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'In a Witches' World': Hegel and the Symbolic Grotesque

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Abstract

In his *Lectures on Fine Art* (1835), Hegel emphasizes the grotesque character of Indian art. Grotesqueness results, in his view, from a contradiction between meaning and shape due to the incongruous combination of spiritual and material elements. Since Hegel's history of art is teeming with examples of inadequacy between meaning and shape, this paper aims to distinguish the grotesque from other types of artistic dissonance and to problematize Hegel's ascriptions of grotesqueness to ancient Indian art. In the first part of the paper, I characterize the grotesque by the unnatural distortion of natural shapes with the purpose of achieving a direct sensuous manifestation of an indeterminate and impersonal divinity, Brahman. Such an attempt is, in Hegel's view, self-contradictory and self-defeating, leading to an exaggeration of the conflict between nature and spirit instead of the intended reconciliation between the two parts. In the second part of the paper, I compare Hegel's account of Indian art to the 'monstrous myths' of early modern Europe. Unlike his predecessors, Hegel legitimizes the grotesque representations of Hindu gods as endowed with profound meaning and the result of a universal human need, yet he describes them as ultimately irrational and repulsive based on a prejudiced view of the Indian people(s). In this sense, Hegel's assessment of Indian art functions as a reflection of modern European culture, its fascination and horror in the face of what Enlightenment could not entirely purge, rather than as a truthful and objective account of Indian art and culture. By questioning Hegel's characterization of Hindu iconography and mythology, this paper contributes to underexplored areas of Hegelian aesthetics, namely Hegel's account of symbolic art, especially Indian art, as well as his views on negative aesthetic experiences and values.

Introduction

In his *Lectures on Fine Art* (1835), Hegel emphasizes the grotesque character of traditional representations of the divine in Indian art. Grotesqueness results, in his

view, from a contradiction between meaning and shape due to the incongruous combination of spiritual and material elements. Since Hegel's history of art is teeming with examples of inadequacy between meaning and shape, this paper aims to distinguish the grotesque from other types of artistic dissonance and to problematize Hegel's ascriptions of grotesqueness to Indian art.

This paper contributes to underexplored areas in Hegelian aesthetics, namely Hegel's account of symbolic art, especially ancient Indian art, as well as his views on negative aesthetic experiences and values. While existing scholarship, especially in English, is predominantly focused on the so-called 'end of art' thesis and the problem of the legitimacy of art in modern societies,[1] recent studies suggest the relevance of these less studied themes for a more comprehensive understanding of Hegelian aesthetics, including the 'end of art' thesis. Given that Hegel construes both the symbolic and romantic forms of art, which encompass most artistic traditions, as diverging in various ways from the ideal of beauty, it seems that his aesthetic theory is based on a plurality of aesthetic qualities, amongst which ugliness plays an inconspicuous but important role. Along this line, Annemarie Gethmann-Siefert (2000) and Francesca Ianelli (2012) argue that Hegel recognizes and values ugliness as a possibility of modern art that reflects a new tendency towards the free expression of subjectivity. Although these studies are mostly concerned with the configurations of art in modern societies, Jeong-Im Kwon notes the structural similarities between the symbolic and romantic forms of art and argues that, throughout the 1820s, Hegel showed consistent interest in the incorporation of symbolic elements in romantic art as a means to expand subjective interiority (2001: 17).[2] Several commentators reinforce the idea that Hegel's account of symbolic art must be interpreted in light of his own historical time, considering the biases and prejudices that are inscribed in Hegel's philosophy and the intellectual tradition to which it belongs. Thus, M. A. R. Habib claims that Hegel's reception of Indian art is based on the application of European aesthetic and cultural standards, which are extrinsic to the culture under assessment and distort important aspects of it (2017: Ch.8).[3]

For Hegel, beauty consists in 'the pure appearance of the Idea to the sense [das sinnliche *Scheinen* der Idee]' (*Ä* I: 151/111),[4] that is, the sensuous presentation of the whole or totality of social norms, which reconciles subjective consciousness with the external world (Pinkard 2007: 9). Incorporating beauty as its central aim, fine art is a way to express and know the Absolute, which comprehends 'the *Divine*, the deepest interests of mankind, and the most comprehensive truths of the spirit' (*Ä* I: 21/7). The particular determinations of beauty and art vary according to the values of each civilization, although Hegel integrates them into a unified narrative of the progressive development of human consciousness or spirit. While Kant focuses on the individual experience of aesthetic objects, defining the beautiful and the sublime in relation to the viewer's mental faculties, Hegel considers art

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as an expression of collective self-understanding, which allows the members of a given community to recognize and assess their shared beliefs. Along this line, Terry Pinkard refers to art as 'a way of collectively reflecting on what it means to be human' (2007: 8) and Robert Pippin speaks of 'a collective attempt at self-knowledge across historical time' as part of the 'struggle for the realization of freedom' (2014: 25). Hegelian aesthetics claims that the meaning and normative status of art are essentially historical and can only be ascertained by examining the relation of a work to its historical time (Pippin 2014: 17). This suggests that existing standards of beauty change over time following changing interpretations of what is divine or godlike. Yet Hegel oversees these changes from a vantage point, which allows him to compare and evaluate artistic endeavours throughout time. This results in his affirmation of classical Greek art as the paradigm of ideal beauty, accompanied by the apparent dismissal of most artistic traditions, before and after the classical period, as non-beautiful. Hegel's overall negative appraisal of ancient Indian art, as an early and self-contradictory product of the artistic impulse to materialize the divine, must be interpreted against this backdrop.

Indian art figures in three separate moments of Hegel's *Lectures on Fine Art*. Within his discussion of the symbolic form of art, it appears, first, as a subcategory of *unconscious symbolism*, in a section called 'Fantastic Symbolism' (*Ä* I: 430–48/332–47); and, second, focusing exclusively on Indian poetry, as an instance of the *symbolism of the sublime*, in a section called 'Pantheism in Art' (*Ä* I: 471–73/366–68). Much later, in his analysis of the individual arts, Hegel also devotes some paragraphs to Indian literature (mentioning the *Vedas*, *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and the *Puranas*) in a section called 'The Oriental Epic' (*Ä* III: 396–98/1095–96). This paper focuses on the first section, in which Hegel examines Indian art in general (without restriction to its literary expressions), in greater detail and length.

