NOT ANDY WARHOL (BRILLO BOX) (1995) BY MIKE BIDLO. COURTESY: THE ARTIST AND BRUNO BISCHOFBERGER GALLERY, ZURICH.

Introduction: Modern, Postmodern, and Contemporary

AT ROUGHLY the same moment, but quite in ignorance of one another's thought, the German art historian Hans Belting and I both published texts on the end of art.[1] Each of us had arrived at a vivid sense that some momentous historical shift had taken place in the productive conditions of the visual arts, even if, outwardly speaking, the institutional complexes of the art world—the galleries, the art schools, the periodicals, the museums, the critical establishment, the curatoriat—seemed relatively stable. Belting has since published an amazing book, tracing the history of devotional images in the Christian West from late Roman times until about A.D. 1400, to which he gave the striking subtitle *The Image before the Era of Art*. It was not that those images were not art in some large sense, but their being art did not figure in their production, since the concept of art had not as yet really emerged in general consciousness, and such images—icons, really—played quite different role in the lives of people than works of art came to play when the concept at last emerged and something like aesthetic considerations began to govern our relationships to them. They were not even thought of as art in the elementary sense of having been produced by artists—human beings putting marks on surfaces—but were regarded as having a miraculous provenance, like the imprinting of Jesus's image on Veronica's veil.[2] There would then have been a profound discontinuity between artistic practices before and after the era of art had begun, since the concept of the artist did not enter into the explanation of devotional images,[3] but of course the concept of the artist became central in the Renaissance, to the point that Giorgio Vasari was to write a great book on the lives of the artists. Before then there would at best have been the lives of the dabbling saints.

If this is at all thinkable, then there might be another discontinuity, no less profound, between the art produced during the era of art and art

produced after that era ended. The era of art did not begin abruptly in 1400, nor did it end sharply either, sometime before the mid-1980s when Belting's and my texts appeared respectively in German and in English. Neither of us, perhaps, had as clear an idea as we now might have, ten years later, of what we were trying to say, but, now that Belting has come forward with the idea of art before the beginning of art, we might think about art *after* the end of art, as if we were emerging from the era of art into something else the exact shape and structure of which remains to be understood.

Neither of us intended our observations as a critical judgment regarding the art of our time. In the eighties, certain radical theorists had taken up the theme of the death of painting and had based their judgment on the claim that advanced painting seemed to show all the signs of internal exhaustion, or at least marked limits beyond which it was not possible to press. They were thinking of Robert Ryman's more or less all-white paintings, or perhaps the aggressive monotonous stripe paintings of the French artist Daniel Buren; and it would be difficult not to consider their account as in some way a critical judgment, both on those artists and on the practice of painting in general. But it was quite consistent with the end of the era of art, as Belting and I understood it, that art should be extremely vigorous and show no sign whatever of internal exhaustion. Ours was a claim about how one complex of practices had given way to another, even if the shape of the new complex was still unclear—*is* still unclear. Neither of us was talking about the *death* of art, though my own text happens to have appeared as the target article in a volume under the title *The Death of Art*. That title was not mine, for I was writing about a certain narrative that had, I thought, been objectively realized in the history of art, and it was that narrative, it seemed to me, that had come to an end. A story was over. It was not my view that there would be no more art, which "death" certainly implies, but that whatever art there was to be would be made without benefit of a reassuring sort of narrative in which it was seen as the appropriate next stage in the story. What had come to an end was that narrative but not the subject of the narrative. I hasten to clarify.

In a certain sense, life really begins when the story comes to an end, as in the story every couple relishes of how they found one another and "lived happily ever after."[4] In the German genre of the *Bildungsroman*—the novel of formation and self-discovery—the story is told of the stages through which the hero or heroine progresses on the way to self-awareness. The genre has almost become a matrix of the feminist novel in

which the heroine arrives at a consciousness of who she is and what being a woman means. And that awareness, though the end of the story, is really "the first day of the rest of her life," to use the somewhat corny phrase of New Age philosophy. Hegel's early masterpiece, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, has the form of a *Bildungsroman*, in the sense that its hero, *Geist*, goes through a sequence of stages in order to achieve knowledge not merely of what it itself is, but that without the history of mishaps and misplaced enthusiasms, its knowledge would be empty.[5] Belting's thesis too was about narratives. "Contemporary art," he wrote, "manifests an awareness of a history of art but no longer carries it forward."[6] And he speaks as well of "the relatively recent loss of faith in a great and compelling narrative, in the way things *must* be seen."[7] It is in part the sense of no longer belonging to a great narrative, registering itself on our consciousness somewhere between uneasiness and exhilaration, that marks the historical sensibility of the present, and which, if Belting and I are at all on the right path, helps define the acute difference, of which I think that awareness only began to emerge in the mid-1970s, between modern and contemporary art. It is characteristic of contemporaneity—but not of modernity—that it should have begun insidiously, without slogan or logo, without anyone being greatly aware that it had happened. The Armory show of 1913 used the pine-tree flag of the American Revolution as its logo to celebrate a repudiation of the art of the past. The Berlin dada movement proclaimed the death of art, but on the same poster by Raoul Hausmann wished long life to "The Machine Art of Tatlin." Contemporary art, by contrast, has no brief against the art of the past, no sense that the past is something from which liberation must be won, no sense even that it is at all different as art from modern art generally. It is part of what defines contemporary art that the art of the past is available for such use as artists care to give it. What is not available to them is the spirit in which the art was made. The paradigm of the contemporary is that of the collage as defined by Max Ernst, with one difference. Ernst said that collage is "the meeting of two distant realities on a plane foreign to them both."[8] The difference is that there is no longer a plane foreign to distinct artistic realities, nor are those realities all that distant from one another. That is because the basic perception of the contemporary spirit was formed on the principle of a museum in which all art has a rightful place, where there is no a priori criterion as to what that art must look like, and where there is no narrative into which the museum's contents must all fit. Artists today treat museums as filled not with dead art, but with living artistic options. The museum is a field available for constant rearrangement, and

indeed there is an art form emerging which uses the museum as a repository of materials for a collage of objects arranged to suggest or support a thesis; we see it in Fred Wilson's installation at the Maryland Historical Museum and again in Joseph Kosuth's remarkable installation "The Play of the Unmentionable" at the Brooklyn Museum.[9] But the genre is almost commonplace today: the artist is given free run of the museum and organizes out of its resources exhibitions of objects that have no historical or formal connection to one another other than what the artist provides. In some way the museum is cause, effect, and embodiment of the attitudes and practices that define the post-historical moment of art, but I do not want to press the matter for the moment. Rather, I want to return to the distinction between the modern and the contemporary and discuss its emergence into consciousness. In fact, it was the dawning of a certain kind of self-consciousness that I had in mind when I began to write about the end of art.

In my own field, philosophy, the historical divisions went roughly as follows: ancient, medieval, and modern. "Modern" philosophy was generally thought to begin with René Descartes, and what distinguished it was the particular inward turn Descartes took—his famous reversion to the "I think"—where the question would be less how things really are than how someone whose mind is structured in a certain way is obliged to think they are. Whether things really are the way the structure of our mind requires us to think they are is not something we can say. But neither does it greatly matter, since we have no alternative way of thinking about them. So working from the inside outward, so to speak, Descartes, and modern philosophy generally, drew a philosophical map of the universe whose matrix was the structure of human thought. What Descartes did was begin to bring the structures of thought to consciousness, where we could examine them critically and come to understand at one and the same time what we are and how the world is, for since the world is defined by thought, the world and we are literally made in one another's image. The ancients simply went ahead endeavoring to describe the world, paying no attention to those subjective features modern philosophy made central. We could paraphrase Hans Belting's marvelous title by talking about the self before the era of the self to mark the difference between ancient and modern philosophy. It is not that there were no selves before Descartes, but that the concept of the self did not define the entire activity of philosophy, as it came to do after he had revolutionized it and until reversion to language came to replace reversion to the self. And while "the linguistic turn"[10] certainly replaced questions of what

we are with how we talk, there is an undoubted continuity between the two stages of philosophical thought, as is underscored by Noam Chomsky's description of his own revolution in the philosophy of language as "Cartesian linguistics,"[11] replacing or augmenting Descartes's theory of innate thought with the postulation of innate linguistic structures.

