

THE ARTS IN HEGEL'S AESTHETICS: SYSTEM, MODERNITY AND THE CASE OF CINEMA

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Abstract: *This article has the goal of offering a contribution with regard to an updated reading of Hegel's system of arts, considering the invention of cinema in the turn of the 19th to the 20th century. For this goal, it is necessary to understand how Hegel structures his system of arts in an articulation that is not based merely on the formal properties that are intrinsic to the arts of architecture, sculpture, painting, music and poetry, but that is mainly derived from the specific content of each art. This prevalence of content is justified by the broader context of Hegel's systematic philosophy, in which the logical determinations of the Idea find resonance in the spiritual productions of humankind, not as mere applications of Hegel's logic, but as developments of the Idea itself in its dialectical movements. As a result, the system of arts, as the individual part of Hegel's Aesthetics, follows the systematic development of the artforms, which are, in their turn, particularizations of the universal content of art. In this relation between the arts and the artforms, cinema can be comprehended as part of the romantic artform, which is due not only to the period of history in which it was invented, but also to the content itself that cinema conveys. And as the most recent and final art of the system, cinema not only conveys a content that suits the spiritual demands in the context of the dissolution of the romantic artform, but it also works as a kind of completion to the whole system, insofar as it has the possibility of amalgamating all other arts in itself and of becoming one of the most powerful cultural phenomena of modernity.*

Keywords: *Hegel; system of arts; cinema; modernity.*

Resúmen: *Este artículo tiene como objetivo ofrecer una contribución en lo que respecta a una lectura actualizada del sistema de las artes de Hegel, considerando la invención del cine en el cambio del siglo XIX al XX. Para ello, es necesario comprender cómo Hegel estructura su sistema de las artes en una articulación que no se basa meramente en las propiedades formales intrínsecas a las artes de la arquitectura, la escultura, la pintura, la música y la poesía, sino que se deriva principalmente del contenido específico de cada arte. Esta prevalencia del contenido se justifica*

por el cuadro más amplio de la filosofía sistemática de Hegel, en que las determinaciones lógicas de la Idea encuentran resonancia en las producciones espirituales de la humanidad, no como meras aplicaciones de la lógica de Hegel, sino como desarrollos de la Idea misma en sus movimientos dialécticos. En consecuencia, el sistema de las artes, como parte individual de la Estética de Hegel, sigue el desarrollo sistemático de las formas de arte, que son, a su vez, particularizaciones del contenido universal del arte. En esta relación entre las artes y las formas de arte, el cine puede comprenderse como parte de la forma de arte romántica, lo que se debe no sólo al periodo de la historia en que se inventó, sino también al propio contenido que transmite el cine. Y como arte más reciente y final del sistema, el cine no sólo transmite un contenido que se ajusta a las exigencias espirituales en el contexto de la disolución de la forma de arte romántica, sino que también funciona como una especie de culminación de todo el sistema, en la medida en que tiene la posibilidad de amalgamar todas las demás artes en sí mismo y de convertirse en uno de los fenómenos culturales más poderosos de la modernidad.

Palabras clave: *Hegel; sistema de las artes; cine; modernidad.*

Introduction¹

The third part of Hegel's *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art* is dedicated to investigating the individual arts and their relations to one another. They are conceived as a system, in which architecture, sculpture, painting, music and poetry are the realizations, on an individual level, of the universal concept of art. Those were the arts that Hegel saw as historically and conceptually significant for the expression of the human spirit [*Geist*] throughout the centuries, from ancient times to his own modern context. But with the development of technology, new arts were invented and it can be argued that no other art has resonated more with the public since the beginning of 20th century than the art of cinema². The goal of this text is precisely to understand how the so called seventh art³ relates to the other arts in the system and if it can be conceived within the structural organism Hegel dedicated to the diverse ways of expression of the universal concept of art.

This article is structured in two major parts: the first one is dedicated to understanding how Hegel comprehends the different arts and how he articulates them in a system based not only on their form, but primarily on their content. As it will be argued, this strategy is unusual if compared to other philosophers of the period of German idealism such as Kant, August Schlegel and Schelling, whose divisions of art are based mostly on form, on how the different arts present a content, which, by its turn, is conceived in a more unitary way. Hegel, on the other hand, comprehends the content of art historically; that results in its expression through different artforms (symbolic, classical and romantic) in a system in which those different particularizations of the content of art are more compatible with each individual art.

1 This work was financed by the São Paulo Research Foundation (Fapesp), Brasil, process number 2021/14994-4, and by the DAAD (Grant n. 91881503).

2 Even though the art of cinema was not the only one invented after Hegel held his courses on aesthetics at the University of Berlin during the years between 1820 and 1829, it has arguably become the most significant during the 20th century. No other art has been capable of resonating both within the mass culture and the world of high arts. Another important art that saw its technical development during this period is the art of photography, but it can be argued that it does not invent a major new language as cinema does. Photography can be brought closer to the art of painting, for it presents a still image within a two-dimensional surface; also, photography, as an art, does not have the same repercussions cinema has among the public.

3 With the other six being, as overall conceded, the arts of architecture, sculpture, painting, music, literature and dance. The first five are the ones that are encompassed by Hegel's system. Even though he speaks of *Poesie*, as the terms have evolved in the more than a century and a half since he held his lectures on aesthetics, it has become synonymous with literature, since the term "poetry" has been employed in the last decades more in relation to a specific genre within the literary art. In regard to dance, Hegel acknowledges it at the same time he considers it unfit for his system, belonging to a group of imperfect or incomplete [*unvollkommene*] arts, as it is also the case with gardening [*Gartenbaukunst*] (Hegel, 1990, 262). Regarding the use of texts in other languages, all translations into English were made by me. For Hegel's texts, the English translations were the main source when they were available, with occasional changes; in those cases, the original German text was the one cited.

