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Kant and Hegel on Aesthetic Reflexivity[*]

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Abstract

The paper aims at reevaluating a conception of the aesthetic that was developed by Kant and Hegel but that has been widely neglected due to the fact that their positions in aesthetics have been wrongly considered to be antagonistic to one another. The conception states that the aesthetic is a practice of reflecting on other human practices. Kant was the first to articulate this conception, but nevertheless falls short of giving a satisfying account of it, as he doesn't succeed in explaining its objective aspect. I claim that Hegel resolves this problem by understanding works of art as objects that thermalize essential orientations of historical-cultural practices. But his explanation fails to grasp the specificity of art as a reflective practice. However, Hegel's position gives us a hint for how to deal with this problem: Reflection has to be understood in a practical, and not in a cognitive sense.

Key words: Aesthetic Reflexivity, practice, Hegel and Kant

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Introduction

In its narrower sense, philosophical aesthetics is concerned with the aim of explaining what art is. However, this aim is especially difficult to realize. Art involves a complex set of practices that at the very least includes objects and events, productions, experiences, interpretations as well as many other aspects. It is thus likely that any specific conception of art will fall short of realizing its aim of explaining what art really is. Typical shortcomings in the explanation of art follow out of, for instance, an exclusive focus on either aesthetic experience or aesthetic institutions. Many philosophical disputes revolve around shortcomings of this sort. In the analytic discussion in the second half of the 20th century, it was sometimes argued that one should give up the search for a definition of what art is. A position like this is often inspired by the later thought of Wittgenstein. In a relaxed Wittgensteinian manner, the position claims that art is a family resemblance concept:[1] In this view, many different things can be conceived of as art, and there is nothing that all of these things have in common. Thus, positions that defend an anti-definitional stance towards art contend that every attempt to formulate a definition of what art is must necessarily omit or downplay some aspects relevant for some, but not for all of the things called art.

But the anti-definitional stance is not convincing. The main line of criticism against such a stance goes as follows: If one wants to distinguish between the aesthetic and the non-aesthetic, it is not helpful to state that art is a family resemblance concept. Such a concept does not enable us to decide which objects and events count as art and which do not. For a family resemblance conception of art entails many different criteria for the application of the concept of art, which in the end effectively encompass more or less the whole world. Thus, such a concept does not explain how we decide which objects to take as art and which as non-art. Someone who argues for an anti-definitional stance will doubtlessly reply that this criticism begs the question and contend that it is simply not possible to articulate the distinction between art and non-art. But if the reason for this is that the concept entails many different criteria for its own application, this is to say that the anti-definitional position puts the very idea of a distinction between art and non-art into question. However, such a distinction is important for practices revolving around art and artistic objects. For example, we often ask the question as to whether an object is a work of art or not. We often criticize objects because they do not succeed as art. In the light of such practices, it seems reasonable to want more than what a relaxed anti-definitional stance offers. It is thus no wonder that in contrast with the positions inspired by Wittgenstein, other positions have been developed that explain art in terms of aesthetic

experience,[2] aesthetic institutions(Dickie, 1974), or the meanings of works of art(Danto, 1981). In this regard, positions that are rooted in so-called "continental" philosophy can be brought into play. An explanation of art in terms of aesthetic experience has been worked out by Adorno and several of his followers.[3] Another approach is realized by Gadamer, who explains art in terms of a playful intersubjective practice (Gadamer, 1987). In different ways, these positions try to determine criteria for art. According to their own understanding, these positions aim to answer the question of what art is. But one may wonder as to whether the criteria offered do not once again lead to shortcomings. For example, doesn't a determination of art in terms of aesthetic experience fail insofar as it does not take into account the meanings of works of art, and the intersubjective practices that are bound up with them? Doesn't an attempt to determine art by way of a criterion like aesthetic experience fail to grasp the complexity characteristic of art?

If considerations like these are compelling, we are confronted with the question of how to develop a conception of art that does not share in the shortcomings just mentioned. How is it possible to develop a conception of art that does not fall short of capturing all the aspects relevant to art? This seems to be the most intriguing question in aesthetics today. Suppose this question is a good starting point for thinking about aesthetics. Where should we look if we want to reach a position that enables us to develop a conception of art that encompasses all its relevant aspects? Should we return to the mid-18th century, re-examining the foundations of aesthetics in the philosophy of Alexander Gottfried Baumgarten? Do we find a promising approach in the philosophies of David Hume or Johann Gottfried Herder? It seems to me that another approach is more promising. I propose to return to the aesthetics of Kant. Nowadays, Kant is often regarded as a proponent of a conception of art in terms of aesthetic experience. But ascribing such a view to Kant fails to grasp the basic idea of his aesthetics. This basic idea is that the beautiful is a category of *reflection*. According to Kant, judgments of taste are paradigmatic examples of the reflective faculty of judgment. As paradigmatic examples of the reflective faculty of judgment, judgments of taste make a contribution as such to the *human form of life*. They exemplify what is characteristic of this form of life, namely, the freedom to engage in reflective judging activities. Even though Kant does not ultimately succeed in giving an adequate explanation of this basic idea, he gives a promising starting point to our search for a position that does not share in the shortcomings common to various conceptions of art. With this promising starting point in view, it is possible to develop an interesting thread connecting Kant with Hegel. It is often thought that Kant's and