There is an analogy to the history of art. Modernism in art marks a point before which painters set about representing the world the way it presented itself, painting people and landscapes and historical events just as they would present themselves to the eye. With modernism, the conditions of representation themselves become central, so that art in a way becomes its own subject. This was almost precisely the way in which Clement Greenberg defined the matter in his famous 1960 essay "Modernist Painting." "The essence of Modernism," he wrote, "lies, as I see it, in the use of the characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself, not in order to subvert it but in order to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence."[12] Interestingly, Greenberg took as his model of modernist thought the philosopher Immanuel Kant: "Because he was the first to criticize the means itself of criticism, I conceive of Kant as the first real Modernist." Kant did not see philosophy as adding to our knowledge so much as answering the question of how knowledge was possible. And I suppose the corresponding view of painting would have been not to represent the appearances of things so much as answering the question of how painting was possible. The question then would be: who was the first modernist painter—who deflected the art of painting from its representational agenda to a new agenda in which the means of representation became the object of representation?

For Greenberg, Manet became the Kant of modernist painting: "Manet's became the first Modernist pictures by virtue of the frankness with which they declared the flat surfaces on which they were painted." And the history of modernism moved from there through the impressionists, "who abjured underpainting and glazes, to leave the eye under no doubt as to the fact that the colors they used were made of paint that came from tubes or pots," to Cézanne, who "sacrificed verisimilitude, or correctness, in order to fit his drawing and design more explicitly to the rectangular shape of the canvas." And step by step Greenberg constructed a narrative of modernism to replace the narrative of the traditional representational painting defined by Vasari. Flatness, the consciousness of paint and brushstroke, the rectangular shape—all of them what Meyer Schapiro speaks of as "nonmimetic features" of what may still have been residually mimetic paintings—displaced perspective,

foreshortening, chiaroscuro as the progress points of a developmental sequence. The shift from "premodernist" to modernist art, if we follow Greenberg, was the shift from mimetic to nonmimetic features of painting. It was not, Greenberg asserts, that painting had to become itself nonobjective or abstract. It was just that its representational features were secondary in modernism where they had been primary in premodernist art. Much of my book, concerned as it is with narratives of the history of art, must perforce deal with Greenberg as the great narrativist of modernism.

It is important that the concept of modernism, if Greenberg is right, is not merely the name of a stylistic period which begins in the latter third of the nineteenth century, the way in which Mannerism is the name of a stylistic period which begins in the first third of the sixteenth century: Mannerist follows Renaissance painting and is followed by the baroque, which is followed by rococo, which is followed by neoclassicism, which is followed by the romantic. These were deep changes in the way painting represents the world, changes, one might say, in coloration and mood, and they develop out of and to some degree in reaction against their predecessors, as well as in response to all sorts of extra-artistic forces in history and in life. My sense is that modernism does not follow romanticism in this way, or not merely: it is marked by an ascent to a new level of consciousness, which is reflected in painting as a kind of discontinuity, almost as if to emphasize that mimetic representation had become less important than some kind of reflection on the means and methods of representation. Painting begins to look awkward, or forced (in my own chronology it is Van Gogh and Gauguin who are the first modernist painters). In effect, modernism sets itself at a distance from the previous history of art, I suppose in the way in which adults, in the words of Saint Paul, "put aside childish things." The point is that "modern" does not merely mean "the most recent."

It means, rather, in philosophy as well as in art, a notion of strategy and style and agenda. If it were just a temporal notion, all the philosophy contemporary with Descartes or Kant and all the painting contemporary with Manet and Cézanne would be modernist, but in fact a fair amount of philosophizing went on which was, in Kant's terms, "dogmatic," having nothing to do with the issues which defined the critical program he advanced. Most of the philosophers contemporary with Kant but otherwise "precritical" have dropped out of sight of all save scholars of the history of philosophy. And while there remains a place in the museum for painting contemporary with modernist art which is not itself modernist—

for example, French academic painting, which acted as if Cézanne had never happened, or later, surrealism, which Greenberg did what he could to suppress or, to use the psychoanalytical language which has come naturally to Greenberg's critics, like Rosalind Krauss or Hal Foster,[13] "to repress"—there is no room for it in the great narrative of modernism which swept on past it, into what came to be known as "abstract expressionism" (a label Greenberg disliked), and then color-field abstraction, where, though the narrative did not necessarily end, Greenberg himself stopped. Surrealism, like academic painting, lay, according to Greenberg, "outside the pale of history," to use an expression I found in Hegel. It happened, but it was not, significantly, part of the progress. If you were snide, as critics schooled in Greenbergian invective were, it was not really *art*, and that declaration showed the degree to which the identity of art was internally connected with being part of the official narrative. Hal Foster writes: "A space for surrealism has opened up: an *impensé* within the old narrative, it has become a privileged point for the contemporary critique of this narrative."[14] Part of what the "end of art" means is the enfranchisement of what had lain beyond the pale, where the very idea of a pale—a wall—is exclusionary, the way the Great Wall of China was, built to keep the Mongol hordes outside, or as the Berlin Wall was built, to keep the innocent socialist population protected from the toxins of capitalism. (The great Irish-American painter Sean Scully delights in the fact that "the pale," in English, refers to the Irish Pale, an enclave in Ireland, making the Irish outsiders in their own land.) In the modernist narrative, art beyond the pale either is no part of the sweep of history, or it is a reversion to some earlier form of art. Kant once spoke of his own era, the Age of Enlightenment, as "mankind's coming of age." Greenberg might have thought of art in those terms as well, and seen in surrealism a kind of aesthetic regression, a reassertion of values from the childhood of art, filled with monsters and scary threats. For him, maturity meant purity, in a sense of the term that connects exactly to what Kant meant by the term in the title of his *Critique of Pure Reason*. This was reason applied to itself, and having no other subject. Pure art was correspondingly art applied to art. And surrealism was almost the embodiment of impurity, concerned as it was with dreams, the unconscious, eroticism, and, in Foster's vision of it, "the uncanny." But so, by Greenbergian criteria, is contemporary art impure, which is what I want to talk about now.

Just as "modern" is not simply a temporal concept, meaning, say, "most recent," neither is "contemporary" merely a temporal term, meaning whatever is taking place at the present moment. And just as the shift

from "premodern" to modern was as insidious as the shift, in Hans Belting's terms, from the image before the era of art to the image *in* the era of art, so that artists were making modern art without realizing they were doing anything different in kind until it began to be retrospectively clear that a momentous change had taken place, so, similarly, did it happen with the shift from modern to contemporary art. For a long time, I think, "contemporary art" would have been just *the modern art that is being made now.* Modern, after all, implies a difference between now and "back then": there would be no use for the expression if things remained steady and largely the same. It implies an historical structure and is stronger in this sense than a term like "most recent." "Contemporary" in its most obvious sense means simply what is happening now: contemporary art would be the art produced by our contemporaries. It would not, clearly, have passed the test of time. But it would have a certain meaning for us which even modern art which *had* passed that test would not have: it would be "our art" in some particularly intimate way. But as the history of art has internally evolved, contemporary has come to mean an art produced within a certain structure of production never, I think, seen before in the entire history of art. So just as "modern" has come to denote a style and even a period, and not just *recent* art, "contemporary" has come to designate something more than simply the art of the present moment. In my view, moreover, it designates less a period than what happens after there are no more periods in some master narrative of art, and less a style of making art than a style of using styles. Of course, there is contemporary art in styles of a kind never before seen, but I do not want to press the matter at this stage of my discussion. I merely wish to alert the reader to my effort to draw a very strong distinction between "modern" and "contemporary."[15]