The second part of this article is dedicated to the art of cinema and if and how it can be understood through Hegelian lenses. For that, it will be necessary to comprehend whether it can be integrated into the system and the position it would have within said system. The art of cinema can be placed within the realm of the romantic artform, not only because cinema as a technology was invented in modernity, but also because the appropriation of this technology by the human spirit has the goal of exploring human nature to its deepest level.

The goal of this discussion is to offer a contribution with respect to an attempt at an update of Hegel's system of arts for the present day. It is by no means an unprecedented attempt; Richard Dien Winfield's book *Rethinking the Arts after Hegel: From Architecture to Motion Pictures* has a similar goal in a much more extensive way. However, as this text will discuss, Winfield disagrees with Hegel's reasoning for the division of arts and presents his own, returning to the formal types of expression of each individual art as their major differentiating quality. Nonetheless, his work will be an important source of discussion throughout this whole text, even if my goal is to remain closer to Hegel's own strategy of division. The development of this text also incorporates Alain Badiou's twist of Hegel's systematic in his attempt to characterize cinema as an art that arises after comedy, which is the last stage of poetry that Hegel discusses in his *Aesthetics*. Nonetheless, both authors agree with regard to a characterization of cinema as an art that aggregates all other arts of Hegel's system. Finally, considering the role of the technical reproduction in the essence of cinema, a discussion with Walter Benjamin's classic essay on the topic is necessary, in order to show how his reading of the status of art in modern times compares with Hegel's own reading of the dissolution of art.

Hegel's system of arts⁴

Hegel's *Aesthetics* is divided into three parts: the first one concerns an investigation of the Idea of artistic beauty, "the Ideal, in the still-undeveloped unity of its fundamental characteristics, independently of its particular content and its different modes of manifestation"; the second one corresponds to the development of this "inherently solid unity of artistic beauty [...] unfolded within itself into an ensemble of forms of art", and the third one presents the system of individual arts as the "reality in the element of externality itself", as the "sphere in which the work of art is actualized in the element of the sensuous" (Hegel, 1975, 613-614). The first part corresponds to the universal comprehension of the concept of the beautiful as such, the second to the particularization of this concept in its symbolic, classical and romantic forms and the third to the individualization of the artistic beauty in its effective realization of the particular content of each artform directed to the senses, through architecture, sculpture, painting, music and poetry. Even though it can be argued

⁴ The argumentation of this section mainly follows my previous research dedicated to Hegel's systematization of arts, which I had the opportunity of publishing more thoroughly in the form of the following texts: Torrecilha, 2021 and 2022.

that Hegel himself did not choose to use the term “system” in the title of this part⁵, his division still works in a systematic way, for Hegel comprehends the arts by articulating them around a common principle in a procedure that is common to his philosophy as a whole. In the philosophies of German idealism, to which the notion of system is one of the most important ones, it corresponds to an integration of the various parts not only as a type of organization, but mainly as an organism based on rationality and that contains a universal principle, which originates particular levels in which each part relates both to one another and to the whole, to this main principle. In Hegel’s aesthetics, this principle is the expression of the Idea, the “appearance of the Idea to the sense [*das sinnliche Scheinen der Idee*]” (Hegel, 1975, 111; Hegel, 1989, 151), which takes place through the modes of expression that constitute each art. The individual arts are not indifferent to the content, as if they could indifferently convey any content; they are determined by the content of this Idea and its subsequent particularizations, which means that Hegel sees each art as better suited to a specific artform.

This briefly outlined system that comprehends Hegel’s concept of art is too, by its turn, part of a greater system, as delineated in the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, which sees its first part, the science of logic, as the pure dialectical determinations of the Idea, the second part, the science of nature, as the objective development of the Idea in the world and the third part, that of the science of spirit, as the self-conscious development of the Idea in its return to itself. In this sense, in §§15 and 16 of the *Encyclopedia* Hegel (2010, p. 43) understands the system as a “circle of circles” constructed upon a principle. This principle is the development of the Idea, which is firstly set out in its pure logical determinations and sees the remaining parts, nature and spirit, not as applications of such determinations to other areas of knowledge, but as the immanent development of the Idea itself, which breaks through the pure intellectual determinations to realize itself in nature, only for it to then return to itself by gaining self-consciousness and becoming able to comprehend its own rationality within human thought. It is based on this systematic reasoning that Hegel, following the structure delineated in his *Science of Logic*, understands art as the realization of spirit, that means, as the realization of the Idea through artistic beauty, with the artforms as the particular level and the different arts as the individual level.

5 Hegel’s *Lecture on Aesthetics* are not a work that the philosopher wrote and published; it was his student Heinrich Gustav Hotho who compiled the work based on notes from the courses conducted at the University of Berlin in the summer semester of 1823, the summer semester of 1826 and the winter semester of 1828/1829. Hotho’s edition did not incorporate material from Hegel’s earlier lectures in Heidelberg or from the Berlin winter semester of 1820/21. Hotho had access to Hegel’s own manuscript and also to notes taken by himself and some of his colleagues (the *Mitschriften* and *Nachschriften*). As a matter of fact, the division in three parts appears only in the last series of lectures of 1828/1829 and the *Nachschrift* that we have, which was annotated by Adolf Heimann, presents the third part under the title “On the particular configurations of artworks” [*von den besonderen Gestaltungen der Kunstwerke*] (see Hegel, 2020, 1074). Since we do not have access to Hegel’s own manuscript that Hotho used in his compilation, it is not possible to affirm if the word “system” would actually appear in the title of the section, had Hegel published his philosophy of art as a complete work.

