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# TRANSLATING HEGEL'S AESTHETICS IN FRANCE AND ITALY: A COMPARATIVE APPROACH

by Francesca Iannelli and Alain Patrick Olivier\*

**Abstract.** *This essay aims to reconstruct the most significant stages that have marked the history of translations of Hegel's Aesthetics in France and Italy. This history, far from being exclusively national, has seen repeated intersections between French and Italian scholarship over the centuries and until now. However, each country has developed in its own personal reading - more conservative or more innovative - of Hegel's Aesthetics, also and above all as a result of the translation choices and the impact that translations have had in different cultural and political contexts.*

**Keywords.** *Hegel; Aesthetics; France; Italy; History of translations*

## *Introduction*

In this paper, we would like to focus on the translations of Hegel's Aesthetics in two European countries: France and Italy. We will propose a critical review of the state of the translations in both French (1) and Italian languages (2) and we will highlight the history of these translations since the 19<sup>th</sup> century as part of the reception of Hegel's philosophy and of the Aesthetics. Finally (3), we will offer some perspective for the future of the translations in France and Italy regarding the translation process.

The recent scholarship has shown that, before the first classical editions and translations had been printed, transcripts and translations of Hegel's lectures already circulated among scholars in Europe. Victor Cousin introduced Hegel's Aesthetics in France<sup>1</sup>. This was a first step in the history of the translation. After Hegel's death, H.G. Hotho provided in Germany the first edition of his

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<sup>1</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Esthétique: manuscrit inédit de Victor Cousin*, ed. by A.P. Olivier, Paris, Vrin, 2005.

unpublished lectures on Aesthetics<sup>2</sup>. These led to translations first in France as well as later in Italy in the context of an intense general reception of Hegel's philosophy. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the scholarship became suspicious regarding the authenticity of the posthumous edition. Transcripts have now been published regarding each year of Hegel's Berlin lectures<sup>3</sup>. The editorial situation of the translations in France and in Italy is therefore very different at the beginning of the 21st century.

## 1. *Translations of Hegel's Aesthetics in French*

### 1.1. Hegel/Cousin (Between 1825 and 1828)

Aesthetics is the first of Hegel's works to have been translated in French and also the first work to have been translated in Hegel's lifetime. Due to his connections, around 1828, Victor Cousin received a notebook related to Hegel's lecture on aesthetics written in French<sup>4</sup>. The author of the translation as well as of the German

<sup>2</sup> *Hegel's Vorlesungen über Ästhetik*, ed. by H.G. Hotho, 3 vols., Berlin, Duncker & Humblot, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1835-1838, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1842. The second edition has been reprinted in the complete edition of Hegel's works by E. Moldenhauer and S. Michel, 3 vols., Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1970.

<sup>3</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über Aesthetik. Berlin 1820/21: eine Nachschrift (Nachschrift Ascheberg)*, ed. by H. Schneider, Frankfurt am Main, P. Lang, 1995. Id., *Philosophie der Kunst (Nachschrift Hotho 1823)*, ed. by A. Gethmann-Siefert, Hamburg, Meiner, 1998. Id., *Philosophie der Kunst. Nachschrift Kehler*, ed. by A. Gethmann-Siefert & B. Collenberg-Plotnikov with the collaboration of F. Iannelli and K. Berr, München, Fink, 2004. Id., *Philosophie der Kunst (1826). Nachschrift P. von der Pfordten*, ed. A. Gethmann-Siefert, J.-I. Kwon and K. Berr, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 2005. Id., *Vorlesungen zur Ästhetik, 1828-1829. Nachschrift A. Heimmann*, ed. by A.P. Olivier and A. Gethmann-Siefert, München, Fink, 2017. The notebooks by Ascheberg (1820-1821) and Hotho (1823) have been republished (see below). A new notebook by Griesheim has been edited (1826). See G.W.F. Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 28,1: *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Kunst I. Nachschriften zu den Kollegien der Jahre 1820/21 und 1823*, ed. by N. Hebing, Hamburg, Meiner, 2015. Vol. 28,2: *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Kunst II. Nachschriften zum Kolleg des Jahres 1826*, ed. W. Jaeschke, Hamburg, Meiner, 2018.

<sup>4</sup> Hegel, *Esthétique: manuscrit inédit de Victor Cousin*.

original – which is lost – is unknown. The notebook refers to the 1823 lectures. The content is not similar to Hotho's own transcript for the same year, which leads us to conclude that Hotho was not the writer and translator. The translation was likely made by one of Hegel's students with whom Cousin was in contact during his Berlin period, such as Leopold von Henning. It is not inconceivable that this translation was made by Hegel himself for his colleague Cousin. The writer and the translator were at least very familiar not only with aesthetics, but with the logics and the logical categories as well. For example, *Dasein* is translated here 'être déterminé' ('determinate being') and not simply by 'existence'. The notebook is a very condensed work (76 pages) and offers an astonishing construction and density – especially in the first part – that is not to be found in any other source. Because it is a very dense and concise document based on an argumentative rather than on a rhetorical approach, it is completely different from the excessively extended posthumous edition provided afterwards by Hotho.

## 1.2. Bénard after Hotho I (1848-1852)

Cousin did not publish the notebook he received from his German friends and did not translate Hegel's aesthetics himself. But he commissioned the first French translation of Hotho's edition as well as other translations of Hegel's works, selecting his former students to accomplish this work. The Italian Augusto Vera was in charge of the Encyclopedia, the Logics, the Philosophy of Religion. Charles Bénard was in charge of translating Hegel's lectures on aesthetics. It was not very long after that Hotho sent to Cousin his posthumous edition of Hegel's lectures<sup>5</sup>. Bénard published his translation in five volumes between 1840 and 1852 with an essay on Hegel's aesthetics as part of the 5<sup>th</sup> volume<sup>6</sup>. Then he

<sup>5</sup> Id., *Vorlesungen über Ästhetik*.

