

### Three Decades after the End of Art

IT TOOK a full decade after I published an essay that endeavored to place the situation of the visual arts in some kind of historical perspective for it to strike me that the year in which that essay appeared—1984—had a symbolic meaning that might give pause to someone venturing onto the uncertain waters of historical prediction. The essay was somewhat provocatively titled "The End of Art," and, difficult as it might have been for someone at all familiar with the unprecedented surge in artistic activity in that year and for some years thereafter to believe, I really meant to proclaim that a certain kind of closure had occurred in the historical development of art, that an era of astonishing creativity lasting perhaps six centuries in the West had come to an end, and that whatever art was to be made from then on would be marked by what I was prepared to call a *post-historical* character. Against the background of an increasingly prosperous art world, in which it all at once no longer seemed necessary for artists to undergo the period of obscurity, poverty, and suffering that the familiar myth of the paradigmatic artistic biography required, and in which instead painters fresh from art schools like the California Institute of the Arts and Yale anticipated immediate recognition and material happiness, my claim must have appeared as incongruently out of touch with reality as those urgent forecasts of the immanent end of the world inspired by the Book of Revelations. By contrast with the exultant, even feverish art market of the mid-1980s, which a certain number of grudging but not altogether misguided commentators at the time likened to the famous tulip mania that swamped the characteristic thrift and caution of the Dutch with a kind of speculative fever, the art world of the mid-1990s is a triste and chastened scene. Artists who looked forward to a lifestyle of princely real estate and opulent restaurants are scrambling to find teaching positions to tide them over what in fact may be a very long dry spell indeed.

Markets are markets, driven by demand and supply, but demands are subject to causal determinants of their own, and it is not unthinkable that

the complex of causal determinants that accounted for the appetite to acquire art in the 1980s may never recombine in the form they assumed in that decade, driving large numbers of individuals to think of owning art as something that belonged within their vision of a meaningful style of life. So far as one can tell, the factors that combined to drive the price of tulip bulbs up beyond rational expectation in seventeenth-century Holland never exactly fell together in that way again. Of course, there has continued to be a market in tulips, fluctuating as those flowers have risen and fallen in gardeners' favor, and so there is reason to suppose that there will always be a market in art, with the kinds of rise and fall in individual reputations familiar to students of the history of taste and fashion. Art collecting may not go back as far in historical time as gardening, but collecting is perhaps as deeply ingrained a disposition in the human psyche as gardening is—I am not talking after all about farming but about gardening as a form of art. But the art market of the 1980s may possibly never recur, and the expectations of artists and gallerists of that time may never again be reasonable. Of course, some different constellation of causes may bring about an outwardly similar market, but my point is that, unlike the natural cycles of rise and fall that belongs to the concept of a market, such an occurrence would be strictly unpredictable, say like the abrupt intervention of a meteor in the orderly swing of planets that make up the solar system.

But the thesis of the end of art has nothing to do with markets, or, for that matter, with the kind of historical chaos which the emergence of the fast art market of the 1980s exemplified. The dissonance between my thesis and the heady market of the eighties is as little relevant to my thesis as is the ending of that market in the present decade, which might mistakenly be supposed to confirm it. So what would confirm or disconfirm it? This returns me to the symbolic importance of 1984 in world history.

Whatever the annals and chronicles of world history record as having happened in 1984, far and away the most important event of that year was a nonevent, much in the way in which the most important event of the year A.D. 1000 was the nonending of the world, contrary to what visionaries had supposed guaranteed by the Book of Revelations. What did *not* happen in 1984 was the establishment of a political state of world affairs of the sort George Orwell's novel *1984* forecast as all but inevitable. Indeed, 1984 turned out to be so different from what *1984* predicted for it that one cannot but wonder, a decade later, how a prediction regarding the end of art stands up against historical

reality as we experience it a decade after it was made: if the flattening out of the curves of artistic production and demand do not count against it, what can? Orwell introduced a simile into the language—"like 1984"—which readers of his novel would have no difficulty in applying to certain flagrant invasions by governments into private affairs. But by time that year came round, the simile would have had to be rephrased as "like 1984"—like the novelistic representation of history rather than like history itself, with a discrepancy between the two that would surely have astonished Orwell when, in 1948 (1984 with the last two digits reversed), the novelistic forecast seemed so inscribed in the political weave of world history that the cold dehumanized terror of a totalitarian future seemed a destiny nothing could impede or abort. The political reality of 1989, when the walls were to fall and European politics to take a direction far from imaginable even in fiction in 1948, was hardly yet discernible in the world of 1984, but that world itself was an easier, less threatening place. The scary language of nuclear testing, by means of which hostile superpowers sent signals back and forth when one of them did something the other perceived as threatening, had been replaced with the no less symbolic language of exchanged exhibitions of impressionist and post-impressionist paintings. After World War II, the official exhibition of national treasures was a standard gesture through which a nation expressed to another that hostilities were over, and that it could be trusted with objects of inestimable value. It is difficult to think of objects at once more physically fragile and yet more precious than paintings of a certain sort: the 1987 sale of Van Gogh's *Iris* for 53.9 million dollars merely underscores the implication of trust conveyed by the act of placing one's prized canvases in the hands of those who, shortly before, would have seized and held them hostage. (I might observe in parenthesis that the gestural importance of exhibitions remains viable, even when a nation has no stock of national treasures to entrust: today one establishes one's readiness to be part of the commonwealth of nations by sponsoring a biennial. No sooner had apartheid ended in South Africa than Johannesburg announced its first such show, inviting the governments of the world to sponsor exhibitions in acknowledgment of its moral acceptability).<sup>1</sup> In 1986, forty impressionist and post-impressionist works from our National Gallery went on tour in the then Soviet Union, and during that same year works of comparable quality—works one had never hoped to see outside the Soviet Union—served as aesthetic ambassadors in major American museums. Orwell's Big Brother seemed less and less a political possibility and more and more a fictional being inspired by what in 1948 seemed an