And as his *Logic* also prescribes, Hegel divides the arts based not only on their form, but mainly on their content. This reasoning is outlined by §133 of the first volume of the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, in which, discussing the appearance as part of the doctrine of essence, Hegel (2010, 200) states that

§133. The manner of being-outside-one-another that is characteristic of the world of appearances is a totality and completely contained in its *relation-to-itself*. The relation of the appearance to itself is thus completely determined, has the *form* in itself and because [it is] in this identity, has that form as its essential substance. Thus the form is *content* and, in keeping with its developed determinacy, it is the *law* of the appearance. The negative side of the appearance, what is alterable and not self-sufficient, falls to the *form as not reflected in itself* – it is the indifferent, *external form*.

For the contrast of form and content, it is essential to keep in mind that the content is not formless but instead has the *form within itself* just as much as it [the form] is *something external* to it. A doubling of the form presents itself; at one time, insofar as it is reflected in itself, it is the external concrete existence, indifferent to the content. What presents itself here *in itself* is the absolute relation of content and of form, namely, their turning over [*Umschlagen*] and into one another, so that the *content* is nothing but *the form turning* into content and the *form* nothing other *than the content turning* into the form. This “turning over” is one of the most important determinations. It is *posited*, however, only in the *absolute relationship*.

Considering how art presents the Idea through a material existence that is both directed to the senses and appropriate to the Idea itself, it is understandable how, within Hegel’s systematic philosophy, the expression of art through a specific form constitutes its law of appearance, since it is intrinsically related to its content. Even in the wider logical picture of Hegel’s philosophy, form is both external, in the sense that it is the way content presents itself exteriorly in the effective world, as it is internal to content, in the sense that the form a content assumes is not merely a contingency, but it is contained in the content itself as a necessity for its expression. As a result, both form and content must achieve unity for the proper expression of the Idea and this unity is what allows the logic (and the whole system of categories that stems from it) its systematic structure and unitary logical development, for “if the same content could be developed by alternative routes, then method and content would fall asunder”; and on top of that, “instead of being inherent in logical categories, logical ordering would be external to them”, for “form would be indifferent to content and each category would be something given to the thinking that externally links it to other terms” in a logical substantiation that, “instead of being systematic, [...] would be afflicted by a dual dogmatism, condemned to take for granted the content it thinks and the thinking by which it orders its content” (Winfield, 2014, 34).

In the addition to the *Encyclopedia* paragraph cited above, Hegel (2010, 201) states that “a work of art lacking the proper form is, precisely for this reason, not proper, that is to say, not truly a work of art”, for “genuine works of art are precisely those whose content and form prove to be thoroughly identical”; Hegel himself makes it clear how this logical determination is tied to the effective existence of art. Indeed, in his *Aesthetics*, he states that

art does not seize upon this form either because it just finds it there or because there is no other; on the contrary, the concrete content itself involves the factor of external, actual, and indeed even sensuous manifestation. But then in return this sensuous concrete thing, which bears the stamp of an essentially spiritual content, is also essentially for our inner [apprehension]; the external shape, whereby the content is made visible and imaginable, has the purpose of existing solely for our mind and spirit. For this reason alone are content and artistic form fashioned in conformity with one another (Hegel, 1975, 71).

Hegel (1975, 95) sees in art both a content and its expression or appearance as the realization of this content, with “both aspects [...] so penetrated by one another that the external, the particular, appears exclusively as a presentation of the inner”. In this respect, there are two things to consider. The first one is that, for Hegel, art has two dimensions, the spiritual and the sensuous, with content being linked to the spiritual dimension and form to the sensuous dimension, for it is the effective expression of content. That is why form is associated with the different arts, for art can only exist in the real world through the arts, as it has been discussed above in the outline of the *Aesthetics*, in which the part concerning the individual arts is precisely the sphere of the actualization of the work of art in the element of the sensuous. And considering how this logic determination permeates the whole development of the artistic Idea, it can be conceived how the systematization and division of the different arts derive not from form, but from content as the distinctive quality that gives each one its place. The form, as the realization of the inner spiritual content in the effectiveness of the world, is linked on a higher level with the content and how it can adequately express itself.

And the content of each art stems from the particularizations of the Idea of beauty in the artforms. Hegel (1975, 82) affirms that the “general forms of art must likewise be the fundamental principle for the articulation and determination of the individual arts”, for “the kinds of art have the same essential distinctions in themselves which we came to recognize in the general forms of art”, which, “universal as they are despite their determinateness, break the bounds of *particular* realization through a *specific* kind of art and achieve their existence equally through the other arts [...]”. That means that each individual art is more closely linked to a particular artform, even if they also present the universal Idea of art, which can be conveyed through all other arts; this universal Idea, however, has its ulterior particularizations. The artforms correspond to the “specific shape which every content of

the Idea gives to itself [...] because the content must be true and concrete in itself before it can find its truly beautiful shape” (Hegel, 1975, 300). The first content of the Idea, “still in its indeterminacy and obscurity” (Hegel, 1975, 76), presents itself in the symbolic shape, while the classical content “consists in its being itself the concrete Idea” for it is “*implicitly* the unity of the divine nature with the human”, as opposed to the romantic shape, which “has won a content which goes beyond and above the classical form of art and its mode of expression” (Hegel, 1975, 78-79). So, even if art is understood as the perfect unity between form and content, this unity can take place with: (i) deficiency of both (as it is the case with symbolic art, where the deficiency of content causes deficiency of form); (ii) perfect adequacy of the stage of truth that can be exposed to the human senses and its expression through a sensuous medium (as it is the case in classical art); and (iii) a particular content that already is beyond what can be exposed to the senses, leaving to the form of art to try to overcome the limitations that are imposed by the sensuous appearance (as it is the case in romantic art).

