

Artisans, Artists and Hegel's History of Art*

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Abstract

This article examines Hegel's use of the distinction between 'artist' (*Künstler*) and 'artisan' (*Werkmeister*) in light of recent discussion about the 'end' of art and the distinction between art and craft that, as some have argued, has been central to the concept of the fine arts since the eighteenth century. Hegel does employ an important distinction between artist and artisan, but he does so within a larger account of the continuum of forms of human making that can take into consideration the importance of the artisan's work as well as the artist's. Hegel's account involves two distinctive features not always at issue in the artist/artisan distinction: the stress on the social changes required for new forms of art to emerge and an embrace of the human being as the essentially retrospective and interpretive animal in whom the decisive intersection of content and form finally makes art what it is.

As recent interest in the haunting cave art at Chauvet-Pont-D'Arc (and the now apparently older red-dot hand tracings in the cave at El Castillo) attests, philosophical attempts to answer the question 'what is the origin of art?' have ever been bound up with intriguing parallel historical considerations.¹ If we ask more specifically about the origin of art in the sense of the Western notion of *fine* art, that is to say, in the sense of the *beaux arts*, the *schöne Künste*, it is striking that, especially since the high water mark of modernism, there have been a number of reflections on the relation between philosophy and art history that suggest a crucial relation between questions of *origin* and *end*. Arthur Danto, who holds an essentialist view about the notion of art itself, nonetheless sees the development of Western art as coming to an end in the production of artworks which bear no material difference in comparison with non-artistic works (with Warhol's *Brillo* boxes being his favourite example). At the other end of the historical spectrum, the art historian

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Hans Belting, looking at devotional art in the West prior to the year 1400, relates a narrative of the 'before' to Danto's 'after,' offering a 'history of the image before the era of art' (by which he means the era in which images construed as *being* art or artists construed as *being* artists, did not figure as such into their production).²

What sort of philosophical account does Hegel offer to the question of the origin of art and to the larger concern with the relation between philosophy and art history? Danto of course often cites Hegel's putative notion of the 'end of art' in this context,³ but there is, I think, a wider story to be told, one that offers a distinctive perspective both on the questions concerning the Western notion of fine art which animate Danto and Belting, as well as the questions about the broader origins of human artistic activity that might occur in response to attempts by Werner Herzog and others to capture what is distinctive about millennia-old products of the human hand.⁴

There are many Hegelian issues which have a bearing on these questions, including (1) the status of the artist in Hegel's account—in particular, his use of the contrast between 'artist' and 'artisan'; (2) the status of artistic creation, particularly whether this is a conscious or unconscious activity and how this fits within the larger tradition of the 'imitation of nature' that Hegel famously rejects; (3) the role of social and ethical norms as central to Hegel's account; and (4) the role of religion, alongside the related development of Hegel's famous distinction among symbolic, classical and romantic modes of art. In what follows, I will take up the discussion of Hegel's account of the origin of art in three sections. I will look first (Part I) at Hegel's own categorization of the historical context of his philosophical reflections on art, particularly how it stands against the emergence of the eighteenth century project in aesthetics. I will then turn (in Part II) to Hegel's distinction between 'artist' and 'artisan,' which first emerges in the account he gives of the 'religion of art' in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* but which continues to have a presence in the later lectures on aesthetics as well. Finally (Part III), I'd like to conclude with some suggestions about how Hegel's notion of the origin of art has a bearing on contemporary philosophical discussion concerning intentionality in artistic and other forms.

I. The Eighteenth Century Project in Aesthetics and the Emergence of 'Art'

One philosophical approach to the question of the origin of fine art locates it within a specific historical context: the emergence of the sharp division between *art and craft* and between *artist and artisan* that occurred during the development of formal aesthetics in the eighteenth century. Drawing on a famous (though still quite contested) account by Paul Oskar Kristeller heralding the origin of the

‘modern system’ of the fine arts in the eighteenth century, Larry Shiner has traced the distinguishing of ‘fine’ arts as those pursued for their own sake, enjoyed in moments of refined pleasure as opposed to mere entertainment, and requiring creative genius rather than ‘mere’ artistic skill or the application of workman’s rules in order to be produced.⁵ Over the course of the eighteenth century, the adjective ‘fine’ is ultimately dropped, and *art* in a newly prestigious sense comes to claim an autonomy that distinguishes it not only from craft but from external purposes (religious or utilitarian) that had previously been bound up with artistic work.⁶ A similar development characterizes the new and widening distinction that emerges in the eighteenth century between ‘free’ artists on the one hand and artisans or ‘handicraftsmen’ on the other hand: while genius, inspiration and creativity characterize the activity of the former, the latter are described in terms of skill, working according to a rule, and working within a trade. (In what follows, I will be using the term ‘artisan’ in this narrower sense.)⁷

This historical narrative of the emergence of art as such is quite familiar, but it might of course be asked, in the light of the longer trajectory of human making that takes us back to the caves at Chauvet, whether such a rigid dichotomy makes the best sense of art in all its forms. This question is particularly important if we want to come to terms with the many claims made (by Danto, Belting and others) concerning the ‘end’ of art. As Shiner has asked: ‘What would the story of the ideas and institutions of the fine arts look like if we no longer wrote it as the inevitable triumph of Art over craft, Artist over artisan, Aesthetic over function and ordinary pleasure?’ Would the construction of the ‘modern system of art’ look (in Shiner’s words) in that case ‘less like a great liberation than a fracture we have been trying to heal ever since’?⁸

Since Danto and others often appeal to Hegel precisely in terms of a notion of the ‘end’ of art, it may be useful to see how Hegel’s account of the development of art prior to its end—the relevant notions of art and artist at work in his philosophy of art—compare with this one. Does the philosophy of art in Hegel’s view require such sharp distinctions between art and craft or artist and artisan?