historical inevitability. Orwell's fictional forecast was a great deal closer to historical reality when it was made, in 1948, than my art-historical forecast seemed in 1984, by which time 1984 seemed decisively falsified by history. The circumstances of a collapsed art world in 1994, by contrast, seemed really quite supportive of a thesis of the end of art, but, as I am seeking to explain, that collapse is causally independent of whatever it is that explains the end of art, and it is thinkable that the same collapsed market could be compatible with a robust period of artistic production.

In any case, the end of art, as I am thinking about it, had come well before the market of the 1980s had so much as been imagined. It came a full two decades before I published "The End of Art." It was not a dramatic event, like the falling walls that marked the end of communism in the West. It was, like many events of overture and closure, largely invisible to those who lived through it. There were, in 1964, no front-page articles in *The New York Times*, no "just-in" bulletins on the evening news. I certainly noticed the events themselves, but did not perceive them as marking the end of art, not, as I say, until 1984. But that is typical of historical perception. The really important descriptions of events are often, even typically, unavailable to those who see those events happen. Who, knowing that Petrarch was ascending Mount Ventoux with a copy of Saint Augustine in his hand, could have known that with that event the Renaissance had begun? Who, visiting the Stable Gallery on East 74th Street in Manhattan to see the Warhols, could have known that art had come to an end?<sup>2</sup> Someone might have uttered that as a critical judgment, despising the *Brillo Boxes* and all that pop art stood for. But the end of art was never advanced as a critical judgment at all, but as an objective historical judgment. The structure of beginnings and endings, which almost defines historical representation construed narratively, is difficult to apply even in retrospect. Did cubism begin with Picasso's *Demaiselles d'Avignon*? Or with his little paper sculpture of a guitar in 1912, as Yves-Alain Bois claims in his book *Painting as Model*?<sup>3</sup> Abstract expressionism, in the late 1960s, was said to have ended in 1962, but did anyone in 1962 believe that it had ended? Cubism and abstract expressionism, of course, were movements; the Renaissance was a period. With both of these kinds of temporal entities, it at least makes sense to say that they have endings. My claim, on the other hand, is about *art* as such. But that means that I too am thinking about art itself as naming less a practice than a movement or even a period, with marked temporal boundaries. It is of course a fairly long movement or period, but there are a good many historically sustained periods or movements so universally embodied in human activ-

ities that we sometimes forget to think of them historically at all, but which, once we do, we can imagine coming to one or another end—science and philosophy, for example. They could come to an end without it following that people would stop philosophizing or doing science. After all, they came, so to speak, to *beginnings*. Recall the subtitle of Hans Belting's great text *Likeness and Presence: The Image before the Era of Art*. The "era of art" begins in about A.D. 1400, on Belting's view, and though the images made before then are "art," they were not conceived as such, and the concept of art played no role in their coming into being. Belting argues that until (about) A.D. 1400 images were venerated but not admired aesthetically, and he clearly then has built aesthetics into the historical meaning of art. I shall argue in a later chapter that aesthetical considerations, which climaxed in the eighteenth century, have no essential application to what I shall speak of as "art after the end of art"—i.e., art produced from the late 1960s on. That there was—and is—art before and after the "era of art" shows that the connection between art and aesthetics is a matter of historical contingency, and not part of the essence of art.<sup>4</sup> But I am getting very far ahead of my story.

I want to link these questions with another event of 1984, fateful certainly for me but scarcely so for the history of the world. In October of that year, my life took a sharp turn away from the orthogonal of professional philosophy: I began to write art criticism for *The Nation*, a turn so at right angles to any path I might have predicted for myself that it could not even have been the result of an intention to become an art critic. It was an episode of nearly pure chance, though once embarked on this career, I found that it answered to some very deep impulse in my character, so deep, I suppose, that it would never have surfaced had chance not intervened. So far as I know, there was no serious causal connection between publishing "The End of Art" and becoming an art critic as events, but there are connections of another kind. In the first place, people raised the question of how it was possible to proclaim the end of art and then begin a career of art criticism: it seemed that if the historical claim were true, the practice would shortly become impossible for want of a subject. But of course I had in no sense claimed that art was going to *stop being made!* A great deal of art has been made since the end of art, if it were indeed the end of art, just as, in Hans Belting's historical vision, a great deal of art had been made before the era of art. So the question of an empirical disconfirmation of my thesis cannot rest on the fact of art continuing to be produced, but at best on what kind of