When he speaks of 'Indian art', Hegel seems to refer primarily to Hindu mythology and iconography associated with the proliferation of Bhakti or devotional Hinduism in India in the first century CE, which deposed the previous dominance of Buddhist art in the region (Mitter 2001: 33). His comments are mostly based on literary sources, including the epic poems *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, an ancient genre containing traditional lore called the *Puranas*, and Kalidasa's famous play *Shakuntala*, which dramatizes the story of the queen Shankuntala in the *Mahabharata*. As for the visual arts, Hegel's references are restricted to representations of the Hindu divine triad or Trimurti and the religious iconography in the Hindu temples of Ellora and Salsette (Mitter 1977: 208). Since Hegel did not read Sanskrit and never visited India, he only had indirect contact with ancient Indian culture, mediated by existing translations of classic texts, as well as visual and literary depictions of Indian sculptures and architecture. Regarding the visual arts, the art historian Partha Mitter observes that Hegel did not seem especially

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concerned with actual works of art (1977: 218). As for literature, Hegel often recounts in detail episodes of Hindu mythology only to dismiss them in the end as 'extremely monotonous and, on the whole, empty and wearisome' (*Ä* I: 473/368). Nonetheless, his writings on India reflect a continued interest and extensive study of the topic, based on available sources and commentaries (Mohapatra and Rathore 2017: 18–19).

The basis of this paper is H. G. Hotho's edition of Hegel's lectures on fine art, which has been taken as the standard version of Hegelian aesthetics since its publication in 1835. This text was published posthumously, based on transcripts of the lectures Hegel taught in Berlin in 1823, 1826, and 1828–29 (thus excluding the 1820 lecture series). In recent decades, Gethmann-Siefert, the leading scholar and archivist of the manuscripts, has raised several concerns over Hotho's editorial decisions, questioning the integrity of the text. Amongst other things, she charges Hotho with intervening too much in the systematic organization of the lectures, expanding Hegel's ideas so that they might rival the aesthetic theories of Schelling and Solger, as well as neglecting certain available material, obscuring the development of Hegel's thought throughout the 1820s (Berr and Gethmann-Siefert 2004: xiii–xv). Focusing on the evolution of Hegel's conception of the symbol, Kwon (2001: Ch.2) and Mario Farina (2015a: Ch.3) show that Hotho excessively emphasized beauty as the standard of art, obscuring the broader significance of the symbol and the symbolic form of art, to which Hegel devoted continued attention in the last decade of his life.

Overall, these studies point to the need of approaching Hotho's edition with caution, comparing it with the students' manuscripts and Hegel's other published texts. Fortunately, Hegel wrote extensively on Indian art, religion and philosophy. With some variations and inconsistencies, his comments about India in Hotho's edition recur in the transcripts of his lectures on aesthetics, in other posthumous editions of his lectures, such as the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (1832) and the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (1837), as well as in texts published by Hegel in his lifetime, such as the essay 'On the Episode of the Mahabharata Known by the Name Bhagavad Gita by Wilhelm Von Humboldt' (1827) and the final section on the Absolute Spirit of the *Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences* (published in 1817 and revised in 1827 and 1830). Hegel's division of the symbolic form of art and the place of Indian art within it varied from lecture series to lecture series, signalling the philosopher's struggle to completely assimilate Indian art either to the immediate unity of meaning and shape in Zoroastrian mythology or to the sublimity of Jewish poetry (see Kwon 2001: Ch.2). Based on the transcripts of the lectures I examined, it seems that Hegel only developed the label of 'fantastic symbolism' in 1828–29, although by then he had already consolidated his main views on Indian art and recognized its unique place between Zoroastrian and Egyptian worldviews. The introduction of a separate category suggests that

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Hegel had come to consider that the mode of artistic expression characteristic of ancient Indian art could be partially abstracted from its original context and resurface in a radically distinct cultural setting, such as his own. It is also important to note that, although the term 'grotesque' (*grotesk*, *Groteske*) occurs six times in Hotho's edition, always in connection to symbolic art and fantastic symbolism,[5] the word is less common in the transcripts of the lectures and appears concentrated in the last two series. This discrepancy does not substantially undermine my account, since all the available writings demonstrate that Hegel consistently asserted the grotesqueness of ancient Indian art—its fantastic distortions, monstrous appearances, extravagant confusions, and incongruous combinations of natural and spiritual elements—even if he used the word sparingly.

This paper is structured in two parts. Given the recurrent motive of the inadequacy between content and form in Hegel's history of art, the first part attempts to establish the specificity of the grotesque in comparison to other kinds of artistic dissonance. The second part problematizes Hegel's ascriptions of grotesqueness to Indian art, proposing a distinction between the grotesque and the monstrous based on a comparison of Hegel's account with the early modern reception of Hindu iconography in Europe.

I. The grotesque as a type of artistic dissonance

Ancient Indian art, more specifically Hindu iconography and mythology, features at the beginning of Hegel's account of the conceptual and historical development of art, as the earliest attempt to bridge the contradiction between spirit and nature through the artistic transformation of natural forms. This attempt is, in Hegel's view, self-defeating, since it can only produce grotesque images of the union between the two parts, which aggravate their differences rather than mediate their reconciliation. To properly understand the grotesque quality of ancient Indian art, I examine the main aspects of this failure, namely the unnatural distortion of natural forms, the abstract conception of the divine that such a distortion is meant to convey, and, finally, the fundamental inadequacy between content and form. Afterwards, I discuss the place of fantastic symbolism within Hegel's history of art and contrast it with other forms of inadequacy between content and form, thereby demarcating the grotesque as a distinctive aesthetic category.

In Hotho's edition, Hegel repeatedly qualifies the works of fantastic symbolism as grotesque (*grotesk*, *das Groteske*). In this context, the grotesque constitutes a specific mode of artistic expression (*Ä* I: 400/309) characterized by the 'intermixture of the natural and the human' (*Ä* I: 441/341) or, more generally, by 'the mixture of elements striving against one another' (*Ä* II: 14/428). It can extend from concrete figures (*Ä* I: 436–37/338) to myths (*Ä* I: 402/310), to the whole world if

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viewed from a distorted perspective (*Ä* I: 109/77). Other expressions that describe and complement the grotesque, as part of the same semantic field, are: 'bizarre' (*Ä* I: 109/77, 402/310), 'tasteless' (*Ä* I: 109/77), 'fantastic' (*Ä* I: 400/309), 'jocular' (*Ä* I: 402/310), 'colossal' (*Ä* I: 436/338), 'monstrosity' (*Ä* I: 437/338), and 'confusion' (*Ä* II: 14/428). Hegel's examples of grotesque objects derive from traditional myths and iconography of Hindu gods, which involve the multiplication and confusion of symbols in what Hegel perceives as repulsive shapes (*Ä* I: 442/342), most notably the multiplication of body parts (limbs and heads) (*Ä* I: 436-37/338), as well as the divinization of the trivial and base, such as the ape (Hanuman) and the cow (Kamadhenu) (*Ä* I: 434–35/336), or sexuality and sexual organs (*Ä* I: 444–45/344–45).