I don't especially think that the distinction was sharply drawn when I first moved to New York at the end of the forties, when "our art" was modern art, and the Museum of Modern Art belonged to us in that intimate way. To be sure, a lot of art was being made which did not as yet make an appearance in that museum, but it did not seem to us then, to the degree that the matter was thought about at all, that the latter was contemporary in a way that distinguished it from modern. It seemed a wholly natural arrangement that some of this art would sooner or later find its way into "The Modern," and that this arrangement would continue indefinitely, modern art being here to stay, but not in any way forming a closed canon. It was not closed, certainly, in 1949, when *Life* magazine suggested that Jackson Pollock might just be the greatest

American painter alive. That it is closed today, in the minds of many, myself included, means that somewhere between then and now a distinction emerged between the contemporary and the modern. The contemporary was no longer modern save in the sense of "most recent," and the modern seemed more and more to have been a style that flourished from about 1880 until sometime in the 1960s. It could even be said, I suppose, that some modern art continued to be produced after that—art which remained under the stylistic imperatives of modernism—but that art would not really be contemporary, except again in the strictly temporal sense of the term. For when the stylistic profile of modern art revealed itself, it did so because contemporary art itself revealed a profile very different from modern art. This tended to put the Museum of Modern Art in a kind of bind no one had anticipated when it was the home of "our art." The bind was due to the fact that "modern" had a stylistic meaning *and* a temporal meaning. It would not have occurred to anyone that these would conflict, that contemporary art would stop being modern art. But today, as we near the end of the century, the Museum of Modern Art has to decide whether it is going to acquire contemporary art that is not modern and thus become a museum of modern art in the strictly temporal sense or whether it will continue to collect only stylistically modern art, the production of which has thinned down to perhaps a trickle, but which is no longer representative of the contemporary world.

In any case, the distinction between the modern and the contemporary did not become clear until well into the seventies and eighties. Contemporary art would for a long time continue to be "the modern art produced by our contemporaries." At some point this clearly stopped being a satisfactory way of thinking, as evidenced by the need to invent the term "postmodern." That term by itself showed the relative weakness of the term "contemporary" as conveying a style. It seemed too much a mere temporal term. But perhaps "postmodern" was too strong a term, too closely identified with a certain sector of contemporary art. In truth, the term "postmodern" really does seem to me to designate a certain style we can learn to recognize, the way we learn to recognize instances of the baroque or the rococo. It is a term something like "camp," which Susan Sontag transferred from gay idiolect into common discourse in a famous essay.[16] One can, after reading her essay, become reasonably adept at picking out camp objects, in just the same way it seems to me that one can pick out postmodern objects, with maybe some difficulties at the borderlines. But that is how it is with most concepts, stylistic or otherwise, and with recognitional capacities in human beings and in

animals. There is a valuable formula in Robert Venturi's 1966 book *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*: "elements which are hybrid rather than 'pure,' compromising rather than 'clean,' 'ambiguous' rather than 'articulated,' perverse as well as 'interesting.'"[17] One could sort works of art out using this formula, and almost certainly you would have one pile which consisted pretty homogeneously of postmodern works. It would have the works of Robert Rauschenberg, the paintings of Julian Schnabel and David Salle, and I guess the architecture of Frank Gehry. But much contemporary art would be left out—say the works of Jenny Holzer or the paintings of Robert Mangold. It has been suggested that perhaps we should simply speak of *postmodernisms*. But once we do this, we lose the recognitional ability, the capacity to sort out, and the sense that postmodernism marks a specific style. We could capitalize the word "contemporary" to cover whatever the disjunction of postmodernisms was intended to cover, but there again we would be left with the sense that we have no identifiable style, that there is nothing that does not fit. But that in fact *is* the mark of the visual arts since the end of modernism, that as a period it is defined by the lack of a stylistic unity, or at least the kind of stylistic unity which can be elevated into a criterion and used as a basis for developing a recognitional capacity, and there is in consequence no possibility of a narrative direction. That is why I prefer to call it simply *post-historical* art. Anything ever done could be done today and be an example of post-historical art. For example, an appropriationist artist like Mike Bidlo could have a show of Piero della Francescas in which the entirety of Piero's corpus was appropriated. Piero is certainly not a post-historical artist, but Bidlo is, and a skilled enough appropriationist as well, so that his Pieros and Piero's paintings could look as much alike as he cared to make them look—as much like Piero as his Morandis look like Morandis, his Picassos like Picassos, his Warhols like Warhols. Yet in an important sense, not easily believed accessible to the eye, Bidlo's Pieros would have more in common with the work of Jenny Holzer, Barbara Kruger, Cindy Sherman, and Sherrie Levine than with Piero's proper stylistic peers. So the contemporary is, from one perspective, a period of information disorder, a condition of perfect aesthetic entropy. But it is equally a period of quite perfect freedom. Today there is no longer any pale of history. Everything is permitted. But that makes the historical transition from modernism to post-historical art all the more urgent to try to understand. And that means that it is urgent to try to understand the decade of the 1970s, a period in its own way as dark as the tenth century.

The seventies was a decade in which it must have seemed that history had lost its way. It had lost its way because nothing at all like a discernible direction seemed to be emerging. If we think of 1962 as marking the end of abstract expressionism, then you had a number of styles succeeding one another at a dizzying rate: color-field painting, hard-edged abstraction, French neorealism, pop, op, minimalism, *arte povera*, and then what got to be called the New Sculpture, which included Richard Serra, Linda Benglis, Richard Tuttle, Eva Hesse, Barry Le Va, and then conceptual art. Then what seemed to be ten years of nothing much. There were sporadic movements like Pattern and Decoration, but nobody supposed they were going to generate the kind of structural stylistic energy of the immense upheavals of the sixties. Then all at once neo-expressionism arose, in the early eighties, and gave people the sense that a new direction had been found. And then again the sense of nothing much so far at least as historical directions were concerned. And then the dawning sense that the absence of direction was the defining trait of the new period, that neo-expressionism was less a direction than the illusion of one. Recently people have begun to feel that the last twenty-five years, a period of tremendous experimental productiveness in the visual arts with no single narrative direction on the basis of which others could be excluded, have stabilized as the norm.

The sixties was a paroxysm of styles, in the course of whose contention, it seems to me—and this was the basis of my speaking of the "end of art" in the first place—it gradually became clear, first through the *nouveaux realistes* and pop, that there was no special way works of art had to look in contrast to what I have designated "mere real things." To use my favorite example, nothing need mark the difference, outwardly, between Andy Warhol's *Brillo Box* and the Brillo boxes in the supermarket. And conceptual art demonstrated that there need not even be a palpable visual object for something to be a work of visual art. That meant that you could no longer teach the meaning of art by example. It meant that as far as appearances were concerned, anything could be a work of art, and it meant that if you were going to find out what art was, you had to turn from sense experience to thought. You had, in brief, to turn to philosophy.

In an interview in 1969, conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth claimed that the only role for an artist at the time "was to investigate the nature of art itself."[18] This sounds strikingly like the line in Hegel that gave support to my own views about the end of art: "Art invites us to intellectual

consideration, and that not for the purpose of creating art again, but for knowing philosophically what art is."[19] Joseph Kosuth is a philosophically literate artist to an exceptional degree, and he was one of the few artists working in the sixties and seventies who had the resources to undertake a philosophical analysis of the general nature of art. As it happened, relatively few philosophers of the time were ready to do this, just because so few of them could have imagined the possibility of art like that being produced in such dizzying disjunctiveness. The philosophical question of the nature of art, rather, was something that arose within art when artists pressed against boundary after boundary, and found that the boundaries all gave way. All typical sixties artists had that vivid sense of boundaries, each drawn by some tacit philosophical definition of art, and their erasure has left us the situation we find ourselves in today. Such a world is not, by the way, the easiest kind of world to live in, which explains why the political reality of the present seems to consist in drawing and defining boundaries wherever possible. Nevertheless, it was only in the 1960s that a serious philosophy of art became a possibility, one which did not base itself on purely local facts—for example, that art was essentially painting and sculpture. Only when it became clear that anything could be a work of art could one think, philosophically, about art. Only then did the possibility arise of a true general philosophy of art. But what of art itself? What of "Art after Philosophy"—to use the title of Kosuth's essay—which, to make the point, may indeed itself be a work of art? What of art after the end of art, where, by "after the end of art," I mean "after the ascent to philosophical self-reflection?" Where an artwork can consist of any object whatsoever that is enfranchised as art, raising the question "Why am I a work of art?"

