studied by logic, nature by the philosophy of nature, and spirit by the philosophy of spirit. Each fundamental dimension is constituted by an [236] array of lesser dimensions. Specifying the relations between the various lesser dimensions within a

fundamental one, as well as between the three fundamental dimensions themselves, is the *Encyclopedia's* task.

Thought consists of categories or concepts, which are mental or “inner” elements generating *meaning*. Hegel, *contra* Kant, believes categories induce meaning even when they are unrelated to materiality, externality, or sensibility. Logic demonstrates how this is done. Thus, in logic thought proves to be an *immaterial structure*.

Nature has two components. On the one hand, it consists of categories and concepts (i.e. thought) *as they apply*, as functions of *organization*, to materiality, externality, or sensibility. There is, then, a facet of nature appearing as an organized and hence meaningful structure. On the other hand, nature consists of elements *given* to the categories and concepts of nature *by* materiality, externality, or sensibility. This second facet of nature, which is unorganized and hence meaningless, is what I call “*sheer nature*.” Although Hegel’s *Naturphilosophie* is interested mainly in showing how thought shapes materiality into meaningful structures of nature, it acknowledges sheer nature’s existence.

Spirit differs from both thought and nature, yet it involves them both. It is not simply the concepts and categories organizing nature and it is not simply organized materiality. Spirit, rather, is thought’s *consciousness* of its finding or “knowing” *itself* in nature, or, more specifically, thought’s *consciousness* of its being the *organizing* element in nature. Philosophy of spirit narrates the emergence of such consciousness.

Spirit has three dimensions: subjective, objective, and absolute spirit. As *subjective* spirit, thought thinks of itself in nature as an organizing material structure (either as organ(s) or as physical process(es), such as perception and intuition). This form of thought’s self-consciousness in nature is defective: by reducing itself to materiality, what thought encounters in nature is only sheer nature. As *objective* spirit, thought *posits* itself in nature and thereby becomes an object *for itself*. Thought’s *self-positing* in nature contrasts with *its already being in nature as a material thing*. The problem with *objective* spirit is that nature vanishes and *all* that appears is thought. Finally, as *absolute* spirit, thought can be neither its self-positing in nature *alone* nor a material structure *alone*. The challenge for absolute spirit is to find a way to *combine* thought with nature without annihilating any one of these *at any moment*.

Art is one of *absolute* spirit’s three dimensions, the other two being religion and philosophy. It follows (1) that art, religion and philosophy are modes of thought’s self-consciousness in nature that, *contra objective spirit*, [237] allow nature’s otherness. It also follows (2) that they are modes of thought’s self-consciousness in nature that, *contra subjective spirit*, do not reduce thought to a material thing. In the remainder of the paper I focus on §§556,

558, and 560 of the *Encyclopedia*, seeking to explain how exactly these two fundamental characterizations of absolute spirit apply specifically to *art*.

13.3. Intuition, Ideal, and Beauty (§556)

In §556 Hegel lays out art's minimum, most superficial structure. There is (a) the *artwork*, a *Dasein* external to cognizing subjects and open to common appreciation; (b) the subject *producing* it, the artist; and (c) the subject(s) *receiving* it, the audience. As soon as this structure is laid out, Hegel qualifies it significantly. First, he declares that the artwork's reception has the character of *intuition* (*Anschauung*). Second, he asserts that what is intuited is *the ideal* (*das Ideal*). Third, he maintains that what is intuited has "the shape of *beauty*" (*die Gestalt der Schönheit*). In the present section I unpack these three statements.

I. Intuition: In §449 Hegel defines intuition, a form of subjective spirit, as thought's "recollecting" itself in an externally existing material in which it remains *sunk* (*versenkt*). Thought's *remaining sunk* in externality is crucial, as suggested by its being repeated in the *Zusatz* of §450.

The *Zusatz* of §449 clarifies this definition by differentiating intuition from representation and sensation. On the one hand, while in both representation and intuition "the object is both separate from me and simultaneously mine," *that* the object is mine is *explicit* in representation but only *implicit* in intuition. The object's "mineness," i.e. thought's self-recollection in it, is *suppressed* in intuition because "in intuition the *objecthood* (*Gegenständlichkeit*) of the content predominates (*überwiegt*)" (PHM). This "objecthood" is the object's material givenness. Thus, in intuition thought sees itself in the object but it is unaware of this because the object's material givenness predominates in the subject's experience of the object.