The grotesqueness of fantastic symbolism is defined, at the most superficial level, by the unnatural distortion of natural phenomena. According to Hegel, the early artistic pantheism of the East 'violently coerces the phenomena to express its view of the world whereby it becomes bizarre, grotesque, and tasteless' (*Ä* I: 109/77). This 'violent coercion' consists in the abnormal alteration of sensuous shapes, by which they lose part of their quality and value. The three main forms of distortion Hegel identifies are: (1) the 'extravagant exaggeration of size' (*Ä* I: 437/338)[6] or intensity (*Ä* I: 432/334); (2) 'the multiplication of one and the same characteristic' (*Ä* I: 437/338); and (3) the combination of disparate elements (*Ä* II: 14/428). Hegel singles out the distortion of the human figure as a central component of Indian art (*H23*: 134)—which strongly hints at the corruption of beauty, since the human form constitutes for him the shape of the ideal of beauty, as 'individually determinate spirituality' (*Ä* I: 110/78). It is also important to note that, in Hegel's view, distortion is not necessarily physical: the veneration of a cow or an ape, not as a symbol of the divine, but as a direct manifestation of the divine falls into the third category outlined above, because it implies the attribution of sacred properties to an animal that is entirely immersed in immediate existence, with no notion of sacredness whatsoever, constituting a 'grotesque intermixture of the natural and the human' (*Ä* I: 441/341).

In symbolic art, Hegel insists, the distortion of natural forms is meant to express a religious worldview (*Ä* I: 109/77), thereby solving the contradiction between natural phenomena and normative principles:

> In order, as sensuous figures themselves, to reach universality, the individual figures are wildly tugged apart from one another into the colossal and grotesque. For the individual figure, which is to express not itself and the meaning appropriate to it as a particular phenomenon but a universal meaning lying outside its own, does not satisfy contemplation until it is torn out of itself into monstrosity without aim and measure. (*Ä* I: 436–37/338)

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The grotesqueness of fantastic symbolism does not consist simply in the defacement of natural forms, but in the defacement of natural forms *as a means* to give a sensuous expression to a universal meaning that cannot be sensuously expressed. Therefore, the grotesque cannot be exclusively determined by its appearance, but also requires a consideration of its purpose and context. In this view, then, natural deformities do not count as grotesque as long as they are perceived as unintentional and meaningless.

So, what is the purpose of the grotesque? According to Hegel, ancient Indian art seeks in concrete and sensuous objects a direct manifestation of the divine, not just representations or symbols that indirectly point to something beyond themselves (*Ä* I: 436/337–38). Since it involves an awareness, albeit muddled, of the incompatibility between the divine and nature, Indian art strives to recover the substantial and undivided unity between the two through the imaginative transformation of natural forms. The proper need for art arises at this moment, when the sensuous presentation of the divine is not immediately given in nature but must be devised by the spirit (*Ä* I: 430–31/333). Hegel interprets Brahman[7] as the Hindu concept of the Absolute and, thus, the central concept of Hinduism, defining it as an impersonal and formless whole, which cannot be manifested or personified. Since Brahman is entirely abstract, lacking determinacy and individuality, the Indian imagination is restricted, in the attempt to express it, to the distortion of physical reality (*Ä* I: 433–34/335–36). Therefore, the artistic deficiencies in the forms of Hindu art result from the lack of truth and determinacy of the Idea that they are meant to convey (*Ä* I: 390/300; see also *EPG*: 370/261).

Hegel believes that this strive for reconciliation in fantastic symbolism is bound to fail, aggravating, rather than attenuating, the differences between spirit and nature. Although the conception of Brahman, in its indeterminateness, resembles the God of the Hebrews, most artistic representations of Hinduism do not attain, like the Psalms, sublimity:

> the Indian imagination in such wild configurations does not succeed in positing negatively the phenomena that it presents, but precisely by that immeasurability and unlimitedness thinks that the difference and contradiction between the Absolute and its configuration has been obliterated and made to vanish. (*Ä* I: 439/340)

In other words, the combination of spiritual and natural elements in ancient Indian art, instead of resulting in a genuine unity and harmony between the two, as intended, unwittingly exaggerates their irreconcilability. In contrast, the sublime poetry of the Hebrews assumes such irreconcilability from the start and intentionally presents the contrast between the two elements. In its 'double struggle to spiritualize the natural and to make the spiritual perceptible' (*Ä* I: 413/319), fantastic

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symbolism relies on two mutually contradictory assumptions: on the one hand, Brahman as the supreme principle is defined by the complete lack of concrete determination; on the other, it is believed to be directly present, and not merely implied, in individual material things, which leads to a profusion of extravagant, fantastic creations of unbounded sensuality (*Ä* I: 436/337–38). Therefore, both the separation and the linkage of the divine and nature remain confused (*Ä* I: 430–31/333).[8]

According to Hegel, this failed unity is visible in the work of art in two interrelated ways: first, in the 'incongruity between meaning and the immediate artistic expression' (*Ä* I: 400/309); and, second, in 'the grotesque intermixture of the natural and the human, so that neither side gets it right, and both are reciprocally vitiated' (*Ä* I: 441/341). The human element here corresponds to the collective self-understanding of a society, which gives meaning to a work of art, while the natural element concerns the use of natural shapes and materials by which such meaning becomes perceptible. According to Hegel, the failure of ancient Indian imagination is in fact twofold: it fails to grasp not only the meanings of the works it produces but also 'existing reality in its own proper shape and significance' (*Ä* I: 432/334). As Habib remarks regarding the characterization of Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita*, Hegel objects to 'the lack of mediation between universal and particular', as well as to 'the lack of differentiation between particular existents' (2017: 94), which result in a distorted view of both nature and spirit.

In a nutshell, the grotesqueness of fantastic symbolism consists in (1) the unnatural distortion of natural shapes, (2) aiming at the transformation of a concrete sensuous object into a direct manifestation of the divine, (3) which ultimately fails because it depends on an indeterminate and impersonal conception of the Absolute, and (4) results instead in a contradiction between nature and spirit and the inadequacy between meaning and shape.

Regarding its historical significance, Hegel argues that Indian art reflects a nascent intuition of a contradiction between natural things and the spirit (*Ä* I: 408/315), which marks 'the beginning' and 'the threshold of art [*Vorkunst*]' (*Ä* I: 393/303). The identity of spirit and nature, god and light, characteristic of Zoroastrianism, is split and replaced by an abstract conception of Brahman as the highest principle of the universe, so that all attempts to restore this lost unity must involve the imaginative transformation of material reality. Ancient Indian art, thus, marks the beginning of art, as one of the first manifestations of what Hegel names the 'symbolic form of art'.