For an initial answer, if we look at the *Lectures on Aesthetics*, Hegel is clearly the inheritor, in some very evident ways, of this eighteenth century shift in the notion of art. Art for Hegel is, first of all, something that is *significant* rather than (‘merely’) decorative, since it is concerned—if it is to really count as art—with what Hegel calls the ‘deepest interests of mankind, and the most comprehensive truths of Spirit.’⁹ Art is also *free*, Hegel says, both in its means and ends: art can only *be* art in its freedom.¹⁰ While Hegel (like Shiner and those who question the art/craft distinction) does think that there is an important story to tell in terms of a *continuity* between art and craft, it is ultimately the larger terms of art’s significance and freedom that are relevant for an Hegelian understanding of art

as something that *matters*, and matters in a way that goes beyond what is merely decorative or what we find appealing because of its craftsmanly construction. Hegel's own official list in the *Aesthetics* of the arts which count in this way is limited to the five identified by Kristeller as canonical in the late eighteenth century after Batteux (architecture, sculpture, painting, music and poetry); other forms of artistic practice are labeled in the lectures as 'imperfect' (gardening, dancing, etc.) and mentioned only in passing.¹¹

And Hegel certainly construes his own approach to the philosophy of art as something which has emerged over the course of the development of aesthetics and art in the eighteenth century: the so-called 'historical deduction' of art, as the section is titled in Hotho's edition,¹² stands in the introduction to Hegel's lectures after a discussion of various eighteenth century approaches that did not fully understand the importance of art, and then traces the rise of art as it *matters* from Kant to Schiller to Schelling, with Hegel's as the philosophical approach which has best comprehended this development (and Schlegelian irony as something of a coda). It is only in the course of this development from Kant to Hegelian idealism that, Hegel says, 'the *concept* of art, and the place of art in philosophy was discovered.'¹³

I want to mention at the start, however, two important differences in Hegel's approach to the distinction between art and craft that make it something different from what Shiner attacks. The first is a conceptual point and the second is an historical point.

First, the conceptual point: as opposed to the account Shiner and others give, for Hegel the art/craft difference is not something primarily discoverable in distinctions between types of artistic activity or spectatorial experience, but more importantly in the larger set of cultural and social patterns within which artistic practice is embedded. In other words, the question of how we come to make a distinction between art and artisanry is ultimately for Hegel a question of what a culture comes to value *as* art. (We might think about this in terms of the resources Hegel's philosophy of art can bring to bear when it accounts for the emergence of new forms of art—for example, what is involved in Hegelian terms when an art, even one like photography, which he never encountered, stops being just a sort of *technē* or craft that draws curiosity and comes to be conventionally considered as being a fine art in itself. Hegel's answer would seem to be that behind the new attributions of genius and inspiration to photographers as well as painters lies a set of social and cultural norms in terms of how photography is viewed.)

The second and historical point also makes the story more complicated. Like Winckelmann, Schiller and Schlegel, Hegel's view of the history of art—however much it owes to new philosophical distinctions that emerge over the course of the eighteenth century—gives nonetheless a particular privilege to a much older

moment: that of ancient Greece. In fact, in the official Hegelian story, both in his earlier and his later aesthetics, the real origin of art is always located in ancient Greece, whether we look to the emergence of the ‘spiritual work of art’ as such in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* or the classical ideal of beauty in the lectures. So there are actually, in Hegel’s view, two significant historical moments of diæresis: it is only with the Greeks that art in its genuine sense emerges, but at the same time the full philosophical *significance* of the Greeks’ achievements in the arts is philosophically understood only in the wake of the eighteenth century and Kant.

With these two important differences in mind, I’d like to explore the art/craft distinction particularly through the lens of the issue raised in the title, that is to say, Hegel’s own distinction between artist and artisan. Hegel makes clear that what is at issue here is precisely what he calls the recognition of ‘*the inner process of the origin of art (den inneren Entstehungsgang der Kunst)*’.¹⁴ Despite some differences, the Hegelian narrative about this emergence remains consistent over the development of his philosophy of art from Jena to the Berlin lectures, so I’ll begin with the *PbG*’s account of the distinction of artisan and artist and then turn to this distinction in the context of the lectures.

II. From Artisan to Artist: Hegel’s Characterizations of Artistic Activity

In paragraph #702 of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, in a section entitled ‘Religion in the Form of Art,’ Hegel heralds the emergence of what he calls ‘absolute art,’ which he contrasts with the ‘instinctive fashioning of material’ that had characterized the figure in the previous section, ‘the artisan,’ *der Werkmeister*.¹⁵ The artisan, as opposed to *der Künstler*, the artist, ‘produces itself as object but without having yet grasped the thought of itself’; its productions are thus equivalent, says Hegel, with ‘the building of honeycombs by bees’ (*PbG* #691). Hegel tends to use the term *Werkmeister* in ways that stress a certain unconsciousness of agency, at least for some part of an agentive whole; he uses it, for example, in the section of the *Phenomenology* on physiognomy and palm-reading to describe the hand as the ‘ensouled artisan of its fortune’ (*PbG* #315), and in the later systematic works to stress the larger actions of *Geist*, the Concept or history as kinds of artisans as they work themselves out beyond the immediate control or perspective of individual agents (there is in this sense also an important concern with how artistry is in fact *masterly (meisterhaft)*, a point to which I will return).¹⁶

It’s striking that what happens in order for the transition from artisan to artist to be effected is not something which Hegel details in terms of the development of new specific artistic skills, tools or media, but rather in terms of a new religious and artistic conception—a shift that Hegel seems to link especially to the development that occurs between Egyptian and Greek religious artwork

and is thus in Hegel's later aesthetics essential for understanding the move from the symbolic to the classical form of art. It is only when the artisan gives up 'the synthetic effort to blend the heterogeneous forms of thought and natural objects' (characteristic of the sphinx and other products of Egyptian religious art where animal and human forms are blended) that 'the shape has gained the form of self-conscious activity' and has thus become a 'spiritual worker' (*geistiger Arbeiter*).