With that question the history of modernism was over. It was over because modernism was too local and too materialist, concerned as it was with shape, surface, pigment, and the like as defining painting in its purity. Modernist painting, as Greenberg defined it, could only ask the question "What is it that I have and that no other kind of art can have?" And sculpture asked itself the same kind of question. But what this gives us is no general picture of what art is, only what some of the arts, perhaps historically the most important arts, essentially were. What question does Warhol's *Brillo Box* ask, or one of Beuys's multiples of a square of chocolate stuck to a piece of paper? What Greenberg had done was to identify a certain local style of abstraction with the philosophical truth of art, when the philosophical truth, once found, would have to be consistent with art appearing every possible way.

What I know is that the paroxysms subsided in the seventies, as if it had been the internal intention of the history of art to arrive at a philosophical conception of itself, and that the last stages of that history were somehow the hardest to work through, as art sought to break through the toughest outer membranes, and so itself became, in the process, paroxysmal. But now that the integument was broken, now that at least the glimpse of self-consciousness had been attained, that history was finished. It had delivered itself of a burden it could now hand over to the philosophers to carry. And artists, liberated from the burden of history, were free to make art in whatever way they wished, for any purposes they wished, or for no purposes at all. That is the mark of contemporary art, and small wonder, in contrast with modernism, there is no such thing as a contemporary style.

I think the ending of modernism did not happen a moment too soon. For the art world of the seventies was filled with artists bent on agendas having nothing much to do with pressing the limits of art or extending the history of art, but with putting art at the service of this or that personal or political goal. And artists had the whole inheritance of art history to work with, including the history of the avant-garde, which placed at the disposition of the artist all those marvelous possibilities the avant-garde had worked out and which modernism did its utmost to repress. In my own view, the major artistic contribution of the decade was the emergence of the appropriated image—the taking over of images with established meaning and identity and giving them a fresh meaning and identity. Since any image could be appropriated, it immediately follows that there could be no perceptual stylistic uniformity among appropriated images. One of my favorite examples is Kevin Roche's 1992 addition to the Jewish Museum in New York. The old Jewish Museum was just the Warburg mansion on Fifth Avenue, with its baronial associations and connotations of the Gilded Age. Kevin Roche brilliantly decided to duplicate the old Jewish Museum, and the eye is unable to tell a single difference. But the building belongs to the postmodern age perfectly: a postmodern architect can design a building which looks like a Mannerist chateau. It was an architectural solution that had to have pleased the most conservative and nostalgic trustee, as well as the most avant-garde and contemporary one, but of course for quite different reasons.

These artistic possibilities are but realizations and applications of the immense philosophical contribution of the 1960s to art's self-understanding: that artworks can be imagined, or in fact produced, which look exactly like mere real things which have no claim to the status of art at all,

for the latter entails that you can't define artworks in terms of some particular visual properties they may have. There is no a priori constraint on how works of art must look—they can look like anything at all. This alone finished the modernist agenda, but it had to wreak havoc with the central institution of the art world, namely the museum of fine arts. The first generation of great American museums took it for granted that its contents would be treasures of great visual beauty and that visitors would enter the tresorium to be in the presence of spiritual truth of which the visually beautiful was the metaphor. The second generation, of which the Museum of Modern Art is the great exemplar, assumed that the work of art is to be defined in formalist terms and appreciated under the perspective of a narrative not remarkably different from the one Greenberg advanced: a linear progressive history the visitor would work through, learning to appreciate the work of art together with learning the historical sequences. Nothing was to distract from the formal visual interest of the works themselves. Even picture frames were eliminated as distractions, or perhaps as concessions to an illusionistic agenda modernism had outgrown: paintings were no longer windows onto imagined scenes, but objects in their own right, even if they had been conceived as windows. It is, incidentally, easy to understand why surrealism has to be repressed in the light of such an experience: it would be too distracting, not to mention irrelevantly illusionistic. Works had plenty of space to themselves in galleries emptied of everything but those works.

In any case, with the philosophical coming of age of art, visuality drops away, as little relevant to the essence of art as beauty proved to have been. For art to exist there does not even have to be an object to look at, and if there are objects in a gallery, they can look like anything at all. Three attacks on established museums are worth noting in this respect. When Kirk Varnedoe and Adam Gopnick admitted pop into the galleries of the Museum of Modern Art in the "High and Low" show of 1990, there was a critical conflagration. When Thomas Krens deaccessioned a Kandinsky and a Chagall to acquire part of the Panza collection, a good bit of it conceptual and much of which did not exist as objects, there was a critical conflagration. And when, in 1993, the Whitney compiled a Biennial consisting of works that really typified the way the art world had gone after the end of art, the outpouring of critical hostility—in which I am afraid I shared—was by an inestimable factor unprecedented in the history of Biennial polemics. Whatever art is, it is no longer something primarily to be looked at. Stared at, perhaps, but not primarily looked at. What, in view of this, is a post-historical museum to do, or to be?

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 tresorium 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 Modernita* (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 perpective 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 cheiropoieton* ('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 Brookyn Museum* (New York: New Press, 1992).

10. As the title of a collection of essays by diverse philosophical hands, each representing an aspect of the somewhat massive shift from question of substance to questions of linguistic representation which marked twentieth-century *analytical* philosophy, see Richard Rorty, *The Linguistic Turn: Recent Essays in Philosophical Method* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967). Rorty, of course, made a counterlinguistic turn not long after this publication.

11. Noam Chomsky, *Cartesian Linguistics: A Chapter in the History of Rationalist Thought* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966).

12. Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, ed. John O'Brian, vol. 4: *Modernism with a Vengeance: 1957–1969*, 85–93. All citations in the present paragraph are from the same text.

13. Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993); Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993).

14. Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, 4:xiii.

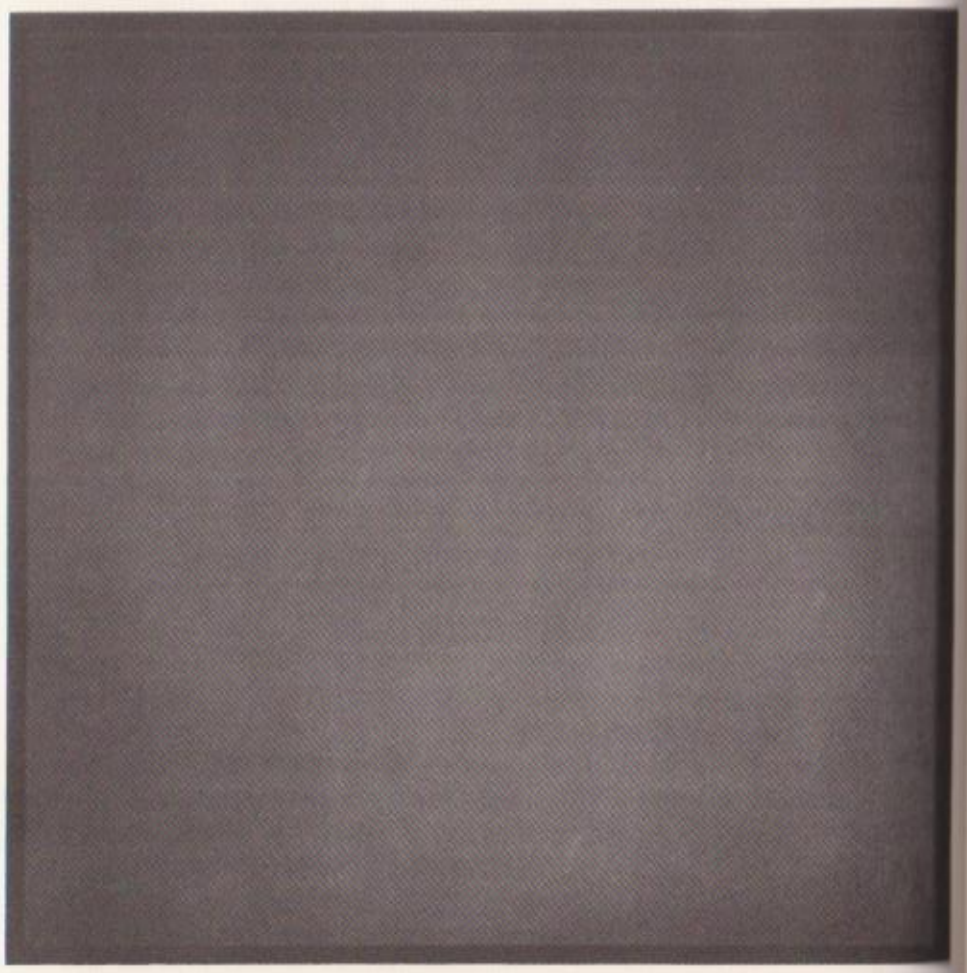
15. "The problem of the status of modern over against contemporary art demands the general attention of the discipline—whether one believes in postmodernism or not" (Hans Belting, *The End of the History of Art?*, xii).