In contrast to the humanized conceptions of the godhead in Greek mythology and Christianity, symbolic art is rooted in a misguided view of the Absolute as a distant divine in which humanity does not participate except by the annihilation of self-consciousness and personality (*Ä* I: 433/335). Such a view obstructs the consciousness of our freedom, which involves, in the

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framework of Hegelian idealism, 'rejecting the idea of a transcendent divine and an acceptance of humans' role as the sole source of normative authority and so as self-determining and free' (Moland 2019: 56–57). All symbolic art is, therefore, determined by a fundamental inadequacy between content and form, which results from the use of symbols as a distinctive mode of artistic vision and representation without a determinate grasp of what they are meant to symbolize (*Ä* I: 393/303). Since the social understanding of the Absolute, which is inherited by the artist, is still indeterminate, the formal aspects of the work remain likewise abstract and arbitrary, with a defective correspondence between meaning and shape (*Ä* I: 109/77).

The inadequacy of the grotesque images of Hindu gods differs, nonetheless, from other configurations of symbolic art. In the 'conscious symbolism of the comparative art form', the final phase of symbolic art, which includes didactic and descriptive poetry, the separation between meaning and shape is complete, leading to the explicit comparison, instead of the immediate unity or negative relation, between the two terms and, hence, to the dissolution of the symbolic standpoint (*Ä* I: 412/318). As Kwon points out, in conscious symbolism the content of art is clearly grasped as a 'particular individuality', thus as arbitrary and contingent, instead of being obscurely grasped as universal and divine (2009: 70). At this moment of the Hegelian narrative, meaning and shape are taken as independent from one another and strung together by convention, so there is no conflict generated by the forged unity and identity of the two parts, as occurs with ancient Indian art.

Regarding the 'symbolism of the sublime', the difference consists in this: whereas the sublime raises the divine from the sensuous existence of empirical things, presupposing an awareness that divinity cannot be adequately expressed in finite phenomena (*Ä* I: 466–67/362), the grotesque attempts to dissolve the contradiction between nature and spirit through the distortion of natural forms. Focusing on the Hindu concept of Brahman, Hegel finds in Indian poetry traces of a 'positive' sublime, according to which the divine is glorified as the creative power of all things and immanent in its created accidents (*Ä* I: 468–69/364). Grotesqueness intrudes, displacing this sublime expression of Hindu pantheism, when the same outlook is transposed to the visual arts, which, according to Hegel, are unsuitable to represent it since they must render in a static form the indeterminate and accidental character of empirical things (*Ä* I: 471/366). This does not necessarily mean that there are only visual grotesques in Hegelian aesthetics, but only that the grotesque occurs more frequently in the visual arts, where there are fewer available means to express suprasensible truths without resorting to the unnatural distortion of natural phenomena and where distortion is more immediately perceptible.[9] The grotesque inventions of Indian art are more evidently contrasted with the negative form of sublimity manifested in Hebrew poetry, in which the divine is glorified in opposition to and apart from the

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phenomenal world (*Ä* I: 469/364). Both the sublime and the grotesque express the contradiction between nature and spirit, but whereas the grotesque results from an unsuccessful attempt to dissolve this contradiction through the fantastic distortion of natural phenomena, the sublime presupposes and reasserts it, emptying natural phenomena of their significance, instead of attempting to aggrandize them (*Ä* I: 439/340).

Finally, the inadequacy of the Indian grotesques is also distinct from the 'symbolism proper' of Egyptian art and its hybrid god figures, to which they are aesthetically and conceptually close, since the two traditions are defined, in Hegel's view, by the unconscious and implicit conflict between meaning and shape (*Ä* I: 412/318). In Egyptian art, according to Hegel, 'the natural shape in its immediacy and sensuous existence can no longer be interpreted as coinciding with the meaning glimpsed in it, because the meaning of the external itself just consists in its dying in its real existence and transcending itself'(*Ä* I: 451/349). In other words, in Egyptian art symbols are more clearly recognized as such, as unable to bring into contemplation an *immediate* adequate existence of the Absolute and, instead, merely *hinting* at a more comprehensive meaning they cannot fully represent. Therefore, the restless 'battle between shapes' (*Ä* I: 450/348), which characterized Hindu iconography, finally ceases, and artistic symbols acquire a more precise and intelligible configuration, in which the 'the purely fantastic is displaced solely by these more fundamental traits of affinity and by the closer correspondence between meaning and its expression' (*Ä* I: 453/350). In contrast to the jumbling of immaterial and material elements in the works of Indian art, the shapes of Egyptian art are clearly defined and connected to their meaning (which remains mysterious and abstract), bringing forth a conscious differentiation of the two parts. Another way to understand this difference is by noting that in Egyptian art nature is de-deified, whereas in Indian art the divine is still submersed and sought in nature (Kwon 2009: 68). So, despite their visible similarities, Hegel distinguishes Indian from Egyptian religious iconography because Egyptian symbols are more clearly defined and stable than Indian ones, with a more intelligible correspondence to the meaning they are meant to convey. This is due to the fact that they are not intended as a direct sensuous manifestation of the divine, as in Indian art, but only as an indirect expression of the divine through affinities with natural phenomena. The grotesqueness of Indian art is thus dependent on these two conditions: the instability and irrationality of the symbols, combined with the aim to immediately manifest (rather than indirectly represent) the divine.

The dissonance of Indian art and its grotesques is also distinct from that which arises in romantic art after the dissolution of classical beauty. According to Hegel, the classical form of art corrects the insufficiencies of the symbolic form, recognizing spirit as free from external necessity, yet concretely determined and appropriately embodied in the human figure (*Ä* I: 391–92/301). In contrast to

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Indian personifications, whose personal character is accidental and easily dissolved into an abstract whole, the Greek gods are endowed with genuine individuality and subjectivity and represented in such a way that meaning and shape interpenetrate, instead of colliding with each other. The ideal of beauty is most fully realized at this moment, with the harmonious unity of meaning and shape, yet it can only afford a limited understanding of spirit as particular, restricted to individual bodies and actions, and lacking reflective inwardness (*Ä* I: 110–11/78–79). This limitation signals the limits of art itself as a distinctive mode of knowledge: given its *sensuous* nature, art is intrinsically unable to fully capture and express infinite subjectivity as self-determining freedom (Pinkard 2007: 19). In opposition to classical art, romantic art involves an understanding of the inwardness and reflexivity of self-consciousness, which cannot be fixed in an immediate unity with the external world (*Ä* I: 111–12/78–80). At this stage, the content of a work of art exceeds its form and cancels the unity of classical art, thereby exposing the limits of art itself as a sensible-affective form of access to truth (*Ä* I: 111/79).

In both forms, the symbolic and the romantic, the shape of the work is inappropriate to its content, which cannot be presented to the senses. Yet there are different reasons for this inadequacy, based on two radically distinct conceptions of the Absolute: in romantic art, the Absolute is recognized as self-conscious subjectivity that is present in each individual human being, whereas in symbolic art it is indeterminately grasped as an abstract and impersonal divinity, far removed from humanity. Moreover, there is, in the grotesques of Indian art, a frustrated and self-defeating attempt to restore the immediate unity with nature, to make the divine immediately manifest, while romantic art involves an awareness that reconciliation can only be achieved mediately, through critical reflection. This means that, in the context of romantic (and late romantic or modern) art, the fantastic distortion of natural forms carries an entirely different meaning than in ancient Indian art and must be understood in reference to the value of individual subjectivity in modern European culture.