On the other hand, while in both sensation and intuition a manifoldness of individual features comes to the fore, it is only in intuition that this manifoldness appears as "a totality, an abundance of determinations being held together." Sensation does not *unite* the determinations, intuition does. In [238] Hegel's words, "in immediate intuition I do have the whole object before me." By uniting the determinations, intuition "grasps the *solid substance* of the object," something that sensation cannot do because it presents us only with an aggregate, a disjointed plurality. This "solid substance" of the object is its *meaning*.

By unifying an object's manifold determinations, intuition generates meaning in nature. This unifying function, Hegel believes, cannot belong to material givenness, to sheer nature, but can only belong to thought. It is the thought-in-intuition, not the nature-in-intuition, that

generates meaning in nature. Yet, it is intuition's peculiarity that in it thought is *unaware* of its own unifying function. The material givenness "predominating" in intuition does not allow thought to realize that the unifying element in nature is thought itself, an immaterial, non-natural element. Because of this deficiency, Hegel writes that "intuition is [...] only the beginning of cognition" and that "it is a blatant error to believe that one has already true knowledge of the thing when one has an immediate intuition of it." Absolute spirit, which sublates subjective spirit and hence intuition, cannot be "an immediate intuition," to wit, it cannot be *just* intuition. Nevertheless, *insofar as absolute spirit is intuition*, thought is dominated by sheer nature and thereby fails to behold itself as the unifying element in nature.

Since intuition characterizes art's reception, art is located in materiality, externality, and sensibility. Art is determined fundamentally by a material external object's being given to the audience's senses. Yet, given the nature of intuition, what the audience receives is not only a manifoldness of determinations, but also a unified manifoldness, a "totality." The audience thus finds *meaning* in the artwork. This meaning, as we know, cannot derive from the artwork's material givenness – it is thought's work. Yet, insofar as art's reception is determined by intuition, the audience does not recognize this: they see that the artwork has meaning but they do not espy thought as that meaning's generator. They assume this meaning is *in* the artwork's material givenness, *in* its colors, weight, lines, texture, sounds, and so on. In art's reception thought's function as the unifying element in nature remains hidden from thought.

Crucially, however, art is not "an *immediate* intuition;" it is *absolute spirit*. *Insofar as it is absolute spirit*, art enables thought to *recognize* itself in the artwork as the unifying element in nature. Thought *does* see the artwork as its own product, as what it "has posited." In Desmond's words, art indeed is, for Hegel, "a form of sensuous *self-knowledge*" (Desmond 1986: 2).

Since art's reception is both intuition and absolute spirit, it is determined as a 'conjunction' of (a) thought's being dominated by material [239] givenness (sheer nature) and hence being *unaware* of its presence in nature and (b) thought's *self-recognition* in nature. These two, though, cannot exist simultaneously: they cancel each other out. Given that they both determine art's reception, they must exist in the latter *but not simultaneously*. Art's reception is a structure of fluctuation, of *becoming*: thought moves from self-recognition to annihilation, from recognizing itself as the unifying function in nature to being dominated by material givenness, and *vice versa* (see Trisokkas 2012: 110-116). Because of this fluid structure art is *not fully* absolute spirit; it is, rather, as Hegel notes in §556, absolute spirit only *implicitly* ("[art] is the concrete intuition [...] of the *implicitly* absolute spirit [...]") (PHM).

This, then, is art's *implicitness* as absolute spirit: in art thought finds itself as the unifying force in nature, *but not constantly*. It is art's distinctiveness that there are *moments* when the artwork's materiality or "objecthood" – its colours, sounds, lines, texture, mass, weight, and so on – "predominates" the audience's experience. Being fundamentally a realm of intuition, art constantly *relapses* into the dominance of nature over thought. Regardless of how hard we try, we cannot avoid being hit by the artwork's material constitution. The *problem* is that when this happens in art's reception, *thought loses itself* in nature. So, art's reception is determined fundamentally by *two* phenomena: (a) thought "recollecting" itself in materiality, externality, and sensibility as the unifying element in nature and (b) this self-recollection being constantly interrupted by raw materiality, by a dominant nature that leads thought into (momentary) vanishing.

