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Gustavo Torrecilha

## THE END OF ART, MODERNISM AND POSTMODERNISM

### ABSTRACT

This article tries to offer a contribution with regard to the understanding of the periods of modernism and postmodernism in the arts through a Hegelian point of view. Based on Hegel's thesis about the end of art, the article tries to show how modernism can be seen, at the same time, as both the realization and the negation of this end, for modernist art embodies the reflective character demanded by the modern spirit and at the same time it tries to resist the loss of relevance of art in the modern world. This type of art, thus, tries to be more than just an aesthetic experience by seeking to influence life and society and to reclaim for itself the primary role of expressing the truth. Postmodernism, in turn, as the negation of modernism, fully carries out Hegel's reading on the art of his own time, accepting this loss of relevance and turning to representations that no longer have the goal of being spirit's highest mode of self-apprehension. Postmodernism has, however, two possible readings: it can either be seen negatively, as an art that has become sterile and that demands to be accepted by institutions and the market, or positively, as an extension of the freedom achieved by modernist experimentations to every artistic production without being limited by a programmatic view. Both these readings show the intrinsic contradictions of artistic postmodernism and the role of philosophy in apprehending it.

### KEYWORDS

Hegel; end of art;  
modernism;  
postmodernism.

## Introduction

Hegel's thesis of the end of art has been, since he held his lectures on the fine arts in the universities of Heidelberg and Berlin during the years between 1818 and 1829, one of the topics that found the most resonance in philosophical debates in the two centuries following his work. Even after the turn of the 21st century, much is still written regarding his thesis about the end of art, which shows the importance of his philosophy to the understanding of the historical development of art during the period in which art saw the rise and fall of modernism and its succession in postmodernism. This article will try to elucidate Hegel's thesis and how it relates to both modernism and postmodernism.

Gustavo Torrecilha: PhD candidate at the Department of Philosophy of the Universidade de São Paulo (Grant n. 2021/14994-4, São Paulo Research Foundation). Visiting doctoral researcher at the Universität Kassel (DAAD Grant n. 91881503); [gustavo.torrecilha@usp.br](mailto:gustavo.torrecilha@usp.br)



This will be done not only by investigating Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics*, but also by discussing with authors who have engaged with this text in order to explain both contexts, since it was historically impossible for Hegel to have written anything about these moments, even if some of his formulations may seem foreshadowing for some of the thinkers discussed in this article.

Considering that Hegel thought his own time to be that of the end of art, this article tries to expand his interpretation to the movements that took place a few decades after he held his lectures, proposing a philosophical comprehension of modern art and its contradictions. But now being clear that modernism has also reached its end, the question regarding the application of Hegel's philosophy of art to the comprehension of postmodernism also arises. Considering how modernism is, in a way, an attempt to recover a condition of art that was lost with its end, as narrated by Hegel, it is possible to see how applicable his thesis would also be in trying to understand the end of modernist aspirations. Modernist art intended to be more than a simply aesthetic experience – it was as if art, self-conscious about its own historical development, were trying to regain the relevance it once had in the past<sup>1</sup>. In other words, modernism tries to resist the end of art, but it comes to an end too due to the inevitability of the loss of primary relevance of art in the contemporary world. With regard to the goal of this text, it is worth bringing Dieter Henrich's evaluation of Hegel's aesthetics and the possibility of a diagnosis of the art of modern times, in which he says that “art theory does not have to avoid being close with Hegel's aesthetics because it fears, in this proximity, being paralyzed by the conceptual superiority and historic distance”, for it can only overcome this superiority through “inversely, seeking and expanding this proximity” (Henrich 2003: 125). This is what this text tries to do; but while Henrich highlights the necessity of building upon Hegel's fundamentals for the development of an autonomous theory of art, it must be said that this text does not have the goal of being a polished theory of art, but rather an attempt of contributing to a reading of Hegel's philosophy of art considering the developments that took place in the last two hundred years.

In fact, there are many thinkers influenced by Hegel's philosophy who have tried to understand both these periods, emphasizing how important and useful his formulations are for the comprehension of them. That shows how Hegel's aesthetics offers many possibilities in its historical and dialectical apprehension of art, not being limited only to his own time. Important works as such are Pippin's (2014) attempt to explain the pictorial modernism of the impressionists, especially Manet's, or even Rutter's (2010) interpretation of the modern arts, even if his work is not entirely dedicated to modernism in the strict sense. On the other hand, both Jameson (1998) and Danto (1997) have also tried to understand postmodernism by employing Hegel's thesis about the

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<sup>1</sup> This treatment of art (a sphere of the absolute spirit) as if it were a subject is justified by Hegel's own treatment of the Absolute as a subject in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (cf. Hegel 1980: 18-19).

end of art – with conflicting conclusions. The arguments of these four authors will be employed in order to explain the development of art in the modernist and postmodernist eras; first, in modernist art’s attempt to regain the primary position it once had with regard to the expression of spiritual content and second, in its discussion of the possibilities offered by postmodernist art after the loss of this aspiration. The discussions with these authors have the goal of highlighting the different readings Hegel’s end of art thesis has to offer, which can even be conflicting among themselves.

Hegel’s philosophy is considered, at least by a few of those who claim to be Hegelian themselves, as the main philosophy of modern times. His conception of the human spirit becoming fulfilled and able to comprehend itself historically and retrospectively is one of the main aspects that allows this interpretation, for the understanding of modernity is linked to this consciousness and awareness of the past. And since the comprehension of the modern world is already a way of seeing it in comparison with a past mentality that modernity claims to have overcome – even if not always in a positive sense –, seeing a postmodern condition is also a way of affirming that this same period and its ambitions are at least partially overcome. Given that many modern visions believe to be – as some interpret Hegel’s works, especially the *Phenomenology of Spirit* – the fulfillment of a historical condition in which the conscience becomes aware of itself, its history and its development (finally understanding what it is now supposed to be and how it got to where it now is), classifying something as postmodern means seeing this realization as already left behind, which can be due to a number of reasons.

Here, it is worth pointing out how modernity is essentially thought of as a narrative that is necessarily opposed to a period that came before it, just as postmodernity itself is only thought as the negation of the modern period, as Jameson (2012) discusses. In fact, in many discussions – Lyotard (1979) being the main example here – postmodernity is understood precisely as the negation of narratives. For Jameson, one of these possible narratives about modernity is based on artistic modernism itself; this is not, however, a single possible narrative, for there are several moments in history in which one can see the birth of modernity (in philosophy, art and economics), always linked with the question of innovation. For example, a possible narrative of modernity in philosophy may see its beginning with Descartes and the “discovery” of the Self. In the arts, however, such conscience of itself and its history, even if already present before modernism, sees its radicalization through modernism’s movements and avant-gardes.