Hegel's aesthetics stand in opposition to one another. According to this view, while Kant develops a formalist conception of art, Hegel is focused on the historical-cultural character of art and thus on the content of works of art. Hegel's content-oriented approach seems to contradict the formalist tendencies of Kant. But an assessment along these lines is superficial. If one takes the basic idea of Kant's aesthetics into account, it becomes apparent that Hegel does not contradict Kant. Moreover, Hegel's project works out the basic idea that Kant has proposed, for Hegel appropriates Kant's fundamental claim: namely, that the beautiful (or art) is a category of reflection. Hegel thus continues on the same conceptual path paved by Kant. More importantly, this continuation is promising, insofar as Kant's basic conception of art seems to allow for an explanation that does not determine art merely in terms of some set of defining characteristics. His basic idea is that one has to spell out art's contribution to the human form of life.

My aim in what follows is to programmatically reinvestigate Kant's and Hegel's aesthetics as positions that can help us avoid the shortcomings characteristic of many contemporary positions in aesthetics. I won't provide much detail about the interpretation of their positions, but will rather try to explain what I take to be the thread that leads from Kant to Hegel, and thereby sketch a position that can be helpful for developing a conception of art that does not fall short of capturing all aspects relevant to art. In the first part of my paper, I analyze Kant's conception of "*cognition in general*" (*Erkenntnis überhaupt*). In the second part, I follow Hegel in his critical appropriation of this basic idea of Kant. For the purposes of this paper, my main interest lies in the question of why Hegel holds that Kant's basic idea needs to be captured in terms of historical-cultural practices. This brings me to the third part of my paper, where I ask in what sense a concept of practical reflection is essential for the conception of art that I seek to work out.

1. Kant: Art as a Self-Reflection of Cognitive Faculties

In determining the specificity of what art is, Kant develops an insight that sets the standard for all his followers. The insight in question is this: The beautiful is a medium of reflection on the specifically human cognitive standpoint in the world. Kant articulates this insight in slightly different terms, stating that a judgment of taste is both subjective and universal. A judgment of taste expresses central aspects of the standpoint of a finite being who must encounter the world sensuously and thereby understand the world in Kant's distinctive sense of the word understanding.

Kant reaches this insight by analyzing the specificity of judgments of taste. A judgment of taste is a judgment of the type "X [e.g., this flower]

is beautiful." For Kant, such a judgment is neither objective nor subjective. In dealing with something beautiful, our goal is not to find concepts that apply to the very objects to which these concepts are directed, thus coming to know the world by understanding it. Judgments of taste are not judgments of cognition in the sense that certain objects in the world are subsumed under certain concepts. Nor do judgments of taste investigate the peculiarities of a subject in its dealings with the world. Judgments of taste are not subjectively aesthetic in the sense that they do not articulate subjective preferences.

The positive determination that Kant develops from these points is that a judgment of the type "X is beautiful" is one that is both subjective and universal. Even though a judgment of taste does not articulate the nature of an object, it expresses something that has a claim to universal validity. In this light, judgments of taste express a cognitive claim that goes beyond particular subjects of experience. But the cognitive claim expressed in judgments of taste is not one that pertains to objects of possible experience, which one has cognition of in the strict Kantian sense (for according to Kant, it is only, strictly speaking, objects of possible experience that one has cognition of). Taking this restriction into account, Kant relates the claim for cognition that stands in question to subjectivity as such. That is, the experience of something beautiful expressed in a judgment of taste confirms the subject in its cognitive faculties. As already mentioned, Kant emphasizes this by introducing the expression "*cognition in general*" (*Erkenntnis überhaupt*)(Kant, 1999, §9). A judgment of taste does not articulate a determinate cognition. Rather, it articulates the self-reflexive experience of the cognitive faculties themselves. In this sense it expresses "cognition in general".

But how can dealing with a beautiful object be conceived of as an experience of the cognitive faculties? Kant's answer to this question is quite speculative: He speaks of a "free play of the faculties of the understanding"(Ibid). According to him, such a free play is elicited by one's confrontation with a beautiful object, which he explains in the following way: It is the form of a beautiful object (Ibid, §9) that brings the imagination and the understanding into free play with each other. Concepts and imaginative representations enter into a free play in which neither a determinate representation nor a determinate concept takes the lead. The experience that one has in the confrontation with a beautiful object is thus an experience that shows how a cooperation of imaginative representations and concepts is possible. And in Kant's sense, that is just to say that the confrontation with a beautiful object elicits an experience of "cognition in general."