II. The Ideal: Hegel's second statement in §556 is that what is intuited in the artwork is absolute spirit *as the ideal*. Hegel there defines the ideal as "the concrete shape born of subjective spirit" in which "natural immediacy is only a sign of the idea" (PHM). On the one hand, being born of *subjective* spirit, the ideal is a *material external shape* given to the senses. On the other hand, as a sign, this shape expresses the *idea*. What is intuited, then, is a material shape that expresses the idea.

The idea is defined in §213 as "the absolute unity of concept and objectivity" (Enz. I §213). "Concept" is another name for "thought" and "objectivity" is another name for "nature," so the idea is the unity of thought and nature. Hegel writes that objectivity is the idea's "real content" and has "the form of external *Dasein*" (Enz. I §213). The idea is not about "this" or about "representations" or about "external *things*" (Enz. I §213). [240] It is not an "idea of *something*," a particular idea (Enz. I §213). The idea, most generally, is the presence of thought ("the concept") in externality, in nature.

The definition of the idea as the unity of thought and nature determines the idea as a genus and can be qualified in many ways. The idea's qualification creates its species, which express it in subtly different ways (see Enz. I §214). The *ideal* is one of the idea's species. As ideal, the idea's concreteness is specifically a material-sensory shape. Since, however, the idea is not only concreteness but also the unity of thought and nature, *the ideal is an expression of this unity in a material-sensory shape*. The unity of thought and nature is another name for thought's being the unifying function in nature.

What is intuited in the artwork, therefore, is the unity of thought and nature (the unification of nature by thought), which is the idea. Yet, in art's reception absolute spirit is

bound to sensibility and materiality. In Hegel's own words, "art displays the genuine universal or the *idea* in the form of *sensory reality*" (§456 *Zusatz*/PHM). *This display is the ideal.*

III. Beauty: Hegel holds that what is intuited in the artwork's reception has "the shape of beauty." *The ideal*, then, has the shape of beauty. This means that art as *absolute spirit* is exclusively *beautiful* art. In §556 "the shape of beauty" as the ideal's shape has a twofold determination. On the one hand, it is "a *sign* of the idea." On the other hand, it is specified "that *nothing else* [other than the idea] is shown in the shape."

"Sign" (*Zeichen*) is discussed in §§457-458. In the Remark to §457 signs are described as "unifications of what is the spirit's own or its interior with the *intuitive*" (PHM). A sign connects material-sensory concreteness, natural immediacy, with a meaning, an inner element. Crucially, the meaning and the sign have a relation of *otherness*: the sign does not signify itself – it is *not* a structure of *self-signification* – but, rather, something *alien* to it. In Hegel's own words, "when intelligence has designated something [as a sign], it has finished with the content of intuition and has given the sensory material an *alien* meaning as its soul" (§457 *Zusatz* / PHM).

This interpretation is confirmed by what Hegel writes next in §458:

In this unity, stemming from intelligence, of an *independent representation* and an *intuition*, the matter of the intuition is of course initially something [241] received, something immediate or given (e.g. the colour of the cockade, etc.). But in this identity the *intuition* does not count as positive or as representing itself, but as representing *something else*. It is an image that has received into itself as its soul an *independent* representation of the intelligence, its *meaning*. This intuition is the *sign*. (§458/PHM)

Sign, then, is a given *material* designating a *meaning* that is an *other* to it. The meaning becomes the material's "soul" but is "something else" other than it. In the Remark to §458 Hegel repeats that "in the sign [...] the intuition's own content and the content of which it is a sign have nothing to do with each other" (PHM).

This description of "sign" is greatly illuminating regarding Hegel's characterization of "the shape of beauty" in §556. His statement that the beautiful shape is "a *sign* of the idea" can only mean that a given sensory material designates an element that is *not* such a material. This element is the idea, the unity of thought and nature or, if you will, thought's unifying function in nature. So, in §556 Hegel states that the beautiful artwork is a natural immediacy, a sensory concreteness, opening up this unity. The artwork's materiality, being a *sign*, is totally distinct from the idea. In art, nature maintains its independence, but thought, nature's other, is able to

encounter itself in nature as the unifying force therein. Art creates a “space” for the idea’s “posited” appearance *without* losing its naturalness, its givenness, its sensibility *altogether*.