Artistic postmodernism, as the negation of the modernist narrative, can either allow a pessimist vision, which sees this self-consciousness captured by forces outside its own realm (such as the market and artistic institutions), or an optimist view, which understands postmodernity as the generalization of this self-consciousness that becomes even greater, as this article will discuss based on the visions of Jameson and Danto, respectively. In the arts, such understanding of its own history is achieved by modernism and its proposal of being

a new way of expressing the spirit that differs from representations of the past – modernist art, being aware of its place in history, proposes a critical reading of art and even society; modernism is not only an art that proposes an understanding of what art ought to be beyond the mere aesthetic appreciation of its objects, but it can also lead to a political engagement with its own time. And at the same time, this critical reading also means a recovery of art's past characteristics, in which it offered the public a more immediate and relevant relation – especially to those in ancient times and in the Middle Ages – as a privileged means of spiritual expression that was lost in modernity before modernism tried to recover it. Postmodernist art, in turn, could mean either giving up this critical ideal and pretension of being more than just art and becoming completely dictated by the market, or embracing the possibilities that were opened by this awareness, achieving complete freedom in terms of artistic expression.

The engagement with Danto's text also offers a possibility of further specifying what can be understood as modern and postmodern in the arts, given that the terms employed by him – “modernism”, “postmodernism”, “contemporary” and “post-historical” – are seen as more than merely chronological delimitations; they correspond to ways of producing art. Danto (1997: 8) clarifies that modernism is “marked by an ascent to a new level of consciousness, which is reflected in painting as a kind of discontinuity” with regard to “mimetic representation”, which “had become less important than some kind of reflection on the means and methods of representation”. “Contemporary” is also seen as more than a “temporal term, meaning whatever is taking place at the present moment”, and, in Danto's view, “moreover, it designates less a period than what happens after there are no more periods in some master narrative of art, and less a style of making art than a style of using styles” (Danto 1997: 9-10). But while there is a “relative weakness of the term ‘contemporary’ as conveying a style”, because it seems “too much a mere temporal term”, “post-modern” also seems “too strong a term, too closely identified with a certain sector of contemporary art”, for it seems linked to a “certain style we can learn to recognize, the way we learn to recognize instances of the baroque or the rococo” (Danto 1997: 11). That is why Danto prefers to use the term “post-historical”, a concept that, just as Lyotard's understanding of “postmodern”, is linked to the idea of overcoming a certain modernist narrative. The point is to understand postmodernism as the negation of narratives and the possibility of employing every style and endless forms.

This article starts by presenting Hegel's end of art thesis in its two main dimensions, which are related to (i) the end of the age in which art served as the primary mode of expression of the truth of its time, and (ii) the new possibilities that are open to the artist in regard to what can be expressed, since art is no longer the main mode of conveying spiritual content. Next, it investigates how the end of art thesis allows the comprehension of the modernist period, as some Hegel scholars have dwelled on; it is mainly concerned with the new interpretative and reflective aspects of this art that is no longer immediate to the public and how this consciousness culminates in the modernist aspiration

of being more than mere art, at least more than what art had become since it lost its pre-modern status. Then, it is necessary to discuss the relations between modernism and postmodernism using texts from philosophers who have also dealt with Hegel's philosophy of art, starting with Jameson's formulations, which are dedicated not only to the universe of art, but to culture and even economy on a greater scale. Following that, this article investigates Danto's defense of the art produced in the period of art that was inaugurated with Andy Warhol's *Brillo Boxes*. Both their comprehensions see postmodernist art as the negation and overcoming of modernist ideals, either with a positive and a negative outcome on the artistic production that followed.

## The end of art in Hegel's aesthetics

First, it is necessary to understand how Hegel poses his theory about the end of art. And in order to understand that, it has to be clear that Hegel does not directly state the term "end of art". In fact, his discussions on the topic arise throughout the entirety of his *Lectures on Aesthetics* – each of the chapters on the romantic arts discusses directly or indirectly something that is related to this theme –, even though two passages are the most important: the introduction, where he discusses philosophy's relation to art (and even if it is appropriate that philosophy addresses such a topic) and the passage regarding the dissolution of the romantic artform<sup>2</sup>. The first dimension of the end of art can be seen in the following passage, which has been the most cited by scholars when visiting this topic, maybe because it is one of the first grand statements in Hegel's text:

In all these respects, art, considered in its highest vocation, is and remains for us a thing of the past [ein Vergangenes]. Thereby it has lost for us genuine truth and life, and has rather been transferred into our ideas instead of maintaining its earlier necessity in reality and occupying its higher place. What is now aroused

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<sup>2</sup> But even with such statements about art's condition in his time, there are still some scholars dedicated to Hegel's philosophy who see in the *Lectures on Aesthetics* a camouflage of this thesis (cf. Rutter 2010: 42-43); regarding that, it is worthy pointing out that Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics* consist of a compilation made by his student Heinrich Gustav Hotho after his death, using both Hegel's own manuscript and transcriptions from students who attended his lectures. Therefore, because it was not written by Hegel himself, its legitimacy has been put into question in the past couple of years, while the publications of such transcriptions (including Hotho's, which is considered to be one of the most complete and useful sources on Hegel's aesthetics) has simultaneously been carried out. Despite all that, regarding the end of art thesis, even if it was camouflaged, it can still be found in the version that Hotho compiled and published in the 1840s and which became the reference for many other thinkers who engaged with Hegel's aesthetics before these transcriptions even began being published from the 1990s on – that includes Jameson and Danto, who are important references to this text and who deal with the Hotho edition; Pippin and Rutter, both scholars of Hegel, also frequently quote Hotho's edition in their works. On account of all that, the traditional edition of the *Lectures on Aesthetics* will serve as the main source for this article.

in us by works of art is not just immediate enjoyment but our judgment also, since we subject to our intellectual consideration (i) the content of art, and (ii) the work of art's means of presentation, and the appropriateness or inappropriateness of both to one another. The philosophy of art is therefore a greater need in our day than it was in days when art by itself as art yielded full satisfaction. Art invites us to intellectual consideration, and that not for the purpose of creating art again, but for knowing scientifically what art is (Hegel 1989: 25-26)<sup>3</sup>.

This perspective of Hegel's end of art thesis is based on the argument that "neither in content nor in form is art the highest and absolute mode of bringing to conscience the true interests of the spirit", for "precisely on account of its form, art is limited to a specific content" in such a way that "only one sphere and stage of truth is capable of being represented in the element of art" (Hegel 1989: 23). The intellectual scenario of modernity creates a more reflective worldview, which demands more than the direct representation to the senses. Hence, art is no longer "the highest mode in which truth fashions an existence for itself" and human beings do not bow their knees before works of art as they used to (Hegel 1989: 141-142). In this first dimension, Hegel deals with the pastness of art, which does not mean that art would no longer be produced, but rather, that it does not have the same relevance that it used to have in contexts such as Ancient Greece and Rome or even the Middle Ages. Artworks are no longer the main mode of expression of the Absolute and humans do not turn as much to art because they live in a world in which reflection and rational thought have become the best ways of responding to spiritual demands and of gaining knowledge and comprehension of themselves. Modern times are the era of philosophy and, precisely because of that, this comprehension of spirit's entire historical development – which encompasses the different roles art had throughout history – could have only emanated from a philosophical system.