16. Susan Sontag, "Notes on Camp" in *Against Interpretation* (New York: Laurel Books, 1966), 277–93.

17. Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, 2d ed. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1977).

18. Joseph Kosuth, "Art after Philosophy," *Studio International* (October 1969), reprinted in Ursula Meyer, *Conceptual Art* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1972), 155–70.

19. G. W. F Hegel, *Hegel's Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 11.



BLACK PAINTING (1962) BY AD REINHARDT. OIL ON CANVAS. 60" × 60". PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF PACEWILDENSTEIN. PHOTO CREDIT: ELLEN PAGE WILSON.

CHAPTER TWO

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 *Irises* 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).[1] 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?[2] 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 *Demoiselles d'Avignon*? Or with his little paper sculpture of a guitar in 1912, as Yves-Alain Bois claims in his book *Painting as Model*?[3] 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 activities 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.[4] 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.[5] 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."[6] 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."[7] In 1922, the Berlin dadaists celebrated the end of all art except the *Maschinekunst* 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.[8] 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.
PHOTO CREDIT: JOHN BLAZEJEWSKI.

"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."[9] "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."[10] "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 Francoise Gilot, that the cubists "abandoned color, emotion, sensation, and everything that had been introduced into painting by the Impressionists."[11] 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—*Artforum*, *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."[12] 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,"[13] 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.[14]

"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?[15]

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."[16] 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.[17] By history, of course, he meant the grand narrative Hegel lays out in his book on the philosophy of history, 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."[18] 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 momentously different, philosophical categories.[19] 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."[20] 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."[21] 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.

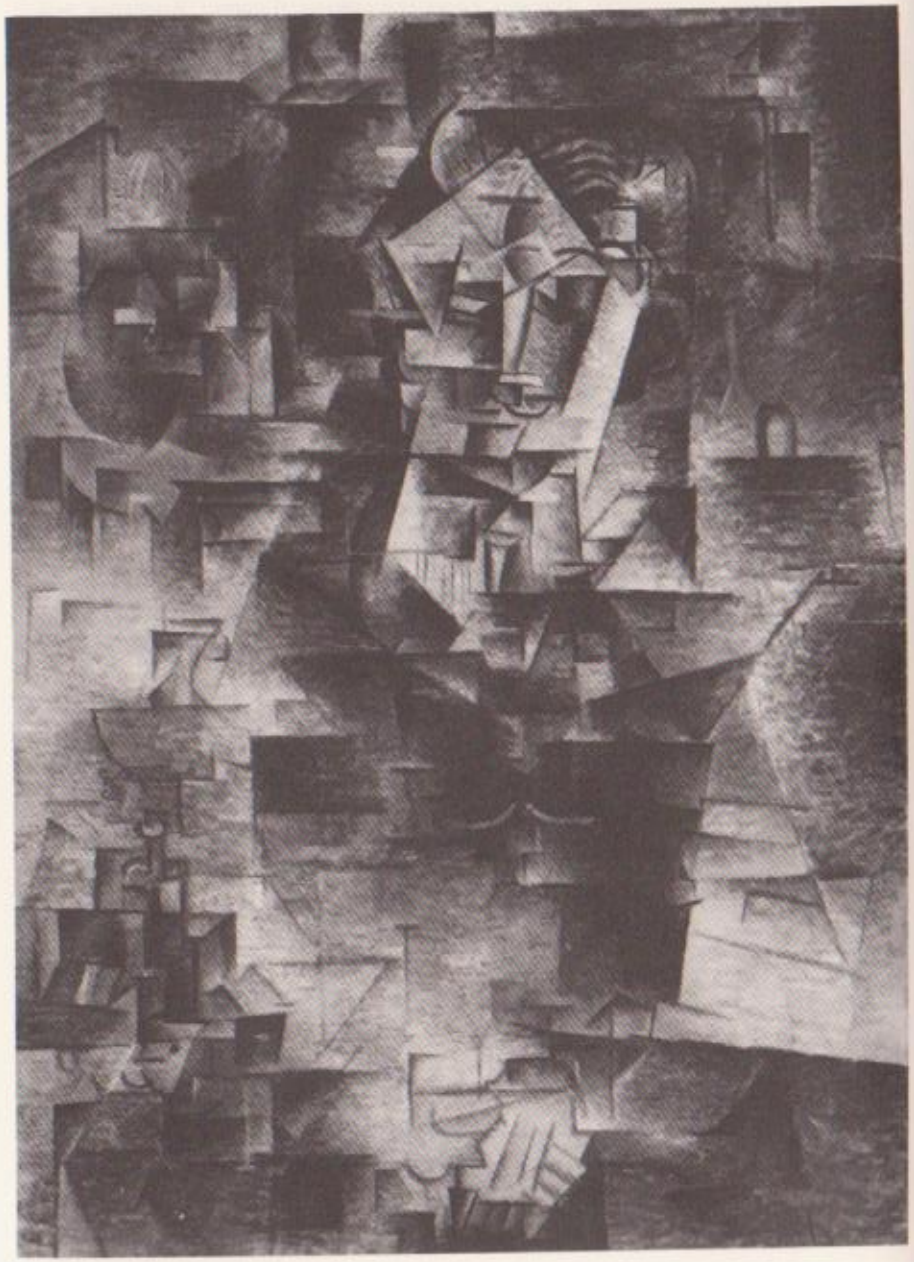
17. Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, 2d ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), 436n; trans. J. H. Nichols, Jr., *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* (New York: Basic Books, 1969), 160ff.

18. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1933), proposition 4.003. The abusive "pseudo-question" was standard in logical positivist discourse, as was "pseudo-statement," which appears in Rudolph Carnap's "The Elimination of Metaphysics through Logical Analysis of Language," trans. Arthur Pap, in A. J. Ayer, *Logical Positivism* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1959), 61 and passim.

19. I develop this concept at length in my *Connections to the World: The Basic Concepts of Philosophy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989).

20. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "The German Ideology," in Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), 160.