In addition to describing “the shape of beauty” as “a *sign* of the idea,” Hegel stipulates “that *nothing else* [other than the idea] is shown in the shape.” This means that it is a peculiarity of artistic beauty that nothing else, other than the unity of thought and nature, is brought to the audience’s awareness. Art as absolute spirit opens up a “space” *only* for the reception of such a unity. All other features of thought and nature disappear from awareness. Thus, a beautiful artwork is able to suppress natural elements resisting nature’s unity with thought, to wit, elements exemplifying the dominance of material givenness.

But we must be very careful here. Given the *intuitive* character of art’s reception, that suppression is only *implicit* or *momentary*. *Necessarily*, then, there are moments when beautiful artworks succumb to the brutal forces of material givenness. There are moments when the spectator of Praxiteles’s *Apollo Sauroktonos* does not experience it as the presence of divinity (thought) in an anthropomorphic body (nature) but *only* as a piece of bronze. Beautiful art cannot escape from *this* experience. As Hegel elsewhere puts it, “in beauty the natural element – its [i.e. the idea’s] sensuous coefficient – *remains*” (VPG 308/LPH 261).

[242] On the whole, §556 stresses the presence of two conflicting elements in art’s reception: intuition and the ideal. As intuition, art suppresses the idea and appears as material givenness. As the ideal, art brings to awareness the idea and suppresses material givenness. The audience’s experience fluctuates from the one to the other situation. Art is essentially a becoming (*Werden*). As much as we are enthralled by the idea’s presence in the artwork, as much as we see it as a sign of thought’s being the unifying force in nature, as much as we feel “at home” in art, we will always be met with the harsh realization that the artwork is simply a natural immediacy, a raw materiality, an aggregate of colours, sounds, weight, mass, texture, hardness, and so on. In the domain of art as absolute spirit brutal naturalism will always come back to haunt spirituality. This is why thought eventually must move on to religion and philosophy to become fully spiritual.

13.4. Art and Natural Form (§558)

We have seen that art’s reception is partially determined by material givenness, which is a species of natural immediacy. What is received in this way is a material (colours, texture, lines, sounds, and so on) destitute of thought and hence of meaning. Thus, insofar as art is specified as material givenness, thought disappears from art. Hegel insists that natural immediacy is

present in art's reception not only as material givenness but also as *natural form*. Natural form is the theme of §558, to which I now turn.

As seen, what is received in the beautiful artwork is not only material givenness but also a *unified* material givenness. It is in such a unified structure, resulting from thought's unifying function, that thought finds itself in the artwork. In §558 Hegel identifies the unified material givenness with a *natural form*. This means that, on the one hand, what is presented in the artwork is thought's work but, on the other hand, thought unifies the material *in order to present a natural immediacy*. Apparently, Hegel thinks that only by presenting (*darstellen*) a *natural form* can beautiful art bring to awareness the unity of thought *and nature*.

Hegel endorses H1 ('H' stands for 'Hegel'), which is a passage from §558:

H1: Art also needs, for the expression of spiritual content, the given forms of nature together with their meaning, which art must discern and appropriate (cf. §411). (§558/PHM)

Immediately before H1, Hegel repeats that "art [...] needs, for the intuitions to be produced by it, an external given material" (§558/PHM). [243] The "also" in H1 thus specifies that, *in addition* to "an external given material," art needs "the given forms of nature." Crucially, *they are needed "for the expression of spiritual content," for the expression of the idea*.