The second dimension, in turn, can be seen in the section about the dissolution of the romantic artform, in which Hegel states that:

in our day, in the case of almost all peoples, criticism, the culture of reflection [Bildung der Reflexion], and, in our German case, freedom of thought, have mastered the artists too, and have made them, so to say, a tabula rasa in respect of the material and the form of their productions, after the necessary particular stages of the romantic artform have been traversed. Bondage to a particular subject-matter and a mode of portrayal suitable for this material alone are for artists today some thing past [etwas Vergangenes], and art therefore has become a free instrument which the artist can wield in proportion to his subjective skill in relation to any material of whatever kind. The artist thus stands above specific consecrated forms and configurations and moves freely on his own account, independent of the subject-matter and mode of conception in which the holy and eternal was previously made visible to human apprehension (Hegel 1990a: 235).

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3 The quotes from texts originally written in other languages were all compared with the respective translations (when available) to the English language and slightly altered when necessary. When not available, the translations were made by me.

Here, Hegel deals with the consequences of this loss of the status art used to have during the Greek and Roman periods and that of the Middle Ages. Because art is no longer the main mode of spiritual expression, topics that would otherwise be excluded from art can now be brought to light. This allows the artist to explore mundane and profane objects in order to express his subjectivity, as in Hegel's notorious interpretation of Dutch painting of the Golden Age, since the divine is no longer the only theme that is available to art. For these productions, the matter is not what is being represented, but how the artist represents it. From this point in history on, "everything has a place, every sphere of life, all phenomena, the greatest and the least, the supreme and the trivial, the moral, immoral, and evil", and "the more art becomes secular [sich verweltlicht], the more it makes itself at home in the finite things of the world, is satisfied with them, and grants them complete validity" (Hegel 1990a: 221). Since art can no longer be the primary mode of representation a people or a nation has of itself, it is the artist's own subjectivity that he objectively expresses in a work. There is no longer a universal *Gehalt*, and art makes "Humanus its new saint" (Hegel 1990a: 237). And the reflection itself, which inserts another dimension in the appreciation of works of art beyond the immediate enjoyment, is also absorbed by the artistic production. That allows the artists to experiment with art's modes of representation, pushing them to their limits, as is seen not only in modernism and postmodernism, but already before, for example in the vast number of possibilities offered by the genre of novel<sup>4</sup>.

Even though this thesis would be incorporated by many authors in order to explain different contexts in the history of art, it is worth noting that Hegel has in mind the artistic production of his own time. Some elements of the end of art can already be seen throughout the entire romantic era, since it is "the self-transcendence of art but within its own sphere and in the form of art itself" (Hegel 1989: 113) and the beginning and preparation for this new historical stage of art. This entire era can even be seen as a long ending of art, as the overcoming of its previous classical stage, in which art best fulfilled its concept of beauty and perfection. For Hofstadter, several of Hegel's claims about the romantic art in the period of its dissolution also find resonance in the productions made during the last two centuries. For him, "this period is not over", since "there is no other spiritual possibility", meaning that "if Hegel's assertion of the end of art is correct, then the whole of our lasting artistic life, in his understanding of the word, must be romantic" – as a result, "it seems appropriate, therefore, to incorporate his concept of the romantic and compare it with the artistic developments of our time" (Hofstadter 1983: 272). However, it is not any romantic worldview, but the romantic worldview at the time of its dissolution – after, according to Hegel's division, the religious and chivalrous domains are surpassed and subjectivity becomes the main content of art. Hegel discusses several works by artists from this time, in which art has already begun to feel different than it used to feel for ancient peoples. And

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4 Which Hegel (1990b: 392) notoriously classifies as the "modern bourgeois epic".

some of these artists and works of art are very much appreciated by Hegel, such as the already mentioned Golden Age of Dutch painting, but also Shakespeare's plays and the works of his contemporaries Goethe and Schiller, to name a few examples. Claiming that art is a thing of the past does not mean that Hegel discredits the artistic production that was contemporary to him; at the same time, it makes clear that his point of reference is his own time and that he was not intentionally making a prediction about the future (however applicable his considerations may be for the forthcoming art), but evaluating the condition of his era.

The artworks of the end of art can no longer be understood as the direct "presentation of a truth to the conscience, but as the consequence of truth [Wahrheitsfolge]" (Henrich 2003: 132-133)<sup>5</sup>. That means that art has a "partial character" as its content and that it is permeated by "reflectiveness [Reflektiertheit]", which stands in an intimate relation with the freedom of the modern artist and the lack of a worldview linked to his nationality and context (Henrich 2003: 130-131). For Hegel, modern art belongs to a time of a "reflective culture [Reflexionsbildung]" that is the "result of the ambivalent self-experience" that constitutes the "modern conscience", which leads to the fact that art is "only one element in the more universal movement of reflection, which is kept in motion by the problem of the mediation of being and self-power"; as a result of being only one element in this modern conscience, Hegel understands art as having only a partial character, which leads to the renunciation of any type of "utopia of arts" (Henrich 2003: 149).

But despite the new diminished role art has in the modern era, it is not as if Hegel merely dismisses its productions. Artworks are still a relevant mode of self-understanding; they are just no longer the primary mode. Gethmann-Siefert (2013: 33) highlights the role art still has, as a symbol of the ethical community [Symbol der Sittlichkeit] that offers "formal culture [formelle Bildung]", which, even if not primary, is still relevant to the contemporary intellectuality; "art retains its significance in the modern – i.e. in my opinion also in today's – world. The only difference is that identification with the content conveyed by art is replaced by a reflective examination of proposals for viewing the world", in a way that "art is no longer a binding orientation in terms of content, but provides formal culture". Art is still connected to the modern worldview, and it is precisely the reflective character of modernity that drives art's questioning of itself that would be the main feature of modernism. And even

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5 It must be highlighted that, for Henrich, the aspiration of understanding the art produced after Hegel's time based on his philosophy can, at best, be built upon his arguments. Henrich (2003: 133) concedes that, in order to understand the partiality of the art of modern times, one must go "beyond the limits" of Hegel's own theory of art, because, in his formulations, the expression of truth to the senses is the definition *per se* of art, and if one understands it only as "consequence of truth", so "the conditions of its definitions are no longer fulfilled". Since Hegel himself acknowledges this contradiction, dealing with modern art from a Hegelian point of view means absorbing this whole conceptual and historical development.



though art is no longer the main mode of conveying content, it still is related to the content that constitutes the modern worldview. What modern art can produce are precisely works “that stand in double reflection: through their reflection on the character of being works of art (1), and through reflection on the consequences that are necessarily associated with the formal structures of a successful work (2)”, and, by having itself as a theme and by reflecting about itself, a modern work of art becomes a “program” (Henrich 2003: 150). This programmatic character is one of the main features that would be reinforced by modernist production:

Already from the reflectiveness of the work as such was revealed that its relation to the spectator had to become different from that of the traditional arts. Reflection was also integrated in the contemplation. In the effort of art against form per se, the same thing happens once again and in an even more important way. The first reflection still left the possibility of the freedom of the spectator, even if it gave it a different character from that which the conventional separation of interpretation and intuition [Anschauung] assumed. The reflection on the meaning [Bedeutung] of form has as a consequence, however, that no longer only the genesis and technique of the work become its own object. It includes now the question of its meaning [Sinn] and of the possibility of adequately recognizing [gewahren] it. [...] Thus, the modern work gains an intensity which, albeit in a completely different sense [Sinn], seemed to be preserved for the mythical era of the arts and which the art of the modern age, emancipated from the religious sphere, could not have had before (Henrich 2003: 153).