<sup>6</sup> *Cours d'esthétique*, par W.F. Hegel, analysé et traduit en partie, par M.C. Bénard, ancien élève de l'École normale, agrégé, docteur ès-lettres, professeur de philosophie. Première partie. Paris, Aimé André, Hachette, Joubert, Nancy, Grimblot, Raybois et Cie, 1840. Deuxième partie. Paris. Joubert, 1843. Troisième partie. Paris, Joubert, 1848. Quatrième volume. Paris, Ladrangé, Joubert,

published separately *La Poétique* (i.e., the chapter on poetry) and *Le système des beaux-arts de Hegel* (i.e., the third part of the lectures on the different arts)<sup>7</sup>. In 1875 he published a second edition of his entire translation in two volumes<sup>8</sup>. The book won the Prize of the Académie Française, as mentioned on the front page. Bénard was a perfect ‘homo academicus’ representative of the philosophical institution organized in France under the July Monarchy. He was a student of the École normale supérieure, the first laureate by the agrégation examination in 1831, ‘doctor ès lettres’ from the Sorbonne University in 1836, then professor on his demand at the Lycée in Besançon, where he had among his students the future painter Gustave Courbet. Bénard was a spiritualist philosopher and called for a scientific approach of aesthetics as defined by Victor Cousin after German Idealism. He wrote some of the seminal texts in order to diffuse this conception as well as many pedagogical books concerning the academic practice of philosophy. Jacques Derrida was perfectly right with his intuition that the concept of ‘art’ has to do with the institution of philosophy, with the class of philosophy, the agrégation examination, with all that which Cousin put into existence. In the forewords of his editions of Hegel’s lectures on aesthetics, Bénard made explicit and assumed his principles of translation, and the fact that he had not followed common rules. He chose namely not to translate the text in its entirety, but wanted to make it shorter and clearer, especially in the Introduction and the first part of the German edition, while remaining close to the original in the second and the third parts of the text. According to him, it would have been «barbare et inintelligible»<sup>9</sup> to make a complete and literal translation. Bénard aimed to adapt the German philosophical language, full of abstract and

1851. Cinquième volume. Suivi d’un essai historique et critique sur l’esthétique de Hegel par le traducteur. Paris, Ladrance, Joubert, 1852.

<sup>7</sup> *La Poétique, par W.F. Hegel, précédée d’une préface et suivie d’un examen critique. Extraits de Schiller, Goethe, Jean-Paul, etc., sur la poésie*, par C. Bénard [...], 2 vol., Paris, Ladrance, Joubert, 1855

<sup>8</sup> Hegel, *Esthétique*, traduction française, deuxième édition, 2 vols., Paris, Germer-Baillière, 1875.

<sup>9</sup> Bénard, *Préface du traducteur*, in Hegel, *Esthétique*, 1840, p. V.

scholastic terms as well as metaphorical expressions, to the characteristics of French language and audience. He also wanted to produce a faster reading: «une exposition plus facile, plus rapide, plus claire». He deleted some «détails inutiles», some «répétitions», some «digressions» as well as some developments which wouldn't be of interest for a French lector<sup>10</sup>. At the same time, he aimed to be as faithful as possible to Hegel's thinking. Bénard legitimized his freedom regarding the text by arguing that the German text had to be adapted to the French lectors, and also because the book was not written by the author himself, since it was a posthumous edition written by Hotho<sup>11</sup>. A large part of his griefs actually is related to Hegel and to the German language, but to Hotho's redaction as well. The paradox of Bénard's edition today is that his rewriting, even if it doesn't fulfill the academic criteria for a good translation, made the text closer to the original lectures and to their pedagogic purpose. The attention for a good style was also a reason of the success of his translation until now. It is not attested that Bénard's translation of Hegel's aesthetics did not remain confidential, as some scholars assert. The influence of this translation has been underestimated. The different editions of this translation inspired not only scholars like Hippolyte Taine, but also prominent artists, musicians, painters and writers, like Gustave Flaubert and Charles Baudelaire, and were discussed until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by artists and writers such as André Breton and Marcel Duchamp, and which have been very present in the pedagogy until now (see § 1.5).

### 1.3. Jankélévitch after Lasson and Hotho I (1944)

The philosophical situation shifts in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century given that the academic interest to read Hegel's texts in the original and to translate them in a more literal and conceptual way increased after Alexandre Koyré's studies, Alexandre Kojève's lectures on Hegel's *Phänomenologie des Geistes* in 1934-1935, and Jean

<sup>10</sup> Ivi, p. VII.

<sup>11</sup> Id., *Préface du traducteur*, in Hegel, *Esthétique*, 1875, p. II.

Hippolyte's translation of the same work in 1939 and 1941. This translation – based in part on De Negri's Italian translation – became a standard for generations of scholars translating Hegel<sup>12</sup>. During the period of the German occupation in France, a new translation of Hegel's *Aesthetics* had been published in four volumes by Aubier (in the same spiritualist collection as Hyppolite's translation of *Phenomenology*)<sup>13</sup>. This new translation was not only based on Hotho's German edition, but first on Georg Lasson's new critical edition published in Germany<sup>14</sup>. Lasson wanted to provide a scientific edition of the lectures based on the student's manuscripts, but he mostly used the transcripts from the years 1823 and 1826, added some passages from Hotho's second edition, and introduced his own divisions and titles. He only published the first volume of his translation in 1931. The French translator explained in the foreword that his text had been «fait de la juxtaposition de différentes variantes dont on ne saurait dire laquelle est la plus authentique»<sup>15</sup>. He asserts that he used a few pages from the Lasson edition and preferred to follow Hotho. This translation could have offered a more literal and complete translation of Hotho's first edition, especially as concerns the introduction and the first part. But in fact, the comparison we made shows that the translator followed mostly Lasson's text regarding the Introduction and the first two chapters of the first part, choosing sometimes Hotho's variants, and went finally to Hotho's text for the rest of the lectures. The translator took in that way the freedom to adapt, cut and mix both versions. But who was

<sup>12</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Phénoménologie de l'esprit*, trans. by J. Hyppolite, 2 vols., Paris, Aubier, 1939, 1941. On De Negri, see *Avertissement du traducteur*, p. VII.