21. G. R. Swenson, "What Is Pop Art?: Answers from 8 Painters, Part 1," *Art News* 64 (November 1963), 26.



DANIEL-HENRY KAHNWEILER (1910) BY PABLO PICASSO, SPANISH, 1881–1973. OIL ON CANVAS, 100.6 × 72.8 CM. GIFT OF MRS. GILBERT W. CHAPMAN IN MEMORY OF CHARLES B. GOODSPEED, 1948.561. PHOTOGRAPH © 1996, THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

CHAPTER THREE

Master Narratives and Critical Principles

THE STORY of anyone's life is never the simple unfolding through time of an internally programmed narrative, even if it exhibits what one might call a standard episodic structure—for example, Shakespeare's "seven ages of man." What makes biography worth writing and reading are the accidents, the intersection of crossed causal histories that produce events not strictly predictable from either chain. Thus we say, "As chance would have it, I did not go out for lunch that day," or, "On an impulse, I decided to stop into the bookstore on my way downtown." And in both cases something happened of immense importance to the speaker's life which might never have taken place and never even have been imagined. Now someone might ask me to put next to my story of how I came to be an art critic the story of how, in my view, art came to an end, and then go on to ask how, if the former story seems to pivot on an element of utter chance and complete unpredictability, at least from within the boundaries of my life-story considered internally, I can say with any confidence that the story of art is over and that no matter of chance is possible which might lead to a continuation of the story of art along lines now as unpredictable as my own story proved to be. The objection might go further and insist that art is almost paradigmatically unpredictable, the very embodiment of human freedom and creativity. Picasso painted *La famille des saltimbanques* in 1905, but who, including Picasso himself, could have believed that just over a year later he would do something as strictly unimaginable in 1905 as *Les demoiselles d'Avignon* was to be? Who in 1955, when abstract expressionism was at the flood, could have predicted it would be fundamentally over as a movement in 1962 and replaced by something, pop art, which, while imaginable in one sense because its objects were so familiar, would not have then been imaginable *as art*? For that matter, who, in the time of Giotto, could have predicted the art of Masaccio? Certainly, Giotto could not have, or, one

feels, he would already have found a way of using what we credit Masaccio with having discovered. Indeed, if he had been able to predict the perspectival devices so central to Masaccio's representation of the world and *not* have used them, then we would be obliged to see his own work very differently from the way we in fact see it. It would now exemplify an artistic choice, and involve an artistic rejection. Giotto's case would parallel that of the Chinese artists of the Qing dynasty who knew about perspective from the missionary painter Father Castiglione, but who felt that there was no room in their artistic agenda for its assimilation. But this meant that the structure of Chinese paintings, now a matter of choice since there were clear, known alternatives to it, had become a deliberate manner.

After all, perspective would not be the kind of thing one could predict would be discovered without ipso facto knowing how to do it. There was a time when someone could predict that human beings would someday be able to land on the moon, without knowing what technologies would be required in order to do this. With perspective, by contrast, just knowing what one was predicting would be to have it already available if one cared to use it. As Confucius cleverly observes, just to want to be moral is already to have taken the first step.[1] Nor would one be able, I think, to say that like the Chinese, Giotto would have had no use for the discovery, not if we are at all right in thinking of him as "the father of naturalism." Had someone in the days of high abstract expressionism predicted that one day artists would be painting soup cans and Brillo boxes, the knowledge would not have been usable at the time the prediction was made, just because there really was no room, or in any case not a great deal of room, for a precocious assimilation into the art of the New York School of the strategies of pop. Motherwell, to be sure, used torn labels from Gauloises packages in his collages at least as early as 1956, but I would hesitate classing this as anticipatory pop: it is, rather, late *Merzbild*, and belongs to an altogether different artistic impulse. Motherwell, aesthetically and sentimentally, loved Gauloise *bleu*, but he had little use for pop art when it emerged: he did not see it as fulfilling an agenda he had begun, nor did the practitioners of pop regard him as a predecessor. David Hockney's early paintings, which Lawrence Alloway had specifically in mind when he coined the expression "pop art," have a certain outward resemblance to the Gauloise collages of Motherwell, since he uses the Alka-Selzer logo (probably as a jokey emblem for heartburn and hence the burning heart he pictures in "The Most Beautiful Boy"), but they belong to different historical structures and carry different meanings

and fulfill different intentions. The artist who calls himself simply "Jess" turns up in almost every history of pop art because of his altered Dick Tracy comic strips, but when we see these in the context of his program of collages, we recognize that his impulses were as remote from pop as Motherwell's were. One cannot establish historical affinities on the basis of resemblances, and it is one task of these lectures to identify something of the logic of the kinds of historical structures to which I am tacitly appealing in making such claims.

I shall be obliged to do that in any case, if only for reasons of systematic consistency. The claim that art has ended really is a claim about the future—not that there will be no more art, but that such art as there will be is art after the end of art, or, as I have already termed it, *post-historical art*. But in my first serious philosophical work, *Analytical Philosophy of History*, I argued that it was certain claims about the future which render what I there termed substantive philosophies of history illegitimate. Those claims tended to treat history as if it were an objective story, only part of which has been disclosed, and that the substantive philosopher of history, as it were, claims some kind of cognitive privilege—claims to have looked at the end of the book to see how it is going to come out, like readers unable to stand the suspense. This of course is prophecy rather than prediction, as Sir Karl Popper so usefully distinguished these for us—and of course the prophet himself would acknowledge the distinction, without at all feeling defeated by it: his claim is based not on some grounded prediction of things to come, but on a revelation of how they will end. Is my claim about the future a prediction? Or a prophecy? And what makes it legitimate if substantative philosophies of history are illegitimate? Well, I must say that I am likely today to take a more charitable view of substantive philosophies of history than I would have done in 1965, when my book was written in the late stages of high positivism. But that is because it has seemed more and more plausible to me that there are objective historical structures—objective in the sense that, to use the example just cited, there was no objective possibility that the works which Motherwell's Gauloises collages later resembled could have fit into the historical structure to which those works of Motherwell belonged, and no way in which the latter could have fit into the historical structures defined by pop. The earlier historical structure defined a closed range of possibilities from which the possibilities of the latter structure were excluded. So it is as if the former structure were replaced by the latter structure—as if a range of possibilities opened up for which there had been no room in the earlier structure, and hence, again, as if there were

a kind of discontinuity between the two structures, a discontinuity sufficiently abrupt that someone living through the change from the one to the other might feel that a world—in our case an art world—had come to an end and another one begun. And that means, philosophically, there is a problem in analyzing both historical continuity and historical discontinuity. In the first instance there is the problem of what is continuous in a period of continuity, which immediately yields an answer to the question what changes when discontinuity takes place. One natural candidate for the answer would be *a style*. This takes me well ahead of my story, but in the loose and tentative way in which I have introduced the idea, one mark of art having ended is that there should no longer be an objective structure with a defining style, or, if you prefer, that there should be an objective historical structure in which *everything is possible*. If everything is possible, nothing is historically mandated: one thing is, so to say, as good as another. And that in my view is the objective condition for post-historical art. There is nothing to be replaced: one can, to return to Warhol's phrase, be an abstract expressionist, or a pop artist, or a realist, or anything else. And that is pretty much the end-of-history condition Marx and Engels described in *The German Ideology*.

In the foreword to the sixth edition of his *Principles of Art History* of 1922, Heinrich Wölfflin wrote:

> Even the most original talent cannot proceed beyond certain limits which are fixed for it by the date of its birth. Not everything is possible at all times, and certain thoughts can only be thought at certain stages of the development.[2]

Strikingly, Matisse said very much the same thing in one of his conversations with Teriade:

> The arts have a development which comes not only from the individual, but also from an accumulated strength, the civilization, which precedes us. One cannot just do anything. A talented artist cannot do just as he likes. If he used only his talents, he would not exist. We are not the masters of what we produce. It is imposed upon us.[3]

This is no less true today than it ever was: we live and produce within the horizon of a closed historical period. Some of the limitations are technical: one cannot produce easel paintings before the easel painting is invented. One cannot make computer art before the invention of the computer. In speaking of the end of art, I am not foreclosing the possibility of undreamt of technologies that will put at the disposition of artists the

same range of creative possibilities the easel painting and the computer exemplify. How, seriously, could I? And some of the limitations are stylistic: it was possible, in 1890, if you were an African artist, to produce masks and fetishes in forms not available to the European artist just because, in Wölfflin's sense, it was not possible to be a European artist if one produced masks and fetishes. One had to fit into a closed system of possibilities, different from the possibilities which excluded an African artist from painting easel pictures, just because the technology was unknown, say, to the Baule in 1890. Today one can be an American or a European artist who makes masks and fetishes, as one can be an African artist who paints perspective landscapes. In the sense that certain things were not possible for a European or an African in 1890, everything is possible today. Still, we are locked into history. We cannot have the system of exclusionary beliefs that prevented artists in Europe from making masks and fetishes. We cannot be such a European for the same reason that such a European could not have been an African. But there are no forms today that are forbidden us. All that is forbidden us is that they should have the kind of meaning they had when they were forbidden us. But these are limitations well lost. It is no limit on the idea of freedom that we are not free to be prisoners!