art it is, and then on what one might, to borrow a term from the philosopher I have taken as my sometime master in this inquiry, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, speak of as the *spirit* in which the art was made. In any case, it was consistent with art having come to an end that there should go on being art and hence there should go on being plenty of art to write about as a critic.<sup>5</sup> But then the kind of criticism it would be legitimate to practice must be very different from the kind licensed under some view of history other than mine—under views of history, for example, which identify certain forms of art as historically mandated. Such views are the equivalent, so to speak, of a chosen people with whom the meaning of history is supposedly bound up, or a specific class, like the proletariat destined to be the vehicle of historical destiny, and in contrast with which, no other class or people—or art—has any ultimate historical meaning. In a passage that would certainly land him in hot water today, Hegel writes about Africa as "no historical part of the world. . . . What we properly understand by Africa, is the Unhistorical, undeveloped Spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature."<sup>6</sup> Hegel similarly, and with a gesture no less sweeping, dismisses Siberia as lying "out of the pale of history." Hegel's vision of history entailed that only certain regions of the world, and then only at certain moments, were truly "world historical," so that other regions, or the same region at other moments, were not really part of what was historically taking place. I mention this because the views of the history of art that I want to contrast mine with similarly define only certain kinds of art as historically important, and the rest as not really being at the present moment "world historical," and hence not really worth consideration. Such art—for example, primitive art, folk art, craft—is not, as partisans characteristically say, really art, just because, in Hegel's phrase, it lies "out of the pale of history."

These kinds of theories have been especially prominent in modernist times, and they have defined a form of criticism against which I am anxious to define my own. In February 1913, Malevich assured Matiushin that "the only meaningful direction for painting was Cubo-Futurism."<sup>7</sup> In 1922, the Berlin dadaists celebrated the end of all art except the *Maschinenkunst* of Tatlin, and that same year the artists of Moscow declared that easel painting as such, abstract or figurative, belonged to an historically superseded society. "True art like true life takes a *single road*," Piet Mondrian wrote in 1937.<sup>8</sup> Mondrian saw himself as on that road in life as in art, in life because in art. And he believed that other artists were leading false lives if the art they made was on a false path. Clement Greenberg, in an essay he characterized as "an historical apology for abstract art"—



INSTALLATION PHOTOGRAPH, 1ST INTERNATIONAL DADA EXHIBITION, BERLIN 1921.  
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"Toward a Newer Laocoön"—insisted that "the imperative [to make abstract art] comes from history" and that the artist is held "in a vise from which at the present moment he can escape only by surrendering his ambition and returning to a stale past." In 1940, when this was published, the only "true road" for art was abstraction. This was true even for artists who, though modernist, were not fully abstractionists: "So inexorable was the logic of the development that in the end their work constituted but another step towards abstract art."<sup>9</sup> "The one thing to say about art is that it is one thing," Ad Reinhardt wrote in 1962. "The one object of fifty years of abstract art is to present art-as-art and as nothing else . . . making it purer and emptier, more absolute and more exclusive."<sup>10</sup> "There is just one art," Reinhardt said over and over, and he believed fervently that *his* paintings—black, matte, square—are what art essentially is.

To claim that art has come to an end means that criticism of this sort is no longer licit. No art is any longer historically mandated as against any other art. Nothing is any more true as art than anything else, nothing especially more historically false than anything else. So at the very least the belief that art has come to an end entails the kind of critic one cannot

be, if one is going to be a critic at all: there can now be no historically mandated form of art, everything else falling outside the pale. On the other hand, to be that kind of critic entails that all the art-historical narratives of the kind of I have just cited must be henceforward false. They are false, one might say, on philosophical grounds, and this requires a certain comment. Each of the narratives—Malevich's, Mondrian's, Reinhardt's, and the rest—are covert manifestos, and manifestos were among the chief artistic products of the first half of the twentieth century, with antecedents in the nineteenth century, preeminently in connection with the ideologically retrograde movements of the pre-Raphaelites and the Nazarenes. An historian of my acquaintance, Phyllis Freeman, has taken the manifesto as her topic of research, of which she had unearthed roughly five hundred examples, some of which—the surrealist manifesto, the futurist manifesto—are nearly as well known as the works they sought to validate. The manifesto defines a certain kind of movement, and a certain kind of style, which the manifesto more or less proclaims as the only kind of art that matters. It is a mere accident that some of the major movements of the twentieth century lacked explicit manifestos. Cubism and fauvism, for example were both engaged in establishing a new kind of order in art, and discarded everything that obscured the basic truth or order the partisans supposed themselves to have discovered (or rediscovered). "That was the reason," Picasso explained to Françoise Gilot, that the cubists "abandoned color, emotion, sensation, and everything that had been introduced into painting by the Impressionists."<sup>11</sup> Each of the movements was driven by a perception of the philosophical truth of art: that art is essentially X and that everything other than X is not—or is not essentially—art. So each of the movements saw its art in terms of a narrative of recovery, disclosure, or revelation of a truth that had been lost or only dimly acknowledged. Each was buttressed by a philosophy of history that defined the meaning of history by an end-state which consisted in the true art. Once brought to the level of self-consciousness, this truth reveals itself as present in all the art that ever mattered: "To this extent," as Greenberg remarks at one point, "art remains unchangeable."