<sup>13</sup> Id., *Esthétique*. Tome premier. *L'idée et l'idéal*, traduction originale par J.G., Paris, Aubier, 1944. (Dépôt légal: 1<sup>er</sup> trimestre 1944). Tome II: *Développement de l'idéal et sa différenciation en formes d'art particulières*, Aubier, Editions Montaigne, 1944. Tome III: (I<sup>re</sup> partie). *A. Les arts plastiques: architecture, sculpture. B. Les arts romantiques: peinture. Musique*, Paris, Aubier, Editions Montaigne, 1944. Tome III (2<sup>e</sup> partie). *Les arts romantiques (suite). La poésie*, Paris, Aubier, Montaigne, 1944.

<sup>14</sup> Id., *Die Idee und das Ideal*, ed. by G. Lasson, Leipzig, 1931. Only the first part of the lectures on aesthetics has been published by G. Lasson who died in 1932.

<sup>15</sup> J. G., *Note du traducteur*, in Hegel, *Esthétique*. Tome premier, 1944, p. 5.



the translator? In the first volume (printed in the beginning of the year) the translator is only named through his initials «J.G.» According to Michael Kelly this translation was written by Jean Gibelin and Serge (*recte*: Samuel) Jankélévitch<sup>16</sup>. But the fourth volume clearly indicates that Samuel Jankélévitch is the only translator of the whole translation<sup>17</sup>. In the interval, Paris was liberated in July 1944. It was clearly impossible for him to publish under his real name because of the anti-Jewish measures of the Vichy regime and the politics of collaboration with national-socialist Germany. His son, the philosopher Vladimir Jankélévitch, was at that time excluded from his functions as teacher in France and forced into hiding under different identities. Samuel Jankélévitch was a doctor in medicine and not a professional philosopher, unlike his son. He was an extremely prolific translator in the fields of philosophy and social sciences, translating from German as well as from English, Russian or Italian into French. He is known as the first translator and pioneer of Sigmund Freud's work in France in the 1920s. He translated Benedetto Croce, Werner Sombart, Bronislaw Malinowski, etc. He also provided in 1949 the first complete translation of Hegel's *Science of Logic*. His translation of Hegel's Aesthetics was reprinted in eight volumes in 1964 by Aubier and then in four volumes in 1979 by Flammarion. The first volume of this popular edition is still available today<sup>18</sup>. Jankélévitch's translation made Hegel's text accessible. Like Bénard's translation, it is a more target-orientated than a source-orientated way of translating. It doesn't completely fulfill the academic standards of scholars, even if it was used for pedagogy and has found a large audience in France and in Italy. The result is that the French public didn't have access neither to the original sources nor to an appropriate translation of Hotho's edition until the 1990s, especially regarding the Introduction and the first part of the lectures. The dissatisfaction with Bénard as well as with

<sup>16</sup> M. Kelly, *Hegel in France*, Birmingham, Birmingham Modern Language Publications, 1992, manuscript, p. 14.

<sup>17</sup> Hegel, *Esthétique*, Tome III (2<sup>e</sup> partie), p. 290.

<sup>18</sup> Id., *Introduction à l'esthétique. Le beau*, Paris, Flammarion, 2009.

Jankélévitch led, for example, Philippe Muller, a professor at the University of Neuchâtel, to organize with his research group in Switzerland a completely new translation of the Introduction, the first part and the beginning of the second part after Hotho's second edition<sup>19</sup>.

#### 1.4. Lefebvre and Schenk after Hotho II (1995-1997)

At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the standards of translation became more demanding regarding the translation of Hegel's texts, and Hotho's edition based on a compilation has been criticized from a scientific point of view. Annemarie Gethmann-Siefert and Helmut Schneider at the Hegel-Archiv in Bochum began publishing the original sources of Hegel's lectures on aesthetics<sup>20</sup>. In 1995, Jean-Pierre Lefebvre and Veronika von Schenk published a new translation of Hegel's *Esthétique* in three volumes by the same publisher Aubier, which previously published Jankélévitch's translation<sup>21</sup>. The translators – unlike Paolo D'Angelo in Italy (see 2.4) – preferred for some reason that Lefebvre indicate in his Foreword not to translate any notebook, but to translate for a third time Hotho's edition (after the second edition and not after the first edition, like Bénard and Jankélévitch, but without any comment on these previous translations). Jean-Pierre Lefebvre (born in 1943) is a professor of German civilization at the Ecole Normale Supérieure, in Paris, well known for his translations of Sigmund Freud, as well as of Karl Marx and his professor Paul Celan. He first translated the *Phénoménologie de l'esprit* in 1991 before translating the Aesthetics. From an ideological point of view, his approach of the aesthetics is situated ironically in an anti-Soviet context<sup>22</sup>. Lefebvre

<sup>19</sup> *Leçons sur l'esthétique de Hegel: version française de l'Introduction (Ed. Hotho 1842)*, 2 vols., Centre d'études hégéliennes et dialectiques, Neuchâtel, 1991.

<sup>20</sup> See note 3.

<sup>21</sup> Hegel, *Cours d'esthétique (édition Hotho)*, trans. by J.P. Lefebvre and V. von Schenk, 3 vols., Paris, Aubier, 1995-1997.

<sup>22</sup> Lefebvre, *Présentation*, ivi, vol. 1, 1995, p. XLII-XLIII.

was very well informed about the state of the edition and the history of the reception. His arguments for not translating the notebooks are not completely convincing nowadays for the following reasons: 1) According to him, Hotho could have had access to original manuscripts that are lost. But Hotho wrote that he didn't use Hegel's original manuscript. And we have access to enough transcripts today, some of which had been used by Hotho himself for his edition; 2) The fact that no one really complained about Hotho's editions at that time – but Bénard, for example, was not convinced by the German text – is also due to the standard of the philology and edition at that time; 3) Lefebvre tried to legitimize the principle of the compilation, because it would be natural to include the different years in one edition and a betrayal to publish only one year. But it is not proven that Hegel's students were obliged to follow the lectures many times. It is now possible to translate the four years of lectures, if we really believe that «repetition» and «durée»<sup>23</sup> are requested. In the footnotes, the translators give some references and very useful clarifications for German words, especially Hegelian concepts, which are ambiguous or difficult to translate, like: *Phantasie*, *Einbildungskraft*, *Anschauung*, *Darstellung*, *Vorstellung*, *Gemüt*, *Entfremdung*, *Sache*, *Empfindung*.