And even though Henrich (2003: 154) grants that “there is no occasion to suppose that future art could liberate itself from partiality and reflection, and in all seriousness no motive to yearn for such liberation from the essential”, it is as if this programmatic tendency tried to do exactly that and relive the mythical era of pre-modern art. Both dimensions of the end of art highlighted by Hegel can be applied, firstly, to the understanding of modernism. Because what were the avant-garde movements if not a way of pushing art to its limits, either with it reflecting about itself (as in modernist painting and the making of its means, specially its flatness, its own object) or even making complete mundane and profane objects that are surely not spiritually elevated by themselves as its themes (as in many works produced during this period)? In modernism, these new themes show a type of self-criticism art has about itself due to the recognition of the new possibilities it now has with its diminished role. But, by reflecting about itself, art also denies a position of mere observer of the world and tries to go beyond itself; an example of this is the modernist mantra of blurring the boundaries between art and life – which, in a way, is an attempt to retrocede to the time before the end of art, in which art and the public for whom it was produced were a community and in which art was much more immediate and relevant to everyday life. Even a work that shows mundane objects (Duchamp is the main example here) has as its goal reflecting on and criticizing the development of art and the position it had taken in this era.

In his *Theorie der Avantgarde*, Bürger (2017) describes this process as art gaining autonomy<sup>6</sup> and becoming an institution in bourgeois society after the Renaissance period and the rise of the individual creation of singular artworks; art thus separates itself from the vital praxis and becomes merely art pour l'art or aestheticism. This process is only perceived when the avant-garde movements – as a form of art's self-criticism about itself – point it out and try to restore the relations between art and life. So modernism itself can be seen both as a realization of Hegel's end of art thesis and as a way of fighting this loss of social and intellectual status. It tries to be a sort of "Aufhebung" (Bürger 2017: 68), combining art's pre-modern significance with its modern critical capacity. Postmodernism, in turn, could be seen as the true end of art, in which this loss is no longer fought, for this fight will not be won in a bourgeois, bureaucratic and reason-oriented world. Art then gives up this aspiration of becoming once again the main mode of spiritual representation and fully embraces the possibilities opened by the modern world, adopting a pluralist attitude and/or even attaching itself to the market<sup>7</sup>.

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6 The reading of art gaining autonomy in the modern era is a fairly common one in the field of aesthetics. It is argued that art has become autonomous for the moderns to the extent that it becomes an end in itself; it can even be argued that art as a concept is a modern invention. This perspective is certainly present in the Hegelian thesis of the end of art, but there is also more to it than that. Werle (2011: 55-56) shows how Hegel's thought offers perspectives beyond autonomy as the "guarantee of a space of its own for art after this space had been lost or stolen from social praxis", for "autonomy, as the most proper field of modern subjectivist art, also implies or 'promotes' the very end of art, long before it is a mere result of it". Art, in its relation with the spirit, as a particular form of its appearance that is based on materiality, already had an autonomy even in ancient times: the relation between art and ancient societies was more organic insofar as it more directly represented their respective spiritual aspirations and was more deeply embedded in everyday social and religious life, but as an intellectual activity – an aspect that is only more recognizable in modern life – it was already separated as an end in itself. No matter how direct the relations between an ancient people and the sculptures that represents their gods or the architectural temples that determine the places of meeting and celebration, they still did not arise spontaneously or unconsciously; they are the effective results of the spirit's work in its process of self-understanding that culminates in the end of art. There was always a degree of autonomy in art, which is only recognizable (and not inaugurated) by modernity, and which leads to the intellectual scenario that is able to make such a recognition.

7 Once again, Bürger's *Theorie der Avantgarde* provides an interesting reading of the art after the avant-garde and how it longs for being accepted by the institutions rather than criticizing them: "if an artist sends a stove pipe to an exhibit today, he will never attain the intensity of protest of Duchamp's Ready-Mades. On the contrary, whereas Duchamp's *Urinoir* is meant to destroy art as an institution (including its specific organizational forms such as museums and exhibits), the finder of the stove pipe asks that his 'work' be accepted by the museum" (Bürger 2017: 167).

## Hegel and modernism

Hegel's thesis about the end of art serves as the basis for, among many others, Pippin's attempt to understand the painting produced by the generation of European artists that emerged after Hegel had held his lectures on aesthetics during the 1820s. Pippin sees in Hegel's comprehension a very reasonable explanation for the meaning of the modernist experimentations, of an "art produced under the pressure of art having become a problem for itself, in a period when the point and significance of art could no longer be taken for granted", and structures his book as a defense of "Hegel's concept of art, as well as his claim about what is at stake in the historicity of art" (Pippin 2014: 1-2). This concept of art provides the understanding of "artworks as elements in such a collective attempt at self-knowledge across historical time", in which such self-knowledge also plays a major role "in the struggle for the realization of freedom" (Pippin 2014: 25). Right after quoting the aforementioned passage regarding the first dimension of the end of art, in which Hegel sees art as *ein Vergangenes*, Pippin (2014: 38) discusses Hegel's prophetic tone and how he "provided the resources for an approach to modernism and a way of understanding its relation to the self-knowledge problem", even considering him to be "the theorist of modernism, malgré lui and avant la lettre". For "Hegel's 'pastness of art' claim lands him very close to, if not directly in, the historical situation – the crisis – of modernist art, having to confront, rather than simply assume, its continuing possibility and importance", a situation in which "art itself simply began to look (and read and sound) radically different from art of the past" (Pippin 2014: 8). Pippin understands the modernist movements as a type of reflective art, which is to be expected in the modern context, due to new demands of spiritual self-comprehension.

As a result of this reflective scenario, Pippin points out that interpretation becomes a very important factor in the relations between the public and artworks. His basis for that is a reference to Hegel's claim that art makes "every one of its productions into a thousand-eyed Argus, whereby the inner soul and spirit is seen at every point", and in which "not only the bodily form, the look of the eyes, the countenance and posture, but also actions and events, speech and tones of voice, and the series of their course through all conditions of appearance" are made into an eye in which "the free soul is revealed in its inner infinity" (Hegel 1989: 203-204). Pippin (2014: 51) sees in modernist works precisely this "resistance [...] to conventional appreciation and interpretation, the unfamiliarity and opacity we often see in its thousand 'eyes' can be understood as something like the culmination of this difficulty".

So what is at stake in this reading of Hegel applied to modernism is precisely the aspect mentioned above, of a reflective comprehension of oneself with regard to its own past. Modernity is the first period in which art becomes aware of itself, and this development culminates in modernism. With modernism, this awareness grows to such a level that art aims to become something different than what it used to be, at least with regard to its modes of representation,

trying to conceive other means to expose its conscience. This is what constitutes such a resistance to conventional appreciation and the need of interpretation, because art starts to demand more from itself and, hence, from its spectators. Modernism saw the art from the past as easily graspable, whether due to the more immediate relation between the public and the works in ancient and medieval times or to the fact that the art in the dawn of modernity allegedly did not make much demands from its public, as if it had already accepted its new relegated status. In the period of the dissolution of the romantic artform, art represents mundane and even trivial objects because it is no longer the primary mode of spirit's self-apprehension.