These *Naturformen* have meaning and are therefore distinct from natural immediacy as a simply "external given material." Yet, as we have seen, beautiful art has meaning as absolute spirit by being a *sign*, which is a structure of *other-signification*. The beautiful artwork, then, is a natural immediacy consisting of (a) an external given material and (b) a natural form signifying something alien to it. This alien element is, as we already know, the idea. *But what are these Naturformen which beautiful art presents and which function as signs of the idea?*

At the end of H1, Hegel refers to §411 as a text which should illuminate H1. §411 discusses "the actual soul." The *actual* soul, he informs us, is the soul (or thought or intelligence) permeating a *body* so fully that this body's appearance immediately shows *it* as having a soul, as being a body that thinks, or, again, as being a unity of soul (thought) and body (nature). This does not mean that *the body* collapses into the unity of body and soul. Hegel writes that in actual soul the "externality [of bodiliness] represents not itself, but the soul of which it is the *sign*" (§411/PHM). Given Hegel's definition of "sign," this means there is still a distinction between the body, as the signifier, and the unity of body and soul, as the signified.²

² Peters (2015: 33) argues that the actual soul is a *self-signifying* sign: "Hegel holds that the actual soul constitutes an *identity* of inner and outer; hence the actual soul as sign does not signify something other than itself." To square

The body as natural immediacy remains devoid of thought. Nevertheless, even though the body *is* sheer nature, it is *also* pervaded by the soul, an element of thought. Our senses are affected by sheer bodiliness, but insofar as it is part of the actual soul, the body acts as a sign, bringing forth the soul pervading it. Given Hegel's reference to §411 in H1, it is justifiable to interpret "the given forms of nature" as instances of the actual soul: *bodies* appearing as *signs* of the *soul*. If this holds, then, solely the basis of H1, one understands that beautiful art presents *any* body immediately expressing its unity with soul. The presented body would be "the given form of nature," [244] that species of natural immediacy (distinct from the artwork's material givenness) acting as a sign of the unity of thought and nature.

In the Remark of §558 Hegel declares that H1 "takes care of the principle of the *imitation of nature* in art" (PHM), namely, that an item is an artwork if, and only if, it imitates nature. In Hegel's view, this principle is not completely true because beautiful art should "imitate" only that dimension of nature acting immediately as a "sign" of its unity with thought (cf. Peters 2015:41-42 and Desmond 1986:1-13). Nature "taken *only* in its externality" (my emphasis), as an element devoid of thought, offers nothing to art as absolute spirit. It is only when nature becomes a "meaningful natural form signifying the spirit" that nature has value for art as absolute spirit, for it is only in this case that thought can find itself in nature. Beautiful art should "imitate" bodies, but only bodies that are actual souls.

This interpretation of §411 and hence of H1 can be partially challenged. Hegel concludes §411 by stating that the actual soul has "human [...] expression." If the actual soul has *only* a human form, H1 must be understood as saying that beautiful art presents – not *any* body but – solely the *human* body. This claim, however, does not fit with passage H2, which immediately follows H1:

H2: Among such formations (*Unter den Gestaltungen*) the human is the highest (*die höchste*) and truthful (*wahrhafte*) formation [...]. (§558)

If we identify "such formations" with H1's "the given forms of nature" that "art needs for the expression of spiritual content," which is the obvious option, H2 clearly forbids the

her interpretation with Hegel's divergent account of "sign" Peters simply discards it and suggests that regarding the actual soul Hegel has in mind "a peculiar kind of sign," "a special kind of sign," a sign that "cannot be understood as a sign in the narrow sense of the term" (Peters 2015: 32-34, 40). The problem is that Hegel never talks of *kinds* of sign, something that eventually leads Peters to describe his statement that the body is a sign of the soul as "odd" (Peters 2015: 33). My interpretation saves Hegel's account from oddity since it takes the actual soul as being an *other*-signifying structure, not a self-signifying structure: the body signifies the unity of body and soul, which is distinct from the signifying body.

identification of the given natural forms with *solely* the human form. It refers to a plurality of natural forms that express “spiritual content” and states that the human is only *one* of these forms. The combination of H1 and H2 characterizes beautiful art as an activity presenting not only the human form but also other natural forms that are actual souls (whatever these may be).

Yet, H2 does inform us that the human form is the highest of those forms and the “truthful” one. This creates a hierarchy of natural forms, at the top of which sits the human form. If beautiful art covers the whole spectrum of this hierarchy, it is divided into “the highest art,” which presents the human form, and lower species of art, presenting non-human natural forms. In this case, beautiful art as a whole would not be anthropocentric, but the *highest* beautiful art would be.