### 1.5. Translations for Pedagogic Purpose, Anthologies and Extracts

Apart from these editions of the complete lectures, we have to take in consideration a collection of partial editions, which provide abstracts or concentrate on one chapter. They mainly follow a pedagogic purpose and are obviously dedicated to students as introductions to Hegel's philosophy. Hegel became a classical author studied in France in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century (and not in the 19<sup>th</sup> century) in the philosophical curriculum at university, as well as in the 'grandes écoles' and in the high schools, in the so called 'classe de philosophie'. It is very common that some extracts of the lectures on aesthetics are nowadays used for exams from the 'baccalauréat' to the 'agrégation' (the official exams for recruiting

<sup>23</sup> Ivi, p. XIV.

philosophy teachers instituted by Victor Cousin). These pedagogical editions are based either on existing translations or provide new translations of some parts of the lectures. Editors are philosophy teachers, in most cases ‘agrégés’ and ‘docteurs ès lettres’ like Bénard was. It is no surprise if these pedagogical editions often use Bénard’s translation in order to introduce not only Hegel’s aesthetics, but his philosophical system in general. This is the case of the anthology of texts compiled by Claude Khodoss, a philosophy professor at Lycée Buffon in Paris. This pedagogical edition has been reprinted seventeen times since 1954<sup>24</sup>. Only few corrections and additions have been made on Bénard’s translation («with the help of Mme Martinet»), and the single volume contains the sixth of the original. This is actually the original extent of the transcripts and of Hegel’s lectures. Bernard Teyssède, a professor of aesthetics at the Sorbonne University, selected some texts from Jankélévitch’s translation to edit a brief anthology of texts on Hegel’s theory of figurative painting<sup>25</sup>. The philosophy teacher Gérard Bras wrote a short essay on Hegel and art with few texts taken from the same translation (with some other texts translated by J. P. Mathieu)<sup>26</sup>. Patrice Henriot, professor at the Lycée Jules Ferry, published his own translation of the chapter on painting (after Hotho<sup>II</sup>) with his comment for a pedagogical publication<sup>27</sup>. Caroline Guibet-Lafaye, agrégée de philosophie, in order to introduce Hegel’s aesthetics, chose some pages on the artistic forms from the second part of the lecture (after Hotho<sup>2</sup> as well)<sup>28</sup>. Claire Margat revised Bénard for her pedagogical edition of

<sup>24</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Esthétique*, textes choisis par C. Khodoss, Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 1<sup>st</sup> édition: 1954, 17<sup>th</sup> édition: 2003.

<sup>25</sup> Id., *Esthétique de la peinture figurative*, texte réunis et présentés par B. Teyssède, Paris, Hermann, 1964.

<sup>26</sup> G. Bras, *Hegel et l’art*, Paris, Presses universitaires de France, collection «Philosophies», 1989.

<sup>27</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *La peinture: Esthétique, 3<sup>e</sup> partie, 3<sup>e</sup> section, chapitre 1*, traduction, présentation, notes et commentaires par P. Henriot, Paris, Hatier, 1991, collection «Profil philosophies».

<sup>28</sup> Id., *Leçons d’esthétique*, Paris, Ellipses, 2002, collection «Philo-textes».

the Introduction<sup>29</sup>. Nicole Abecassis, based as well on the Introduction of Hegel's lectures, but in the translation by Lefebvre and Von Schenk, to provide a handbook which is a not only a comment of the text but a training book for school exercises as well<sup>30</sup>. These publications reveal how the Cousin-Bénard tradition is present in France, not only regarding the conception of translating, but more important regarding the tradition of pedagogy.

We also have to mention that Benoît Timmermans, and Paolo Zaccaria, both researchers in Belgium, provided a complete reprint of Bénard's translation for a popular edition<sup>31</sup>. The editors report that, since Bénard didn't translate the entire Introduction or the first part of the lecture, but instead omitted several portions of text, they had to translate the text completely after Hotho. They only introduced some corrections regarding the other parts. On the contrary, Daniel Banda, a philosophy teacher and assistant at the Sorbonne University, offered an electronic version of the first part of Bénard's translation (after the second edition of the translation), without publishing the second part of his edition<sup>32</sup>.

#### 1.6. The Edition of the Cousin Manuscript (2005)

Even if interest for the original transcripts was real in France, as Lefebvre and some other scholars attested, these transcripts were not translated and not accessible to the French public in translation. The situation changed with the discovery and publication in 2005 of the original source of Hegel's lecture on aesthetics written in

<sup>29</sup> Id., *Introduction aux «Leçons d'esthétique»*, trad. par C. Bénard, revue et annotée par C. Margat, Paris, Nathan, 2003, collection «Les intégrales de philo».

<sup>30</sup> N. Abecassis, «*Cours d'esthétique*», *Hegel, extrait de l'Introduction*, Rosny, Bréal, 2004, collection «La philothèque».

<sup>31</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Esthétique*, trad. par C. Bénard, revue et complétée par B. Timmermans et P. Zaccaria, 2 vols., Paris, Librairie générale française, 1997, collection «Le Livre de poche».

<sup>32</sup> D. Banda, *Note sur la présente édition électronique*, in Hegel, *Esthétique*, Tome 1 (1835). Viewed 31 October 2019: <[http://classiques.uqac.ca/classiques/hegel/es-thetique\\_1/esthetique\\_1.html](http://classiques.uqac.ca/classiques/hegel/es-thetique_1/esthetique_1.html)>

French that Alain Patrick Olivier, co-author of the present paper, discovered and published. The manuscript was unknown and not published at that time, since Hegel was not mentioned on the notebook. The purpose of the edition was to provide the French lecturers as well as the international community with a different version of Hegel's Aesthetics, not a monumental text, and not a compilation, but an original source and an original translation. This edition should provide one of the sources of Hegel's lectures on aesthetics, but it also an original translation from the time of the philosopher, and perhaps by the author himself. This combination makes the document very special for the French reception. But it does not imply that no other transcripts should be translated into French, in order to highlight the diversity of the reception through the different writers and in the different years of Hegel's lecturing in Berlin, and also to avoid the illusion of Hegel's Aesthetics as a monolithic, monumental and printed work.