The prevalence of such objects constituted the alleged crisis that prompted modernism. An example of this contradiction can be seen in genre painting by the Dutch: while Hegel understands the exhibition of such objects as representations "in which the productive artist himself lets us see himself alone" (Hegel 1990a: 229), or, in other words, as representations of spiritual subjectivity – which is understood as the reconciliation of the subject with objectivity and as the expression of the modern human being through the material effectivity of art –, even a philosopher of his own time, Schelling (1966: 65), sees some of the Dutch works as "the most coarse [derbsten]". Hegel, however, recognizes the new status of art and that the implications around it do not mean that art becomes irrelevant or useless, even though he still avoids the "utopia" and "programs of a universal artwork", as opposed to Schelling, who still longs for the primacy of art, which causes him to dismiss this partial productions in his "dream of an epic of the modern world in which the idealistic gods of the new era are implanted in the nature for the last and supreme synthesis" (Henrich 2003: 130). It is this widespread comprehension of such works, that saw them in a crisis, what drove modernism to try to overcome this era of art by resisting the conventional ways of appreciation and interpretation.

And almost paradoxically, this differentiation from the art of the past – here meant this art that modernism saw as mainly produced for mere exhibition in museums in the bourgeois era – also meant a recovery of the art from the past way before; the historical development narrated by Hegel in his aesthetics shows how art loses relevance during its history, due to the new spiritual necessity, in modern times, of intellectual reflection. Art, thus, becomes relegated to a secondary function rather than having primary significance for the public. For Hegel, the value of art in modern times is connected with its capacity of arousing intellectual consideration. Modernist art, by incorporating such reflection in itself, tries to fight this loss of relevance and to become once again the main mode of spirit's self-apprehension, what it was before it was overcome by rational thought in modernity, which meant the end of the era of art. Modernism is, dialectically, an embracement of the reflective possibilities brought by this new historical context of self-apprehension and the negation of the very relegated status that results from this new reflective era. It is this embracement of reflective possibilities that makes art become a problem for itself as something whose significance can no longer be taken for granted.

Another author who investigated Hegel's comprehension of art in modern times was Rutter. And even though his book is not focused solely on modernism and in fact is more directed to the modern arts in a much broader sense (with deep discussions on Goethe, Dutch painting of the Golden Age and Lawrence Sterne, to name a few examples), Rutter still tries to grasp one of the most important modernist expressions: abstract painting. He first interprets it through a Hegelian point of view by establishing a comparison between abstract painting and instrumental music. Autonomous instrumental music (which Hegel lived long enough to see become more important) could be meager in terms of representing the spirit, especially if compared to the power of music that accompanies a text<sup>8</sup>. Hegel was afraid instrumental music could fall into the condition of being something produced only for specialists, giving up its potential for spiritual expression and becoming more about skills than anything, which is something abstract painting could also be guilty of. But even though Hegel favors music that is accompanied by a text, Rutter still sees in his aesthetics a defense of the liberation of music from texts and concludes that he could have had the same opinion regarding the appreciation of abstract painting, had he been around during the time of its rise in the artistic scene inaugurated with modernism. The reason for this is that, "unless there is some principled difference in this case between sound and vision", Rutter believes "it seems reasonable to think that Hegel's commitment to the representation of objects and bodies is simply an artifact of his experience rather than a principled position" (Rutter 2010: 117). Rutter argues that Hegel could also have seen in the abstract painting of modernist artists such as Kandinsky and Rothko the same employment of the magic of colors that he mentions in his aesthetics: "in so handling all the colors that what is produced is an inherently objectless play of pure appear", "a fusion of colors, a shining of reflections upon one another which become so fine, so fleeting, so expressive of the soul that they begin to pass over into the sphere of music" (Hegel 1990b: 80-81).

The employment of the magic of colors is a privileged means of expressing subjectivity, the reason why Rutter understands abstract painting as akin to music – and autonomous instrumental music in particular –, the most interior and subjective of all arts in Hegel's system. But the Kolorit also relates to the exploration of painting's flatness and its possibilities, as Rutter emphasizes, also mentioning Dutch painting of the Golden Age. When discussing the relations between color and sound – "just as in music the single note is nothing by itself but produces its effect only in its relation to another, in its counterpoint, concord, modulation, and harmony, so here it is just the same with color" – Hegel brings up ter Borch's ability to depict satin: "each spot of color by itself is a subdued gray, more or less whitish, bluish, yellowish, but when it is looked at from a certain distance there comes out through its position beside

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8 However, it still has its value when it has "development", for instrumental music "cannot simply linger in continuous consonance; there must be interjections or marked musical events, further housed within an overall cadential structure" (Eldridge 2007: 141).

another color the beautiful soft sheen proper to actual satin” (Hegel 1990a: 228)<sup>9</sup>. Rutter (2010: 118) sees here a discovery “of the tension between flatness and depth that is among the organizing ideas of modernist painting”. It is such tension that modernist art critic Clement Greenberg considers to be the essence of modernism, and that is entirely related to these new reflective requirements modernist art makes from itself and its spectators. The limitations imposed by the flatness of painting caused not only the development of techniques that at first tried to overcome such limitations (and that were not only limited to color, but to drawing and perspective too), but also promoted discussions about painting’s own means and what could even be expressed through its flatness.

Rutter, as Pippin, sees in his reading of modernism through Hegel an art that makes a discovery about itself and, in this discovery, reflects about its very own nature. Even though they both add an element to Hegel’s conception of the state of modern culture, seeing an art that becomes reflective, it is worth highlighting that, for Hegel, as discussed in the first quotation on the end of art brought above, it is not art itself that becomes reflective, but it arouses reflection. But, as Henrich (2003: 149) notes, even though Hegel “did not acknowledge the reflectiveness of the work of art itself” and that he “could describe the reflection at best as the formation [Bildung] of the poeta doctus [...]”, there is still the possibility of, “against his will”, seeing “in his own theory” that the “work of art itself must have the character of being reflected and of implying itself as a work of art”. After all, the work of art is inserted in this cultural context of modernity and reflects it in itself. This reflective capacity prompted the reaction modernism tried to incorporate in art, responding to the productions of the early modern days.