The picture then is this: there is a kind of transhistorical essence in art, everywhere and always the same, but it only discloses itself through history. This much I regard as sound. What I do not regard as sound is the identification of this essence with a particular style of art—monochrome, abstract, or whatever—with the implication that art of any other style is false. This leads to an ahistorical reading of the history of art in which all

art is essentially the same—all art, for example, is essentially abstract—once we strip away the disguises, or the historical accident that do not belong to the essence of “art-as-art.” And criticism then consists in penetrating these disguises, in getting to the alleged essence. It also, unfortunately, has consisted in denouncing whatever art fails to accept the revelation. With whatever justification, Hegel claimed that art, philosophy, and religion are the three moments of Absolute Spirit, so that the three are essentially transforms of one another, or modulations in different keys of the identical theme. The behavior of art critics in the modern period seems almost uncannily to have borne this out, for their endorsements have been, as it were, *autos-da-fe*—enactments of faith—which is perhaps an alternative meaning of “manifesto,” with the further implication that whoever does not adhere must be stamped out, like heretics. The heretics impede the advance of history. In terms of critical practice, the result is that when the various art movements do not write their own manifestos, it has been the task of critics to write manifestos for them. Most of the influential art magazines—*Artsforum*, *October*, *The New Criterion*—are so many manifestos issued serially, dividing the art world into the art that matters and the rest. And typically the critic as manifesto writer cannot praise an artist she or he believes in—Twombly, say—without denouncing another—Motherwell, say. Modernism, overall, was the Age of Manifestos. It is part of the post-historical moment of art history that it is immune to manifestos and requires an altogether critical practice.

I cannot deal further at this point with modernism so construed—the last era of art history before the end of art, the era in which artists and thinkers scrambled to nail down the philosophical truth of art, a problem not truly felt in the previous history of art when it was more or less taken for granted that the nature of art was known, and an activity necessitated by the breakdown of what, since the great work of Thomas Kuhn in systematizing the history of science, has been thought of as a paradigm. The great traditional paradigm of the visual arts had been, in fact, that of mimesis, which served the theoretical purposes of art admirably for several centuries. And it defined, as well, a critical practice quite different from that entailed by modernism, which had to find a new paradigm and to extirpate competing paradigms. The new paradigm, it was supposed, would serve future art as adequately as the paradigm of mimesis had served past art. In the early fifties, Mark Rothko told David Hare that he and his peers were “producing an art that would last for a thousand

years.”<sup>12</sup> And it is important to recognize how historical this conception really was: Rothko was not talking about producing works that would last a thousand years—that would stand the test of time—but a *style* that would define artistic production for a thousand years—for as long a period as that specified by the mimetic paradigm. In this spirit Picasso told Gilot that he and Braque were endeavoring to “set up a new order,”<sup>13</sup> one which would do for art what the canon of rules of classical art did, but which broke down, he thought, with the impressionists. That the new order was to be universal was marked by the fact that the paintings of early cubism were anonymous, and hence pointedly anti-individual because unsigned. Of course, this did not last especially. The manifestoed movements of the twentieth century had lifetimes of a few years or even just a few months, as in the case of fauvism. The influence naturally lingered longer, as did that of abstract expressionism, which even today has adherents. But no one today would be prepared to celebrate it as the meaning of history!

The point about the Age of Manifestos is that it brought what it took to be philosophy into the heart of artistic production. To accept the art as art meant accepting the philosophy that enfranchised it, where the philosophy itself consisted in a kind of stipulative definition of the truth of art, as well, often, as a slanted rereading of the history of art as the story of the discovery of that philosophical truth. In that respect my own conception of things has a great deal in common with these theories, with whose implied critical practice my own necessarily differs, but in a way different from that in which they differ from one another. What my theory has in common with them is, first, that it too is grounded in a philosophical theory of art, or better, in a theory as to what the right philosophical question is concerning the nature of art. Mine is also grounded in a reading of the history of art, according to which the question of the right way to think philosophically about history was only possible when history made it possible—when, that is to say, the philosophical nature of art arose as a question from within the history of art itself. The *difference* lies here, though I can only state it schematically at this point: my thought is that the end of art consists in the coming to awareness of the true philosophical nature of art. The thought is altogether Hegelian, and the passage in which Hegel enunciates it is famous:

Art, considered in its highest vocation, is and remains for us a thing of the past. Thereby it has lost for us genuine truth and life, and has rather been transferred into our *ideas* instead of maintaining its earlier necessity

in reality and occupying its higher place. What is now aroused in us by works of art is not just immediate enjoyment, but our judgment also, since we subject to our intellectual consideration (i) the content of art, and (ii) the work of art's means of presentation, and the appropriateness or inappropriateness of both to one another. The philosophy of art is therefore a greater need in our day than it was in days when art by itself yielded full satisfaction. Art invites us to intellectual consideration, and that not for the purpose of creating art again, but for knowing philosophically what art is.<sup>14</sup>

"In our days" refers to the days in which Hegel delivered his tremendous lectures on fine art, which took place for the last time in Berlin in 1828. And that is a very long time indeed before 1984, when I reached my own version of Hegel's conclusion.