In both conditions—the end of history and the end of art—there is a state of freedom in two senses of the term. Human beings, in Marx and Engels's picture, are free to be what they want to be, and they are free from a certain historical agony which mandates that at any given stage there is an authentic and an inauthentic mode of being, the former pointing to the future and the latter to the past. And artists, at the end of art, are similarly free to be what they want to be—are free to be anything or even to be everything, as with certain artists I take to exemplfy the present moment in art to perfection: Sigmar Polke, Gerhard Richter, Rosemarie Trockel, Bruce Nauman, Sherrie Levine, Komar and Melamid, and any number of others who refuse to be bounded by the limits of a genre—who have rejected a certain ideal of *purity*. They would correspond in a way to academics who refuse to be limited by a parallel sense of disciplinary purity, and whose work takes them across the lines professionalism has drawn. And artists are free as well from the kind of historical prejudice pitching some historically favored form—abstraction in the most developed philosophy of art history—against a form which belongs to an outworn past—naturalism, say. They no longer need to believe, like Mondrian, that there is only one true form for art to practice at any given moment. The difference between the Marxian

prophecy and mine is that the condition of unalienated human life Marx but sketched lay in some distant historical future. Mine is what one might call a *prophecy of the present*. It sees the present, so to speak, as revealed. My only claim on the future is that this *is* the end state, the conclusion of an historical process whose structure it all at once renders visible. So it is, after all, very like looking at the end of the story to see how it came out, with this difference: we have not skipped anything, but have lived through the historical sequences which led us here: that this is the end of the story of art. And in particular what is required is some demonstration that this really is an end state and not a stage on the way to a future as yet undreamt of. This returns me to the matter of objective historical structures, with their ranges of possibilities and impossibilities, and the concomitant matter of style.

I am going to use the word style in a somewhat eccentric way in order to get my story told. I shall use it this way: a style is a set of properties a body of artworks share, but which is further taken to define, philosophically, what it is to be an artwork. For an extended historical period, it was taken for granted that to be an artwork, especially a work of visual art, was to be mimetic: to imitate an external reality, actual or possible. No doubt this was but a necessary condition, inasmuch as there were mimetic representations—mirror images, shadows, reflections in water, the imprinted face of Jesus on Veronica's veil, the imprinted body of Christ on the Shroud of Turin, simple snapshots after the invention of photography, and doubtless many others not worth going into here—which were not artworks. "Imitation" was the standard philosophical answer to the question of what art is from Aristotle down into the nineteenth century, and well into the twentieth. Hence mimesis, on my use, is a style. In the period in which it defined what it was to be art, there was no other style in this sense. Mimesis became *a* style with the advent of modernism, or, as I termed it, the Age of Manifestos. Each of these manifestos sought to find a new philosophical definition of art, so cast as to capture the art in question. And, because there were so many definitions in this age, it was inevitable that these should be urged with a certain dogmatism and intolerance. Mimesis did not become ideologized until the age of modernism, but certainly those who after that subscribed to it were prepared to dismiss *as not art at all* the paradigmatic works of modernism. The Age of Manifestos, as I see it, came to an end when philosophy was separated from style because the true form of the question "What is art?" emerged. That took place roughly around 1964. Once it was determined that a philosophical definition of art entails no stylistic imperative whatever,

so that anything can be a work of art, we enter what I am terming the post-historical period.

Thus sketched, the master narrative of the history of art—in the West but by the end not in the West alone—is that there is an era of imitation, followed by an era of ideology, followed by our post-historical era in which, with qualification, anything goes. Each of these periods is characterized by a different structure of art criticism. Art criticism in the traditional or mimetic period was based on visual truth. The structure of art criticism in the age of ideology is the one from which I sought to disengage myself: it characteristically grounded its own philosophical idea of what art is on an exclusionary distinction between the art it accepted (the true) and everything else as not really art. The post-historical period is marked by the parting of the ways between philosophy and art, which means that art criticism in the post-historical period must be as pluralistic as post-historical art itself. It is quite striking that this tripartite periodization corresponds, almost uncannily, to Hegel's stupendous political narrative in which, first only one was free, then only some were free, then, finally, in his own era, everyone was free. In our narrative, at first only mimesis was art, then several things were art but each tried to extinquish its competitors, and then, finally, it became apparent that there were no stylistic or philosophical constraints. There is no special way works of art have to be. And that is the present and, I should say, the final moment in the master narrative. It is the end of the story.

Often, since my first reflections on the end of art were published, philosophers have sought to counter the thesis by observing, on whatever empirical grounds, that the propensity of human beings to express themselves through making art is inextinguishable, and that, in that sense, art is "everlasting."[4] There would be no incompatibility between the thesis of the everlastingness of art and the thesis that art has ended, for the latter is a story about stories: the story of art in the West is in part the story of different stories rather than merely the sequential appearance of works of art over time. It is quite possible that human beings will always express joy or loss through dance and song, that they will ornament themselves and their dwellings, or that they will always mark with rituals that verge on art the momentous stages of life—birth, the passing into adulthood, marriage, and death. And it may perhaps be true that with any degree of the division of labor, there will emerge some who will provide these services because of natural aptitude and become the group's artists. There may even be theories of art to account for the importance art is perceived to have in the common course of things. I have nothing to say

about this at all. Mine is not a theory of the "origins of the artwork," to use Heidegger's phrase, but of the historical structures, the narrative templates, so to speak, within which artworks are organized over time, and which enter into the motivations and attitudes of artists and audience who have internalized these templates. My thesis is, rather, akin (but only akin) to that of a spokesman for the so-called Generation X, who said of his peers that "they have no narrative structure to their lives," and then, after listing some of these, went on to say, "All these narrative templates have eroded."[5] The narrative structures of traditional representational art, and then of modernist art, have eroded in at least the sense that they have no longer an active role to play in the production of contemporary art. Art today is produced in an art world unstructured by any master narrative at all, though of course there remains in artistic consciousness the knowledge of the narratives that no longer apply. Artists today are at the end of a history in which those narrative structures have played a role, and thus they have to be distinguished from the artists I have somewhat sentimentally imagined who first emerge as specialists in the early division of labor which enable gifted individuals to take on the aesthetic responsibilities of society: to dance at marriages, sing at funerals, and decorate the spaces in which the members of the tribe commune with spirits.