The emergence of this spiritual worker in the context of the Religion chapter of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is a compressed and seemingly Delphic moment within an especially compressed and Delphic section of Hegel's text. Systematically and in terms of Hegel's development, there is a great deal afoot. First of all, in terms of the larger progression of moments within the *Phenomenology*, the Religion chapter represents a key narrative deepening of the task of the *Phenomenology* and hence a moment of revision and expansion — in this case, as often in the *Phenomenology*, retrospectively, since, while Chapter VII, the Religion chapter, clearly tracks the moments of Chapter VI's account of Spirit from 'true' to 'self-alienated' to 'self-certain' spirit, and thus is concerned with a development that runs from ancient Greece to contemporary Romanticism, it does so now from a new point of departure, that of religious conceptions that historically antedate the Greeks. Systematically, Hegel is concerned here with the relation between self-conscious Spirit and world, the relation between Spirit and nature, and with the transition from conscience, by way of religion, to absolute knowing. Moreover, from the perspective of the development of Hegel's philosophical position on absolute spirit, these sections represent an important expansion of Hegel's detailed concerns with religion and art in their embodied historical concreteness—on the side of religion, one that particularly offers a certain opening to the East (and that comes to be amplified in Hegel's Heidelberg years as he studies Creuzer's mythology, among other things) and on the side of art one that offers the possibility of breaking beyond the Romantic duality between Greek and modern that Hegel thought had unduly constrained Schlegel's account of symbolism and art.¹⁷

All of this means that the initial appearance of Hegel's distinction between artisan and artist is one that seems to bear unusually heavy freight. And there is a dense concentration, even confusion, of imagery surrounding the sections where the artisan appears as we move across the three phases of Natural Religion—the Zoroastrian view of God as Light, which as the 'shape of shapelessness' does not yet involve a wide range of imagery or an account of the makers of such imagery; the Hindu incorporation of Plant and Animal into new religious imagery, where we first have some account of human making; and the third section entitled 'The Artisan,' which is the transition point directly into the moments of religious artistry proper.

The emergence of the artisan in the section on Plant and Animal is odd, in that he is neither really identified nor introduced as a figure. The first indication of the potential importance of a human maker comes at the end of this section, where an anonymously described ‘worker’ (*der Arbeitende*) is said to be a self-producing and self-consuming self because it ‘retains the upper hand’ over the mutually destructive animal spirits that it presumably involves in its construction of religious imagery. The key to the transition to the section on the ‘artisan’ proper lies in the conditionality or imperfection of the worker’s constructive activity: at this stage, he still uses material that is just ‘to hand’ or *found* (that is, for example, still in the form of an animal) rather than material that itself reflects the human being behind the construction of religious imagery (#690).

The task for the artisan proper is to overcome this division between objective material and subjective human maker: as Hegel puts it, this task is the *Aufhebung* of the division between body and soul, and what the artisan’s activity accomplishes at once gives a shape or form of clothing to the soul (the German is *bekleiden* and *gestalten*) and a soul or liveliness to the body (*beseelen*). Owing to the natural medium in which the artisan works, there is still a division that must be overcome: the artisan blends both natural and human shapes and produces creatures like the Sphinx, an ‘ambiguous being which is a riddle to itself, the conscious wrestling with the non-conscious, the simple inner with the multiform outer, the darkness of thought mating with the clarity of utterance, these break out into the language of a profound, but scarcely intelligible wisdom’ (#697). But what is achieved in the artisan’s production of the riddling Sphinx has the significance of being the ‘end of instinctive effort’ and affords the artisan finally a recognition where his own active self-consciousness can be met with self-consciousness in the object. Thus the partly human, partly animal ‘monsters in shape, word and deed’ that are central to this moment of the artisan are ‘dissolved into spiritual shape’ in the newly self-conscious activity of the artisan as he is transformed into an artist proper: now we have ‘an outer that has retreated into itself, and an inner that utters or expresses itself out of itself and in its own self’; we have ‘thought which begets itself, which preserves its shape in harmony with itself and is a lucid, intelligible existence.’

Once the attempt to blend human and animal forms has been given up, and the artisan has created a shape which has the form of self-conscious activity—that is to say, the human form—he is now an artist, a ‘spiritual worker’ (#699). And this moment allows therefore the transition between natural religion and the religion of art proper.

What sort of an account has Hegel given, then, of the artisan in transition to become artist? Notice again that very little, if anything, has been said about the material conditions of the artisan’s work or what might lie behind the specific creative achievement involved in moving from a blended use of naturalistic and

human forms to anthropomorphic images of the god—the key moment in the move to the Greek ‘art religion.’