Yet again, this interpretation is undermined by passage H3, immediately following H2 (I repeat H2 in the brackets): [245]

H3: [Among such formations the human is the highest and truthful formation] because only in the human formation can spirit have its bodiliness and hence its intuitable expression. (§558)

H3 undermines H2 because whereas H2 informs us that spiritual content is “expressed” by *both* non-human natural forms *and* the human natural form, H3 tells us that *only* the human form can express it. We have reached an interpretative impasse that §558 leaves unresolved.

Peters (2015:9, 17-38, 49) utilizes evidence from the *Lectures* and the “Anthropology” section of the *Encyclopedia* in order to defend her thesis that, for Hegel, the human form is the sole “shape of beauty.” I find Peters’s arguments convincing (especially those based on Hotho 1823:36, 157-158) and hence I agree with her thesis. Nevertheless, *pace* Peters (2015:41-42), §558 does *not* support this thesis. Since the present paper focuses on the *Encyclopedia*’s section on art, it is certainly important to know that it allows for a (lower) *beautiful* art that presents non-human natural forms.

Independently of how this issue could be resolved, Peters is, in my view, mistaken to present the human form as a *self*-signifying sign (Peters 2015:40). For Hegel, the human form is a *sign* of the idea in the precise sense that the human body, *a natural immediacy, a natural form devoid of soul*, brings forth what is *other* than it, the unity of body and soul. The beautiful artwork, by presenting the human form, allows thought (the soul) to “see” *itself* in what is *other* than itself. In art *as absolute spirit* the otherness of the presented body (sheer nature) appears equally as strongly as the idea signified by it. *Thus, nature is stubborn in art not only as material givenness but also as a presented natural form, as a depicted sheer (human) body.*

In his *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno criticizes Hegel for treating art in such a way that nature loses therein all its independence. In his view, Hegel develops a “language of art” that replaces the “language of nature” (Adorno 2002:77). Nature is “repressed” in art (Adorno 2002:61), being subsumed under the influence of the “subject,” “spirit” or “thought.” For Adorno, Hegel thinks that in art “nothing in the world is worthy of attention except that for which the autonomous subject has itself to thank” (Adorno 2002:62). In this way, in art nature is ruled by “the dark shadow of idealism” (Adorno 2002:62). Art has been “liberated” “from the heteronomy of the material, especially of natural objects” and “expunged” from itself “the rawness of what is unmediated by spirit” (Adorno 2002:63). Adorno’s message is clear: Hegel treats art as a domain in which nature is completely subordinated to thought.

Our discussion has shown the mendacity of Adorno’s critique. For Hegel, although nature is not thoroughly dominant in art, it is partially [246] or momentarily dominant. For him, in art nature is *not* fully sublated by thought. While art *is* absolute spirit, it is not *fully* or explicitly absolute spirit, since there are *moments* when thought is dominated by nature: there are moments when thought vanishes completely in art. As Desmond remarks, in art nature “refuses to be appropriated without residue” (Desmond 1986:5-6). This “residue” is nature’s material givenness, the given natural forms, and, as we shall now witness, the artist’s genius.

13.5. Beauty and Genius (§560)

In the last two sections, I discussed the twofold manifestation of nature’s stubbornness (“natural immediacy”) in Hegel’s conception of art’s reception: even though the audience does experience the idea in the artwork and thereby thought finds itself therein as the unifying function in nature, this finding is only implicit (i.e., momentary), since there are moments when *material givenness* and the presented *natural form* interrupt that experience. In §560 Hegel turns his attention from art’s reception to its *production*: besides being received by an audience, the artwork is “something *made* by the artist” (§560/PHM). In the present section I argue that analogously with art’s reception, which is determined by “the one-sidedness of [natural] immediacy in the ideal” (§560), namely by material givenness and natural form, art’s production is marked by a similar stubbornness or “one-sidedness.” *This* “one-sidedness” is owed to the artist’s *genius*.

We have seen that in art *as absolute spirit*, the artwork is received as “the shape of beauty” and that an inherent determination of this shape is that it exemplifies *only* the idea. It is in this way that the beautiful shape is a *perfection*. It has also been ascertained that, regarding at least the highest beautiful art, the beautiful shape is the human form. Since what the audience

must receive from the highest beautiful art is the human form *exclusively* as the unity of thought and nature (the idea), *the artist*, who “transfigures” the idea in the shape, must ensure “that nothing else is shown in the shape” than that unity (§556).