In the realm of the individual arts, if we take into consideration, first, how “the *true* element for the realization” of the romantic content “is no longer the sensuous immediate existence of the spiritual in the bodily form of man, but instead the *inwardness of self-consciousness*”, and second, how this “new content, thus won, is on this account not tied to sensuous presentation, [...] but is freed from this immediate existence” in a way that “it retreats from the sensuousness of imagination into spiritual inwardness and makes this, and not the body, the medium and the existence of truth’s content” (Hegel, 1975, 80), it can be clear how Hegel associates this type of content with the arts of painting, music and poetry, for they gradually suppress the tridimensionality of art. They first, through painting, cancel “the *real* sensuous appearance [*Erscheinung*], the visibility of which is transformed into the pure *shining* [*Schein*] of art” through “colour, [...], the differences, shades and blendings” (Hegel, 1975, 625-626). Painting, as opposed to architecture and sculpture, is already a more interior expression of the human spirit, and even if it is considered a plastic art too, it is not as real and external as the other two. While the works of architecture and sculpture are themselves installed in the real world, painting creates its own world within its frames, which delimit the work in its opposition to the real world, without mixing itself with the outer universe. Music’s content is also “constituted by spiritual subjectivity” of the “inner life as such”, whose “explicitly shapeless feeling [...] cannot manifest itself in the outer world”, just as poetry’s is the “richest”, which makes it “the most unrestricted of the arts” to the point that it even is perceived as “the absolute and true art of the spirit and its expression as spirit, since everything that consciousness conceives and shapes spiritually within its own inner being speech alone can adopt, express, and bring before our imagination” (Hegel, 1975, 626). Both music and poetry emphasize painting’s deepening into human nature by suppressing even more the real and external parts of art and expressing the subjectivity that constitutes the spirit after the classical era.

The “principle and content” of sculpture, on the other hand, is the “spiritual individuality as the classical ideal”, which expresses itself “in the human form and its objective organism, pervaded by spirit, which has to shape into an adequate appearance the independence of the Divine in its lofty peace and tranquil greatness” (Hegel, 1975, 624-625). Architecture is tied to the symbolic, for it is also seen as the “beginning of art because, in general terms, at its start has not found for the presentation of its spiritual content either the adequate material or the corresponding forms” and must therefore “be content with merely seeking a true harmony between content and mode of presentation and with an external relation between the two”, which is achieved by employing a heavy material that is “inherently non-spiritual, [...] shapeable only according to the laws of gravity” and whose form “is provided by production of external nature bound together regularly and symmetrically to be a purely external reflection of spirit and to the the totality of a work of art” (Hegel, 1975, 624). Both architecture’s and sculpture’s works are characterized by their heavy materials, with the difference of how the latter can convey organic (specially human) forms to perfection, which makes it more closely tied to the spiritual expression that is feasible of being realized through art. Architecture, on the other hand, is limited to the symmetry and regularity of its constructions, which even when they aspire to be beautifully and artistically presented, find the practical and utilitarian limitations of what can be molded in these materials, as the symbolic art itself finds limitations in its indeterminacy and obscurity for the beautiful expression of the true spiritual interests of humankind.

The content of each artform is therefore what Hegel (1975, 623) perceives to be the “mode of division which has deeper grounds” and “as the true and systematic articulation of this Third part”. As a result, he must dismiss the form as the basis of division, for it is not directly associated with the spiritual side of art, but with the realization of the spiritual side for the senses. Even if Hegel acknowledges that art has an instance of its production directed to the senses, it is essentially directed to the spirit and it cannot be independent from the spiritual instance. That is why he considers the “purely sensuous apprehension” of “merely looking on, hearing, feeling, etc.” to be the “poorest mode of apprehension” (Hegel, 1975, 36). The conception of art (and thus of the different individual arts) through the senses is merely abstract and related to only one side of art, the sensuous side; the true division must take the spiritual side in consideration, where the content of art acquires its spectrum of possibilities, with the sensuous side being the effective expression of these possibilities in the material existence. This is what allows the individual arts to be a circle within the circle of art, which, by its turn, is also a circle within Hegel’s systematic philosophy. They all are guided by the same principle, the Idea, and how the Idea develops itself in the different levels of its realization, be it within the pure determinations of thought, be it in the spiritual productions of humankind.

This way of proceeding is quite different from other authors from the period of German idealism. Kant, in *Critique of Judgment* (2007, 149), bases his division of the

expression of the aesthetic ideas on an “analogy which art bears to the mode of expression of which individuals avail themselves in speech, with a view to communicating themselves to one another as completely as possible”, in which the modes of expression consist “in *word*, *gesture*, and *tone* (articulation, gesticulation, and modulation)”. August Schlegel (see 1884, 112-127), by his turn, sees a poetic character in all arts, differentiating their genres based on the apprehension of said character by the senses: there are the ones that simultaneously express the sensible intuition (grasped through vision, as in sculpture, painting and architecture) and the ones that express it successively (grasped through audition, as in music and poetry); as an intermediate genre he mentions dance, as an art composed of movements that take place in space following temporal measures of sound. Finally, Schelling (see 1966, 125-131) divides the particular forms in two groups based on the potency each art has to express the Absolute: those are the group of the plastic arts (including music, painting, architecture, bas-relief and sculpture), which concerns the real side of the artistic world, expressed through matter, as opposed to the art of language, which concerns poetry, which, as the ideal side of art, expressed through the Idea, is the higher potency of the plastic arts. Kant, A. Schlegel and Schelling follow a formal division of the arts insofar as they comprehend their content to be ultimately the same. As a result, there are no particularizations of it that can serve as the basis for the systematic articulation of the arts.