Hegel effects the transition instead—as I hope was evident in what I stressed—by a peculiar appeal to a figure that is itself part of a construction within a poetic work of art. As he emphasizes in the later *Lectures on Aesthetics* in taking up precisely this transitional scene to give an account of the move from the symbolic to the classical form of art: the artisan who becomes artist—who is the first to turn in his art to the human shape as such—is not Pheidias or even Sophocles but rather the person who was able to understand that the ‘riddle’ of Egyptian art embodied in the Sphinx has a ‘solution.’ The artisan who becomes artist, the thinker who can recognize in the Sphinx the ‘symbol of the symbolic itself’ is, in Hegel’s rich iconography of the emergence of art, the character Oedipus. To quote the account from the Hotho version of the lectures (a scene which is, however, also clearly attested in various versions in the lecture notes, as well):

The Sphinx propounded the well-known conundrum: What is it that in the morning goes on four legs, at mid-day on two, and in the evening on three? Oedipus found the simple answer: a man, and he tumbled the Sphinx from the rock. The explanation of the symbol lies in the absolute meaning [Hegel says], in the spirit, just as the famous Greek inscription calls to man: Know thyself. The light of consciousness is the clarity which makes its concrete content shine clearly through the shape belonging and appropriate to itself, and in its [objective] existence reveals itself alone. (LFA I:361, SW XIII.465)

As we look at what the Lectures make explicit on this point of transition (the naming of Oedipus in this context, which does not happen in the *PbG*, despite the strong hints in that direction), a number of other questions arise. The transition in the Lectures from the symbolic to the classical form of art is as strange and Delphic in its way as the transition in the *PbG* from natural religion to the religion of art. As in the *PbG* account, there is significant ambiguity about exactly when the relevant transition occurs: while Hegel calls the symbolic realm in general the realm of *Vorkunst* or pre-art, when we reach the ‘actual symbolic’ (*die eigentliche Symbolik*) moment of Egyptian art, the Egyptians are described as ‘the properly artistic people,’ as well (*das eigentliche Volk der Kunst*), a people that Hegel emphasizes is engaged in a wider set of human artistic activities such as building, agriculture and excavation.¹⁸ Hegel’s sequence of Egyptian art also confirms this: only the pyramids, the Egyptian use of animal imagery and the statues of Memnon come on the scene before Hegel insists, as he turns to what he calls *vollständige Symbolik*, that in fact at just this point the symbolical form has

already started to disappear, insofar as the inner and the spiritual becomes itself the content of the represented human form. Thus by the time we have reached what Hegel calls *die eigentliche Symbolik*, we are already in fact at the classical—a point which Hegel confirms in his sweeping remark that ‘[t]he symbol, in the meaning of the word used here, constitutes the beginning of art, alike in its nature and its historical appearance.’¹⁹

But the question persists in both the *PbG* and the Lectures: why is Oedipus the figure to whom Hegel appeals in trying to give some account of what makes the artist in his work distinctive from the artisan, and what sense can we make of Hegel’s account of this transition? I think there are important Hegelian reasons for this stress on the kind of artistic ‘activity’ we can see *within created artworks* rather than in presumed glimpses ‘behind the scenes’ into the artist’s studio or study (something in the hundreds of pages of notes on the hundreds of details of art from Hegel’s lectures we very rarely have), and they have to do with a richer but in many ways strange understanding of the notion of ‘artistic intention’ that we can find in Hegel. So I will turn to that topic in the third and final section of the paper.

III. Intention and Creation in Art

In this section, I want to link some recent discussion of the issue of intentionality in agency with questions that have arisen in Hegel’s account of the relation between artist and artisan. Robert Pippin and Alexander Nehamas have both recently raised questions about the relation between art and intention that link the inquiry into artistic activity with contemporary philosophical questions about ordinary human agency. Pippin draws on Hegel’s criticism of the form/content distinction to question whether intention and action—whether in a piece of our everyday agency or in the works created by artistic agency—can ever be held as formally apart as the standard account assumes. Pippin argues that it is one of the philosophical merits of Hegel’s view of action that it levels a strong skeptical suspicion toward accounts which falsely separate intention and action and which construe an agent’s reasons for acting as isolatable and ‘episodic or dispositional and perhaps uniquely causal mental states.’²⁰ If, following Hegel, we do not start in our account of the philosophy of agency with assumptions about an intention as something always separable from and causally put into play in action, the animating question here is something like this: what might it mean to be an agent whose sense of his own desire or will is always one that she is coming to terms with *after* the fact? Hegel’s boldest claim (as he puts it in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*) is that ‘an individual cannot know what he is until he has made himself a reality through action.’²¹

In his recent article on 'The Absence of Aesthetics in Hegel's *Aesthetics*,' Pippin has extended this claim in the direction of artistic intentionality, arguing that neither in action nor in artistic creation is there anything like a "two-stage" process; 'neither the conceptualization of independently acquired sensory material, nor an inner intention functioning as a distinct cause, initiating a subsequent bodily movement as one might kick a ball to start it rolling': 'Art-making is not an incidental or contingent or merely illustrative expression of an already achieved self-knowledge, any more than action is the result or expression of a distinct inner intention.'²²

Hegel himself makes this point about intentionality clear in a number of ways in the *Aesthetics*—for example, in his claim that the Greek art forms—the genres of sculpture, epic, tragedy and comedy, etc.—were not pre-existing and therefore ready to be seized by artists and imposed on new material, but were instead the only forms in which the essential content of Greek art could actually have been expressed. The mode of expression is essential to the artwork itself, in other words.²³

But could it really be Hegel's position that we can't understand *any* artwork as the result of an artist's intention? Such a position would seem to be in tension not only with some of our own basic intuitions about art but also with Hegel's own account of artistic production elsewhere in the *Aesthetics*. Hegel does, for example, say very straightforwardly in his discussion of the 'position of the productive artist in classical art' that appears in the introduction to the Hotho edition of the lectures that the production of the artist is 'the free deed of the clear-headed man who equally *knows* what he wills and *can* accomplish what he wills, and who, in other words, neither is unclear about the meaning and the substantial content which he intends to shape outwardly for contemplation, nor in the execution of his work does he find himself hindered by any technical incapacity.'²⁴

I want to argue that it is important that we see *both* how Hegel subjects his broad account of intentionality in ordinary agency and artistic activity to a critique of the artificial separation between intention and action *and* how he nonetheless preserves elements of the traditional distinction between artist and artisan as resting on the further distinction between conscious and unconscious activity. To do that, I would like to look a little more carefully at the role Oedipus is playing in his account of the transition from the activity of the artisan to the activity of the artist.