For Hegel, “thought” is a *universal* structure (Trisokkas 2009). For this reason, when thought is united with nature, what is *presented* is universal, an element devoid of particularities, individual feelings, eccentricities, and so on. So, in the beautiful artwork, as Wicks (1993:367) puts it, “all contingencies in appearance must be eliminated to the greatest extent such as to allow the universality of this content to exhibit itself through the image.” In the *Encyclopedia* Hegel relates this demand for universality in beautiful art with [247] the fact that it is presented and addressed to a *community*. Beautiful art must be able to “speak” to *all* in a community, so the artist must seek to express a universal idea, an idea that can “touch” and be significant for everyone (cf. LFA I:7. 11, 30). Precisely because the beautiful artwork is “a work of external *common* reality” (§556/PHM), the idea the artist “builds into” (*einbilden*) it must be a *universality*, an idea the whole community will recognize as the unity of thought and nature.

In the most beautiful artworks the idea is expressed through the human form. It follows that the human form presented by the most beautiful artworks must not include elements destroying the idea’s universality. The artist, therefore, should not simply choose an actual human being and present her in the artwork; she must rather *purify* actual beautiful human forms, *abstract* from their deficiencies, and thereby present a *perfect* human form as a sign of the idea (Peters 2015:45, 48, 57; Wicks 1993:366-368). According to Peters (2015:44), for Hegel, such perfect human forms would be the figures of Greek gods and Christian saints.

This is how Hegel expresses this demand for universality (or perfection) in art in §560:

The subject is the formality of activity and the artwork is an expression of God *only when there is no sign of subjective particularity in it*, and the content of the indwelling spirit has conceived and brought itself forth into the world, *without admixture and unsullied by its contingency*. (§560/PHM, my emphasis)

The expression “the subject is the formality of activity” has a twofold sense. On the one hand, the subject, namely the artist, is the “formal” cause of the artwork in that she builds a natural *form* into a material. On the other hand, she is a “formality” in that what is built into the material is *universal*, an idea devoid of particularities and contingencies. The word “God,” I maintain, is equivalent to the expression “the absolute,” which denotes a structure defined by the idea.

God, simply, is, for Hegel, the unity of thought and nature. So, when he writes that “the [beautiful] artwork is an expression of God,” he claims that the beautiful artwork expresses the unity of thought and nature.

Since this unity is a universal structure, the beautiful artwork can express it only if the artist can manage to remove any “sign of subjective particularity in it.” If, contrastingly, the artwork becomes a sign of “subjective particularity,” of peculiarities belonging to the artist who produced it, it stops being “the shape of beauty” and expressing “God” or the idea. Nothing other than the idea must be shown in the artwork and the artist’s subjective particularity, [248] upon entering the artwork, blocks that showing. Subjective particularity generates “contingency,” which destroys the idea’s universality, and, therefore, the artist must build the idea into the artwork “without admixture” and “unsullied” by the contingency of her own subjective particularity.

In my understanding of §560, Hegel is adamant that this goal of the creator of beautiful artworks, the creation of a perfection, *never* materializes. Unlike the philosopher and, to a lesser degree, the genuine believer, the artist lacks the capacity to free herself completely from her subjective particularities. The freedom of thinking or genuine faith is higher than the freedom of artistic production. When Hegel writes that “freedom only advances as far as thinking” (§560/PHM), he implies that freedom *from subjective particularity* follows a progression from art to religion to philosophy: only in philosophy this freedom maximizes itself and in art it remains limited by the artist’s subjectivity particularity.

What is it that limits the artist’s freedom from subjective particularity? Hegel could not be any clearer: this obstructive element is her “inspiration,” which derives from her “genius.” The beautiful artwork is permeated *not only* by the idea or the rational thinking the artist employs in order to build the idea into the artwork, *but also* by “the *inspiration* of the artist,” which is “an *unfree* passion, like an alien power within the artist” (§560/PHM). “Inspiration” is a source of “subjective particularity” and hence affects the artwork as an expression of absolute spirit negatively. This is so because it interrupts the expression of a universality (the idea) with expressions of peculiarities belonging to the artist.