Cognition in general is thus both subjective and universal. It holds for every subject that is constituted in the way that we human beings are.[4] It is characteristic for a human being that cognition for it is only possible by way of sensuous interactions with the world. We are, to put it in Kant's terms, beings that are sensuously receptive. We have to acquire representations through sensuous intuition in order to obtain knowledge. Our imagination (our faculty to have sensuous representations) has to cooperate with our understanding (our faculty to use concepts in judgments). Such cooperation is the condition of possibility of cognition. And our encounter with a beautiful object is one way in which such cooperation can come about. In our usual interactions with the world, objects elicit sensuous representations that are articulated by concepts in judgments. This is different in the case of a beautiful object. Here the interplay of the imagination and the understanding is not determinate. Sensuous representations and concepts enter into a free play. In dealing with a beautiful object, then, we undergo an experience that is exemplary in nature. We experience the functioning of the interplay between the imagination and the understanding. Dealing with beautiful objects thus demonstrates that human beings are able to acquire cognition in the world or, as Kant puts it: It shows that and how "the human being fits into the world."[5]

It is important to note that the medium of "cognition in general" is experience, not cognition in the strict sense, for the "cognition in general" elicited by beautiful objects is not conceptually articulated. A subject does not attain "cognition in general" by saying to itself: "Ah, I am able to acquire knowledge!" On the contrary, the cognition in question is articulated by a specific pleasure. Kant speaks of a "pleasure which is very recognizable" (*eine sehr merkliche Lust*).[6] We may speak of an aesthetic pleasure. This pleasure is caused by the beautiful object. It is experienced in confrontation with the beautiful object.[7] Thus, *experience* is the medium in which "cognition in general" is obtained. In this way, Kant solves the problem mentioned above of envisaging a mode of cognition that cannot be conceived of as cognition in the strict sense. One of the central results of Kant's critical philosophy is that human beings can only acquire knowledge of objects which they sensuously experience. It follows from this that we can't have knowledge of the cognitive faculties of a knowing subject, for such faculties are not objects that we can have sensuous experiences of. Aesthetic pleasure thus expresses a sort of knowledge that is not cognition in the strict Kantian sense of 'cognition'.

Now, we have followed Kant's analysis thus far in order to understand his insight concerning the determination of the beautiful. The

beautiful is a medium of reflection. Beautiful objects elicit an experience by which the experiencing subject reflects on the cognitive faculties specific to a human being. On Kant's account, the reflective dimension of the experience we have when encountering a beautiful object can be conceived of as follows: Our dealings with beautiful objects refer to the subject's cognitive faculties – the faculties which are in play in every cognitive activity of the subject in question. It may be important to say a word about how "reflection" is understood here. An act of reflection is an act by which a subject makes reference to itself. The experience elicited by the beautiful object refers to the specific cognitive structure of the experiencing subject and hence to all the activities which this structure makes possible. Thus, the reflection can be explained in terms of practices: Aesthetic experiences refer to all practices of cognition of the aesthetically experiencing subject. But the reference in question is not determinate. Encounters with beautiful objects do not reflect specific practices of cognition. They do not investigate specific objects, concepts or subjective forms of cognition. Rather, they make reference to cognitive practices in general. Kant's concept of "cognition in general" is thus a concept that articulates an indeterminate reflective relation.

In Kant's view, an indeterminate reflective relation like this has a specific value: It brings the subject to life through the interplay of its faculties of imagination and understanding. It is the free play of these faculties that effectuates such a bringing to life. As Kant writes: "The animation of both faculties (the imagination and the understanding) to an activity that is indeterminate but yet, through the stimulus of the given representation, in unison, … is the sensation whose universal communicability is postulated by the judgment of taste."[8] According to this explanation, what brings the subject to life in this sense takes place within the experiencing subject: The faculties of the subject are indeterminately referred to, the subject thereby experiencing the functioning of these faculties. The experience undergone by the subject in this context has the effect of activating it in a distinctive way, of bringing it to life in this way. By encountering something beautiful, the subject makes reference to its own liveliness – which is the liveliness of a being that acquires cognitions through sensuous interaction with the world. It is not a sort of liveliness that belongs to a specific subject, but one that holds for all subjects whose cognition is conditioned by sensibility. This is the reason why aesthetic pleasure is, according to Kant, "universally communicable" (*allgemein mitteilbar*)(Kant, 1999:§39).