Considering that, for Hegel, art has long reached its limit as an imperfect and incomplete mode of self-knowledge, it seems that its history is, to a large extent, a history of the shortcomings of beauty, an almost uninterrupted succession of flawed attempts to present universal values and truths to the senses—a history in which the highest achievement of beauty is itself a partial failure. Displacing beauty at its centre, Hegel's aesthetic theory could be recast in terms of the collapse of or opposition to beauty, that is, in terms of ugliness in its multifarious forms, which reflect the diversity of historical and conceptual insufficiencies impeding the pursuit of freedom and self-knowledge. The negative dimension of all these 'failed' works pertains, in Hegelian aesthetics, not to the displeasure they may elicit, but to the inadequacy between content and form. In this framework, the grotesques of ancient Indian art can be distinguished from other failures to achieve

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beauty by their 'double struggle to spiritualize the natural and to make the spiritual perceptible' (*Ä* I: 413/319). Such a struggle imposes a violent coercion of natural shapes, which must be expanded, multiplied, and deformed to reach something that is outside their reach. Importantly, this coercion does not aim, like the sublime poetry of the Hebrews, to assert the contradiction between natural phenomena and the spirit, nor does it aim, like romantic art, at reconciliation mediated by reflection. Instead, it consists in the attempt to reconcile spirit and nature in an *immediate unity*. In this purpose, the grotesque is akin to beauty, but it relies on a confused understanding of the contradiction between spirit and nature, as well as an abstract conception of the Absolute, which, unlike the humanized gods of Greek polytheism, does not admit embodiment. Consequently, in sharp contrast to beauty, the grotesque undermines its purpose by using a defective method—distortion of natural forms—,which leads to undesired results—the aggravation of conflict rather than its resolution.

II. The grotesque and the monstrous: Hegel's reception of Indian art

As Mitter observes, Hegel's account of Indian art is a response to 'the problem of assimilating Indian art in the light of the classical canon of beauty, the problem which had given rise to the monster myths' (1977: 218). From the late medieval to the early modern period, these myths, in which Hindu deities are represented as pagan monsters and demons, thrived in Europe, based on skewed accounts of the first European travellers to India. These travellers' perception was, according to Mitter, distorted by their total ignorance of Hindu iconography and by the preconceptions they inherited from two medieval traditions: the large body of literature about Eastern monsters and marvels, inspired by classical mythology, combined with Christian imagery and Apocalyptical literature, especially representations of Hell, demons, and the Anti-Christ (1977: 6–10). Thus, in their first encounters with the sacred images of Hinduism, European travellers could only see 'infernal creatures and diabolic multiple-limbed monsters' (Mitter 1977: vii). Their assimilation of Hindu gods as pagan idols led to biased and inaccurate visual and literary descriptions of these figures, to which elements that were alien to Hindu iconography, such as hooves and goat-like legs, were often added, therefore contributing to the misunderstanding and rejection of Indian art in Europe.

The monster myths gradually dissolved with the increase of reliable information available. By the late eighteenth century, there was a substantial shift in the European appreciation of Indian art due to the Romantic reconsideration of non-classical artistic traditions, the surge of travels to distant regions in search of aesthetic pleasures, and the European discovery of Sanskrit and other major Asian languages (Mitter 1977: 105). In the nineteenth century, Indian art was embraced

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by the German Romantics as an expression of 'the archaic, the primitive, and the unformed', in a reaction against the scientific rationalism of the previous century (Mitter 1977: 202). The Romantic praise of Indian art, much like the classicist rejection of it, relied on a mythical conception of India as 'the archaic homeland of mankind, the archetype of the primitive stage of history, and the ultimate source of all religion, poetry, and moral laws' (Mitter 1977: 202). In other words, Indian art was considered, by its detractors and enthusiasts alike, as an expression of a 'primitive' mode of thinking, characterized by a 'surfeit of invention, unrestrained by reason' (Connelly 1999: 60). At the same time, the grotesque, which developed in the periphery of classicism as an aesthetic principle applied to the ornamental arts, was displaced from its original context and established as one of the main features of so-called 'primitive' art. There, it was considered as an expression of 'the darkest reaches of the "primitive" imagination overheated by violent passion and frightful superstition' (Connelly 1999: 36).

Hegel's understanding of Indian art counts amongst these primitivist myths of European modernity, which succeeded the monster myths from the early modern period. His introduction of symbolic art as an independent art form, along with the classical and the romantic, points to a general appreciation (mitigated by their relatively low position in the Hegelian system) of the cultural significance of Eastern civilizations. Following Friedrich Creuzer, Hegel shows a sympathetic attitude towards some aspects of the Indian culture, recognizing its significance for the early developments of art and philosophy—without, however, approving the Romantic glorification and fetishizing of India as a primal fount of intuitive wisdom (Mohapatra and Rathore 2017: 20; Signoracci 2017: 3–4). Hegel's appreciation of Hindu mythology and iconography rests, moreover, on an extensive study of the available sources and existing literature about Indian thought (Mohapatra and Rathore 2017: 18–19). As Kwon notes, Hegel's evaluation of symbolic art, including Hindu iconography, is determined by the rational ideas contained in its myths rather than by its formal beauty (2009: 68). Unlike his predecessors (and some of his successors), who immediately rejected Indian art for its bizarre forms, Hegel accepts it as the legitimate expression of a historical worldview, derived from the same need that is shared by all human civilizations of realizing their highest values in an external, perceptible form, and containing, therefore, some insight and truth in it. Hegel has the merit, however slight, of acknowledging the representations of Hindu gods not as monsters, idols or demons, but as serious (yet fallible) embodiments of the divine. Even if their appearance is disgusting and ridiculous, there is nothing disgusting or ridiculous in the meaning they convey, and we should not dismiss them as mere fantasies —Hegel implies.