## 2. *Translations of Hegel's Aesthetics in Italian*

### 2.1. From Bénard to De Sanctis

The first resonances of Hegel's philosophy in Italy were first and foremost political and began the year after Hegel's death in 1832, with an extremely polemical essay by Gian Domenico Romagnosi, titled *Alcuni pensieri sopra un'ultra metafisica filosofia della storia*. Romagnosi attacked the very Hegelian notion of *Weltgeist*, and initiated a debate that involved even Giuseppe Mazzini in 1837, in defence of Hegel<sup>33</sup>. It is therefore not difficult to imagine that around 1840, though in decline in its land of origin, Idealism came back to new life in a country like Italy, politically fragmented as was Germany, but culturally much more backward<sup>34</sup>. The

<sup>33</sup> For further information please refer to F. Gallo, *Gli hegeliani di Napoli e il Risorgimento*, «LEA. Lingue e Letterature d'Oriente e d'Occidente», 2017, pp. 651-668, here p. 653.

<sup>34</sup> See G. Oldrini, *L'estetica di Hegel e le sue conseguenze*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1994, pp. 53-55.

Hegelian theories of freedom and progress took root in the middle of the Risorgimento climate, giving hope for a future political and cultural emancipation of the country. Hegel's philosophy became an anchor of salvation, a secular «cult» or an «ideal religion»<sup>48</sup> as Bertrando Spaventa claimed, which should guide the political action of Italian intellectuals.

Among the various declinations of the Hegelian system that from the beginning had resonance in the *Bel Paese*, however, in addition to the Philosophy of history and the Philosophy of Right, should also be counted – at least until 1848 – Aesthetics, mostly known indirectly through the French translation by Charles Bénard (see § 1.2).

Unsatisfied with contemporary Italian Aesthetics, the young southern Hegelians Stanislao Gatti, Stefano Cusani, Giambattista Ajello and especially Francesco De Sanctis, who later became a leading Italian literary critic, evolved into pioneers of Italian aesthetic Hegelianism. As Croce recalls in an essay: «It is known that De Sanctis, like all the best Neapolitan youth who matured between 1840 and 1848, was invested by the great light of Hegel's philosophy»<sup>35</sup>. None of these young Hegelians, however, lent their names to the history of Italian translations of Hegel's works. Nevertheless, Aesthetics was not among the first translated titles; this distinction was reserved for the *Philosophy of History* edited by Giambattista Passerini in 1840<sup>36</sup>, which was followed in 1848 by the *Philosophy of Right*, translated by Antonio Turchiarulo.

While, therefore, the history of the reception and translation of Hegel's Aesthetics in France had certainly begun in a glorious way with the authoritative names of Victor Cousin and Charles Bénard, the same cannot be said for Italy, which could not boast in its history of the Aesthetic's reception intellectuals who had direct contact with Hegel, as happened in 1817 for Cousin in

<sup>35</sup> B. Croce, *De Sanctis e l'hegelismo*, in *Saggio sullo Hegel. Seguito da altri scritti di storia della Filosofia*, ed. by A. Savorelli, Napoli, Bibliopolis, 2006, p. 365.

<sup>36</sup> *Filosofia della storia* di G.G. Federico Hegel, compilata da Edoardo Gans, Capolago, tipografia Elvetica, 1840. It was translated by Passerini during his years of exile in Switzerland, after having met Hegel in 1826 and Cousin in 1828.

Heidelberg<sup>37</sup>. In addition, Italy had to wait very long; that is, until the 20<sup>th</sup> century actually, to count on a valid translation of the Hegelian *Lessons on Aesthetics*.

Because of these two reasons, it is easy to understand why the history of the reception of Hegel's *Aesthetics* in Italy is not completely separated, especially at its beginning, from France. In fact, Hegel's *Aesthetic* became known in Italy first and foremost in the French version of Bénard. Although the text was not philologically accurate, since the translator does not hide the fact that he intervened with cuts and sums, it remains an excellent introduction to the reading of Hegel which exerted a considerable influence both in France and in Italy, from Flaubert's poetics to De Sanctis' literary criticism. It is well known that the Italian intellectual read with great enthusiasm<sup>38</sup> the first two translated volumes (published by Bénard in 1840 and 1843) and proposed between 1844 and 1846 a first presentation, though not without critical interpretations (i.e., on the vitality of art), to his students who were enthusiastic about it<sup>39</sup>.

The figure of De Sanctis is also an exceptional case for the intensity of the initial attraction and subsequent rejection of Hegel's philosophy, studied with great interest and dedication, not only in its aesthetic declination but also in its logic<sup>40</sup>. It was in the Neapolitan fortress of Castel dell'Ovo, where the Italian philosopher spent long years of imprisonment from 1850 to 1853, as a result of his participation in the uprisings of 1848, that he began to study German<sup>41</sup>. Here he translated some scenes from Goethe's

<sup>37</sup> See above, § 1.1.

<sup>38</sup> De Sanctis himself recalls this in the introduction to the course on Leopardi in B. Croce, *Pagine sparse di F. de Sanctis*, «La Critica», X, 1912, p. 227.

<sup>39</sup> F. De Sanctis, *Memorie, Lezioni e Scritti giovanili*, Bari, Laterza, 1962. F. De Sanctis, S. Tommasi, A. Labriola, *Sviluppi dello hegelismo in Italia*, ed. by M. Rossi, Torino, Loescher, 1970, pp. 7-28.

<sup>40</sup> See V. Stella, *De Sanctis e l'estetica di Hegel*, in *Francesco De Sanctis un secolo dopo*, ed. by A. Marinari, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1985, pp. 161-195, here p. 186; R. Franchini, *Fu De Sanctis un Filosofo*, in *Francesco De Sanctis un secolo dopo*, pp. 197-215, here p. 197. See also Croce, *De Sanctis e l'hegelismo*.

<sup>41</sup> On the studies of De Sanctis in prison see B. Croce, *Studi hegeliani di F. de Sanctis*, «La Critica», VII, 1909, pp. 240-243.