Kant thereby attains the insight of conceiving the aesthetic as a medium of reflection. His conception of the reflection in question can be summarized as follows: The beautiful reflects the cognitive faculties of

human beings in general. Nevertheless, even though this is a promising starting-point for a conception of art, Kant's explanations cannot ultimately satisfy us. I would like to specify two reasons for this assessment:

(1) It is not at all clear what indeterminate cognition amounts to. It is certainly possible to have knowledge of how to construct a good table or even of a just world order. But what is indeterminate cognition? A certain reply to this critical question can be considered in this context. According to this reply, Kant avoids explicating the judgment of taste as a judgment of cognition in the sense that we don't acquire determinate cognition of objects in the world in our encounters with beautiful objects. As already mentioned, for Kant, the cognitive faculty of a subject is not a possible object of knowledge. It is thus impossible to conceive aesthetic reflection directly as a practice that leads to cognition. Kant respects this restriction by speaking of indeterminate knowledge as something constituted in an experience *qua* aesthetic pleasure and expressed by a judgment of taste. But this explanation is not a solution. It is rather the articulation of a problem. Namely, how is it possible to conceive the aesthetic as a medium of reflection without taking the reflection as cognition, i.e., as a form of knowing? How can reflection be explicated if it is not possible to do so in terms of knowledge? This is a question that Kant leaves unanswered.

(2) Kant assumes that the beautiful is irrelevant in relation to the practices of everyday life. This assumption comes through in Kant's notion of *disinterestedness* (Kant, 1999: §2).Practices of cognition or ordinary actions in the world are not affected by our dealings with beautiful objects. Kant insists that the aesthetic pleasure elicited by beautiful objects has to be differentiated from other forms of pleasure. It is a pleasure "without interest at all". Thus, it is supposed to be different from all other ordinary forms of pleasure that have to be understood as interested: It is different from the pleasure that comes about in connection with the good and the pleasant. The pleasure that we have in our experience of beautiful objects is supposed to be different because it is disinterested. Objects that bring about aesthetic pleasure are not motivating actions. Indeed, we must often make efforts to seek out beautiful objects – Kant does not need to deny this. It follows from this Kantian view that we do not pursue actions with beautiful objects or in relation to them in everyday life. According to Kant, then, aesthetic reflection takes place when we distance ourselves from everyday practices. But this distancing has the problematic consequence that the interrelation between aesthetic practices and other everyday practices becomes incomprehensible. In this sense, Kant has a mixed message for the discussions concerning aesthetics that follow him. On the one hand,

Kant highlights the reflective character of aesthetic experiences. On the other hand, he can only conceive this reflection as being without interest and effect. From this perspective, the self-reflection of the human cognitive faculties in aesthetic experience is not relevant for everyday practices. Reflection does not contribute anything to the interplay of the faculties of imagination and understanding that reflection itself considers. It is like a "bonus", i.e., something that is a happy by-product that occurs distinct from and alongside everyday practices.

Now, one may disagree with what I attribute to Kant, for on Kant's view, our encounters with beautiful objects consist merely in bringing the interplay of the faculties of imagination and understanding to life. So far so good. But Kant does not succeed in explaining the specific relevance of this process for the experiencing subject. Why does the interplay of the faculties of imagination and understanding need to be brought to life? Kant's answer to this question has to be that, generally speaking, there is no need to bring the interplay of the faculties of imagination and understanding to life.[9] The interplay between imagination and understanding functions independently of its aesthetic reflection. Although reflection is certainly involved in the experience of aesthetic pleasure, it does not make a specific contribution to the human form of life. Rather, aesthetic reflection is, as it were, a playful bonus.

2. Hegel: Art as Bringing Substantial Orientations to Life

Hegel does not comment directly on Kant's analysis of the beautiful and on his notion of "cognition in general." But he spells out a position in aesthetics that can be read as a resolution of the mixed message that I have attributed to Kant. The thrust of Hegel's view can be understood as follows: He aims to explain aesthetic reflection in such a way that we can understand how this reflection makes a contribution to other practices within the human form of life. In his aesthetics, Hegel directly envisages the reflective dimension of the aesthetic. He does not primarily investigate the specificity of art, but rather its relevance within the human form of life.

In this way, Hegel's aesthetics takes Kant's position a step further. We may explain his position as follows (even though Hegel would not use the Kantian vocabulary in this way). Hegel's objection to Kant is that it is not possible to focus on the faculties of imagination and understanding independently of determinate practices of knowledge. That is, he holds that the free play of the faculties of imagination and understanding has to be conceived such that it entails determinate concepts; such concepts, according to Hegel, achieve their determinateness only in historical-cultural practices. In Hegel's view, then, the faculties of imagination and

understanding, which enter into a free play in aesthetic practices, have to be conceived on the basis of historical-cultural practices.[10] This line of thought has consequences for the conception of aesthetic pleasure. Kant explains aesthetic pleasure as an expression of an experience that is both subjective and general. If aesthetic pleasure is rooted in historical-cultural practices, however, its generality has a fundamentally different character. It cannot be an experience of something that is universally valid for all subjects who acquire knowledge on the basis of sensuous experiences. Rather, such experience has to be conceived as an occurrence that is bound up with determinate historical-cultural practices. We are faced, then, with the following question: What can such an occurrence or state of free play of imagination and understanding consist in?