What I'd like to suggest is that Hegel's account of Oedipus' role gives us a window onto two important components of artistic intentionality that are distinctive of Hegel's approach to this question—one related to the social and *geistig* character of artistic activity and the other concerned with the importance of interpretation.²⁵

(1) If we trust Hegel's account of the riddle-solving Oedipus, we must notice that an important part of the 'work' that must go on for there to be a transition from artisanal handwork to the genuine possibility of art—or more broadly, for there to be a transition to a new mode of art-making at all—is something which must be viewed as an achievement of the larger social world in which the artist lives and which the artist himself can then somehow pick up as lying in front of him within the cultural world he inhabits (it is *fertig* and *vorhanden*, as Hegel says). The achievement of Greek culture must precede the cultural work of the artist. (This is perhaps clearest in Hegel's insistences that the real difference between instinctive artisanal *Arbeit* and the spiritual work of the artist lies first of all in what is being used as material for fashioning: in the first case, it is a natural product—the plant or animal—and in the second case it is something that already is a spiritual product—the human shape.)

(2) If we think about Oedipus the riddle-solver as the embodiment of the Hegelian notion of the artist at work, we may be prompted to the conclusion that the activity of the artist involves not so much the imposition of some new and separable artistic intention *on* the world in front of him but rather—above all—a form of *interpretation*. In the case of Hegel's Oedipus metaphor, interpretation involves the sort of insight needed to solve a riddle. An old problem which has no answer in the context of one cultural world has—thanks to already ongoing efforts within culture as a whole—the potential for resolution, but it is often only an especially *geistreich* artist who can see what that potential is and seize it with the result that a new form can emerge. (The question is: how do we understand what happened when a Greek artist first thought to himself: 'god doesn't look like an animal, but like a human being!')

What has happened to the artist/artisan distinction and the conscious/unconscious creation distinction in the process? One thing we might suggest is a certain commonality between what Hegel distinguishes as instinctive and absolute art: both of course involve some connection to strivings of which the artisan or artist is himself unconscious. But it's important to notice that Oedipal interpretive artistry *is* clearly intentional in a recognizable sense: the discovery of a solution to the Sphinx' riddle is Oedipus' and no one else's. Like the products of our own intentional agency in the world around us: what he has done is something he owns, and for which he is famous. The Oedipal solution is *Oedipus*'. But it is not because Hegel is employing some notion of a prior and separable intention which the artist has put into play in his work, but—again like our experience in ordinary everyday agency—it is because we have ways of construing and recovering our actions that ultimately have retrospective significance.²⁶

And here it's worth noticing that the very strongest claims Hegel makes for intentionality and art are claims that are made about the *artwork*: it's not (or not only) the *artist* but the *work* which Hegel says 'knows and therefore points' to

itself (*indem sie sich weiss, sich weis*)²⁷—and it is thus as much a ‘cultural achievement of the Greeks’ as it is the distinctive ownership of particular artists. Of course the artist in some sense becomes himself the object of his work, but it is *in* his work—in its completion and ultimately in its interpretation—that he really becomes self-aware.

We might consider one of the more famous passages from the Hotho edition of the lectures in this regard. In the transition from symbolic art, where free individuality is not yet the content and form of art, to the classical realm where genuine art is *about the person*, it is asserted:

[T]he person is what is significant for himself and is his own self-explanation (*das Subjekt ist das Bedeutende für sich selbst und das sich selbst erklärende*). What he feels, reflects, does, accomplishes, his qualities, his actions, his character, are himself; and the whole range of his spiritual and visible appearance has no other meaning but the person who, in this development and unfolding of himself, brings before our contemplation only himself as master over his entire objective world. Meaning and sensuous representation, inner and outer, matter and form, are in that event no longer distinct from one another; they do not announce themselves, as they do in the strictly symbolic sphere, as merely related, but as *one* whole in which the appearance has no other essence, the essence no other appearance, inside or alongside itself... In this sense the Greek gods... are not to be taken symbolically; they content us in and by themselves. For art the actions of Zeus, Apollo and Athene belong precisely to these individuals alone, and are meant to display nothing but their power and passion.’ (LFA I.313, SW XIII.405)²⁸

This is one of a number of passages where it's not clear exactly what figure Hegel is talking about: the gods, but presumably the gods as they appear within Greek works of art, yet in the discussion of person feeling himself ‘master over his entire objective world,’ Hegel uses language that he elsewhere links directly to the artist's power as *Meister des Gottes*, a phrase that Hegel seems to connect with *Werkmeister*, the German word for ‘artisan’ and which plays a significant role in the awareness of human making that allows for the transition from art and religion to philosophy within Hegel's mature account of absolute spirit. But that *Meisterschaft* on the part of the artist is deeply embedded in the work the artisan or artist creates. It's in this sense, I think, that Hegel gives such an active role in his account of Greek art to the ‘action’ of figures like Zeus and Athene or Oedipus and Antigone as they appear in the works of Homer, Sophocles and Pheidias

(as opposed to an account of the daily actions of actual artists like Homer, Pheidias and Sophocles).

Of course we have still a question about the kind of artistic activity Hegel is ascribing to his Oedipus (and in fact why he may have chosen this figure at all): if the Oedipus who is at the center of this scene is Oedipus the riddle-solver (a scene which Sophocles in any case does not show us), what are we to make of the tragic denouement which this riddle-solver ultimately encounters, a denouement which involves precisely the defeat of knowledge at the hands of fate?

