Art no longer affords the satisfaction of spiritual needs which earlier ages and nations sought in it, and found in it alone … Art, considered in its highest vocation, is and remains for us a thing of the past. [It] invites us to intellectual consideration, and that not for the purpose of creating art again, but for knowing philosophically what art is.¹

This (abridged) quotation is perhaps the best known from all the 1,200 pages of Hegel’s Lectures on Aesthetics. It is certainly a strange statement. On the one hand, it still strikes us as bizarre, a senselessly irritating provocation which (as the English translator suggests) simply cannot mean what it says. It surely struck Hegel’s students and followers in that way—including, unfortunately, the editor of his lectures, Heinrich Hotho, who undertook some radical editorial interventions to tone it down and make it more palatable.² Felix Mendelssohn, who in the late

² From the mid-1980s onwards, radical doubts have been raised about the authenticity of Hotho’s text, still the only one available to us. The editor of a forthcoming
text (based on the original student notes and on transcripts of the original lectures), Annemarie Gethmann-Siefert, first in her dissertation (‘Die Funktion der Kunst in der Geschichte. Untersuchungen zu Hegel’s Aesthetik’, Hegel-Studien, Beiheft, 23, 1984), then in a series of subsequent papers dealing with more particular topics, has underlined sharply that Hotho’s edition significantly changed, even directly distorted, Hegel’s views and superimposed upon them his own more conservative, nationalistic and religiously oriented aesthetic ideas. In the absence of the new edition it is not possible to evaluate this claim – which leaves the interpreter of Hegel’s Aesthetics in an unenviable position today. In this paper I have relied, of course, on the available text. I have however taken into account some of the “corrections” indicated by Gethmann-Siefert, especially when they were amply substantiated by quotations from the yet unpublished lecture transcripts. In this I relied particularly (beyond her dissertation) on the following publications: “Hegel’s These vom Ende der Kunst und der ‘Klassizismus’ der Aesthetik,” Hegel-Studien, 19 (1984); “Das ‘moderne’ Gesamtkunstwerk: die Oper,” Hegel-Studien, Beiheft 34, 1992; and “Hegel über Kunst und Alltäglichkeit,” Hegel-Studien, 28 (1993).