Hegel's answer is that such an occurrence or state, which is both subjective and general, has to rely on elements that are established in historical-cultural practices and shared by every individual participating in these practices. What are these elements? Hegel proposes to understand them as *substantial orientations* that are essential for a certain complex of historical-cultural practices. Such elements encompass all practices of cognition internal to such historical-cultural practices. Thus, for Hegel the former are indispensable if one wants to investigate the faculties of knowledge of those who engage in this practice. An occurrence or state that is both subjective and general has to be conceived as one in which subjects refer to the substantial orientations of their historical-cultural form of life.

To put it differently, Hegel's claim is that the generality that holds of subjects with regard to the basic character of their aesthetic experience has to be realized in a concrete manner. Such generality only exists in historical-cultural forms of life. Historical-cultural forms of life are established in traditions; they encompass many practices in a community that build a whole. According to Hegel, such a whole is only realized if the individuals in a community share fundamental convictions. Examples for shared convictions like these are: convictions pertaining to death, love, transcendence, self-determination, bodily control, and so on. If convictions like these are shared by many individuals in a community, a whole is formed such that, according to Hegel, the community in question is understood as a form of life. I call these shared fundamental convictions "*substantial orientations*." If substantial orientations are thematized, such a thematization concerns every individual belonging to a form of life in its generality. With a thematization of substantial orientations, the faculties of imagination and understanding of the individuals are, so to speak, elaborated at a general level.

On Hegel's account, this is the framework within which one has to conceive of aesthetic reflexivity. Art accomplishes a thematization of the substantial orientations of a form of life. Such thematization, and here Hegel agrees with Kant, has an enlivening dimension. But this process of bringing substantial orientations to life does not concern universal faculties of imagination and understanding. Rather, it concerns faculties of imagination and understanding in their concrete formation, such that they come to guide individuals within a complex of historical-cultural practices. In dealing with works of art, substantial orientations of a complex of historical-cultural practices are reinforced and thereby brought to life again. Bringing substantial orientations to life is thus historically embedded and concretely determinate. This Hegelian account also implies that substantial orientations can lose their liveliness within a form of life. Hegel thinks, therefore, that the substantial orientations of a community can become static or congeal in this sense.[11] This static character, however, can be altered and brought back to life through aesthetic practices on account of their reflective nature.

It is illuminating to contrast Hegel's conception of an aesthetic way of bringing substantial orientations to life that I have elaborated thus far with the conception of aesthetics that Kant lays out. In opposition to Kant, Hegel conceives the process of aesthetically bringing substantial orientations to life as a determinate process. According to Hegel, this process cannot consist in an indeterminate free play, but is only actualized in the determinate act of concretely engaging with a work of art. As determinate objects or events, works of art thematize substantial orientations, i.e., are meaningful and compelling for a complex of historical-cultural practices. In doing so, they bring these orientations to life such that this process does not only affect a subject, but a set of intersubjective practices as a whole. In other words, works of art do not initiate something *in*determinate; rather, they initiate a *determinate* play of determinate practices within a form of life. By encountering works of art, subjects are addressed by the concrete generality in which they live, i.e., at the level of their determinate historical-cultural reality.

According to Hegel, however, the specificity of art is not explained sufficiently by this account. For the function of bringing substantial orientations to life is also served by other practices: namely, by religion and philosophy. This is the reason why Hegel takes himself to be confronted with the task of distinguishing art from religion and philosophy. Hegel proposes to draw such a distinction as follows: The specificity of art is such that its thematization of substantial orientations of historical-cultural practices has a specific form, namely, a sensuous form. Works of art are realized in a sensuous way, in certain sensuous media.

The sensuous media out of which works of art are formed are bound up with different materials and different perceptual practices that their recipients take up and perform.

What I have explained thus far can be understood as an explanation of the famous formula by which Hegel expresses the beauty of an artwork: According to Hegel, art is a "sensuous shining of the idea."[12] It is a *sensuous shining* because its presentations are realized in sensuous-material ways; and it is a shining *of the idea* because art brings about a thematization of substantial orientations within a complex of historical-cultural practices.

By way of this explanation, Hegel is able to resolve the mixed message that I attributed to Kant. Hegel does not explain the specificity of art in such a way that this specificity would conflict with art's reflective contribution to a form of life. Even though works of art provoke a specific mode of attention, this attention is one that draws on what is at stake in concrete historical-cultural practices. Works of art demand specific practices: They aim to be explored in detail. In this way they separate their recipients from the everyday practices in which the latter live. Despite this separation, however, works of art for Hegel are inherently related to everyday practices and make a contribution to them, insofar as aesthetic reflections bring substantial orientations of everyday practices to life.