There are two longer Hegelian answers to this question, both of which are spelled out in his narratives of artistic agency in the *PbG* as well as in the *Aesthetics*. These answers take us in further directions that we do not have time to fully examine here, but the outlines may still help us with the question of artistic agency. First of all, Hegel's ultimate conception of the Greek artist, as is well-known, is in fact one of a suffering figure whose achievement of certainty comes at the cost of a figure who has 'lost his world': that is to say, an essentially tragic figure who marks a transition to another culture. If the first Oedipus in Hegel's narrative is an Oedipus who sees the way to solve something which marks a cultural leap forward, the second Oedipus in Hegel's narrative is an Oedipus who has an insight that pulls away to what will ultimately dissolve that culture. In Sophocles' account of Oedipus there is not merely the riddle solver and the perpetrator of the two great crimes (the subjects of the *Oedipus Rex*) but also a further vision of an older Oedipus in the second play, the *Oedipus at Colonus*, which Hegel termed a play of tragic reconciliation and which many others, including Bernard Williams, have talked about in terms of its offering a view of agency beyond conventional notions of prior intention. From this perspective there can be found a number of interesting Hegelian insights into the questions of intentional artistic agency, as well, in terms of the notion of reconciliation—or we might say in terms of the recovery of self, if we want the broadest term for what goes on in play like this. Self-recovery, if we want to venture in this direction, is also very much a matter of (self-) interpretation: it must continually take into account the ways in which the 'I' that has been achieved has come about through longer-term and not necessarily deliberate action, but it is not for that un-intentional or not mine.

If this seems like a strange account of intention in action and art, it's worth noticing that Hegel is not the only figure in 19th century philosophy to pursue the question in this way. In a recent paper entitled 'Nietzsche, Action, Intention,' Alexander Nehamas suggests a similar Nietzschean critique of separable intention. He argues: '[I]n all complicated activities—writing a novel, going on a journey, planting a garden, becoming a philosopher—both agents and interpreters begin with a hazy idea that can't possibly correspond to the intention that is manifested once their actions are complete. In such cases, the intention

comes into being with the activity itself.²⁹ (In Aaron Ridley's terms, the success-condition of such actions are 'internal to the execution' and unspecifiable in a non-trivial way prior to the event.³⁰)

If this point is right, claims Nehamas, intentions are 'not so much self-sufficient mental states that cause actions as they are markers and modifiers of the more extended performance to which we must appeal in order to explain a particular action... our understanding of both intention and action is therefore provisional.' On the account of Nehamas' Nietzsche, too, the task of construing intention is an inherently interpretive activity, one that requires making sense of what happens often seemingly by chance and often taking responsibility even for what we may not anticipate. He quotes in this context Zarathustra, whose language in the great section on 'Redemption' is reminiscent in many ways of Hegel's Oedipus:

I walk among men as among the fragments of the future—that future which I envisage. And this is all my creating and striving, that I create and carry together into One what is fragment and riddle and dreadful accident. And how could I bear to be a man if man were not also a creator and guesser of riddles and redeemer of accidents? To redeem those who lived in the past and to re-create all 'it was' into a 'thus I willed it'—that alone should I call redemption.' (Nietzsche 1954: 139)

It is in many ways a similar appeal that Hegel makes to the birth of artistry as an essentially intentional and interpretive activity—what often is, in fact, a kind of riddle-guessing—as he considers the figure of Oedipus. (What Hegel adds, of course, among other things, is a fuller account of the social and cultural origins of the riddles themselves.)

IV. Conclusions

In this paper, I began with a question about the origin of art and the well-known distinction between artist and artisan, as well as the critique of this distinction, and asked whether Hegel employed it in a way that makes the critique relevant. And my answer is that Hegel does employ an important distinction between artist and artisan, but he does so within a larger account of the continuum of forms of human making that can take into consideration the importance of the artisan's work as well as the artist's. And, as I've argued, with the help of a reading of Hegel's curious employment of the figure of Oedipus as a sort of a proto-artist, Hegel's account involves two distinctive features that are not always at issue in the artist/artisan distinction: first, the stress on the social changes required for new

forms of art to emerge and secondly an embrace of the human being as the essentially retrospective and interpretive animal in whom the decisive intersection of content and form finally makes art what it is.

In this context, what should we say, then, is the ultimate significance of Hegel's treatment of craft/artisanship? Should it be viewed simply as an historical moment on the way to the emergence of 'high' art that is progressed beyond, or is it an aesthetic or artistic category in the broader sense that remains useful and important for him? It is true that Hegel says notoriously little over the broad span of his lectures on aesthetics about craft and artisanship as such in the world contemporary to him. But if I am right that Hegel's account of the emergence of art in general is an account that requires some re-thinking of the notions of intention and social context in art, then there may be some good Hegelian resources available for picking up on recent attempts to reconsider the practice and process of craftsmanship as raising important new questions for the philosophy of art.³¹

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Notes

¹ On dating the most recent discoveries, see A. W. G. Pike *et al*, 'U-Series Dating of Paleolithic Art in 11 Caves in Spain,' in *Science* (June 2012).