Modernism is a type of art that becomes reflective, an art that aims to be more than just the production of trivial images that had allegedly defiled artistic production in the few centuries before; modernist art sees itself as a way of reaffirming and reclaiming the status art had lost. Modernism aims to become more than what art was in modern times prior to the emergence of its movements. In this sense, it must be noted that the adjectives “modern” and “modernist” are not necessarily synonyms. While “modern” refers to a way of seeing art in comparison with the art from the past – which was a relevant topic of discussion since the emergence of aesthetics in the context of 18th century German philosophy –, “modernist” refers to this self-consciousness elevated to a whole new level. It is no longer a matter of simply recognizing art’s position in the historical development of the spirit, but of seeing what this position allows. There is also the possibility of demanding more from art and even trying to recover the role it once had but in a much more conscious way about this role. Because, even if art in ancient times was not unconscious about itself and the expression of spirit – since it belongs to the first level of the absolute

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<sup>9</sup> One work to which Hegel may have been referring is the one called *Galante Konversation*, acquired in 1815 by the Gemäldegalerie of Berlin. There is also a slightly bigger version of the work that belongs to the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, which Hegel could also have seen during his trips to the Dutch capital.

spirit, together with religion and philosophy<sup>10</sup> –, it was still not conscious of the whole process the spirit would go through, a process that would cause the very own decline of its role and relevance.

Modernism reacts to the modern art that allegedly accepted this loss of relevance and the expansion in the circle of objects that can be represented. While Hegel sees the value of the “triumph of art over the transitory, a triumph in which the substantial is as it were cheated of its power over the contingent and the fleeting” (Hegel 1990a: 227) in the expression of subjectivity, this vision is not unanimous. With the loss of art’s capacity of being spirit’s main mode of highest representations, the modernist ideology does not see a powerful message that is conveyed through the art that preceded it, and these artworks are dismissed because of it. It is as if modernism only understands the negative side of Hegel’s claim about the end of art, in which, “if we keep before our eyes the essential nature of works of art proper (i.e. of the Ideal), where the important thing is both a subject-matter not inherently arbitrary and transient and also a mode of portrayal fully in correspondence with such a subject-matter, then, in the face of works of that kind, the art products of the stage we are now considering must undoubtedly fall far short” (Hegel 1990: 223). Modernism, in response to the modern art that comes before it and falls short, not only sees itself as capable of being once again much more significant to society, but in a way that it would actually be able to influence it through its productions. However, as it shall be seen in the following discussion of post-modernism, this falling short is the result of the development of art itself, and dealing with it is of fundamental importance to the art of today.

## Hegel and postmodernism

As seen above, Hegel’s aesthetics can be employed in order to understand modernist art insofar as it incorporates this capacity of critical reflection that starts to be demanded by the human spirit when art is deemed insufficient for its self-apprehension. By reflecting about itself and its history, art tries to regain its status of pre-modern times – which, in this context, means trying to be more than a mere aesthetic experience. During the period of modernism, art tries to resist its loss of relevance and partial character by incorporating reflection in such a way that it dialectically tries to become once again the privileged means of representation of the Absolute. However, this era also comes

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10 In the oral additions of the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, Hegel (1995: 33) says that “§385. [...] The spirit is already the spirit in the beginning, but it does not yet know that it is this. It has not itself already grasped its concept in the beginning, but only we who contemplate it are the ones who recognize its concept. That the spirit comes to know what it is, this constitutes its realization”. It is only in the absolute spirit that “§381 [...] the idea grasps itself – neither only in the one-sided form of the concept or of subjectivity, nor only in the equally one-sided form of objectivity or of effectivity, but in the perfect unity of these moments that are different of it, i.e. in its absolute truth” (Hegel 1995: 22).

to an end, which evokes once again the application of Hegel's end of art thesis to the comprehension of postmodernism. From a Hegelian point of view, it can be argued that the modernist aspirations are overcome because this loss of art's primary position in the highest modes of self-apprehension is art's natural and inexorable development:

On the other hand, in the position we have been forced to assign to art in the course of its development, the whole situation has altogether altered. This, however, we must not regard as a mere accidental misfortune suffered by art from the outside, owing to the distress of the times, the sense for the prosaic, lack of interest, etc.; on the contrary, it is the effect and the progress of art itself which, by bringing before our vision as an object its own indwelling material, at every step along this road makes its own contribution to freeing art from the content represented. What through art or thinking we have before our physical or spiritual eye as an object has lost all absolute interest for us if it has been put before us so completely that the content is exhausted, that everything is revealed, and nothing obscure or inward is left over any more. [...] But if the essential worldviews [Weltanschauungen] implicit in the concept of art, and the range of the content belonging to these, are in every respect revealed by art, then art has got rid of this content which on every occasion was determinate for a particular people, a particular age, and the true need to resume it again is awakened only with the need to turn against the content that was alone valid hitherto [...] (Hegel 1990a: 234).

The modernist aspiration of making art regain its former relevance as the main mode of conveying spiritual content cannot endure for much time during this new era of reflection in which the spirit demands more than what is feasible of being conveyed through sensible manifestations. Art has already expressed its limited content, and for Hegel (1990a: 236), "is therefore no help to [the artist] to adopt again, as that substance, so to say, past worldviews, i.e. to propose to root himself firmly in one of these ways of looking at things". As a result, "no Homer, Sophocles, etc., no Dante, Ariosto, or Shakespeare can appear in our day; what was so magnificently sung, what so freely expressed, has been expressed; these are materials, ways of looking at them and treating them which have been sung once and for all"; but still, "it is the appearance and activity of imperishable humanity in its many-sided significance and endless all-round development which in this reservoir of human situations and feelings can now constitute the absolute content of our art" (Hegel 1990a: 238-239). Art has played its role in the process of spirit's self-apprehension and is no longer the primary mode of conveying spiritual content. The first mode of representation that the spirit has is the one of material exteriority, but through the exploration of this means, the spirit is able to reach its full potential and the point of its final stage, which demands its self-apprehension through the intellectual means of philosophy. Even if this final stage involves a culture of reflection and this reflection is absorbed by art itself, it will always be limited to the exterior means and its apprehension by the senses. The primary mode



of conveying content will be that of philosophy and art will be relegated to the function of reflecting this content in its productions.

Art will not be as relevant as it once was, but this loss of relevance at least offers the possibilities of exploring new ways in the portrayal of human subjectivity, which becomes the new content of art as opposed to a universal *Gehalt* that had prevailed in the symbolic, classical and romantic artforms. These new possibilities, the freedom that Hegel identified in the art of his own time, resemble very much the condition of postmodernism. In fact, even though Pippin (2014: 43) spends the vast majority of his book applying Hegel's vision to the comprehension of the modernist period in which Manet produced his impressionist paintings, he also recognizes that the *Lectures on Aesthetics*, especially the aforementioned second dimension of the thesis about the end of art, can also "almost sound like a celebration of postmodernism", because "for the contemporary artist, anything from the past is available, any style, tradition, technique, any theme or topic".

There are two possible interpretations of this new possibilities postmodernist art has before itself. Jameson and Danto, while engaging with Hegel's text, propose a reading of this moment in which modernist art became too a thing of the past and the period of the end of art could finally establish itself with no more disturbances that attempted to regain the primary position regarding the conveyance of content. Their visions, however, are conflicting in terms of what it means to postmodern art. While Jameson, a prominent critic of postmodernism and whose reading of Hegel is inspired by a Marxist orientation, sees the postmodern condition in the arts as a loss of modernist aspirations and the realization of Hegel's thesis that gives way to another main form of grasping the world (that of Theory), Danto praises the postmodern art and sees it as a positive fulfillment of Hegel's thesis about the end of art, insofar as the works incorporate in themselves art's very own philosophy and art finally becomes completely free to reflect about itself with no more ties to a mimetic or an ideological perspective. Such mixed interpretations also serve to elucidate the role of Hegelian dialectics and the internal contradictions postmodern art poses to itself by negating the modernist period, which was itself a negation of the late romantic period, which itself was too a negation of art's concept as realized in the classical era.