But Hegel's explanation of aesthetic reflection cannot ultimately satisfy us either. Once again, two reasons for this assessment may suffice:

(1) Hegel's position exhibits a problem that is complementary to the one I discerned in Kant's position. Hegel explains the reflective relationship that holds between aesthetic practices and everyday practices as a determinate relationship: Works of art thematize substantial orientations of everyday practices. But this explanation does not capture the specificity of art. The specificity of art lies in the *specific form* of thematization that art facilitates. Works of art present what they thematize in a sensuous way. According to Hegel, however, it is not necessary for the thematization of substantial orientations to be realized in a sensuous way. Thus, the specificity of art is not an essential aspect of its contribution to a complex of historical-cultural practices. To put it differently: According to Hegel, the reflective dimension of art is not specific to art. Insofar as it is reflective, art is equivalent to religion and philosophy (all three form parts or aspects of what Hegel calls "absolute spirit"). Thus, Hegel explains the specificity of art as being distinguishable from the reflective dimension of art. It follows that Hegel does not explain the sense in which art makes a specific contribution to historical-cultural practices.[13]

One may object, though, that this is precisely what Hegel does. Doubtlessly he contends (a) that works of art thematize substantial orientations of historical-cultural practices and (b) that art does so in a specific way, namely, in a sensuous-material way. But with this explanation Hegel still does not clarify what the specific contribution of this sensuous-material thematization is. To put it bluntly: In Hegel's view, what can art achieve that cannot also be achieved by religion or philosophy? If the specificity of art is that works of art are sensuous-material presentations, then it would be necessary to ask: What is the specificity of the very reflection that sensuous-material presentations bring about? Hegel has no answer to this question. Hence he has no explanation of the specific contribution that art makes to historical-cultural practices.

(2) As I have shown, Hegel takes up Kant's notion of the beautiful as both subjective and general. According to Hegel, the generality of the beautiful (or of art) does not generally belong to the subject, but to a complex of historical-cultural practices. In other words, Hegel conceives subjective generality as intersubjective generality. Art is always concerned with general aspects of a human form of life. This conception of aesthetic generality is helpful by allowing us to understand how this generality is determinate. Nevertheless, even though this is helpful, Hegel's explanation of how this generality is determinate is not ultimately convincing. Hegel states that substantial orientations are shared within a community in such a way that the community forms a whole. He thereby assumes that every individual of the community in question shares the same substantial orientations. But this assumption is highly problematic. Communities are heterogeneous. They consist of different groups, different social formations, and different individuals. These groups, social formations, and individuals do not necessarily share the same orientations. If this is so, then Hegel's assumption has to be abandoned. It follows that Hegel's conception of generality, as this applies to the aesthetic, does not work, for it relies on the untenable assumption that every individual of a community shares the same substantial orientations.

3. Beyond Kant and Hegel: Art as a Practice of Reflection

In my view, it is important now to ask how we can pursue Kant's and Hegel's promising ways of conceiving and explaining the specificity of art. As I have tried to show, Hegel follows Kant in a basic way by conceiving of art as a reflective practice. But both Kant and Hegel do not provide a satisfactory explanation of the specificity of the reflection in question. Thus, it is important to ask how we should react to the problems pointed out in Kant's and Hegel's positions. What is the reason for the

shortcomings in Kant's and Hegel's views? It seems to me that the central problem is that neither Kant nor Hegel asks what it really means to conceive the aesthetic in terms of reflection. What does it mean to say of a practice that it is reflective? What is a reflective practice? I propose to investigate the notion of a reflective practice in order to clarify how the specificity of art can be understood by means of this very notion. It is not possible, of course, to pursue an extensive investigation here. But I want to try to give a sense of how one can explain the notion of reflection and, furthermore, how doing so can be illuminating for attaining an adequate conception of art.

With regard to the concept of reflection, I propose a simple distinction: namely, that we distinguish a *theoretical* and a *practical* understanding of reflection. By drawing this distinction, I want to highlight the fact that one often assumes a theoretical understanding of the concept of reflection. I want to emphasize, however, that this is only one possible way of understanding the concept of reflection. Another understanding is available, and it is instructive to emphasize it in our context. The distinction between a theoretical and a practical understanding of reflection can be explained as follows:

According to a *theoretical understanding*, reflection is a state of knowledge. The reflective relationship is explained in such a way that the object of reflection is objectified in a cognitive way. Reflection thus implies *distance*. It is bound up with a position that ensures distance to the object cognized. A position like this can be conceived of in analogy with the perspective of another person on me, i.e., with a third-person perspective. Someone who reflects in a cognitive way objectifies what he reflects in the sense that, or as if he were to adopt the perspective of another person on what he reflects.[14]