*Faust*, while at the same time he devoted himself to the translation of Hegel's *Logic* and Rosenkranz's *History of Poetry*<sup>42</sup>. It is known, however, that De Sanctis would soon move away from Hegel's idealism<sup>43</sup> and reject above all the narrow mesh of the system that would appear to him little by little unable to interpret the transformations of the real, so as to push him to defend progressively extreme theses, such as those advocated in 1883 in *Il darwinismo nell'arte*. If he had remained more faithful to Hegel's idealism and taken on the challenging task of translating the Aesthetics, the history of Hegelian translations in Italy would certainly be very different and perhaps even more illustrious.

## 2.2. Novelli after Hotho II (1863-1864)

Things went very differently when Italy, between 1863 and 1864, had its first translation of Hegel's *Aesthetics*<sup>44</sup> by Alessandro Novelli (1827-1868). Not only did the text arrive late<sup>45</sup>, but it was also philologically unreliable and inconsistent with the lexical choices, as was inevitable, given that it came to light in that two-year 'Hegelomania' that led Alessandro Novelli, between 1863 and 1864 to translate numerous Hegelian works, among them the *Phenomenology of the Spirit* (1863), *Philosophy of Right* (1863), *Logic* (1863), *Philosophy of the Spirit* (1863), *Philosophy of Nature* (1864) and *Philosophy of History* (1864), all published by Rossi-Romano in Naples. Novelli's translation of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, for

<sup>42</sup> Id., *Pagine sparse di Francesco De Sanctis*, «La Critica», X, 1912, pp. 146-7.

<sup>43</sup> A testimony can be found in the letter of Diomede Marvasi written in Turin on December 28th, 1858 to De Sanctis. F. De Sanctis, *Lettere da Zurigo a Diomede Marvasi 1856-1860*, ed. by E. Marvasi, Napoli, Ricciardi Editore, 1913, pp. 86-87.

<sup>44</sup> *Eстетica* di Giorgio G.F. Hegel ordinata da H.G. Hotho, traduzione dall'originale per A. Novelli, 4 voll., Napoli, F. Rossi-Romano, 1863-1864.

<sup>45</sup> In Russia, for example, Hegel's Aesthetics was translated earlier, namely between 1847 and 1859 by V. Modestov, even if the Russian text was «not properly speaking even a translation but an abridged retelling of the French text, which, in turn, was a rather free exposition of the German original» (N. Plotnikov, *Hegel at the GAKHN: between idealism and Marxism – on the aesthetic debates in Russia in the 1920s*, «Studies in East European Thought», LXV (3-4), 2013, pp. 213-225, here p. 214).

instance, was defined later by Croce in *Ciò che è vivo e ciò che è morto della filosofia di Hegel* as a very «wicked» enterprise<sup>46</sup>.

Italian intellectuals then continued to make use of French translations of Hegel's Aesthetics, and not only of the one edited by Bénard, but also, later, of the other edited by Jankélévitch<sup>47</sup>. It is therefore not unusual to find quotations in French within studies and research dedicated to Hegel's Aesthetics by Italian authors. This is the case of Filippo Puglisi, who in 1953 in the *Preface* to the Essay *L'estetica di Hegel e i suoi presupposti teorici* explicitly declares to have read the lessons in Jankélévitch's translation and compared it with the German text edited by Lasson (1931) and by Hotho<sup>48</sup>.

The spread of this Franco-*philia* in Italy up to the 1960s is understandable only if we consider the poor quality of the first Italian translation of Hegel's *Aesthetics*, which was often approximate, not rigorous, and imprecise. The value of Novelli's translations was so underestimated by Croce that he supposed there was a sort of conspiracy, something like a hidden anti-idealist strategy. In a 1938 essay, Croce reports a very curious anecdote with legendary tones according to which Novelli, who was a priest, had been paid by the Jesuits to make a manifestly poor translation of Hegel's works so that the thought of the German philosopher would have no resonance in Italy and the Italians would be disgusted by it<sup>49</sup>.

In fact, that Novelli was by no means a refined Hegelian exegete is evident in several lexical choices<sup>50</sup> and especially from the introduction to the second volume of Aesthetics, namely *Le forme artistiche o lo sviluppo dello ideale* (1863), where the translator interprets aesthetics as a philosophy of literature in a very general way. It was

<sup>46</sup> B. Croce, *Ciò che è vivo e ciò che è morto della filosofia di Hegel*, Bari, Laterza, 1907, p. 222.

<sup>47</sup> See above § 1.3. The translation was published in 4 volumes, based on the ed. Hotho 1835-1838.

<sup>48</sup> F. Puglisi, *L'estetica di Hegel e i suoi presupposti teorici*, Milano, Cedam, 1953, p. 7.

<sup>49</sup> B. Croce, *Alessandro Novelli, Il traduttore italiano di Hegel*, «La Critica», XXXVI, 1938, pp. 311-316, here p. 311.

<sup>50</sup> Novelli translates for example 'das Klassische' with 'classicismo' and 'Begriff' with 'nozione'.

therefore no coincidence that in Italy very few «competent» scholars – as Morpurgo-Tagliabue<sup>51</sup> writes – worked on Hegel's Aesthetics, until a second translation emerged in 1963. Beyond Croce, who divulged but also embalmed the image of Hegel's philosophy of art in the stereotype of the 'death' of art, there are very few names of Italian scholars<sup>52</sup> who in the first 60 years of the 20th century seriously confronted themselves with Hegel's philosophy of art. The same De Negri (1943) and De Ruggiero (1951) gave it marginal attention as if to say that Novelli the «conspirator» had succeeded in the perverse enterprise of annihilating the power of idealistic thought in Italy, at least in the aesthetic field, through a shameful translation. But both of Croce's studies on Italian literary life between 1860 and 1900<sup>53</sup> and on Novelli as a translator, showed how complex the political and philosophical situation was in South Italy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Croce was extremely critical in his 1938 article *Alessandro Novelli, il traduttore italiano di Hegel* concerning Novelli's translation enterprise, judged by Croce as absolutely deplorable («discreditatissima traduzione»<sup>54</sup>) and therefore impossible to be further discredited, even if the Italian Catholic philosopher Siro Contri (1898-1969) in his *La genesi fenomenologica della «Logica» hegeliana* (1938) preferred Novelli's old «monumental» version to the new translation of the *Phenomenology* published between 1933-1936 by Enrico De Negri with La Nuova Italia Press.