In his text "'End of Art' or 'End of History'", Jameson (1998: 73) brings up this question through a Marxist point of view, which sees an overlap of economics and culture in a way that "everything, including commodity production and high and speculative finance, has become cultural; and culture has equally become profoundly economic or commodity oriented". He sees in modernist art precisely the claims Hegel had made about the art of his past, in which art was the main mode of bringing truth to existence: "what has defined modernism in the arts above all is that it laid peremptory claim to a unique mode 'of apprehending and representing the Absolute'", for "it was indeed for us or at least wished to be for us par excellence 'the highest mode in which truth claws its way into existence'" (Jameson 1998: 82). If, at least in Hegel's view, art ought

to be dialectically overcome by philosophy, “rather, a new and different kind of art suddenly appeared to take philosophy’s place after the end of the old one, and to usurp all of philosophy’s claims to the Absolute, to being the ‘highest mode in which truth manages to come into being’” (Jameson 1998: 83). This art was precisely that of modernism and by incorporating in itself the necessity for critical reflection that the modern spirit demands, modernism aspires, in Jameson’s point of view, to be more than just beautiful, but also sublime<sup>11</sup>.

Art, according to Jameson’s understanding of it, has two halves, the Sublime and the Beautiful. The end of modernist art means that the brief period in history in which art aspires to be more than just beautiful is “dried up”, which means “a return of Beauty and the decorative, in the place of the older modern Sublime, the abandonment by art of the quest for the Absolute or of truth claims and its redefinition as a source of sheer pleasure and gratification (rather than, as in the modern, of *jouissance*)” (Jameson 1998: 86). But the role of the Sublime would ultimately be taken over by Theory, “as that seemed to supplant traditional literature from the 1960s onwards, and to extend across a broad range of disciplines, from philosophy to anthropology, from linguistics to sociology, effacing their boundaries [...]” (Jameson 1998: 84-85). For Jameson, this moment of Theory would actually be a confirmation of Hegel’s “premonitions” that art would be superseded by philosophy. If modernism was a way of art trying to be more than just beautiful, or, as in Jameson’s term “*transaesthetic*”, postmodern art would be the resurgence of beauty due to the loss of this *transaesthetic* aspiration. In Jameson’s Marxist understanding, it happens due to the further development of the cultural industry, which becomes even greater than it was during the time some of the modernism tried to criticize it. As a consequence, this “return of the Beautiful in the postmodern”, Jameson (1998: 87) writes, “must be seen as just such a systemic dominant: a colonization of reality generally by spatial and visual forms which is at one and the same time a commodification of that same intensively colonized reality on a world-wide scale”. For that matter, it is worthy noticing that Jameson sees in postmodernism not merely a style, but the historical periodization of culture that is deeply intertwined with a new stage in global capitalism.

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11 For Jameson, sublime does not have the exact same meaning it had during the period of aesthetic formulations made by classical German philosophy from Kant to Hegel, but means, rather, the belief art has of being something beyond mere aesthetic. He says: “The sublime was for Burke an experience bordering on terror, the fitful glimpse, in astonishment, stupor, and awe, of what was so enormous as to crush human life altogether: a description then refined by Kant to include the question of representation itself, so that the object of the sublime becomes not only a matter of sheer power and of the physical incommensurability of the human organism with Nature but also of the limits of figuration and the incapacity of the human mind to give representation to such enormous forces” (Jameson 1991: 34). But due to the development of capital and of urban life (Jameson is particularly interested in modern and postmodern architecture), “the other of our society is in that sense no longer Nature at all, as it was in precapitalist societies, but something else which we must now identify” (Jameson 1991: 35).

Danto, on the other hand, still sees something positive in his application of Hegel's end of art thesis to the comprehension of the art produced from the 1960s on. He also understands modernism as an art that tried to be more than just art: in his interpretations, each of the avant-garde movements had a philosophical comprehension of the essence of art and tried to defend its point of view at the same time they tried to eliminate others. They also denied the aspiration of a mimetic representation of reality in order to pose the question of art's true philosophical nature. For Danto (1997: 30), modernism was the Age of Manifestos, in which "to accept the art as art meant accepting the philosophy that enfranchised it, where the philosophy itself consisted in a kind of stipulative definition of the truth of art", as well as, most of the time, "a slanted rereading of the history of art as the story of the discovery of that philosophical truth". It is followed by post-historical art and the age of pluralism for, if "a manifesto singles out the art it justifies as the true and only art, as if the movement it expresses had made the philosophical discovery of what art essentially is", he argues, "the true philosophical discovery, I think, is that there really is no art more true than any other, and that there is no one way art has to be: all art is equally and indifferently art" (Danto 1997: 34). This mentality, which had the goal of differentiating true art from alleged pseudo-arts from other movements, would be overcome in the 1960s with pop art. The main example for Danto is Andy Warhol's *Brillo Boxes*, giant replicas of a mass consume cleaning product that show that from this moment on, anything can be a work of art and that the difference between a work of art and a mere object cannot be stated simply through visual inspection<sup>12</sup>.

Danto sees it as a positive thing that art has gone through this process because it is this very process that allows it to be what it is supposed to be. Art becomes its own philosophy and, by reflecting about itself, realizes that there is no way it necessarily must be. Modernism movements and avant-gardes, no matter how open they were to experiment with and to even deny art's predetermined forms, which were related to a mimetic aspiration, were still not entirely open to other forms of experimenting with art that would be against its alleged true essence. For Danto (1997: 46), Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* make it historically possible that the true real essence of art emerges: "the Age of Manifestos, as I see it, came to an end when philosophy was separated from style because the true form of the question 'What is art?' emerged". Danto sees post-historical art as the recognition of pluralism because the question of what art is is not

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12 Due to the scope of this article, it is not possible to deeply investigate Danto's reading of Hegel's aesthetics and the criticism he received from scholars specialized in Hegel's philosophy. It must be noted, however, that his thesis about the "philosophization of art" (Danto 1990: 334) – which Danto supports with his reading of Hegel's aesthetics – is contested by, for example, Iannelli (2015: 120), who states that, for Hegel, there is a "sensuous dimensions that determines the ideal limits that art must not exceed if it does not want to become philosophy and disappear". For Iannelli (2015: 127), Danto's reading would be based more on Kojève's reading of Hegel than on Hegel's philosophy itself.

necessarily tied to an affirmation of its essence in a stylistic manner. And the positive consequence is that art finally becomes free to achieve all that was prepared in the modernist era. That means the end of the search for a rigid definition of art and the embracement of complete and total freedom.