According to a *practical understanding*, reflection is something that *intervenes*. The reflective relationship is conceived and explained in such a way that reflection is *efficacious* in relation to other practices. The efficacy of reflection in this sense is bound up with a *practical self-relation*. We can explain a practical self-relation as follows: A reflective practice makes an impact on another practice of the same subject who reflects.[15]

If we suppose that it is helpful to distinguish between a theoretical and a practical understanding of reflection, we can then assess Kant's and Hegel's positions as they have been discussed thus far as follows: Kant's explanations manifestly show the distancing character exhibited by a cognitive understanding of reflection. According to Kant, aesthetic reflection implies a distance between encounters with beautiful objects and everyday practices. Aesthetic disinterestedness establishes this

distance, which is prerequisite for a *theoretical* reflection on the human cognitive faculties. Indeed, according to Kant, we have seen that aesthetic reflection on the interplay of the faculties of imagination and understanding is constituted in the medium of experience. Nevertheless, Kant implicitly adopts a theoretical understanding of reflection. Disinterested pleasure is a state which entails a theoretical aspect.

Something similar takes place in Hegel's aesthetics. As we have seen, Hegel succeeds in developing a conception of aesthetic reflection that gives it a historical-cultural dimension. On Hegel's account, works of art bring substantial orientations of a complex of historical-cultural practices to life. In doing so, aesthetic reflection acquires a more practical dimension than it does in Kant's explanation. That said, Hegel does not explicate this practical dimension in a satisfying way. If Hegel claims that works of art present substantial orientations of a complex of historical-cultural practices, he has to assume that these orientations are, as it were, constituted independently of their aesthetic presentation. What works of art thematize is "actual" in historical-cultural practices, in the sense that what is thematized exists independently of, and is distinguishable from, its aesthetic presentation. As something actual in this sense, these orientations can be brought to life by way of aesthetic reflection. Hegel's explanation of aesthetics thus contains a peculiar ambiguity that can be stated as follows: Works of art intervene practically in a historical form of life by thematizing certain substantial orientations characteristic of this very form of life. The contribution that art makes to historical-cultural practices relies on a *theoretical* attitude that is, oddly, practically realized.

In my view, it is important to overcome the ambiguity of Hegel's explanation. That is to say, my suggestion is that we have to grasp the practical dimension of aesthetic reflection in a consistent and consequential way. Therefore, it is necessary first of all to conceive of reflection in a practical way. In such a conception, reflection is a practice that makes an impact on another practice. Such an impact is the result of a relationship to oneself: In reflecting we realize a *self-imposed* determination of practices. Such a determination is the result of self-imposed constraints, such that some practices of a subject make an impact on other practices of the very same subject. We can gloss the thought in question by stating that reflection is effectuated by self-imposed commitments. An example for such a self-imposed commitment is the assertion "I have asked you a question. (Could you please give me an answer?)." Someone who, in chatting with others, comments on the conversation with such an utterance makes an impact on her own practices. In such a case she determines the force of a previously stated utterance. She commits herself in relation to others. A commitment like

this is not based on theoretical distance. It is based on the capacity to make a determining impact on one's own practices.

We may further clarify the practical conception of reflection by saying that reflection in the practical sense always implies change. Reflection is a relationship to oneself by which practices are determined. Reflection intervenes in practices. Thus, it brings about a change *in, of,* or *to* something. Once reflection intervenes, some practices become different than what or how they were before this intervention. But it is important not to understand the notion of change in an overly narrow way. Reflection does not only intervene by making everything quite different from how it was before. Furthermore, reflection is often bound up with an affirmation of what has been reflected. Practices are determined in such a way that they are oftentimes re-affirmed. An affirmation like this implies change, too. A practice can be determined in an affirmative way. The example just given illustrates this point: Someone who asserts that she has just asked a question affirms (in the normal case) a practice performed before. An affirmation like this has an impact, a practical efficacy (on what is to come).

Equipped with these conceptual clarifications, we can once again return to the question of how we can understand Kant's and Hegel's lessons concerning aesthetics. If we suppose that a conception of art as a reflective practice has to be clarified by a concept of reflection that conceives it in a practical way, we can raise the following questions: In what sense do works of art provoke practices that intervene in other everyday practices? In what sense do aesthetic practices make a specific contribution to other everyday practices? Kant attains the insight that aesthetic practices have to be understood as reflective practices. But Kant's account fails to conceive the efficacy of the reflective practices in question. For this reason, Hegel explains the reflexivity of aesthetic practices in a different way. But his explanation does not allow for a conception of the specificity of the reflection that aesthetic practices bring about. Hegel does not grasp the challenge that aesthetic practices make to everyday practices. He overemphasizes the affirmative aspect of art. For these reasons, in following the lesson taught by Kant and Hegel, it is necessary to analyze the specific way in which aesthetic practices challenge and intervene in other practices.