In his articles from 1909 and 1938, Croce showed that Novelli was a bizarre and troubled Catholic priest belonging to the order of the Scolopi, educated in the seminars and not at the university, author of a *Sommario della scienza filosofica quale è intesa in Italia al declinar del secolo XIX* (1862). But Croce also mentions socialist tendencies by Novelli: after having been Giobertian and then having «traversed»<sup>55</sup> Hegel, the rebel and unexemplary priest

<sup>51</sup> G. Morpurgo-Tagliabue, *L'estetica di Hegel oggi*, «De Homine», V-VI, 1963, p. 463.

<sup>52</sup> Vecchi is among the few exceptions.

<sup>53</sup> B. Croce, *La vita letteraria a Napoli dal 1860 al 1900* (1909), in *La letteratura della nuova Italia. Saggi critici*, volume quarto, Bari, Laterza, 1964 (1915<sup>1</sup>), pp. 275-268.

<sup>54</sup> Id., *Alessandro Novelli*, p. 312.

<sup>55</sup> Ivi, p. 315.

Novelli had therefore reached a «socialistic» rationalism. In his youth he was full of enthusiasm for Rousseau's ideas (exactly like the young Hegel at the protestant seminar in Tübingen). At a certain point, there is a curious convergence with the «bohème» of the anarchist and antiacademic Intellectuals from Naples. What markedly separates Novelli and Croce, however, is not simply the fact that Novelli (albeit in an extravagant way) belonged to the Catholic environment and Croce did not, but above all the conception of translation that for Croce meant full adherence to the terminological mould, philological preparation, and concern for accuracy and proximity to the original that Novelli did not possess. This is the only way to explain the «transparency» of a titanic translation enterprise that was profoundly «infelicitous» and destined to fade «on the walls and the stalls of Naples, where they dragged on for years and were eroded by the sun and the rain»<sup>56</sup>.

### 2.3. Building Hegel's Aesthetics: Merker and Vaccaro after Hotho II (1963)

A century will pass from the translation of Novelli to the publication of the now classic translation by Nicolao Merker (1931-2016) and Nicola Vaccaro (1922-1964), published in 1963 (and re-issued in 1978 in paperback) by Feltrinelli<sup>57</sup>. Born in Trento in 1931 to a German father and an Austrian mother, in 1953 Nicolao Merker graduated in philosophy at the University of Messina, where he was a pupil of Galvano Della Volpe and Assistant Professor from 1957. He moved to Rome in 1974, where he taught the History of Modern Philosophy at Rome's Sapienza University until 2006. His first studies on Hegel's logic and dialectics merged into the monograph *Le origini della logica hegeliana. Hegel a Jena* (1961). He was never an aesthetician, but rather a political philosopher and a scholar of Marx. Nicola Vaccaro, active in 1963 in the Communist Party, was not an aesthetician, but rather a Gramsci scholar.

<sup>56</sup> Id., *Prefazione del traduttore*, in G.W.F. Hegel, *Enciclopedia delle scienze filosofiche in compendio*, trans. by B. Croce, Bari, Laterza, 1907 («Classici della filosofia moderna», ed. by B. Croce and G. Gentile», 1), pp. V-XXVI, here p. XX.

<sup>57</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Estetica*, 2 vols., Milano, Feltrinelli, 1963 (1978<sup>2</sup>).

Nevertheless, their translation of Hegel – as Morpurgo-Tagliabue hoped – was a great «cultural event»<sup>58</sup> for Italy in the 1960s. It was so first of all for popular reasons, since it allowed Hegelian aesthetic thought to circulate more easily and to be known to a wider public, not only to specialists. In addition, it also helped to reopen the debate, revisiting problems that were still alive, such as the question of the dissolution of art. Italian Hegelian scholarship could so address old questions from new points of view and in light of an artworld in profound transformation. Compared to Croce's reception, the political background had transformed as well, as evidenced by the same «Preface» written in 1963 by Merker with Marxist tones, which allows us to recall how the interest in Hegel was reborn in the 1960s in light of the reversal of Idealism in dialectical materialism. Finally, thanks to the Merker/Vaccaro translation, it became increasingly clear how inalienable the Hegelian aesthetic heritage was for the 20th century. Morpurgo-Tagliabue expressed this conviction solemnly: «everything that taste and aesthetic reflection have produced from the nineteenth century to the present day has been, or conforms to Hegel's thought, or is against it; very little or nothing outside»<sup>59</sup>. As if to say: either for, or against, but in any case never without Hegel. Something similar, only five years later, in that momentous year, 1968, is repeated by Brissoni in his volume *Ricerche sull'Estetica di Hegel*, in which he argues that Hegel's Aesthetics was a «firm point» and that «we are all Hegelian and at the same time we are not»<sup>60</sup>. The translation was so successful that it was reprinted in 1967<sup>61</sup> and then in 1997 by Einaudi<sup>62</sup>. The Italian aesthetician Sergio Givone, in a paradoxical «nostalgia for the future», in the Introduction he wrote for the 1997 re-edition, considered the Merker/Vaccaro translation timeless and lasting, at least until another, more accurate, textual apparatus was available to document the contents and

<sup>58</sup> Morpurgo-Tagliabue, *L'estetica di Hegel oggi*, p. 463.

<sup>59</sup> Ivi, p. 465.

<sup>60</sup> A. Brissoni, *Ricerche sull'Estetica di Hegel*, Padova, Liviana, 1968. p. 6.

<sup>61</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Estetica*, Torino, Einaudi, 1967.

<sup>62</sup> Id., *Estetica*, 2 vols., Torino, Einaudi, 1997.

evolutions of the Berlin *Vorlesungen*, beyond the rather arbitrary composition proposed by Hotho in his editions. However, at the beginning of 1997 this prospect seemed a long way off. In just three years, things changed radically.