Now, this does not mean that Hegel completely rejects the representation of Indian art as repulsive and primitive. On the contrary, he maintains that the Indian

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worldview is inherently (and immutably) irrational and its artistic expression distasteful—even when it attains beauty or sublimity, it is mixed with the most disgusting and trivial. In the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (1837), where Hegel articulates in more detail his views on India, he reproduces a vicious stereotype that contributed to the legitimization of colonial and racial oppression. According to Hegel, the Absolute Being appears to the Indians in 'the ecstatic state of a dreaming condition' (*VPG*: 175/157). The principle of 'Hindu spirit' is the 'dreaming unity of Spirit and nature' and Hindu mythology is reduced to 'a wild extravagance of Fancy, in which nothing has a settled form; which takes us abruptly from the Meanest to the Highest, from the most sublime to the most disgusting and trivial' (*VPG*: 194/173). The irrationality of this mode of thinking precludes the cultivation of freedom and morality: '*Things* are as much stripped of rationality, of finite consistent stability of cause and effect, as *man* is of the steadfastness of free individuality, of personality, and freedom' (*VPG*: 177/159). According to this stereotype, Indians are closer to what modern Europeans considered 'primitive' peoples, supposedly immersed in their immediate, physical experience, and over-reliant on feeling and imagination to make sense of the world (Connelly 1999: 14). Although the Indian conception of Brahman reveals a capacity for abstract conceptual thinking, this capacity is thwarted by an excessive attachment to sensuous reality. The idea of a contradiction between a wholly immaterial notion of the whole and an extravagant disposition towards fantasy and sensuality, which is at the heart of Hegel's critique of Indian art, reflects this bigoted view of the Indian people(s) as unable to develop a rational and coherent system of thought.

Even if not entirely ignorant and certainly not indifferent, Hegel's conception of India remains prejudiced. This can be explained, in part, due to the historical context; as Rimina Mohapatra and Aakash Singh Rathore point out, 'Hegel wrote at the height of colonial conquest and in the midst of its intellectual and spiritual justifications, with biased and confused missionary documents among his primary sources' (2017: 19). According to these authors, missionary propaganda contributed to Hegel's conception of the Indian worldview as static, as well as to the reduction of Indian religious views to Brahminical Hinduism (2017: 31). Moreover, Hegel's attempt to incorporate Indian art and culture in his philosophical system often involved making use of generalizations and simplifications, thereby distorting certain ideas and facts to fit a philosophical narrative. Except for a few notions, like that of Brahman and the Trimurti, which correspond to similar notions in Judeo-Christian thought and his own philosophy, Hegel tends to dismiss most aspects of Hindu mythology as wasteful details, 'the caprice of fancy imagination' expanded to 'a wild and inexpressible variety' (*BG*: 203/138). As Mitter emphasizes, 'Hegel's characterization of the Indian "spirit" was not based on empirical evidence but determined essentially by India's temporal position in

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Hegelian metaphysics' (1977: 218). Along the same line, Gino Signoracci argues that Hegel's negative evaluation of India results, in part, from his resistance to the Romantic fetishizing of India and the Orient, and, in part, from his assimilation of Hinduism to Spinoza's philosophy, from which he wished to demarcate his own philosophy (2017: 4). Similarly, Mohapatra and Rathore interpret Hegel's critique as an attempt to distance his own philosophical system from Indian idealism, given the surprising likenesses between the two (2017: 57). These different readings suggest the same thing, namely that Hegel's reception of Indian art is, to a significant extent, determined by standards that are extrinsic to it, based on his philosophical agenda, as well as his particular sensibility. The latter is especially visible in the following passage:

> […] and we live amongst configurations arising out of this mutual perverse transposition of one side into the other as in a witches' world where no determinacy of form, when we hope to fix our attention on it, stays firm but suddenly is changed into its opposite or swells and spreads into extravagance. (*Ä* I: 434/336)[10]

Echoing *Macbeth*'s Weird Sisters ('Fair is Foul, Foul is Fair'), Hegel characterizes the world of ancient Indian art as a place where we cannot have a clear grasp of anything, for everything collapses into its opposite or is exaggerated almost beyond recognition. As he later explains, proper miracles, as interruptions of the normal course of things, can only arise once nature is organized according to laws, and finite reality becomes fixed. The world of ancient Indian art, on the contrary, is a place where everything is miraculous, 'torn from its place and deranged', with no intelligible connection (*Ä* I: 483/375). In such a 'field of murky confusion' (*Ä* I: 431/334), there is also no place for beauty, because the Absolute cannot be embodied as a concrete individual entity but is, instead, indistinguishably dissolved in ordinary things, which lose their particular character by unnatural exaggerations. According to Habib, Hegel's implicit application of Western aesthetic criteria, such as mimesis and catharsis, misses the point that the purpose of Indian poetry is to enable transcendent forms of experience, 'mystical liberation or *moksa*, a state of extrasensory introspection embodying consciousness of one's pure, immaterial self' (2017: 108). Unlike the Greek epic, Indian poetry is not concerned with the representation of reality or the development of a structured narrative. Yet, when measured against the determinate individuality of Greek polytheism or the fixed laws of Judaism, it is bound to appear disorderly and fuzzy.

In a passage from the 1826 lectures, there is also the suggestion that ultimately there is something repulsive in Indian art that cannot be completely explained or dissolved even after recognizing the contradictions in the underlying religious worldview—a gratuitous excess or crudity of fantasy that remains unintelligible:

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> If the sensuous is extended and not left in its immediate form, it is distorted, splayed, exaggerated in such a way that it becomes shapeless [*Ungestalte*], tremendous [*Ungeheure*], grotesque [*Groteske*]. We find ourselves standing in a field of fantasy, but of the most savage kind. It is not so much the religious way of considering [things] as this manner of artistic creation that is utterly unpleasant [*Unschönes*]. (*K26*: 78)

Both in the transcripts of his lectures and in Hotho's edition, Hegel uses the German word '*ungeheuer*', which can be translated as 'tremendous' or 'monstrous', to describe the works of ancient Indian art, apparently as a synonym of '*groteske*'. Even though Hegel uses the two terms interchangeably, the distinction between the monstrous and the grotesque allows us to contrast Hegel's account of Hindu art with the monster myths of early modern Europe.

There are three interrelated aspects in which these two aesthetic qualities diverge. First, as Mark Dorrian points out, the grotesque is historically associated with an oscillation between the extreme poles of terror and laughter, whereas our response to monsters is typically dominated by fear and repulsion. From this, he infers that 'the grotesque enfolds the monstrous, with the sense of the latter asserting itself within the former as the sense of power changes to paranoia' (Dorrian 2000: 316). In other words, our emotional response to the grotesque tends to be more ambivalent and controlled than to the monstrous, in which univocal repulsion prevails.

Second, this makes the grotesque more suitable for artistic expression than the monstrous. According to Carolyn Korsmeyer, the grotesque involves the artistic representation of disgust, by which this emotion becomes more amenable to our senses and taste (2011: 40). In contrast, the monstrous, as the 'maximalism of the repulsive' (Goodwin 2009: 181), constitutes an excess beyond art. As Dorrian argues, whereas the grotesque is contained within art, affording us a sense, albeit precarious, of superiority and control over the intrusive aberration, the monstrous threatens to escape art, involving 'the *sense* of the effacement of representation, the apparent collapse of representational "distance"' (2000: 316).