With this lesson in mind, we can now return to the questions with which I began this paper. How is it possible to develop a conception of art that does not fall short in its aim of encompassing all the aspects that are relevant to art as a human practice? Kant and Hegel's basic contribution to aesthetics is that art has to be understood as a reflective practice. This conception of art enables us to see how all the different aspects pertaining

to what art is can be integrated: They can be integrated by adopting a point of view that explains the specificity of art in terms of a decidedly *practical* understanding of reflective practice. Kant and Hegel do not equip us with an understanding of the specificity in question. But they have put us in the position to understand that this is the question we have to answer if we want to arrive at an understanding of aesthetic practice that encompasses *all* the aspects relevant to art as a human practice. Having the right question in view, of course, does not mean that we already possess plausible answers to it.

Notes

1. See Moritz Weitz, "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 62 (1953): 27-35.
2. See Monroe C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism* (2nd ed. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1981).
3. See, for instance, Martin Seel, *Aesthetics of Appearing* (Stanford University Press, 2004); Christoph Menke, *The Sovereignty of Art: Aesthetic Negativity in Adorno and Derrida* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999).
4. For a thorough investigation of the rationalist-perfectionist tendencies of Kant's position see Rachel Zuckert, "Kant's Rationalist Aesthetics," *Kant-Studien* 98 (2007): 443-463.
5. Immanuel Kant, Nachgelassene Reflektion 1820a, *Akademie-Ausgabe*, Band XVI (Berlin/Leipzig: Königlich Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften 1924), p. 127 (my translation).
6. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, B XL.
7. There is no agreement among the commentators of Kant's position about how Kant conceives of the relation between aesthetic pleasure, aesthetic judgment, and the free play of the faculties of the understanding. Henry Allison has argued convincingly that both Paul Guyer (cf. *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, [Cambridge University Press, 1979], pp. 110-119, pp. 151-160) and Hannah Ginsborg (cf. "Reflective Judgment and Taste," in: *Noûs* 24 [1990]: 63-78) fall short of capturing Kant's position because they put aesthetic pleasure in the first place and thereby miss the fact that Kant conceives of it as a pleasure of the generality which is experienced in confrontation with a beautiful object (cf. Henry Allison, *Kant's Theory of Taste* [Cambridge University Press, 2001], pp. 112 ff.). But Allison himself tends to give a formalist account of Kant's position, which results from the fact that he does not allow for the reflective dimension of the free play of the faculties of the understanding which Kant articulates in his notion of "cognition in general".
8. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, §9 ("Die Belebung beider Vermögen (der Einbildungskraft und des Verstandes) zu unbestimmter, aber doch vermittelst des Anlasses der gegebenen Vorstellung, einhelliger Tätigkeit … ist die Empfindung, deren allgemeine Mitteilbarkeit das Geschmacksurteil postuliert.")
9. A similar explanation could be given with regard to Kant's conception of the beautiful as a "symbol of the morally good" (cf. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of*

Judgment, § 59). Even though Kant explains an effect of aesthetic experiences by saying that they symbolize the morally good, he would have to say that there is, in the end, no need for such symbolization. As rational beings, humans are always related to the morally good.

10. Different from my interpretation of Kant, my account of Hegel's position is more or less uncontroversial in its general lines. See, for instance, Terry Pinkard, "Symbolic, Classical, and Romantic Art," in *Hegel and the Arts*, ed. Stephen Houlgate (Northwestern University Press, 2007), pp. 3-28.

11. For an elaboration of this claim of Hegel's see Robert B. Pippin, "The Absence of Aesthetics in Hegel's Aesthetics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel and Nineteenth Century Philosophy*, ed. F. Beiser (Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 394-418, esp. pp. 400-402.

12. G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T. M. Knox, vol. I (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), p. 111 (translation modified).

13. That Hegel fails to conceive of the specificity of art is nicely reflected by Robert Pippin when he states: "... art, at least for most of its existence, had for Hegel a philosophical work to do: ..." (Robert B. Pippin, *After the Beautiful: Hegel and the Philosophy of Pictorial Modernism* [University of Chicago Press, 2014], p. 33)

14. Such a conception of reflection is often attributed to the philosophies of German Idealism. See Dieter Henrich, "Self-consciousness, a Critical Introduction to a Theory," *Man and World* 4:1 (1971): 3-28 for a thorough investigation of the problems that are bound up with a theoretical understanding of reflection.

15. See Richard Moran, *Authority and Estrangement* (Princeton University Press, 2001) for an assessment of reflection in this vein.

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