

The Effect of Hegel's Philosophy of Art on Kandinsky in the Essay "Concerning the Spiritual in Art"

¹Zahra Hosein Abadi and ²Ramin Keshavarz

¹Department of Art and Architecture, University of Sistan and Baluchestan, Zahedan, Iran

²Department of Higher Education, Institute of Eram and Art, University of Shiraz, Shiraz, Iran

Abstract: According to art historians, factors such as advances in science, the mass media and findings of modern psychology, have had the pivotal role in evolving this trend. However, considering the great influence of philosophy on the art of the twentieth century, what has been the contribution of philosophy, especially German rational idealism and philosophers such as Hegel, in this trend and whether can one regard Hegel's ideas about the art of the 20th century, especially the works of Kandinsky to have had influence on abstract art? Are among important questions about the nature of modern art in the 20th century. This research by matching Hegel's philosophy of art and artistic ideas of Kandinsky in his essay "Concerning the Spiritual in Art", uncover the influence of Hegel's views on art and Kandinsky's thoughts and reveal the contribution of Hegel's philosophy of art in the 20th century as one of the influencing factors on the 20th century painting.

Key words: Hegel, kandinsky, aesthetic, abstract painting, Zeitgeist,

INTRODUCTION

Hegel is considered as a last philosopher having a vast philosophical system. He saw the philosophy of art as foundation of his philosophy and claimed that every philosopher and thinker must be familiar with the category of art and aesthetical problems. This German idealist philosopher with declaration of death of pure art (classical art) predicts that the art future is a tendency to pure abstraction and art work's becoming empty of form and object and understands the abstraction expanded upon it as a result of self-understanding and artist's spirituality and the influence of *Zeitgeist* on his inspirations; according to him this self-involvement of subject is essential for the evolution of the spirit and makes to create the spiritual consciousness from God in the individual (artist). The result of all categories that Hegel puts forward for describing the philosophy of beauty and aesthetics can be observed in the coming years and the beginning of the next century (early twentieth century) in artworks of artists such as Kandinsky and Paul Klee that somehow have included the concerns and issues of their artistic work. Since in twentieth century the art and philosophy in a unprecedented way are intertwined what categories the impact of Hegel's philosophy on Kandinsky's thought and discourse about abstract art includes? Can we consider the increasing tendency of abstractionism and the emphasis on individual expressionism, creativity and innovation in art that

blossomed at the beginning of the twentieth century as a result of thought and approach of idealist philosophers such as Hegel? In this research through reviewing and comparing Hegel's thought about modern art and the coming necessary abstraction and Kandinsky's ideas about spirituality in art we try to reveal the relationship between Hegel's thoughts and Kandinsky's foundation of abstract painting so that, the invention of abstract art by Kandinsky can be seen as a result of Hegel's thoughts and predictions in the field of art in which almost all his ideas have been fulfilled. Due to lack of available Persian resources and the Latin literature on the impact of 19th century philosophy on the works of art of 20th century, it is clear that researches of this kind helps to better understand the artistic events of the modern and post-modern era. Because these events should be analyzed as a hypertext that has a hypo text in itself so that, its first cause is correctly revealed. It is only by this view that we can analyze significantly the past and upcoming events in the field of art and thought.

Research conceptual framework

Concept of idea and the absolute (geist) in Hegel's intellectual idealism: Idealism in philosophy encompasses the whole variety of perspectives and is classified and identified in three main approaches: intellectual, emotional and voluntary. Kant and Hegel are amongst the intellectual idealists (Zeymaran, 1998).

Hegel studies theoretically the existence, social sphere and intelligible world in relation to objective thought that is their philosophical reflection. "Idea" in a sense signifies the totality that the representatives of classical German idealism have achieved as a result from thinking on the world; an idea that is of the independent and rational existence and movement in the history. The idea is the crystallization of human conscious activity that Hegel has abstracted it as a consequence of this activity (objective thought) and has recognized it as a principle of the movement of things and human actions (Ebadian, 2011).