What differentiates Hegel from those thinkers is how he perceives the content of art in a way that is not so unitary. There is of course a universal determination of this content (which is the topic of the first part of the *Aesthetics*), but even in its universality the content of art is historically apprehended, which results in its particularizations that ultimately serve as the fundament for the individual arts. It must be added, however, that Hegel does not merely chose to put content as the differentiating quality in the relations of arts to one another as if he could have arbitrarily made this decision; as discussed, it is the necessary development of his own systematic thinking and of the logical determinations of the Idea, not only in terms of form and content, but also in the relations between the universal, the particular and the individual stages or moments of the concept of art.

It must be added, however, that Hegel’s way of proceeding does not come without criticism after all. Winfield, whose commentary on Hegel’s logic served to elucidate the necessity of a unitary development between form and content, strongly disagrees with the consequence of this division, namely, the association of each artform to each specific individual art. But it is a stance that he developed when directly discussing the systematization of the arts and in establishing his own contribution to this topic. In *Stylistics: Rethinking the Artforms after Hegel*, he still emphasizes the “immanent character of systematic argument” in which “any conceptual advance must rely on nothing but the terms already established”, resulting in an “ordering of topics” that “will reside in their own content”; as a result of this ordering of topics, he concedes that the “prior” determinations of the particular artforms mean “that the forms of art are distinguishable without introducing any features specific

to an individual art, whereas the individual arts incorporate in their own reality the different artforms” (Winfield, 1996, 8). He even questions if the “spatio-temporal orderings are sufficient to identify such media in regard to the additional physical properties that otherwise distinguish them”, because “if these further features are not incidental to the aesthetic significance of each putative artistic media, then a spatio-temporal schematization will not be the proper vehicle for individuating the arts” and it “will hardly be the only principle for dividing the arts that can be derived from the concept of art” (Winfield, 1996, 102). In Hegel’s system, given the logical determinations of form and content, these further features are clearly not incidental, for the form is also contained in the content itself.

But if in *Stylistics* he highlights the importance of such a philosophy of art in contrast to formal aesthetics, it is in his other work, *Rethinking the Arts after Hegel*, published almost 30 years later, that Winfield engages more critically with Hegel’s division of arts, dismissing this consequence with regard to the association between artforms and individual arts. He considers that Hegel’s claim that the “differentiation of individual arts that attends only to the physical, psychological, and linguistic aspects of artistic media ignores a further connection essential for understanding the proper identity of each art” represents a collapse of the “systematic demarcation of the particular and individual dimensions of fine art”, because “instead of operating within a three-fold division of visual art, music, and literature, Hegel reorganizes the individual arts under a different three-fold division corresponding to the three-fold differentiation of particular artforms” (Winfield, 2023, 18-19). Such claims are “hardly benign” for they “not only [...] call into question the aesthetic capabilities of each individual art, but they end up limiting the form and content of individual arts in ways that are insupportable” (Winfield, 2023, 19). Winfield (2023, 15) opts, instead, to take a step back and to examine each art by how its “defining media gives specific embodiment to the features general to fine art and then to each of the fundamental artistic styles, every one of which incorporates what is universal to aesthetic worth”. Such “differentiation of the arts by sensuous properties and corresponding media appropriate for aesthetic employment leaves us with ‘pure,’ nonhybrid varieties” of “architecture, sculpture, painting (and all other two-dimensional graphic art), music, and literature, including the ‘still’ and ‘moving’ options that leave room for kinetic sculpture (and dance) and cinema” (Winfield, 2023, 16). It is a system that, by building upon “upon Hegel’s account of the individual arts, remedy its glaring inconsistencies and major omissions” (Winfield, 2023, 6) and becomes even more comprehensive than the system that served as its fundament, with each art being analyzed in relation to the “aesthetic value that revolves around the unity of meaning and configuration” (Winfield, 2023, 447-448) and to the development of this unity in the three different artforms.

If Hegel had considered that each part of his aesthetics presupposed the previous one, Winfield also tries, albeit with a different approach, to comprehend each art both in relation to the universal concept and its pure character as an art, as in relation to the different

particularizations this universal concept and pure character can shape. So, sculpture, for example, is not only discussed from the point of view of classical art, but also from the point of view of symbolic and romantic art. Hegel, again in the example of sculpture, even when he discusses it in the symbolic period (as in Egyptian sculpture), bases his vision on the point of view of sculpture as a classical art and dismisses its symbolic productions, opposing its animal or anthropomorphic forms and its alleged rigid nature to the perfection of the classical Greek sculpture and its human forms, which perfectly convey the classical content more appropriate to this specific individual art. For that matter, it must also be granted that Winfield does recognize that Hegel's association of each particular artwork to each individual art means, on no account, exclusivity. In fact, it is as if Winfield tries to give classical and romantic architecture, symbolic and romantic sculpture, symbolic and classical painting and music more legitimacy and dignity within the system. However, my brief note serves more as a remark than a discussion worth going into, for Winfield's comments about Hegel's association of artforms and individual arts are unfortunately scarce. In addition, discussing it more thoroughly would certainly hinder the development of the second goal of this text, which is to comprehend how cinema can be perceived through Hegel's systematic understanding of art and the arts.