And even though they both see postmodernism as more than a mere style, and therefore as a historical condition, there is a discordance between Jameson and Danto regarding the value of this postmodernist production. While Jameson sees it as a loss, Danto sees it as an opening of possibilities that modernism, in its dogmatic definition of art's true philosophical essence, did not allow. Such conflictive readings influence how they both perceive an artist such as Andy Warhol. While examining Warhol's *Diamond Dust Shoes*, Jameson (1991: 8-9) argues that "it does not really speak to us at all" in the sense of Hegel's understanding of the process of loss of art's position as the main mode of spiritual expression, simultaneously culturally relevant and immediate to the public; and considering how "Warhol's work in fact turns centrally around commodification" (in his Coca-Cola bottles or Campbell's soup cans), Jameson still does not see it as "powerful and political statements", which makes one wonder "about the possibilities of political or critical art in the postmodern period of late capital"<sup>13</sup>. This loss of depth is not Warhol's fault, but the postmodernity itself is to blame, for it effectively carries out the end of the age of art that modernism tried to recover; the further development of capitalism and the cultural industry that absorbs even the works that are critical to it also plays an important role in the sterilization of art. Danto, on the other hand, sees post-historical art as the celebration of the true philosophical nature of art, of an art that is no longer invested in necessarily defending a position of what it must be. Postmodernist art could be anything, like Warhol's works show us: they are free from the "burden of history" and artists are "free to make art in whatever way they wished, for any purposes they wished, or for no purposes at all" (Danto 1997: 15). In fact, Danto's reading also acknowledges the institutionalization of art that some modernists tried so hard to counter, since, for him, the definition of what is a work of art becomes entirely dependent on how the "artworld" perceives an object (Danto 1964: 580)<sup>14</sup>.

13 However, Jameson is not entirely distrustful of postmodernist production. He just sees a loss of potential in comparison with what the art from the decades prior tried to achieve. And even when he glimpses a new type of critical art, he does so by recognizing that it will be impossible to retrocede to the modernist era. For Jameson, a resurgence of critical art would mean not longing for the modernist past, but creating new possibilities for the future.

14 This is also a point of view that scholars on Hegel have criticized, since Danto's argument for the legitimation of works of art through an artworld contradicts Hegel's vision of art as something universal, created for the sake of humankind's own self-apprehension. Gethmann-Siefert (2013: 35) is one of these scholars, to whom, according to Hegel's "aesthetic concept" of art as the "result of a world formation [*Ergebnis einer Weltgestaltung*]", "works of art do not become – as in Danto's determination of the art after its end – citizens of a special world, but retain their significance 'for us'". It is also necessary to highlight that, even if this "institutionalist" thesis can be attributed to

Such readings, even if conflicting when it comes to the assessment of post-modern art, still employ Hegel's aesthetics as a way of explaining the development and the changes in artistic production, especially from the 1960s on. It must be noted that both Jameson and Danto have their own perspective, in which they do not intend to necessarily develop Hegel's thesis to its ultimate consequences; they both operate as philosophers and cultural critics themselves, employing Hegel's thought to base their own. By doing so, each of their readings highlights one aspect of the end of art that was mentioned above, with Jameson emphasizing the loss of relevance, and Danto accentuating the freedom and the infinite new possible paths art now can follow, even if such dimensions are intertwined and do not exist without the other. This is a contradictory condition of postmodernity that can be found in Hegel's reading of his own time. While he acknowledges the loss of art's place as the primary mode of conveyance of content, he still values many of the productions of this era, for, even if they are not the primary mode of transmitting content as artworks used to be, they at least convey the individual subjectivity that constitutes the culture of reflection. These works reflect (on) the world in which they exist and that is of great relevance, albeit diminished in comparison with that of philosophy and the reflective potential granted by its purely intellectual means. Postmodernist production cannot be simply disregarded, but it is still necessary and possible to demand and extract something from it; the point is understanding the position of art in the face of rational thought and the contemporary world. The different readings of postmodernism and even the evaluation of its consequences for the culture as a whole show how contradictory this period is and how necessary dealing with such contradictions is for the comprehension of it. And in maturely dealing with this loss of relevance and making use of its almost unlimited possibilities resides a possibility for art to still try to intervene in social life, even if to a limited degree.

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Danto, he also persists in search for an essentialist definition of art and puts interpretation and the discovery of the work's embodied meaning as the basis for both the philosopher and critic, allowing "the *art world* to decide whether something is a work of art" and assigning "to philosophy the task of defining the essence of art in such a way that it fits everything judged to be an art work by the art world" (Houlgate 2013: 281). However, Houlgate argues, based on Hegel's logical framework, that Danto adheres to the standpoint of the understanding [*Verstand*] and not to that of the speculative reason [*Vernunft*] in his conception of the essence of art, presupposing it to differ from its appearance as the "simple *negation* or elimination of what is inessential" (Houlgate 2013: 283); as a result, "Danto's radically pluralistic attitude to contemporary art itself rests on what is, to Hegelian eyes, a profoundly conservative and inadequate conception of 'essence'; [...] This means that, for Danto, art's essence does not require art to look any particular way, that it makes no *visible* difference to the way art works look. This, in turn, means that art's essence does not make itself visible, does not *appear* for all to see, in works of art. Yet here lies the problem: for after Hegel's proof that essence *must* appear, the idea that essence does *not* appear is no longer sustainable; nor can Danto sustain the associated, radically pluralistic, idea that art can look any way at all and still be art" (Houlgate 2013: 286).

Hegel's end of art thesis serves as a way of understanding both modernism and postmodernism, because, rather than being seen as a foreshadowing about a specific event in history, it accounts for a profound understanding of art, its function and its historical development in a much broader cultural sense, related to other spheres of intellectual production. By placing art as the first mode of the spirit comprehending itself, Hegel states its cultural significance, especially in a given period of time, the one that started in Ancient Greece and that endured until the Middle Ages. But, simultaneously, he also underscores how it is not spirit's final mode of self-apprehension. Art must be overcome by other modes of self-knowledge, and modernity offers that with the rise of rational thought, of a pure intellectuality that no longer depends on the senses. By incorporating in itself this gain of a reflective capacity, modernist art is the brief period of time in which this development is most radically fought, but it cannot endure for long. The spiritual aspirations of humanity still need to go beyond what is feasible of being expressed to the senses. Even without intentionally making predictions for the future, the conceptual and historical development of art narrated by Hegel's aesthetics allows the understanding of the contradictions of modern and postmodern art.

Even now, with the expansion of postmodernism, it may still take some time for critical thinking to fully respond to postmodern phenomena and their different possible readings and assessments. The goal of this text was not to speculate on what Hegel would have thought or said of modernism and postmodernism, but to show how his philosophy of art and the historical understanding of this concept still offer a way of comprehending the contradictions art poses for itself in the modern and postmodern eras. However foreshadowing Hegel's remarks about the end of art may seem, his philosophy is not about predicting the future, but retrospectively analyzing the process of the development of the human spirit and the contradictions that emerged along the way. Applying Hegel's aesthetics to the understanding of modernism and postmodernism requires a similar procedure. And such theoretical procedure is necessary due to the nature of philosophy and art themselves and their relation in and to the overall state of culture since the dawn of modern times.

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