Finally, more broadly, in comparison to the monstrous, the grotesque can be more adequately integrated into a wider cultural framework, which renders its apparent incongruities more comprehensible and meaningful. As James Goodwin puts it, unlike the monstrous, 'the disorder or defiance encountered within the grotesque is in the end contained and recuperated within a stronger sense of encompassing, even if at times contradictory, cultural values' (2009: 7).

In sum, both the grotesque and the monstrous involve the appearance of aberrations that unsettle established norms and conventions, eliciting repulsion. Yet, in the case of the grotesque, this threat is contained within a broader cultural

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framework, where it reflects internal contradictions or contrasts. We retain at least a minimal degree of control and distance in relation to the repulsive object, which is, therefore, more suitable to artistic representation and can be experienced, not only with fear and disgust, but also, for example, with amusement or wonder. On the contrary, the monstrous is characterized by the collapse of aesthetic distance, which leads to a more immediate and unambiguous response of horror, as well as the inability to comprehend the monstrous object or make sense of it with existing conceptual resources. Thus, we can only grasp the monstrous under the elusive and menacing category of the other, intruding from outside cultural norms and conventions. The boundary between these two categories, the monstrous and the grotesque, is uncertain and can only be tentatively determined on a case-by-case basis, according to concrete experience and with an awareness of the wider cultural context.

Regarding the reception of ancient Indian art, we may argue that the response of early modern Europeans was closer to the category of 'monstrous'. It is true that the representations of Hindu gods were incorporated (displaced) into Judeo-Christian frames of meaning, but there they could only feature as an alien element, as the forbidden demons and idols of ancient pagan cultures —an interpretation that exaggerated the perceived threat and hideous features of the works rather than dissipating them. In contrast, by interpreting Hindu iconography in reference to a historical worldview and integrating it into his philosophical system, Hegel was able to acquire a critical distance from these works and appreciate them as art. As the art historian Frances Connelly says regarding the visual grotesques made by Picasso, 'the idols of Picasso are frightening yet pleasurable, because they, like the primitivism they embody, are framed and controlled by the broader aesthetic norms of "fine art"' (1999: 114). Hegel achieves a similar result with his description of Indian art, attenuating its apparent monstrosities, and, thus, allowing a more nuanced response to it, which recognizes the affinity of Indian art to artistic endeavours and human aspirations in our own culture. However, Hindu iconography does not operate, like Picasso's paintings, within the Western tradition of fine art. There remains, in Hegel's account, a monstrous residue to it, an unintelligible and repulsive element that resists aesthetic enjoyment, which explains his perception of Hindu iconography as a kind of black magic. This monstrous residue, moreover, poses a threat to Hegelian aesthetics, since it cannot be dispelled by an explanation of the supposed errors in the underlying religious worldview and, therefore, cannot be fully incorporated into Hegel's rationalist system.[11]

Hegel's characterization of ancient Indian art implies a conflict and hierarchy of perspectives. In part, Hegel attempts to understand and communicate the 'Hindu perspective'—although he misrepresents it in important ways, right away by assuming a uniformity and consistency that does not exist in the variety of

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Indian religious views. According to this perspective, the grotesques of Hindu iconography are intentional and meaningful, justified in their purpose of materializing the divine. If ancient Indians truly believed, as Hegel thought, that the distortion of natural forms eliminated the differences between spirit and nature, forming a genuine reconciliation between the two elements (*Ä* I: 431/334, 439/340), then it seems that the figures he deems grotesque would appear beautiful in their eyes. However, Hegel judges these works as incongruous and dissonant according to external standards, informed by a modern, Germanic, Protestant, capitalist worldview and sensibility, assuming the superiority of this second perspective over the first. All this makes Hegel's ascriptions of grotesqueness to ancient Indian art—like other ascriptions of grotesqueness to so-called primitive cultures in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe—extremely problematic.

Nonetheless, Hegel's account remains relevant to contemporary studies on the grotesque for two main reasons. First, it contributes to our understanding of the grotesque as a sensuous mode of revelation. As an imperfect embodiment of the divine, the grotesque provides an insight into suprasensible truths, while at the same time confronting us, as finite corporeal beings, with the limits of our power and knowledge. In its revelatory dimension, the grotesque has a strong affinity with the sublime, since both qualities express an abstract divinity through the contradiction between spirit and nature. They differ, however, in their relation to bodily physicality: the sublime presents the divine as transcending sensuous existence, in a negative relation or opposition to it, whereas the grotesque attempts to present the divine in a material form, as part of embodied experience, though this embodiment involves the distortion and incongruous combination of the spiritual and the sensuous. Along the same line, Connelly claims that the sublime affords a *transcendent* experience, of disembodied abstraction, while the grotesque affords a *profound*, visceral experience, immersed in bodily reality (2014: 154). This is consistent with the idea, articulated in the nineteenth century by Victor Hugo (2004: 28) and John Ruskin (1903: 178), that the grotesque functions as an inverted image of the sublime. Despite the current conflation of the two categories, Hegel's account of the grotesque also allows us to distinguish the grotesque from the monstrous: as a means to visualize the inexpressible, the grotesque is incongruous and contradictory, but it remains a vehicle of profound truths and can be part of a wider frame of meaning, whereas the monstrous tends to be reduced to the meaningless or unintelligible, resisting integration into a larger whole.

Moreover, Hegel's account also elucidates the historical significance of the grotesque as a remnant of irrationality and superstition in Enlightened Europe. As pre-modern beliefs and modes of thinking were progressively excluded from public discourse, supplanted by rational inquiry and technological advances, they came to be embraced and legitimized by the arts, typically in opposition to or in

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the periphery of classicism (see Connelly 2014). This conception fits into Harpham's influential definition of the grotesque as 'the manifest, visible, or unmediated presence of a mythic or primitive element in a non-mythic or modern context' (1982: 51). Following this definition, the grotesque can only be recognized in Western modernity, once elements from earlier or foreign cultures are abstracted from their original context, thereby acquiring a new significance and menacing power. Hegel's ascriptions of grotesqueness to ancient Indian art must be interpreted in this context, as expressing the fear of the persistence of archaic residues in modern European culture, rather than as an accurate description of Hindu mythology and iconography.

Conclusion

In Hegel's *Lectures on Fine Art*, the grotesque emerges as the main principle of visual and literary representations of Hindu gods. There, it is defined by a struggle between natural and spiritual elements in which natural forms are distorted in unnatural ways—typically overblown and multiplied—to express an abstract conception of the Absolute that is unsuitable for sensuous presentation. Distortion is necessary because these images are not meant to be symbols but direct manifestations of the divine, thereby suturing the breach between spirit and nature. However, since the Indian worldview relies on an impersonal and indeterminate grasp of the Absolute, which lacks subjectivity and individuality, Indian art is bound to fail in its purpose, aggravating the contradictions between normative values and natural phenomena. The specific aesthetic dissonance associated with the grotesque differs, first, from *beauty*, in which there is no dissonance since a personal and individualized conception of the divine is adequately embodied in the human figure; second, from the *sublime*, whose purpose is to assert the contradiction rather than to forge the reconciliation between the spiritual and the sensuous; and, third, from other forms of inadequacy between meaning and shape found, for example, in *romantic art*, which do not attempt to reconcile spirit and nature in an immediate unity, but mediately through reflective thinking.