It would certainly seem that the subsequent history of art must have falsified Hegel's prediction—just think of how much art was made after that, and how many different kinds of art, as witness the proliferation of artistic differences in what I have just called the Age of Manifestos. But then, given the question of the status of my prediction, is there then not some grounds for supposing that the same thing that happened with Hegel's startling declaration will happen with mine, which is after all almost a repetition of Hegel's? What would be the status of my prediction if the subsequent century and half were as filled with artistic incident as the period that followed Hegel's? Would it not then be not only false but ignominiously false?

Well, there are many ways of looking at the falsification through subsequent artistic incident of Hegel's thesis. One way is to recognize how different the next period in the history of art was, say from 1828 to 1964. It contained, precisely, the period I have just been characterizing, the period of modernism construed as the Age of Manifestos. But since each manifesto went with another effort to define art philosophically, how different after all is what happened from what Hegel said it would be? Instead of providing "immediate enjoyment," does not almost all of this art appeal not to the senses but to what Hegel here calls judgment, and hence to our philosophical beliefs about what art is? So that it is almost as if the structure of the art world exactly consisted not in "creating art again," but in *creating art explicitly for the purpose of knowing philosophically what art is?* The period from Hegel down, so far as the philosophy of art as practiced by philosophers was concerned, was singularly barren, making of course an exception for Nietzsche, and perhaps for Heidegger, who

argued in the epilogue to his 1950 "The Origins of the Artwork" that it was far too early to say whether Hegel's thought was true or false:

The judgment that Hegel passes in these statements cannot be evaded by pointing out that since Hegel's lectures in aesthetics were given for the last time in the winter of 1828–1829. . . . we have seen many new art works and art movements arise. Hegel did not mean to deny this possibility. The question however remains: is art still an essential and necessary way in which truth that is decisive for our historical existence happens, or is art no longer of this character?<sup>15</sup>

The philosophy of art after Hegel may have been barren, but art, which was seeking to break through to a philosophical understanding of itself, was very rich: the richness of philosophical speculation, in other words, was one with the richness of artistic production. In the ages before Hegel, nothing like this had occurred at all. There were style wars, of course, between *disegno* and *colorito* in Italy in the sixteenth century, or between the schools of Ingres and of Delacroix in France at around the time of Hegel's discourse. But in the light of the philosophical disputation carried out in the name of artistic imperatives in the modernist period, these differences turned out to be minor and negligible: they were differences over the how of painterly representation, not differences which questioned the entire premiss of representation that disputants took for granted. In New York in the first decade of this century, the great style war was between the Independents, led by Robert Henri, and the academy. The squabble concerned manner and content, but an astute art critic observed in 1911, after seeing an exhibition of Picasso at Stieglitz's Gallery 291, that "the poor Independents must look to their laurels. Already they are back numbers and we shall look soon to see them amalgamate with the much abused old National Academy of Design."<sup>16</sup> Picasso differed from them more radically than the ways they differed from one another: he differed from them in the way that philosophy and art differ. And he differed from Matisse and the surrealists in the way that one philosophical position differs from another. So it is altogether possible to view the history of art subsequent to Hegel's pronouncement as a confirmation rather than a falsification of his prediction.

One possible analogy for the thesis of "end of art" is to be found in Alexandre Kojève's argument that history came to an end in 1806 with Napoleon's victory at the Battle of Jena.<sup>17</sup> By history, of course, he meant the grand narrative Hegel lays out in his book on the philosophy of his-



tory, according to which history is really the history of freedom. And there are definite stages of that historical achievement. What Kojève meant was that Napoleon's victory established the triumph of the values of the French Revolution—liberty, equality, fraternity—in the heartland of aristocratic rule in which only a few were free and inequality defined the political structure of society. In one way, Kojève's thesis sounds insane. So much took place, historically, after Jena: the American Civil War, the two world wars, the rise and then the fall of communism. But these, Kojève insisted, were merely the working through of the establishment of universal freedom—a process that even finally brought Africa into world history. What others would see as a crushing refutation Kojève saw instead as a massive confirmation of the realization in human institutions of freedom as the driving force of history.

Of course, not all the visual art of the post-Hegelian era is philosophical in the way in which manifesto-driven art is. Much of it really does arouse what Hegel termed "immediate enjoyment," by which I understand him to mean enjoyment not mediated by philosophical theory. Much nineteenth-century art—and I am thinking of the impressionists especially, despite the uproar they at first aroused—does give unmediated pleasure. One does not need a philosophy to appreciate the impressionists, simply the subtraction of a misleading philosophy, which prevented their first viewers from seeing them for what they were. Impressionist work is aesthetically pleasing, which explains in part why it is so widely admired by people who are not especially partisans of avant-garde art, and also why it is so expensive: it carries the memory of having outraged the critics, at the same time being so enjoyable that it gives those who collect it a sense of terrific intellectual and critical superiority. But the philosophical point to make is that there are no sharp right angles in history, no stopping, as it were, on a dime. Painters worked in the abstract expressionist style long after the movement came to its end, mainly because they believed in it and felt that it was still valid. Cubism defined an immense amount of twentieth-century painting long after the great period of cubist creativity was over. Theories of art give meaning to artistic activities in the modernist period, even after the theories have played their historical role in the dialogue of manifestos. The mere fact that communism ended as a world-historical movement does not entail that there are no more communists in the world! There are still monarchists in France, and Nazis in Skokie, Illinois, and communists in the jungles of South America.