² See esp. Arthur C. Danto, *After the End of Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998) and Hans Belting, *Art History after Modernism*, trans. Caroline Saltzweid and Mitch Cohen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

³ There is now a fairly large literature on Hegel and the 'end' of art, including what sort of Hegelian stance best makes sense of critical post-Hegelian developments in art history such as modernism, conceptual art, etc. See, among other contributions, Robert Pippin, 'What Was Abstract Art? (From the Point of View of Hegel)' *Critical Inquiry* 29.1 (Fall 2002); Jason Gaiger, 'Catching up with history: Hegel and abstract painting,' in *Hegel: New Directions*, ed. Katerina Deligiorgi (McGill Queen's University Press, 2006); Martin Donougho, 'Must It Be Abstract? Hegel, Pippin, And Clarke,' in *Bulletin of the Hegel Society of Great Britain* 55/6 (2007): 87-106; Stephen Houlgate, "Hegel and the 'End' of Art," *Owl of Minerva* 29:1 (Fall 1997): 1-22, Fred L. Rush, Jr., "Hegel's Conception of the End of Art," *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998): vol 2., 368-371, Karsten Harries, "Hegel on the Future of Art," *Review of Metaphysics* 27 (1973-74): 677-696 and Willi Oelmüller, "Hegels Satz vom Ende der Kunst," *Philosophische Jahrbuch* 73 (1965): 75-94.

⁴ Herzog's film of the Chauvet art, *Cave of Forgotten Dreams*, appeared in 2010.

⁵ Larry Shiner, *The Invention of Art* (2001). The importance of the eighteenth century developments discussed in the pair of articles Kristeller originally published on this topic ('The Modern System of the Arts: A Study in the History of Aesthetics', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 12, 4 (October 1951): 496-527; and 13, 1 (January 1952): 17-46) has recently been challenged by James I. Porter, who has defended the Greek origins of much of the 'modern' notion of art ('Is Art Modern? Kristeller's "Modern System of the Arts" Reconsidered,' *British Journal of Aesthetics* 49 (2009): 1-24) and in the broader discussion of his *The Origins of Aesthetic Thought in Ancient Greece: Matter, Sensation and Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), esp. 27-38). Porter's claims have in turn been recently challenged both by Peter Kivy ('What Really Happened in the Eighteenth Century: The "Modern System" Re-examined (Again), *British Journal of Aesthetics* 52.1 (January 2012): 61-74 and Stephen Halliwell in a review of Porter's book (*Classical Philology* 107. 4 (October 2012): 362-366).

⁶ The evolution on the non 'fine' art side runs, as Shiner points out, from mechanical arts to minor arts, lesser arts, applied arts, decorative arts, and finally, near the end of the nineteenth century, crafts.

⁷ There is a significant history to be traced in the terms 'artist' and 'artisan.' William Morris used the term 'handicraftsman' because it conveyed a dignity and honor he thought missing in 'artisan'. For the comparative characterization of 'artist' vs. 'artisan' over the eighteenth century, see the chart in Shiner, *The Invention of Art: A Cultural History*, 115.

⁸ Shiner, *The Invention of Art*, 9.

⁹ Hegel's *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Arts*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), I.7. Further quotations in what follows are by volume and page number to this translation of the Hotho edition (*LFA*); references to the German text on which it draws in *G. W. F. Hegel: Werke in zwanzig Bänden* ed. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970), vols. xiii-xv, hereafter referred to as *SW*.

¹⁰ *LFA* I.7, *SW* XIII.19.

¹¹ Kristeller, 'The Modern System of the Arts: A Study in the History of Aesthetics'. Hegel insists that the reason other arts must be put to the side is that 'a philosophical treatment has to keep to differences determined *by the essence of art* and to develop and comprehend the true configurations appropriate to them' (*LFA* II.627, *SW* XIV.261-2, italics mine).

¹² See my 'Hegel and the "Historical Deduction" of the Concept of Art,' *Blackwell Companion to Hegel*, edd. Stephen Houlgate and Michael Baur (Oxford: Blackwell, 2011), 353-368.

¹³ *LFA* I.63, *SW* XIII.90.

¹⁴ *LFA* I. 314 *SW* XIII.407.

¹⁵ I'm using here Terry Pinkard's recent translation of the *PbG* (currently at this URL: <http://terrypinkard.weebly.com/phenomenology-of-spirit-page.html>) rather than A. V. Miller's 'artificer'.

¹⁶ See, among others: *Enc. #13, VHP* 20.476 (*Randbemerkung*).

¹⁷ Gadamer thought this opening of the Hegelian triptych began only in Heidelberg but, as Pöggeler pointed out, it actually begins in Jena and helps to broaden the account Hegel gives

there of both art and religion: Otto Pöggeler, ‘*Die Entstehung von Hegels Ästhetik in Jena*,’ in Dieter Henrich and Klaus Düsing, *Hegel in Jena* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1980), 249-270.

¹⁸ LFA I.354, SW XIII.456. The use Hegel makes of the figure of the sphinx within the scope of the *Aesthetics* is nothing if not vexed. Although he consistently refers to the ‘riddle’ of the sphinx, Hegel nonetheless officially treats riddles in the section on ‘conscious symbolism’ (*die bewusste Symbolik*) in the *Aesthetics*, rather than the ‘unconscious symbolism’ (*die unbewusste Symbolik*) that he takes to be characteristic of Egyptian art. It is moreover not always clear to whom the sphinx must be a riddle if Hegel’s account is to work—the ancient Egyptians at the time of the building of the great pyramids at Giza or the Greeks many centuries later—or why the Oedipal story within Greek mythology need be read (as Hegel’s use of it seems to require it to be) as a moment of the interpretation of *Egyptian* art as such. The whole section is in fact something of a cautionary tale for an overly empirically-minded reading of Hegel’s narrative of art history: if we are to understand the *Aesthetics*, just as the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, as a sort of ‘gallery of pictures,’ it must be understood not as a catalogue of fixed items as though on permanent exhibit but rather as an ongoing interpretive enterprise in which the crucial task is precisely the interpretive or appropriative one required in order to see items of differing eras and provenance in relation to the concept of *art* as such—i.e., under Hegel’s well-known rubric of ‘embodied meaning.’ And, for Hegel, as I suggest above, the central interpretive moments of reappropriation within that larger task are exactly two: what was required for artists to be able to produce something in which ‘embodied meaning’ had the adequacy of form and content visible in Greek sculpture (thus separating art proper from the symbolic) and what was required for philosophers to discern that attempt at producing works of adequate embodied meaning in the light of art’s ultimate philosophical importance (thus at once opening up the explicit historical category of the romantic and also the relation among art, religion and philosophy as moments of absolute spirit). On this last issue, see Speight, ‘Two Claims of Unity in Hegel’s Philosophy of Art,’ forthcoming in *Hegel: Key Concepts*, ed. Michael Baur.