Cinema and the arts

Due to the period in which it was invented, that of modernity, cinema becomes immediately associated with the romantic artform. As a consequence of his criticism of Hegel's pairing of the artforms with the individual arts, Winfield makes an effort to think all arts from the different points of view of the symbolic, classical and romantic artforms (even in the cases of photography and cinema), but even if he briefly discusses the possibility of cinema being produced from a symbolic or classical point of view, it is clear that, if one tries to incorporate this art to Hegel's system, it must be put in the realm of romantic art, for it is "well suited for a world view that [...] is ready to explore the life of freedom in its totality in every corner of existence, high or low" (Winfield, 2023, 494-495)⁶. With regard to this total

⁶ Winfield (2023, 496-497) believes that "a filmmaker could express the self-understanding of pre-modern communities by using mobile composition and montage to capture such spectacles with a genuinely cinematic visual dynamic", and that "in these ways, the art of film can accommodate all the artforms, even if our earthly experience provides no evidence of anything other than modern, essentially Romantic style movies". However, if we remain closer to Hegel's own comprehension of the adequacy between an artform and an individual art, we can also apply to cinema the same remarks that Hegel made in relation to works such as Goethe's *West-Eastern Divan* and *Iphigenia*, which are seen as assimilations of symbolic and classical contents by the romantic artist. The artist, in this context, "is of course allowed to borrow his materials from distant climes, past ages, and foreign peoples, and even by and large to preserve the historical form of their mythology, customs, and institutions", at the same time that "he must use these forms only as frames for his pictures, while on the other hand their inner meaning he must adapt to the essential deeper consciousness of his contemporary world" (Hegel, 1975, 276). So, even if cinema is to be conceived in a more exclusive relation to the romantic era, it is precisely this era that allows the assimilation of contents from other times.

freedom, cinema can be either compared to the novel – with regard to “depicting problematic individuals who aspire to wield a freedom that cannot be fully embodied in any given sensuous reality” or with regard to “addressing the plight of individuals in a world of settled institutions of freedom who try to find some individual endeavor that retains fundamental significance for the fabric of their community” – or to modernist art and its “flight [...] away from objective representation”, which is achieved by avant-garde or experimental cinema, even though their “motion pictures exhibit their own difficulty at creating any imagery that can adequately express self-determination” (Winfield, 2023, 495). As a result, cinema is a “quintessentially modern art, tied to the world view that invests fundamental value in the reality of inner and outer freedom and finds its artistic fit in what Hegel characterizes as the Romantic style of art” (Winfield, 2023, 492). It is precisely this freedom in the modern artistic world view that allows cinema to even become an art, since the use of its technology is not necessarily and directly linked to an artistic production.

In this sense, if one analyzes the peculiarity of cinema itself, it becomes clear that is not only due to this historical contingency that cinema can be understood as a romantic art; the art of cinema also has the goal of exploring the human nature to its deepest level by employing a variety of forms in order to achieve this. As it was the case with other arts (particularly architecture), that can also be employed non artistically, so can moving pictures (as it is the case with a variety of audiovisual productions, from advertising to documentaries). However, the freedom allowed by this media is completely tied to the freedom that makes up the content of art in the modern romantic era. As an art, cinema carries on with the deepening into the human subjectivity that was conducted during the romantic period, and that, linked with its relevance and its potential to reach the widest of the audiences, is what makes cinema the most resonant art within the public from the 20th century onwards.

It must be noted, however, that the romantic period is, in Hegel’s aesthetics, a quite long one. It begins with the emergence of Christian religion and it lasts at least until Hegel’s own time. Hegel acknowledges a change that takes place in his time and that directly affects the artistic production of the modern world, for if the romantic art was the one that demanded modes of expression that highlighted human subjectivity, during the era of its dissolution, the interior and human side of artistic productions become even stronger. Cinema, therefore, can be thought not only as an art invented during the romantic era, but as an art that constituted itself in accordance with the world view that became predominant during the dissolution of the romantic artform. About this dissolution, Hegel (1989, 235) states that

in our day, in the case of almost all peoples, criticism, the culture of reflection [*Bildung der Reflexion*]⁷, and, in our German case, freedom of thought, have mastered the artists

7 The translation here was slightly altered (for the English text, see Hegel, 1975, 605).

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.

This dissolution of the romantic artform also corresponds to a systematic unfolding of Hegel's philosophy, that sees art coming to an end. This end does not mean that art will not be made anymore, but that the relation between humans and artworks fundamentally changes. As it has already been discussed, the philosophy of art is part of the philosophy of spirit; art constitutes, together with religion and philosophy, the absolute spirit, which encompasses the free and rational productions made by humankind, which, aware of such freedom and rationality, tries to comprehend itself. This circle is delineated in the §§553 to 577 of the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* and concerns these three types of productions made by the free and rational human being towards their self comprehension. Art is the first stage of this self comprehension, for it takes place in the exterior sensuous, while religion takes for its form that of representation and philosophy that of concept, of pure intellectuality. For Hegel, in the historical development of the human spirit throughout the centuries, the exteriority of the sensuous is suppressed as humans increasingly turn to their own interior, and, beginning with painting, art turns to the "treatment of man's inner nature" (Hegel, 1975, 887). Considering that "precisely on account of its form, art is limited to a specific content" and that "only one sphere and stage of truth is capable of being represented in the element of art" (Hegel, 1975, 9), the systematic development sees art lose its relevance as the primary mode for self apprehension in modern times; religion and philosophy become better ways of responding to the spiritual needs of the contemporary world. As a result of this loss of relevance that constitutes the dissolution of the romantic artform, art cannot be enjoyed as the ancient peoples did; instead of worship, reflection becomes the main element in the relation between humans and artworks, with art even incorporating it in itself by trying to explore new modes of configuration. Since art increasingly shares with religion and philosophy the expression of the highest aspirations of the spirit, it becomes free to convey other subjects in its quest for the comprehension of human nature. It is in this sense that Winfield can compare cinema to both the novel and modernism, for all those types of quintessentially modern art profit from the free use of individual contents, forms and configurations.