But similarly, there are still modernist philosophical experiments in art since the end of art, as if modernism had not ended, as indeed it has not in the minds and practices of those who continue to believe in it. But the deep truth of the historical present, it seems to me, lies in the Age of Manifestos being over because the underlying premiss of manifesto-driven art is philosophically indefensible. A manifesto singles out the art it justifies as the true and only art, as if the movement it expresses had made the philosophical discovery of what art essentially is. But the true philosophical discovery, I think, is that there really is no art more true than any other, and that there is no one way art has to be: all art is equally and indifferently art. The mentality that expressed itself in manifestos sought in what it supposed was a philosophical way to distinguish real art from pseudo-art, much as, in certain philosophical movements, the effort was to find a criterion for distinguishing genuine questions from pseudo-questions. Pseudo-questions appear to be genuine and crucial, but they are questions only in the most superficial grammatical sense. In his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, for example, Ludwig Wittgenstein wrote that "most propositions and questions that have been written about philosophical matters, are not false but senseless. We cannot, therefore, answer questions of this kind at all, but only state their senselessness."<sup>18</sup> This view was transformed into a battle cry by the logical positivist movement, which vowed the extirpation of all metaphysics through demonstrating its nonsense. It was nonsense, the positivists (though not Wittgenstein) claimed, because it was unverifiable. In their view the only meaningful propositions were those of science, and science was marked by its verifiability. That of course left the question of what philosophy itself was to do, and the truth was that the verifiability criterion inevitably turned against its defenders, dissolving itself as nonsense. For Wittgenstein, philosophy vanished, leaving behind only the activity of demonstrating its senselessness. A parallel position in art would have left as the only meaningful art, because the only art that was essentially art, the monochrome black or white canvas, square and flat and matte, over and over again, as in the heroic vision of Ad Reinhardt. Everything else was not art, difficult as it would have been to know what, if not art, it was. But in the period of competing manifestos, declaring that something was not—was not *really*—art was a standard critical posture. It was matched in the philosophy of my early education by the declaration that something was not—not really—philosophy. The best such critics would allow would be that Nietzsche—or Plato, or Hegel—might have been poets. The best their counterparts in art might allow is that something which

was not really art was illustration, or decoration, or some lesser thing. "Illustrational" and "decorative" were amongst the critical epithets of the Age of Manifestos.

In my view, the question of what art really and essentially is—as against what it apparently, or inessentially is—was the wrong form for the philosophical question to take, and the views I advanced in various essays concerning the end of art endeavor to suggest what the real form of the question should be. As I saw it, the form of the question is: what makes the difference between a work of art and something not a work of art when there is no interesting perceptual difference between them? What awoke me to this was the exhibition of *Brillo Box* sculptures by Andy Warhol in that extraordinary exhibition at the Stable Gallery on East 74th Street in Manhattan in April of 1964. Appearing as those boxes did in what was still the Age of Manifestos they finally did so much to overthrow, there were plenty who then said—who, as remnants of that age still say—that what Warhol had done was not really art. But I was convinced that they were art, and for me the exciting question, the really deep question, was wherein the difference lies between them and the *Brillo* cartons of the supermarket storeroom, when none of the differences between them can explain the difference between reality and art. All philosophical questions, I have argued, have that form: two outwardly indiscernible things can belong to different, indeed to momentarily different, philosophical categories.<sup>19</sup> The most famous example is the one with which the era of modern philosophy itself opens in the First Meditation of Descartes, where he finds that there is no internal mark by which dream and waking experience can be told apart. Kant tries to explain the difference between a moral action and one that exactly resembles it but merely conforms to the principles of morality. Heidegger shows, I think, that there is no outward difference between an authentic and an inauthentic life, however momentous the difference may be between authenticity and inauthenticity. And the list can be extended to the very boundaries of philosophy. Until the twentieth century it was tacitly believed that works of art were always identifiable as such. The philosophical problem now is to explain why they are works of art. With Warhol it becomes clear that there is no special way a work of art must be—it can look like a *Brillo* box, or it can look like a soup can. But Warhol is but one of a group of artists to have made this profound discovery. The distinction between music and noise, between dance and movement, between literature and mere writing, which were coeval with Warhol's breakthrough, parallel it in every way.

These philosophical discoveries emerged at a certain moment in the history of art, and it strikes me that in a certain way the philosophy of art was hostage to the history of art in that the true form of the philosophical question regarding the nature of art could not have been asked until it was historically possible to ask it—until, that is, it was historically possible for there to be works of art like *Brillo Box*. Until this was an historical possibility, it was not a philosophical one: after all, even philosophers are constrained by what is historically possible. Once the question is brought to consciousness at a certain moment in the historical unfolding of art, a new level of philosophical consciousness has been reached. And it means two things. It means, first, that having brought itself to this level of consciousness, art no longer bears the responsibility for its own philosophical definition. That, rather, is the task of philosophers of art. Second, it means that there is no way works of art need to look, since a philosophical definition of art must be compatible with every kind and order of art—with the pure art of Reinhardt, but also with illustrative and decorative, figurative and abstract, ancient and modern, Eastern and Western, primitive and nonprimitive art, much as these may differ from one another. A philosophical definition has to capture everything and so can exclude nothing. But that finally means that there can be no historical direction art can take from this point on. For the past century, art has been drawing toward a philosophical self-consciousness, and this has been tacitly understood to mean that artists must produce art that embodies the philosophical essence of art. We now can see that this was a wrong understanding, and with a clearer understanding comes the recognition that there is no further direction for the history of art to take. It can be anything artists and patrons want it to be.