For him the idea is nothing but the concept and objectivity is nothing but the reality of very concept. Hegel believes that the power of idea is that its totality does not scatter in objectivity and does not lose in it; but its unity reveals by the reality and in the reality is. For Hegel the idea tells of "the absolute spirit". Spirit or the absolute is a truth that is born from the spiritual world that sometimes is known in the body of concepts (philosophy), sometimes in the body of an intuition that by its being expressed uses the concepts (religion) and sometimes through intuition that is a result of sense perception (art). Hegel considered philosophy, art and religion as three moments of manifestation of the absolute. Art as one of the three moments is correlated with beauty and it is nothing but the manifestation or realization of an idea or the absolute (Ahmadi, 2001). Hegel in his two books "lectures on aesthetics and phenomenology of Spirit" has discussed the philosophy of art and art history; aesthetics is an integral part Hegel's philosophy (Ebadian, 2011). He says that in the art the idea or the intelligible form (intellectual concept in the highest stage of its dialectical development) is embodied in a sensible form; this is beauty and human thereby what he is and can be for himself makes clear (Beardsley, Hospers, 2012). Hegel in his lectures on aesthetics begins discussion from the distinction between "natural beauty" and "artistic beauty". He infers that the artistic beauty is born of the subjective spirit but the natural beauty is the result of objective spirit. Then he puts the artistic beauty beyond the natural beauty, because the artistic beauty is closer to the absolute or idea. In his view in travel of (Odyssey) spirit to the absolute the subjective element is of an important role or rather, is a more complete reflection of idea (Ahmadi, 2001).

Idea of beauty, creation and the intellectual element:

According to Hegel, the beauty is an immediate idea of the spirit and its child. But the idea should also be realized externally and be come in existence as the natural and spiritual objectivity. Since the idea in its external existence is the immediate subject of consciousness and the

concept is unified immediately with its external appearance, the idea is not only true but beautiful as well (Ebadian, 2011). He believes that art is an intuitive character on the one hand (at the moment of the emergence and creation) and on the other hand, like any other human production is an aspect of the usual reasoning of man. An intellectual element that brings in itself the human need to freedom. Hegel believes that the absolute in our lives is hidden in a veil of sensible things and considers beauty the perception of this hidden presence. The beauty from this perspective is "the sensible manifestation of Idea". Sometimes Idea appears in the body of true things and sometimes in body of beauty. The first is understood in the philosophy, understanding the latter is possible only in the art. Finally, he states that the clearness of beauty is the objective and subjective presence of Idea. The first is manifested in corporeality and the second in the intellectual or spiritual theme (Ahmadi, 2001).

Art history in Hegel's point of view: For Hegel the work of art is a result of unity of form and intellectual theme (content); that is to say, the unity of the subjective spirit and objective spirit. So he has examined the evolution of art history in the light of various forms of this unity. He has divided the art history into three parts: symbolic art, classic art and the romantic art.

From the perspective of Hegel in symbolic art the intellectual content or form could not overcome the sensible element or form; therefore the symbolic art does not provide a precise and straightforward report of the (absolute) spirit (Ebadian, 2011). In his opinion, the classic art has established more completely the unity and balance between the two recognizable elements of form and meaning and the unity and comprehensiveness are specificities of classic art. Hegel considers the sculpture of Greece as most complete instrument of expression of this balance. But the unity and balance between form and meaning in romantic art is canceled and the intellectual theme acts beyond the form and more strongly than it. In this art the spirit is so great and wide that does not fit into the body. He believes that in romantic art the form does not refer to something transcendent and every object and every person in the last analysis represents the evolution of "its/his spirit". So the general and, it does not represent a universal, social or collective moral thing. As, we shall see, Hegel's views on art and beauty have become one of the most influential theories of romantic thinkers in 20th century art.

Wassily Kandinsky from expressionism to abstraction:

Wassily Kandinsky born in 1866 in Moscow at the age of thirty gives up the job of legal consultation and



Fig. 1: Image of Wassily Kandinsky



Fig. 2: Painting with home, Kandinsky, 1909, oil on canvas, Estedeljik museum, Amsterdam (Van den Braembussche, 2009)

turns to the training in the field of painting (Fig. 1). He acquaints oneself in Paris during a travel to various parts of Europe with fauvism and works of Henri Matisse. But during this period his paintings are removed from the effects of these collisions and his works aesthetically is subjected to impressionism. This is first step of the formation process of Kandinsky's art and during this period he does not find his own artistic expression (Bocola, 2012). He rents with his friend and colleague, Gabriele Monter, an apartment but they mostly go for painting with several other painters to the "Murnau" (on the outskirts of Munich). Monter in 1909 buys at there a rural home. From this after a profound transformation occurs in the art by Kandinski (2011) (Fig. 2). Elements of painting behind glass, ethnic art of that land that is still



