

Reply to Paul Kottman

ALBERTO SIANI | Morte dell'arte, libertà del soggetto: Attualità di Hegel | ETS 2017 (<http://www.edizioniets.com/scheda.asp?n=9788846746252>).

By Alberto L. Siani

First of all, I would like to thank Paul Kottman for his insightful discussion (<https://virtualcritique.wordpress.com/2018/09/06/paul-kottman-on-alberto-sianis-morte-dellarte-liberta-del-soggetto/>), of my volume, even more so as I plan to keep working on these topics and related ones. Kottman does a great job of situating the volume in the context of “North-American inspired ‘post-metaphysical Hegel studies’”. I am especially thankful for this, since, as Kottman himself remarks, I have not dedicated much space to this task. I should also remark that, from a philosophical point of view, my interpretative reference framework was mostly the so-called Münster School in a broad sense, beginning with Joachim Ritter and Odo Marquard, up to Ludwig Siep and Michael Quante. To this I need to add the work by Annemarie Gethmann-Siefert, which, while offering more diversified and reliable sources on Hegel’s aesthetics, has also challenged received ideas about the latter, most notably insofar as the thesis of the end of art is concerned.

This is why I have not devoted as much space as I probably should have to clarifying that the ‘death of art’ — which is the standard way of putting it in Italian — or its ‘end’ — to follow the German and Anglo-Saxon custom — is perhaps more aptly described as the “pastness of art’s highest vocation”. Building on this interpretation of the thesis of the end of art, and recalling at several junctures some previous works of mine specifically devoted to it (Siani 2010, 2012), I then attempted to show its fundamental inseparability from Hegel’s image of modernity, and vice versa. I remain convinced that my idea that, to quote Kottman quoting me, “art’s contemporary partiality ‘must be integrated into a reflexive mediation through which [it] can lead the individual to a more complex and universal vision of the world’” is, in fact, close to Hegel. This is the only point where I disagree with Kottman’s reading: while art certainly is and remains a thing of the past for Hegel, it can still play a significant role in the *Bildung* of the modern individual, although not an ‘absolute’ and autonomous one.

I must however concede that Kottman is right with his second main critical remark, namely that I have often “conflated the fate of modernity and freedom with ‘Europe’”, without however clarifying what I “meant ‘Europe’ to refer to, exactly”. By way of a partial defence I want to add here that both the conflation and the underdeterminacy of the term ‘Europe’ were intentional and interconnected. The reason for the conflation is pretty straightforward: I am

interested in the first place in the critical reconstruction, foundation, and legitimation of the actuality of freedom in the forms of modern Europe (not only political, but also religious, social, aesthetic, philosophical, etc.), and I believe that this is one of the central threads of Hegel's philosophy. However, I do not take this conflation to be an exclusionary, monolithic one, and here is where the underdeterminacy comes in. It is clear that multiple strategies are possible while approaching the topic of the connection between Europe and freedom in Hegel's philosophy. In the volume I have deliberately avoided to attempt a definition of the term 'Europe', which I kept rather open, historically, geographically, and politically. Instead, I investigate several general conceptual features, which according to Hegel constitute the shared heritage of modern Europe, even though they are actualised in a plurality of historical, geographical, and political shapes. These features are, in my reading, basic but unrevisable starting points rather than end points of European identity. In this sense I welcome and take into serious philosophical account Kottman's closing remark that my "essays are conversation starters, not conversation enders". Rather than attempting to establish material borders for European identity, I preferred to insist on its openness. The principle of subjective freedom as the ultimate normative principle, while characterised by Hegel as a distinctive trait of modern Europe, is not only open to a pluralistic interpretation and actualisation, but also to universalisation, as the case of human rights, discussed in the last of my essays, shows.

Clearly, such a universalisation is not an easy task, whether philosophically or politically. This is why, to finally respond to Kottman's third critical observation, in the volume I have decided not to tackle "the context of international debates about the importance of Hegel for modern forms of life—debates which now stretch from Germany to Australia to Canada to Argentina, in short, far beyond 'Europe'". I have not dealt with the issue of whether Hegel's understanding of modern Europe can be extended to the 'Western' world more broadly nor with the universalizability of his conception more generally. I am of course aware that these are crucial aspects relevant to my topic, but I have preferred to proceed in a hermeneutically focused fashion, avoiding grand openings, especially on such a controversial topic. I shall indeed be very glad if the volume will contribute to the start of some more conversation on this topic and beyond.^[1]

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Notes:

[1] For some developments in this sense, and for a broader clarification of the way in which I myself would start a conversation on this point, see Siani (2014).



References:

Siani, A. (2010), *Il destino della modernità. Arte e politica in Hegel* (Pisa: ETS).

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