Let us return to 1984 and the lessons of that year as against what had been predicted for it in Orwell's shattering novelistic vision of the shape of things to come. The terrifying monolithic states Orwell foresaw were in at least two of the three cases manifesto-driven, and the manifesto was the most celebrated of manifestos, Marx and Engels's *Communist Manifesto*. What the actual year 1984 demonstrated was that the philosophy of history embodied in that document had broken down, and that history was less and less likely to be found embodying the historical laws "working with iron necessity toward inevitable results" of which Marx wrote in his preface to the first edition of *Capital*. Marx and Engels did not really characterize the "inevitable result" of history save negatively, that it would be free of the class conflict that had been the driving force



of history. They felt that history would stop in a sense when class contradictions were all resolved, and that the post-historical period would in a certain sense be utopian. They somewhat gingerly offered a vision of life in the post-historical society in a famous passage in their *German Ideology*. Instead of individuals being forced into "a particular, exclusive sphere of activity," they wrote, "each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes." This "makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd, or critic."<sup>20</sup> In a 1963 interview, Warhol expressed the spirit of this marvelous forecast this way: "How can you say any style is better than another? You ought to be able to be an Abstract Expressionist next week, or a Pop artist, or a realist, without feeling that you have given up something."<sup>21</sup> This is very beautifully put. It is a response to manifesto-driven art, whose practitioners' essential criticism of other art was that it was not the right "style." Warhol is saying that this no longer makes sense: all styles are of equal merit, none "better" than another. Needless to say, this leaves the options of criticism open. It does not entail that all art is equal and indifferently good. It just means that goodness and badness are not matters of belonging to the right style, or falling under the right manifesto.

That is what I mean by the end of art. I mean the end of a certain narrative which has unfolded in art history over the centuries, and which has reached its end in a certain freedom from conflicts of the kind inescapable in the Age of Manifestos. Of course, there are two ways for there to be freedom from conflict. One way is really to eliminate whatever does not fit one's manifesto. Politically, this has its form in ethnic cleansing. When there are no more Tutsis, there will be no conflict between Tutsis and Hutus. When there are no Bosnians left, there will be no conflicts between them and Serbs. The other way is to live together without the need for cleansing, to say what difference does it make what you are, whether Tutsi or Hutu, Bosnian or Serb. The question is what kind of person you are. Moral criticism survives into the age of multiculturalism, as art criticism survives into the age of pluralism.

To what degree is my prediction borne out in the actual practice of art? Well, look around you. How wonderful it would be to believe that the pluralistic art world of the historical present is a harbinger of political things to come!

## NOTES

1. South Africa sponsored its first biennial in 1995, the centennial year of the first Venice Biennale. But it was invited to participate in the 1993 Venice Biennale for the first time since adopting its repugnant political system. Invitations to exhibit have the same meaning in the code of national morality that sponsoring biennials does.
2. I call such descriptions *narrative sentences*—sentences that describe an event with reference to a later event of which those contemporary with the first event could not have known. Examples of narrative sentences, as well as their analysis, can be found in my *Analytical Philosophy of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965).
3. "If the principal rupture in this century's art was indeed that of cubism, this break was probably not made by the *Demoiselles d'Avignon* nor by analytical cubism, but in the collusion between the Grebo mask and the *Guitar*" (Yves-Alain Bois, *Painting as Model* [Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990], 79).
4. I have sought to demonstrate this philosophically in *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), chap. 4; and in *The Philosophical Disenfanchisement of Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), chap. 2.
5. And of course, there have been plenty of exhibitions of art made before the end of art.
6. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (New York: Wiley Book Co., 1944), 99.
7. Malevich (Los Angeles: Armand Hammer Museum of Art and Cultural Center, 1990), 8.
8. Piet Mondrian, "Essay, 1937," in *Modern Arts Criticism* (Detroit: Gale Research Inc., 1994), 137.
9. Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, 1:37.
10. *Art-as-Art: The Selected Writings of Ad Reinhardt*, ed. Barbara Rose (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), 53.
11. Françoise Gilot and Carleton Lake, *Life with Picasso* (New York: Avon Books, 1964), 69.
12. James Breslin, *Mark Rothko: A Biography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 431.
13. Gilot and Lake, *Life with Picasso*, 69.
14. Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 11.
15. Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Artwork," trans. Albert Hofstadter, in Albert Hofstadter and Richard Kuhns, *Philosophies of Art and Beauty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 701–703.
16. Steven Watson, *Strange Bedfellows: The First American Avant-Garde* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1991), 84.
17. Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, 2d ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), 436n; trans. J. H. Nichols, Jr., *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* (New York: Basic Books, 1969), 160ff.