Fig. 3: Improvisation 7, Kandinsky, 1910, Oil on canvas, Tretyakov gallery, (Van den Braembussche, 2009)

very common, combined with the influence of Fauves and Matisse in Paris lead to the creation of the bold paintings with enriched colors that due to the distortions of form violate all the rules of painting nature. In these paintings the historical and religious contents and landscapes intermingle recognizably and create a rhythmic composition of the brilliant color pieces in which the motif is completely obliterated and missing. He in a famous fragment of his notebook in 1913 reports that how he was affected by seeing one of his paintings from the side. Kandinsky describes the result of this event as follows: "Then I realized clearly that the presence of objects in my paintings damages to them" (Sidler, 2010). Kandinsky was one of the few artists that have understood the new theories of age proposed by scientists such as Einstein, Darwin and Freud. He clearly realized that the result of scientific work of these scientists breaks down the public opinion about the subjective reality of the matter. The findings of modern physics of atomic structure have convinced Kandinsky that material objects do not have the real concept (Kleiner, 2006). Thus, in order to achieve the pure reality he removed the recognizable objects from his paintings and began a new art movement, "abstract art" (Fig. 3). In his painting, "simulation" and "relation of things" as a pair and at the same time have been erased (Yucel, 2012). For Kandinsky the abstract painting answer to a spiritual need and searching the absolute; it is a cosmic depth and internal content (Bourdas, 1999). In fact, pure abstraction is a means for distancing the object in order to understand better the depth of nature. This form of art is a way for objectifying the reality through the activity of structure-making of human mind with the



Fig. 4: Several circles, Kandinsky, 1926, Oil on canvas, Gogenheim museum, New york (Guerman, 2004)

fourth dimension and the relationship between space and time (Fig. 4). In the abstract art the artist tries mostly to eliminate any composition and all forms that are based on a recognizable and predictable basis. Without a doubt most trends of modern art is manifested in the art of “abstract”. Since the emergence of the abstract art the main objective of the artists has been the move towards autonomy of art from the real and for this reason they have tried to propose a new aesthetics for representation or even a lack of representation (Suane, 2014). heoretical meditations on the art of abstract are possible with the emergence of aesthetic principles that depend strongly on a study of forms. In the abstract art when the form is freed from the bondage of content, it turns to be its own content (Goudarzi, 2002). The spirituality in Kandinsky’s look is an avoidance of representing the phenomena and turning to the internal states of subject. Thus, spirituality enables the artist to transform the usual figurative art of his era due to the forms originated from inside into the abstract art.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Kandinsky’s ideas about the spread of abstraction and spirituality in modern painting have been formulated in his essay spirituality in art; they are provided in two parts. The first part is called “general aesthetics” and is about the spiritual revolution in art that will enable the artists to express their inner life in the abstract and immaterial forms; Kandinsky in the second part of essay titled as “about painting” discusses the psychology of colors, language of form and color and the artist’s responsibility. Although, Kandinsky in this essay does not any mention to the impact of Hegel’s views on his

thoughts but with a closer examination of this essay the influence of Hegel’s philosophy of art on the Kandinsky’s thoughts will be revealed. Since the main purpose of this study is a comparison of Hegel’s theories about modern art, its expanding abstraction and art future with Kandinsky’s thought, artistic action and his theories about abstract painting, it has been better seen for achieving the desired result and proving the influence of Hegel’s views on Kandinsky’s thought and facilitating the comparison and analysis, in the research findings section the similar ideas of Hegel and Kandinsky under titles such as *Zeitgeist*, idea, roots of abstraction in art, materials of modern art and death of pure art as the cases have been separately reviewed and compared and finally their identity has been proved. In analyzing Hegel and Kandinsky’s theories we have tried to identify and introduce the words that are semantically synonyms; this is important for understanding the research purposes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Zeitgeist: Hegel believed that we could not say the art expresses feelings, emotions and the excitements of the artist, unless we first admit that the artist himself is not aware of secret of these emotions and under influence of inspiration creates a thing that goes beyond his consciousness and it expresses the *Zeitgeist* as Hegel says. In other words, the validity of art is not justified by its conscious production but by its subjective function that is affected by the *Zeitgeist* and expresses it (Adams, 2011) and in principle he considers the imitation of nature of thing as a “purely formal end” for art and believes that the imitation as an artistic play with things around us is a “pointless suffering,” (Ebadian, 2001). Hegel leads us to the conclusion that in art the building or creating something is important and not expressing what already has existed (Ahmadi, 2001).