The dissolution of the romantic artform takes place then in the last great circle of Hegel's aesthetics, that of poetry, where he sees a division between epic, lyric and dramatic poetry. Within this circle is the last one, that of dramatic poetry, which is divided between tragedy, drama and comedy. Comedy must carry out the end of art, since "on this peak comedy leads at the same time to the dissolution of art altogether", for if "all art aims at the identity, produced by the spirit, in which eternal things, God and absolute truth are revealed in real appearance and shape to our contemplation, to our hearts and minds", comedy, by its turn,

presents this unity only as its self-destruction because the Absolute, which wants to realize itself, sees its self-actualization destroyed by interests that have now become explicitly free in the real world and are directed only on what is accidental and subjective, then the presence and agency of the Absolute no longer appears positively unified with the characters and aims of the real world but asserts itself only in the negative form of cancelling everything not correspondent with it, and subjective personality alone shows itself self-confident and self-assured at the same time in this dissolution (Hegel, 1975, 1236).

However, the dissolution of art in comedy may still have an aftermath. And this aftermath constitutes another possibility of contemplating cinema from the point of view of Hegel's system. It must, however, build upon his work and take other elements into consideration, since he could not have foreshadowed the invention of the technology of cinema and its appropriation by the human spirit in order to express and understand its own nature. This possibility sees cinema, as an art that is capable of achieving the deepest of the spiritual subjectivity, congregating other arts in order to constitute itself and to provide its means to achieve the almost infinite variety of forms that are intertwined with modern art. The most complex and profound films deploy not only the representative art of poetry for its storytelling, but also the arts of architecture to build its scenario, of sculpture to constitute its bodily movements depicted on screen, of painting to delimit the frame of each scene, and of music (and sound in general) to add profundity to the elements visually depicted.

This constitution of cinema as the amalgamation of all arts is obviously not directly laid out by the Hegelian text. However, there are authors such as Badiou who see how this total art could constitute itself. He sees in the dissolution of the romantic art form the possibility for a "further dialectical twist, which would be the abolition of this abolition in a new form whereby art would constitute the total deployment of its already existing resources", as "a figure of representation whose content would gradually accumulate the henceforth timeless destiny of a more or less absolute art" (Badiou, 2020, 111). This final art, as opposed to comedy, would not be the negative manifestation of the Absolute, but its manifestation of "itself in the total mobilization of the registers of representation", amalgamating the arts and "drawing the history of art to a close not through the negative pirouettes of comedy,

but with the attendant anxiety and seriousness of a redemptive totalization” (Badiou, 2020, 111-112). It would be the “ultimate art, beyond modern comedy, as the redemptive future of an annihilated art, in the form of *a complete dialectical sublation of comic negativity*. In a sense: as an end of the first ending” (Badiou, 2020, 112). This art would be cinema and according to Badiou (2020, 115), even Hegel would have recognized “in cinema the total overcoming of the negative impasse represented by modern comedy”, proclaiming it the “absolute art”⁸. Winfield understands cinema in a similar sense with regard to unifying in itself all other arts, seeing, after the phase of pure cinema and silent film, with the addition of sound and language, the possibility to “fulfill hybrid cinema’s potential to become a total art, integrating architecture, sculpture, graphic art, music, and literature in service of film’s dynamic visual imagery” (Winfield, 2023, 469).

It can be argued that Hegel had the possibility of recognizing a total art in theater or opera, for they summon “the others to constitute the scenery, the stage, the movement of the actors, gestures, singing and dialog, etc., in order to carry out a single all-encompassing work of art” (Werle, 2013, 241). In fact, in the lecture series of 1826, Hegel (2018, 882) sees opera as a “complete totality [*vollständige Totalität*]” and he even considers the dramas of the ancient peoples to be “essentially opera”, even though “the content of the ancient tragedies was not the one of the contemporary opera”. However, as Werle (see 2013, 294) argues, poetry is the art of representation, with theater or opera only making its action more representative without presenting a new content other than that of their respective texts. Even so, cinema not only goes further than the mere presentation of moving images, but by adding music and language, becomes “the modern world’s dominant ‘total’ art”, taking the place that once belonged to opera and musical theater and becoming a “total hybrid art” (Winfield, 2023, 432).

And cinema, as opposed to theater and opera, which are the representations of a text, has its own specificity. That is what makes it so different to read a play or a libretto as opposed to a script; with the first two, the general idea of the dramatic representation is more directly perceived by the reader, while with the script it is more difficult to effectively visualize the finished work with all its different possibilities, even if they are described in the script. These possibilities concern framing and composition, hand-held or stabilized shooting, fadeouts, cuts, dissolves, split screens, special sounds and effects, flashbacks, narration and slow motion, just to name a few. When the audience sees a film, it is not a representation of another standalone work, but the work itself, as the director intended it to be after all the stages of production, with the script serving merely as the basis for this work. The staging of a play or an opera can aggregate other ideas that were not in the originally conceived text (as

8 It must be briefly noted that, however, for Badiou (2020, 115), this totalization only takes place imaginatively and not “in an authentic artistic singularity”, with cinema being “less an art than a recapitulative nostalgia for the time when real arts existed”.

for example in contemporary stagings that present the action in times and places that differ from the ones imagined by the author) without them being considered other works and not the staging of this text. They can even change plot elements of the original text without that affecting the staging's relation to it; in cinema, a change of plot during recording or editing goes vastly unnoticed, for scripts are normally not made accessible to the public, nor the general public is really interested in them⁹. When they are made accessible to the main public, it is normally in the form of a different standalone text: an example is Tarantino's novelization of his film *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*. With regard to the novel, the subordination of the script to the film is also made clear when a novel is adapted to the screen; in those cases, a script must be written and the director cannot simply use the novel as his basis. Even when plays are adapted to the screen, the original text cannot serve as the basis and a script must also be written; an example of this is Polanski's *Carnage*, whose screenplay was written by the director together with Yasmina Reza, writer of the original play *Le Dieu du carnage*. In cinema, each production is an autonomous work, and even when a remake of a film is only adapted to a different setting, both films constitute different works of art on their own, since their content gives the director an infinite range of possibilities to tell the story using the different modes of montage cinema has to offer. While there may be discussion as to whether the staging constitutes a work on its own (apart from its respective text), it is generally accepted that no script is by itself a work of art¹⁰, only the film. The capacity of cinema to reach the widest of audiences through its technical reproduction is also to be mentioned; while each theatrical production is restricted to those who can attend the theater, the same film is available to a much larger audience worldwide.