It must be plain that there are three models at least, depending upon the kind of art we are dealing with, and depending upon whether it is beauty, form, or what I shall term engagement that defines our relationship to it. Contemporary art is too pluralistic in intention and realization to allow itself to be captured along a single dimension, and indeed an argument can be made that enough of it is incompatible with the constraints of the museum that an entirely different breed of curator is required, one who bypasses museum structures altogether in the interests of engaging the art directly with the lives of persons who have seen no reason to use the museum either as treasury of beauty or sanctum of spiritual form. For a museum to engage this kind of art, it has to surrender much of the structure and theory that define the museum in its other two modes.

But the museum itself is only part of the infrastructure of art that will sooner or later have to deal with the end of art and with art after the end of art. The artist, the gallery, the practices of art history, and the discipline of philosophical aesthetics must all, in one or another way, give way and become different, and perhaps vastly different, from what they have so far been. I can only hope to tell part of the philosophical story in the chapters that follow. The institutional story must wait upon history itself.

#### NOTES

1. "The End of Art" was the target essay in a book, *The Death of Art*, edited by Berel Lang (New York: Haven Publishers, 1984). The program of the book was that various writers would respond to the ideas set out in the target essay. I went on to elaborate on the end of art in various essays. "Approaching the End of Art" was delivered as a lecture in February 1985, at the Whitney Museum of American Art, and was printed in my *The State of the Art* (New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1987). "Narratives of the End of Art," was delivered as a Lionel Trilling Lecture at Columbia University, printed first in *Grand Street* and reprinted in my *Encounters and Reflections: Art in the Historical Present* (New York: Noonday Press, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1991). Hans Belting's *The End of the History of Art*, trans. Christopher S. Wood (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987) first appeared under the title *Das Ende der Kunstgeschichte?* (Munich: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 1983). Belting has since dropped the question mark in his amplification of the 1983 text in *Das Ende der Kunstgeschichte: Eine Revision nach zehn Jahre* (Munich: Verlag C. H. Beck, 1995). The present book, also written ten years after the original statement, is my effort to bring the somewhat vaguely formulated idea of the end of art up to date. It may be mentioned that the idea must have been in the air in the mid-eighties. Gianni Vattimo has a chapter, "The Death or Decline of Art," in his *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and*

*Hermeneutics in Post-Modern Culture* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), originally published as *La Fine della Modernità* (Garzanti Editore, 1985). Vattimo sees the phenomena which Belting and I address from a perspective wider by far than either of us occupies: he thinks of the end of art under the perspective of the death of metaphysics in general, as well as of certain philosophical responses to aesthetic problems raised by "a technologically advanced society." "The end of art" is only a point of intersection between the line of thought Vattimo follows and that which Belting and I seek to draw out of the internal state of art itself, considered more or less in isolation from wider historical and cultural determinants. Thus Vattimo speaks of "earth-works, body art, street theater, and so on [in which] the status of the work becomes constitutively ambiguous: the work no longer seeks a success which would permit it to position itself within a determinate set of values (the imaginary museum of objects possessed of aesthetic quality)" (p. 53). Vattimo's essay is a fairly straightforward application of Frankfurt School preoccupations. Still, the "in the airness" of the idea, whatever the perspective, is what I am remarking.

2. "From the point of view of their origins, it is possible to distinguish two kinds of cult images that were publicly venerated in Christendom. One kind, initially including only images of Christ and a cloth imprint of St. Stephen in North Africa, comprises 'unpainted' and therefore especially authentic images that were either of heavenly origin or produced by mechanical impression during the lifetime of the model. For these the term a *cheiro-poieton* ('not made by hand') came into use, in Latin *non manufactum*" (Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. Edmund Jephcott [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994], 49). In effect, these images were physical traces, like fingerprints, and hence had the status of relics.

3. But the second class of images gingerly admitted by the early church were those in fact painted, providing the painter was a saint, like Saint Luke, "for whom it was believed that Mary sat for a portrait during her lifetime. . . . The Virgin herself was made to finish the painting, or a miracle by the Holy Spirit occurred to grant still greater authenticity for the portrait" (Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 49). Whatever the miraculous interventions, Luke naturally became the patron saint of artists, and Saint Luke portraying the Mother and Child a favorite self-celebratory theme.

4. Thus the title of one of the best-selling texts of my youth, *Life Begins at Forty*, or the Jewish contribution, as recounted in a joke one hears now and again, to a debate on when life begins: "When the dog dies and the children leave home."

5. To the best of my knowledge, this literary characterization of Hegel's early masterpiece was first given by Josiah Royce in his *Lectures on Modern Idealism*, ed. Jacob Loewenberg (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1920).

6. Hans Belting, *The End of the History of Art?*, 3.

7. *Ibid.*, 58.

8. Cited in William Rubin, *Dada, Surrealism, and Their Heritage* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1968), 68.

9. See Lisa G. Corrin, *Mining the Museum: An Installation Confronting History* (Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore), and *The Play of the Unmentionable: An Installation by Joseph Kosuth at the Brooklyn Museum* (New York: New Press, 1992).