Every work of art is child of his time and in many cases it is generative of our feelings, consequently every cultural period creates its own art that is unrepeatable. Trying to revive the past artistic principles in his best form produces a dead art. That is why those who follow the ways of Greek sculpture, achieve only the superficial resemblances but their work is thus lifeless. These expressions are Hegel’s sayings but Kandinsky has written them at the beginning of his spirituality in art. For Hegel and Kandinsky the external form should express the inner feelings of the time (Nasri and Aali, 2013) and imitation and expression of something that already has existed is a pointless suffering that produces a dead art.

Idea: As previously stated, according to Hegel the idea and the absolute is a truth that is born from the inner spiritual world and art is a way to intuition and sense perception of the absolute. Kandinsky also says: “If the artist’s emotional force can overcome the how and in opposition to his high feelings puts an open panorama, art goes a way in which no longer in finding the lost “what” would not be frustrated. A what that opens the way to the spiritual nutrition of life and a newly awakened spirit. This what is an inner truth, a truth that only art can understand it and only art can express it with its own instrument” (Kandinsky, 2011). Here Kandinsky has considered the “what” as equivalent to Hegel’s concept of the absolute and idea; namely an inner truth that is expressed only through art.

Roots of abstraction in the art: Abstraction has been certainly the most proper characteristic of modern art. All arts from music in which this characteristic first of all in Hegel’s view emerged, to painting and literature and even architecture became during this process abstract. This abstract art, in the Hegelian sense, is the form of modernity and being abstract reveals the character of modern art. In the middle of the 18th century, in the Romantic art the characteristic of art representation that was opening the objective world, became the expression of subjectivity. This return from the outside into inside of subject is radical and accompanies with a kind of suspension and abstraction of the objective world. In Hegel’s view the root of tendency to abstraction is our “self-understanding”. In other words, the right to subjective freedom is the focal point of the difference between ancient and modern times. Another aspect of the tendency to abstraction of art in the modern era for Hegel can be found in the characteristic of “internalization”. Internalization is the moving away the representation of external world and to express inner states of the subject. In modern times, this simple unity with itself has excluded any external relations.

Kandinsky in the essay of concerning the spiritual in art with proposing the category of “mystical society” suggests that a great spiritual movement began and took an organized form and includes the groups that seeks to achieve spirituality through the inner self-knowledge (Kandinski, 2011). He introduces the literature, music and painting as the first sense fields that this spiritual revolution have revealed and turn to the issues and ideas that provide an open panorama to the non-materialistic efforts of spirit. He believed that art has a spiritual quality because it is an artefact of spirituality of the artist. That’s why he introduces the choice of object, color harmony and form-harmony in the painting as the three principles



Fig. 5: Improvisation 26, Kandinsky, 1912, oil on canvas, Lanbach House, Muenchen (Duchting, 2004)

based on the internal need (Adams, 2011). Kandinsky says: “the inner need is made of three mysterious elements:

- Artist as a creative that has a thing in himself [emphasis on subjective self-understanding and freedom]
- Artist as a child of his time has to express the spirituality of that age [emphasis on the perception of Zeitgeist]
- Artist as a servant of art should contribute to the movement of art” (Fig. 5)

In his view creates these three elements provide the causes of creation of spiritual art. Kandinsky’s spirituality is a result of internalization of art by the artist that makes possible the lack of representation of the external world and to express inner states of subject. It can be said Kandinsky’s interpretation of spirituality in art is a valve that has been opened on the entry of abstraction to the sphere of abstract painting.

Materials of the modern art: For Hegel the colors in the romantic painting acquire subjective quality and ideal exaltation and in the prevailing subjectivity their physical resistance and mass gradually are reduced. In his view, the sounds of music in the context of romantic art idealize all that is sensible and turn to a media that its audience is the sense of hearing. What in the painting pretends to be an external reality in the ideal range of place, in music is idealized and loses its character and becomes temporal; it becomes sound in which abstract seeing has become aural one. Music sets free the sound, as if it is in prison of matter (Ebadian, 2011). Hegel in recent sentences draws a link between color in painting and sound in music which would thus have both an ideal character.