Hegel's account legitimizes the grotesque images of Hindu gods as endowed with profound meaning and the result of a need shared by all human civilizations. Thus, it departs from the monster myths that prevailed in late medieval and early modern Europe, in which Hindu gods were mistaken for demons and feared for their monstrosity. Yet Hegel continues to describe ancient Indian art as irrational and repulsive at its core, as the product of a contradiction between an impersonal and indeterminate grasp of the Absolute and an unbounded, sensual imagination. Entrenched in this view there is a vicious stereotype of the Indian people(s) as irrational, deluded, servile, immoral, and unchangeably so, since they are

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presumably deprived of historical consciousness. In this sense, Hegel's commentary on Indian art functions more as a reflection of modern European culture, its fascination and horror in the face of what Enlightenment could not entirely purge, rather than as a truthful and objective account of Indian art and culture.[12]

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Notes

[1] Regarding the 'end of art' thesis, see Pippin (2014), Rutter (2010), Gardner (2018) and Donougho (2007). Peters (2015) connects this topic with Hegel's ideal of beauty and the challenges it faces in modernity. For a comprehensive commentary on Hegel's *Lectures on Fine Art*, see Moland (2019).

[2] Kwon (2001) provides a detailed analysis of the development of Hegel's views on symbolic art, comparing Hotho's edition with the transcripts of the lectures. Regarding Hegel's account of symbolic art and the symbol, see also Kwon (2009), Farina (2015a, 2015b), Moland (2019: Ch.2), Davis (2018), James (2009: Ch.1), and D'Angelo (1989).

[3] For a general critique of the racism and Eurocentrism in Hegelian philosophy, see Habib (2017), Zambrana (2017), and Tibebu (2011). Regarding Hegel's general views on India, see Mohapatra and Rathore (2017), Signoracci (2017), De Pretto (2011), Tibebu (2011: Ch. 7), and Spivak (1990: especially 40–54). Habib (2017: Chs. 7–8) and Mitter (1977: 202–20) specifically examine Hegel's reception of Indian art.

[4] Unless otherwise stated, all references are to Suhrkamp's edition of *Werke*, edited by Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel, followed by the page of the English translation (when available). Abbreviations used:

Ä I-III = Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2010)/*Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik, I– III. Werke*, Vols. 13–15 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1995).

BG = Hegel, 'On the Episode of the Mahabharata Known by the Name Bhagavad-Gita by Wilhelm von Humboldt', in *Hegel's India: A Reinterpretation, with Texts*, trans. H. Herring (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017)/'Über die unter dem Namen Bhagavad-Gita bekannte Episode des Mahabharata. Von Wilhelm vom Humboldt [1827]', in *Berliner Schriften 1818–1831. Werke*, Vol. 11 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986).

EPG = Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*, trans. A. V. Miller and W. Wallace, revised by M. Inwood (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010)/*Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften: Die Philosophie des Geistes. Werke*, Vol. 10 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1979).

H23 = Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Kunst (1823)* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2007).

K26 = Hegel, *Philosophie Der Kunst Oder Ästhetik: Nach Hegel, Im Sommer 1826; Mitschrift Friedrich Carl Hermann Victor von Kehler* (München: Wilhelm Fink, 2004).

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VPG = Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (New York: Prometheus Books, 1991)/ *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte. Werke*, Vol. 12 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986).

[5] The English translator T. M. Knox also renders the German words '*fratzenhaft*' and '*Fratzenhaftigkeit*', used by Hegel as attributes of Romantic literature and irony, as 'grotesque'. Although the suggestion of an aesthetic affinity between ancient Indian art and German Romanticism based on the grotesque is fascinating and worth exploring, we should observe the distinction maintained in the original text.

[6] The grotesque and the colossal coincide in terms of the extravagant exaggeration of size. Although Hegel does not differentiate the two qualities, we may distinguish them as follows. First, the colossal, by definition, is connected to one particular kind of distortion, whereas the grotesque can arise from various types of distortion (not all physical). Moreover, the colossal generally retains the proportion between parts in the shape or figure, whereas the grotesque alters it, with the exaggeration of some parts more than others, thereby corrupting its individual character. In the grotesque figures of fantastic symbolism, as Hegel says, the imagination 'drives particular shapes beyond their firmly limited particular character, stretches them, alters them into indefiniteness, and intensifies them beyond all bounds; it tears them apart from one another' (*Ä* I: 432/334).

[7] Hegel explicitly distinguishes *Brahman* (neuter in gender), which is an impersonal and formless whole, from *Brahma* (masculine in gender), who is one of the chief divinities and part of the Trimurti (see *Ä* I: 442/342; *VPG*: 185/166). However, the English translation of the *Lectures* obscures this distinction by rendering both terms as 'Brahma'. For an overview of the concept of 'Brahman', see Williams (2008: 89–90) and Stutley and Stutley (2019: 49).

[8] Hegel reiterates this critique of Indian culture in his lectures and published works. In the *Encyclopaedia*, for example, he argues that, in Indian thought, consciousness of the one is split 'into the determinationless unity of abstract thinking, on the one hand, and on the other, the tiresome; even litany-like, implementation in the particular' (*EPG*: 386/271).

[9] In this respect, Hegel seems to agree with Burke, who argues that many terrifying ideas that inspire a feeling of the sublime in literature, such as Virgil's Fame and Homer's Discord, would become 'wild grotesques' if represented in the visual arts (1998: 58–59).

[10] This passage is extracted from the 1826 lectures, in which Hegel uses the expression 'witches' world [*Hexenwelt*]' to denote the confusion between the divine and material reality in Indian art (*K26*: 84).

[11] Hegel's characterization of Indian culture as stuck in the transition from the divinization of nature to the differentiation of spirit and nature, without a clear grasp of either of these elements, shows some similarities with his descriptions of mental illness—see Achella (2021). The loss of the sense of oneself and the world as an ordered totality leads to a state of mental disorientation that is akin to the 'witches' world' that Hegel finds in ancient Indian art; in a letter to a friend, Hegel describes such a state in the following terms: 'this descent into dark regions where nothing is revealed as fixed, definite, and certain; where glimmerings of light flash everywhere but, flanked by abysses, are rather darkened in their brightness and led astray by the environment,

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casting false reflections far more than illumination. Each onset of a new path breaks off again and ends in the indeterminable, losing itself, wresting us away from our purpose and direction' (Achella 2021: 30).

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