With respect to the term “technical reproduction”, borrowed from Benjamin's classic essay, it is worth briefly discussing it in comparison to Hegel's understanding of the end of art. In Benjamin's text *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility*, the possibility of technologically reproducing a work is something that strips its aura from it, with artworks losing their cult value and gaining value that becomes associated with its exhibition. This a polarity Benjamin sees already in Hegel's claim that “we have got beyond venerating works of art as divine and worshipping them. The impression they make is of a more reflective kind, and what they arouse in us needs a higher touchstone and a different test”, for “thought and reflection have spread their wings above fine art” (Hegel, 1975, 10). Benjamin (2008, 48) sees the significance of the “beautiful semblance [*schöner Schein*]” as “rooted in the age of auratic perception that is now coming to an end”, for aura was the ground of aesthetic experience before the age of technological reproducibility. And film is

⁹ Of course many scripts are easily found online, but they are sought mainly by people who are (or who wish to be) involved with screenwriting and film production.

¹⁰ In this regard, see Winfield, 2023, 456-457. In fact, during the era of silent film, cinema was produced mostly without scripts, which became more important as films became more complex.

the “most powerful agent” of this age, with high “social significance”, which “even – and especially – in its most positive form, is inconceivable without its destructive, cathartic side: the liquidation of the value of tradition in the cultural heritage” (Benjamin, 2008, 22).

Benjamin’s reading tries to add a new dimension to Hegel’s thesis about the end or dissolution of art; by agreeing with Hegel that “an ancient statue of Venus, for instance, existed in a traditional context for the Greeks (who made it an object of worship)”, he also sees a difference “from the context in which it existed for medieval clerics (who viewed it as a sinister idol)”; however, there was something that was “equally evident to both”: “its uniqueness – that is, its aura” (Benjamin, 2008, 24). Even if the relation with the artwork becomes different, with a religious ritual around it giving way to “the most profane forms of the cult of beauty” that still display a “ritualistic basis”, it is only with technological reproducibility that the work of art becomes not only emancipated “from its parasitic subservience to ritual” but also “reproduction of a work designed for reproducibility”, with politics becoming the foundation of artistic production (Benjamin, 2008, 24-25)¹¹. But Benjamin adds some twists to Hegel’s thesis of the end of art; as Werle (2004) points out, Benjamin operates from a point of view in which a technical development causes the change of the relations between humans and works of art, disregarding the role of religion within the modern world. Hegel, on the other hand, sees this change as a result of the development of religion itself, for it is due to Christianity (and Protestantism in particular in the modern world) that humans turn to their own interior. The losing of the aura of the work of art has therefore been in place since the surpassing of classical by the romantic artform, therefore, way before cinema could ever be invented, as for example in the genre painting of the Netherlands¹². Cinema, from a Hegelian point of view, would not contribute to the end of art due to its technology; actually, the appropriation of this technology is just another means of expressing and going even deeper into the content of art that was already present in the dissolution of the romantic artform.

In conclusion, there is room for cinema to be thought within the systematic of Hegel’s comprehension of the arts. Cinema presents a development of the concept of art that allows, in an appropriation of technological development, an even further deepening of the

11 Again, as indicated for Badiou’s text, it is not possible going into the specific political consequences of Benjamin’s vision, given the limited scope of this text.

12 “In contrast to an abstract opposition between art and religion in the modern era, as Benjamin means, what we have in Hegel is a dialectics between religion and art, a double movement from both the absolute to the sensuous as a return from the sensuous to the absolute. Benjamin is focused on only one moment, the one regarding the prevalence of the sensuous, dismissing the proper speculative meaning of this sensuous, that this sensuous mirrors and reflects the religious interiority, instead of placing itself in opposition to it and, precisely in this way, being able to be explored in all its range. [...] The treatment of the sensuous is not dependent upon an abandonment of religion, but rather upon a deepening of the religious interiority towards the prose of life [...]. At the root of the transformation of the concept of art in the modern era is not predominantly the ‘material’ problem of the development of techniques for the reproduction of artworks, but the problem of the spiritual and religious content that has undergone mutations in its own realization” (Werle, 2004, p. 38-39).

human subjective spirituality that is feasible of artistic expression. The appropriation of the immense range of possibilities offered by the technology with regard to the recording and editing of films takes place only as a result of the diversified ways of expression that the human spirit demands in the modern era. Were the capacity of humankind's artistic expression as the appearance of the Idea to the senses not so wide and diverse, the technology of moving images could have stayed restricted to merely non artistic ends. It is not technology itself, but how humans can make use of it in the process of their self understanding that constitutes the core of this art.

At the same time, there's also the aspect of cinema congregating all other arts around itself and of becoming a total art, the ultimate spiritual expression through artistic means. And as the last art of this update of Hegel's system, it incorporates the immense possibilities that arise in the era of the end of art in a form that works as the completion of the system, retrospectively congregating all other parts to constitute itself. Cinema is the positive realization of the end of art and it can only effectively come into existence due to its position at the end of this historical development, which saw the emergence of each art as the most well suited for the expression of a content during a specific period. The arts of Hegel's original system may have sufficed for spiritual expression until his time, but with the subsequent phases of history a new way of self apprehension needed to arise, taking advantage of the possibilities offered by the modern world.

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