Fig. 6: Piano transforming the color into sound, design by N. Siedler inspired from Kandinsky's theories, (Sidler, 2010)

Accordingly, one of the musical arrangements by Kandinsky is also replacing the color by sound in painting. He creates through the juxtaposition of colors a color orchestration and leads it (Fig. 5). Audio decoding of colors in the analysis of Kandinsky's works is a something very important that forms his way of thinking and his use way of color instead of the musical sounds and instruments. Kandinsky in the essay of spirituality in art at the end of chapter "psychology of colors" introduces the feelings of color effects as the material manifestations of spirit and adds: "color tones such as the tonality of sound have a soft tissue and raise in the spirit the sublime emotions" (Kandinski, 2011). Kandinsky in the introduction to the section "language of form and color" stresses that there is a deep connection between the arts especially painting and music. He believes that the spirituality of artist is reflected by a musical harmony created in form and color. In his view, art rather than narrative is an entity composed of rhythmic lines, color and form (Adams, 2011). He says by a clear and precise example: "color is a force that directly affects the spirit. Color, piano screen, eyes, plectrum and spirit form a piano with multiple wires (Fig. 6).

The artist is a hand that touches this or that key, plays piano and causes vibrations in the spirit" (Kandinski, 2011). He emphasizes that the music sound affects directly the spirit and the resonates it and introduces the form and color as the elements that should similar to music based on mutual vibration act on the spirit and considers them as the two guiding principles of the internal need. "Natalia Sidler" believes that many people can translate the senses to each other; this performance is said "displacement of synesthesia" and in many people is inherent. He writes: "displacement of synesthesia is applied as a perceptual multi-faceted methodology that

includes all possible means of connection between sense bounds; a systematic method for harmonizing the auditory and visual characteristics that has a long history in the visual arts, music and literature (Sidler, 2010). A kind of this performance can be seen in the correspondence of sound with primary colors in order to spread abstraction in Kandinsky's paintings as "improvisation".

Death of pure art: Hegel in his book, lectures of aesthetics, states that art as the highest way in which the truth acquires his existence, no longer has validity and the other art forms do not correspond with the needs of spirit. He believes that we are not able to understand the works of art that have been created in the past periods; because the intellectual and spiritual message of it is incomprehensible for our time. The root of this fact for him is the separation of form and content. Therefore the art as position of the Absolute has not any future; hence the death punishment of art (Ahmadi, 2001). For Heidegger the end of art does not mean that the art has lost its place in human culture but it means "the end of great art". That is an art that can represent in its form the spirit, the sacred or complete human culture. So, Hegel believes that the future art depends on the abstraction in which the human activity with its endless importance and development can constitute the absolute content of art. Kandinsky by creating abstract art at the beginning of 20th century fulfilled Hegel's prediction of becoming abstract of art. In fact, Kandinsky's abstract art is a reflection of Hegel's thoughts on art and philosophy of art. This has been the fate of art in modern times that has become a philosophical problem of art as such; so that philosophy of art instead of addressing the art from the external perspective, rather it has become an object into the subject itself. Today it requires the repeated efforts to distinguish art from its philosophy. Works of art have become exercises in the philosophy of art. This Danto's attitude to the modern art can be clearly seen in the works of Kandinsky as the father of abstract art. Kandinsky had realized that the unlimited liberation in a manner of painter that is grasped in the abstract painting leads just to be liberated from the "object". Now this self-magnification must be adapted to an idealized structure of general validity (public value-oriented system) so that this being liberated has a value and permanence, universal connection (Bocola, 2012). Kandinsky for achieving this dealt with explanation and writing his theories and findings in the essay of spirituality in art. In this essay he has tried to explain the philosophical and artistic foundations and his applied codes which represents a separated fundamental element of the 20th century art, i.e., "spirituality". As it was seen, in the completion process of abstract art philosophy he has used Hegel's thoughts as his ideas background.

CONCLUSION

In almost all books of history and analysis of art the 20th century has been considered as the ground of art evolutions in the period of modernism, progress in the branch of modern psychology (psychoanalysis) and the natural sciences and positivism. But art historians and analysts have neglected the philosophical theories of intellectual idealists such as Hegel. Now, through investigating the origins of abstraction in the art of early 20th century the influences of Hegel's thoughts and philosophy of art are visible in the work and thoughts of artists such as Kandinsky. Kandinsky's view about the subject's right to free choice and his attention to the principle of inner need that can be seen as a result of artist's self-understanding makes to internalize the art or move away from pure representation of reality and deal with the internal states of the subject. Finally, by analyzing some concepts expressed by Hegel about modern art in fundamental categories such as the *Zeitgeist*, the idea, freedom of subject and artist's self-understanding, internalization, materials of modern art and death of pure art and comparing them with Kandinsky's essay on the spirituality in art and the principles of abstract art for transforming the objective expression to the subjective one in art is revealed that all the categories mentioned by Hegel have been the foundation of Kandinsky's performance in this process and the abstract art is an all-out mirror of Hegel's ideas about modern art and future of art.

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