Hegel writes that inspiration is “an alien power within the artist.” By this he means it cannot be controlled by thought: it is *stubborn*. While the artist is indeed able to create an artwork that expresses an idea that “speaks” to all in the same way, this is *not always* so: there are *moments* when her inspiration does not succumb to thought, presenting elements that are peculiar, emotive, and contingent. Just as material givenness and natural form undermine thought in art’s reception, so does inspiration in art’s production.

Hegel's aim is to make us realize the stubbornness of nature in art's production. It is a *fundamental* trait of art's production that the artist cannot remove her "subjective particularity," her "inspiration," from "the shape of beauty" she produces. The artist's "labour" is torn between (a) an application of what Hegel calls "technical intelligence and mechanical externalities" (§560/PHM), which are rational tools enabling the expression of a universality, and (b) an application of elements that are [249] peculiar to the artist's character or craftsmanship. The inspired artist, the creator of beautiful artworks, mixes rational thinking and skilled workmanship with her individual passions and cosmotheory in the process of artistic *production*. This becomes a problem for art *as absolute spirit*, precisely because the latter discloses a universal structure, a structure that does not permit, *even momentarily*, the *complete* annihilation of universality by the particular, the emotive, and the contingent.

Hegel concludes §560 with the following:

"[T]he *producing* has in itself the form of *natural* immediacy, it belongs to the *genius* as this *particular subject* [...]. The artwork therefore is just as much a work of free arbitrariness (*freien Willkür*), and the artist is the master of God." (§560/PHM)

Hegel uses "genius" as an umbrella term incorporating subjective particularity, inspiration, and passion. He suggests that when the artist produces a beautiful artwork, she is both a genius and a skilled worker guided by her rationality (note the "just as much" in the quotation). The crucial point is the link between genius and natural immediacy. The artwork cannot escape particularity and arbitrariness precisely because genius infiltrates it with *natural immediacy*. Genius is the reason why art is absolute spirit only *implicitly* from the side of art's *production* as well.

I have claimed that genius is what interrupts the expression of the unity of thought and nature in art's production by allowing *nature* to stand alone therein, cut off from thought (even if momentarily). This reading is ratified by what Hegel says about "genius" in the *Zusatz* of §395. This *Zusatz* presents genius as a "natural determinacy" of the individual soul. The latter has a variety of natural determinacies, but genius is the lowest or *most natural*. In contrast to temperament, character and idiosyncrasy, genius involves nothing extraneous to sheer nature, nothing coming from *thought*: it is a physical processing, an instance of *subjective* spirit. Genius, Hegel claims, is "a determinate direction which the individual spirit has acquired *from nature*." For this reason, genius appertains wholly to "the sphere of the accidental." One artist differs from another precisely because each is determined by a different genius, a peculiar

element *given* to them at their birth. Consequently, each beautiful artwork contains something differentiating it from another: the accidentality of genius sires the accidental diverse features of beautiful artworks.

All in all, §560 attests that art's *production* is not fully absolute spirit: it is not a *perfect* expression of *the unity of thought and nature*. It does express absolute spirit but only *implicitly*. The artist, equipped with "technical [250] intelligence and mechanical externalities," builds into the artwork the principles of her community that allow its members to experience the idea. But it is an attribute of great artists that they are geniuses. Genius functions as a source of natural immediacy, of sheer nature: it infiltrates the artwork with the artist's subjective particularity, her passions, feelings and eccentricities. This does *not* mean that the beautiful artwork cannot open up a "space" for the ideal; it only means that there are *moments* when the audience's experience of the idea is interrupted by impressions of the peculiarities the artist has built into the artwork. The experience of the artwork fluctuates between the experience of the universal idea and the experience of the artist's subjective particularity; it is a *becoming*. *This is caused by the fact that the artist is both a rational craftsman and a genius*. This makes art absolute spirit only implicitly, for there are moments when sheer nature (genius) dominates the unity of thought and nature. Exactly in these moments, Hegel exclaims, "the artist is the master of God."

13.6. Conclusion

The paper has given a precise answer to Speight's question of how naturalism (nature's stubbornness) relates to spirit in Hegel's philosophy of art: the stubbornness of nature (a) is present in art as material givenness, natural form, and genius; and (b) is the exact reason why art is absolute spirit only implicitly and must therefore be superseded by religion and philosophy.

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