¹⁹ LFA I.303, XIII.392, italics mine. On the complicated set of issues involved in what Hegel means by the symbol as used here, see Raymond Geuss, ‘Response to Paul de Man,’ *Critical Inquiry* 10:2 (December 1983), 375-382.

²⁰ Robert Pippin, *Hegel’s Practical Philosophy: Rational Agency as Ethical Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 9.

²¹ *PbG*, #401.

²² Robert Pippin, ‘The Absence of Aesthetics in Hegel’s Aesthetics,’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel and Nineteenth-Century Philosophy*, ed. Frederick C. Beiser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 405, 411. See the discussion of these two passages cited together in Benjamin Rutter, *Hegel on the Modern Arts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 11 fn 12.

²³ Cp. Hegel’s remarks about the relation between religious conception and artistic expression in the Greek genres: ‘[I]t was not as if these ideas and doctrines [i.e., the Greeks’ religious conceptions] were already there, *in advance* of poetry, in an abstract mode of consciousness as

general religious propositions and categories of thought, and then later were only clothed in imagery by artists and given an external adornment in poetry; on the contrary, the mode of artistic production was such that what fermented in these poets they could work out *only* in this form of art and poetry' (LEA I.102, SW XIII.140).

²⁴ LEA I.438, SW XIV.26.

²⁵ On Oedipus' importance for Hegel's theory of action, see Constantine Sandis, 'The Man Who Mistook His *Handlung* for a *Tat*: Hegel on Oedipus and Other Tragic Agents,' *Bulletin of the Hegel Society of Great Britain* 62 (Autumn/Winter 2010): 35–60.

²⁶ The 'retrospective' side of Hegel's account of agency has been discussed by, among others, Michael Quante in his *Hegel's Concept of Action* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, trans Dean Moyer). Claiming that Hegel's view of agency—and art—is retrospective or interpretive does not mean that there is not also a causal story involved or somehow that Hegel thought there was no such thing as intentional agency. The question is what sort of relation there might be between action's inherent retrospectivity on Hegel's account and what Christopher Yeomans has recently called the 'productive' side of agency (Christopher Yeomans, *Freedom and Reflection: Hegel and the Logic of Agency* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012]). A central term in both sides of Yeomans' account is *expression*, which would seem both to offer some potential resources for the artistic questions of agency discussed here but also to raise some important differences: in a case such as Ridley's example of Beethoven's symphony below (see note 31) the central question for a philosopher of art is, e.g., less one of the agent's relevant guidance or control (a point emphasized in Yeomans' understanding of productive expression in the context of the philosophy of action) than one of what makes what *is* produced the realization of something of artistic merit.

²⁷ LEA I.427, SW XIV.12.

²⁸ LEA I.313, SW XIII.405; cp. LEA I.427, SW XIV.12: *classical beauty* is that which *means itself* and therefore *intimates itself* (*das sich Bedeutende* and therefore *sich selber Deutende*).

²⁹ Alexander Nehamas, unpublished manuscript (2012).

³⁰ Ridley notes in his discussion of such actions Nietzsche's use of examples from art to explore the status of intention, as in this quotation from *Beyond Good and Evil*: 'Every artist knows how far from any feeling of letting himself go his most "natural" state is—the free ordering, placing, disposing, giving form in the moment of 'inspiration'—and how strictly and subtly he obeys thousandfold laws precisely then, laws that precisely on account of their hardness and determination defy all formulation through concepts (BGE 188)' (Aaron Ridley, 'Nietzsche's Intentions: What the Sovereign Individual Promises,' in Ken Gemes and Simon May, ed., *Nietzsche on Freedom and Autonomy* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009], 188–89). As Ridley argues elsewhere, cases of such unspecificability prior to action/performance do not imply either lack of (artistic, ethical) standards or a disregard for underlying/material conditions that an agent encounters: "When Beethoven saw, for example, how the coda to the finale of his C-minor symphony had to go, he was answerable to the demands of his material: he could have got it right, he could have got it wrong. But prior to his compositional act no one, himself included, could have stated a rule for arriving at what he arrived at... [O]f course these laws might, in one

sense, be stated *ex post facto*—which is to say, Beethoven’s compositional acts can be made retrospectively intelligible in terms of musical logic (rather than in terms of, merely, of his whims or preferences). But—so stated—such laws would provide material only for ‘imitation,’ as Kant had it, not for *following*. When Beethoven followed them, those laws were unformulable.” (“Nietzsche on Art and Freedom,” *European Journal of Philosophy* 15:2 (2007): 204-224, at 214).

³¹ There are many important questions here, but one important line of the reconsideration of craftsmanship has precisely to do with the understanding of *interpretation* (rather than—*contra* Collingwood—a maker’s mere application of a designer’s directions) as important to craft as well as to art. See, for example, the recent claims of Shiner, who argues that what has been missing from the discussion of craft is in fact a sense of the ‘continuous feedback among the maker’s intentions, the design, the chosen medium and the developing work’—that is to say the interpretive effort denied by Enlightenment versions of craft as the mere application of skill to a defined task (Shiner, ‘Art’s Abject Other or the “New Cool”? Rethinking the Art/Craft Dichotomy,’ unpublished paper, 2012).

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