#### 2.4. Deconstructing Hegel's Aesthetics: From D'Angelo after Hotho/Gethmann-Siefert (2000) to Giugliano after Olivier (2017)

At the beginning of the 21st century, Hegel scholarship in Italy has entered an extremely dynamic phase, encouraged by the increasing number of exchanges with Germany and the excellent Italian translation of the second course held by Hegel in Berlin on Aesthetics, i.e., the summer course of 1823 (edited and introduced by Paolo D'Angelo, Professor of Aesthetics at Roma Tre University)<sup>63</sup> and based on the transcript published in Germany by Annemarie Gethmann-Siefert in 1998<sup>64</sup>. This volume, on the second course, which has currently reached 11 editions, has given rise to a series of critical studies of international scope. What's more, this publication clarified how, for those who wanted to do serious work on aesthetics, one could no longer ignore the individual manuscripts (*Nachschriften*) of the listeners who documented the four courses in Berlin. The great merit was that of deconstructing the monolithic image of Hegel/Hotho aesthetics and placing scholars, not only specialists, in contact with a work in progress. This did not prevent an interest in the Aesthetics of Hotho from remaining alive, so much so that in 2012 Francesco Valagussa, Professor for Aesthetics at the University San Raffaele in Milan, proposed a new translation (the third in Italian) with partial additions from the *Nachschriften* of 1820/21, 1823, and 1826<sup>65</sup>.

To enrich the debate, already very lively, Professor of Aesthetics at Naples Fine Arts Academy Dario Giugliano also contributed

<sup>63</sup> Id., *Lezioni di Estetica*, trans. and ed. by P. D'Angelo, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2000.

<sup>64</sup> See note 3.

<sup>65</sup> Id., *Estetica*, Milano, Bompiani, 2012 (2013<sup>2</sup>).

in 2017 the well-received translation<sup>66</sup> into Italian of the Bibliothèque Victor Cousin manuscript published in France in 2005. This publication takes us back to the very beginning of this essay (§ 1.1); that is to say to Cousin, who had marked the start of the Hegelian reception in France. The Italian *Hegel-Forschung* returns to the Hegelian reception matrix in France. Certainly, this manuscript found among the papers owned by Cousin was the first spark that marked the interest in Hegel's aesthetics and motivated the philosopher to ask his pupil Bénard for an official translation, which not only French intellectuals, but also Italian and even Russian intellectuals have long used<sup>67</sup>.

The publication of the manuscript by Einaudi also has the merit of complicating even more the peaceful image of Hegel's Aesthetics, which for almost 40 years (1963-2000) had reigned unchallenged in the *Bel Paese*. It especially returns to question the fortune of a work that Hegel had never written or that perhaps he would have written giving it another configuration (maybe less systematic, more synthetic and incisive) than that of the lessons or of the monumental Aesthetics by Hotho. This phantom work and its translations nevertheless continue to influence the debate in the most disparate areas, both in the West and in the East, from the *visual culture studies* to *world art history*.

### 3. Conclusion: Toward an Innovative Translation

What does international Hegel scholarship on the philosophy of art still need today? Given that Hegel's Aesthetics is a work that does not exist, specialists and non-specialists can only reference the documents published in Germany in recent years, and which are still being published, in order to get closer to what Aesthetics could

<sup>66</sup> *Il manoscritto della «Bibliothèque Victor Cousin»*, trans. and ed. by D. Giugliano, Torino, Einaudi, 2017.

<sup>67</sup> The first Russian translation (1847-1859) by V. Modestov was made after Bénard. For the Russian reception of Hegel's Aesthetics see N. Plotnikov, *Hegel at the GAKHN*.

have been. In this sense the Hotho edition, in all its possible translations, from the freest ones like Bénard's work to the most accurate like Vaccaro/Merker's, remains a precious document among many, albeit less prestigious than it was in the past.

A more faithful translation to the actual course of Hegel's Berlin lessons on Aesthetics, that just over twenty years ago Sergio Givone still thought unthinkable<sup>68</sup>, is today not only possible, but dutiful. Since 2017<sup>69</sup> we have documents available in German for each course. Although the publication of the tomes in volume 28 of the critical edition of the *Gesammelte Werke* has not yet been completed (GW 28.3 and 28.4 are still missing), modern-day Hegelian scholars of Aesthetics can use the *Nachschriften* in German for each course and can have an overview that until a few decades ago was obscure.

As is well known, Hegel was nonetheless very skeptical about the power of translations that in Nuremberg he compares to artificial roses or a vaporized wine<sup>70</sup>. Of course, each translation has its limitations and, as Benedetto Croce stated, every method of translation is in some way defective<sup>71</sup>. This is why, in our opinion, only the comparative work of translators from different countries could activate a particularly valuable dialectic between the «one's own and the foreign» (*das Eigene und das Fremde*) that enriches the comparison with the original. In this sense, even the support offered by the Digital Humanities in mapping terminological connections, correspondences, intersections and differences among myriad cultural traditions cannot be overlooked.

The time has come to proceed with the «truly innovative translation» that Givone hoped for, but which he intended to entrust to the future. Above all, it will be a translation that once again will

<sup>68</sup> «But this critical and reconstructive work is still far from being completed» (S. Givone, *Introduction*, in Hegel, *Estetica*, Torino, Einaudi, 1997, pp. XXI-XXXV, here p. XXII).

<sup>69</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen zur Ästhetik. Vorlesungsmitschrift Adolf Heimann (1828/1829)*, ed. by A.P. Olivier and A. Gethmann-Siefert, München, Fink 2017.

<sup>70</sup> Id., *Rede vom 29. September 1809*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. 10,1, ed. by K. Grotzsch, Hamburg, Meiner, 2006, p. 460.

<sup>71</sup> Croce, *Prefazione del traduttore*, p. XX.



benefit from the confrontation with otherness, in the conviction that an innovative translation today must always be mindful of the richness of its national tradition, but never a slave to it. It is high time that scholars of different nationalities, united by their interest in the philosophy of art, accept the challenges of translating Hegel with a spirit that is not only European, but global. This is one of the goals of the growing international team of 'Hegel Art Net'<sup>72</sup>, which so far has begun translating in Italian and French manuscripts written by Hegel's students during the four Berlin courses, with the hope of helping to shed light on a ghost work that, despite its absence, continues directly and indirectly to influence our present.

<sup>72</sup> Given space limitations of the present essay, we refer readers to the French-Italian Translation project of the *International Research Network on Hegel's Philosophy of Art*, which offers a more comprehensive presentation: <http://bacheca.uniroma3.it/hpat/>.