With this, I return to my own narrative, and begin with the first great story of art, namely Vasari's, according to which art was the progressive conquest of visual appearances, of mastering strategies through which the effect of the visual surfaces of the world on the visual system of human beings could be replicated by means of painting surfaces that affect the visual system in just the way the world's visual surfaces affect it. It was this story that Sir Ernst Gombrich sought to explain in his important text *Art and Illusion*. Now Vasari's book was titled the *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, but in terms of its epic theme, it is the painters who create the history. Architecture is not easily regarded as a mimetic art, and though a case could be made that Renaissance architecture sought to emulate classical architecture, this is the wrong kind of imitation to bring architecture and painting into parallel with one another. That kind of imitation, rather, would mark the history of painting in China, where artists sought to imitate the ancients, rather than, as in the Renaissance, to advance beyond the ancients by making better pictures, judged by the criterion of better matches to an external reality. It is painting, by and large, of which Gombrich's model is true, the model of "making and matching," which explains progress in

terms of doing better than one's predecessors what those predecessors themselves sought to do, namely "capture" reality on a painted or drawn surface. That model serves not at all for architecture, though it could conceivably serve for sculpture (Cellini argued that drawing consists in showing the boundaries of sculpture, and that painting is but colored drawing, so that sculpture is the basic agency of progress).[6] Still, sculpture already has what painting has to achieve, namely, objects in real or physical space as well as real lights and shadows. But there is still a sculptural need for discoveries like perspective and chiaroscuro, and even foreshortening, as well as for physiognomy, broadly speaking, and anatomy, once the imperative of illusion applies. Taking Gombrich's account at face value, the progress is possible mainly because there are two components, one manual and the other perceptual. It is the latter which reveals discrepancies in representational adequacy, and it is important to take account of the fact that perception itself undergoes relatively little change over the period in question—let's say from about 1300 to 1900—otherwise there would be no possibility of progress: the progress has to be in representations that look more and more like visual reality, and hence is a matter of painters handing down their craft from generation to generation. We don't in that sense hand down how we have learned to see, because we haven't learned anything new to hand down: the perceptual system is importantly impenetrable to cognition. Of course, we certainly learn new things about what we are seeing, and we learn to see new things, without this in any way entailing that seeing itself is something subject to change, for seeing is a lot more like digesting than it is like believing. Hence the thesis often attributed to Gombrich, namely that "perception has a history," needs to be carefully distinguished from his true topic, namely, "why representational art has a history" (which he sometimes elides into "why art has a history").[7] As I see it, the history of the art of painting is the history of the art of making, which in the Vasarian period was pretty much governed by perceptual truth, which did not change from one end of the period to the other, though the art of making clearly did.

Gombrich sees the history of art as rather parallel to the history of science as construed by his colleague and countryman Sir Karl Popper. Popper's view of science is that it involves the rejection of one theory in favor of another because the first has been falsified, and the sequence of conjectures, falsifications, and further conjectures is very like Gombrich's sequence of representational schemata rejected in favor of more adequate ones on the grounds of mismatch with visual reality. And just as

science does not derive its hypotheses by induction from observations, but by a creative intuition which is *then* checked against observation,[8] so the artist, Gombrich contends, "begins not with his visual impression but with his idea or concept."[9] And this is checked against reality and adjusted step by step until a satisfactory match is found. "Making comes before matching"[10] in pictorial representation as theory comes before observation in scientific representation. Both theorists are concerned with what Popper speaks of as the "growth" of knowledge, and hence with an historical process representable via a narrative.

But the difference is that the representations in science themselves progress, themselves get increasingly adequate, not by virtue of matching perceived reality—to which they may not even finally be analogous—but by passing the falsification tests. Gombrich at one point speaks of the pictures on the sides of cereal boxes, which would have caused Giotto's contemporaries to gasp, so far would they have been beyond the power of the best artists of the time to capture them.[11] It would be like the Virgin taking pity on Saint Luke and manifesting herself on the panel on which he had at best been able to set down a wooden "likeness." How to *make* an image that convincing was something Saint Luke could not have known. But he knew that it was convincing: his eyes did not have to be taught *that*. He lacked the art of convincing image making. But he had as much of the "art" of perception as he or anyone would ever have. Gombrich himself cites a wonderful piece of perceptual wisdom from Plato's *The Greater Hippias*: "our sculptors say that if Daidalos were born today and created such works as those that made him famous, he would be laughed at."[12] The same people who laughed at the reincarnate Daidalos would laugh at someone who found his archaic effigies convincing. The assumption would be that such a person had not yet seen Praxiteles's work, not that his perceptual system was as undeveloped as Daidalos's mimetic skills; shown both artists' works, anyone would see the difference immediately, and without special education. There is nothing in science, I think, that plays the role the visual system does in art. So in science there is not just a progress in the art. There is a progress in the representations, which need not, except at the peripheries, connect with experience. The world science tells us about is not at all required to *match* the world our senses reveal. But that was the entire point of the history of Vasarian painting.

Painting as an art, then, to use the expression of my colleague Richard Wollheim, at least under the Vasarian narrative, is a system of learned strategies for making more and more adequate representations, judged

by unchanged perceptual criteria. It was this model of painting that immediately led people to say of modernist painting that it was not art. It really wasn't, as the term had been understood. And the spontaneous response was that modernist painters really had not mastered art—did not know how to paint—or that they did know how to paint but were addressing an unfamiliar visual reality. This was one of the responses to abstract painting, and interestingly it was one congenial to Gombrich: one had to imagine a new visual reality for the painting to represent. These efforts testify to the great power of the Vasarian model, and of course, of its overall mimetic premises. They served to preserve the model, very much as if it were a scientific model one could not readily imagine abandoning, and ways then had to be found for explaining away art that failed to fit it. It is striking that these efforts were in the form of criticisms, and it is worth dwelling briefly on the kind of critical principles the Vasarian model in fact generates.

For Vasari, critical praise consists in claiming, sometimes against all evidence, that the painting in question so exactly resembled reality that one would believe one was in the presence of reality. Of the *Mona Lisa*, for example—a painting there is strong reason for believing he never saw—he wrote, "The nose, with its beautiful and delicately roseate nostrils, might be easily believed to be alive . . . the carnation of the cheeks does not appear to be painted, but truly of flesh and blood; he who looks earnestly at the pit of the throat cannot but believe he sees the beating of the pulses."[13] But Vasari used the same formula in praising Giotto: "Among other figures," he writes of the fresco cycle in Assisi, "that of a thirsty man stooping to drink from a fountain, is worthy of perpetual praise: the eager desire with which he bends toward the water is portrayed with such marvelous effect, that one could almost believe him to be a living man actually drinking."[14] Dispraise, in the nature of the case, is representation one would *not* be disposed to believe was actual rather than depicted. And usually that sort of dispraise would be available only when the art of painting had been advanced beyond that which prevailed when a given earlier level was in force. I have often used Guercino's marvelous painting of Saint Luke displaying his own painting of the Mother and Holy Child to make this kind of point. Guercino was enough of an art historian to know that representations have a history, and that Saint Luke could hardly have known how to paint with the exact verisimilitude available to a seventeenth-century master. So the image Saint Luke displays so proudly is executed by Guercino in what he takes to be an archaic style. Wooden as the image is, an angel in Guercino's painting

is sufficiently compelled by its realism—laughable, almost, when compared with that of Guercino himself—that he (or she) reflexively reaches out to touch the Virgin's garment. But if the angel could step outside the painting and contrast what Saint Luke is capable of with what Guercino is, she (or he) would know the limits under which an artist of Saint Luke's time had to struggle to get a likeness, so far as this was at all relevant to an artist then working. Hans Belting, for example, has instructed us in how little relevant to the power of images of the Virgin representational adequacy actually was. But in any case, there would be scant inclination, from the stage occupied by Guercino, to say of the Virgin as depicted by Saint Luke that you could almost see her breathing (as my brother recently said of a cheerleader by Duane Hanson he encountered in a gallery). So Vasari is being extremely charitable to Giotto, or Giotto has in the instances at hand transcended the schemata that defined his stage in the progressive history of painting.

But the criticisms I have indicated—that the artists did not know how to paint, or that they were trying to shock—are of a different order. They are defending rather than applying the Vasarian model since there is no other model at hand. The artists are not trying to paint and failing. They are violating the rules of painting altogether, and it is surely the mark of something profound having happened in the history of art that Vasari would never have had occasion to deal with issues of this sort. Nor would anyone, really, before the advent of modernism have had occasion to do so.

What interests me more than these efforts to save a narrative are endeavors to tell a new kind of story in acknowledgment, one might say, of a new kind of reality. Roger Fry's preface to the 1912 catalog of the Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition at the Grafton Galleries London, begins: "When the first Post-Impressionist Exhibition was held in these galleries two years ago the English public became for the first time fully aware of the existence of a new movement in art, a movement which was the more disconcerting in that it was no mere variation upon accepted themes but implied a reconsideration of the very purpose and aim as well as the methods of pictorial and plastic art." Fry noted that "accusations of clumsiness and incapacity were freely made" by a public "which had come to admire above everything in a picture the skill with which the artist produced illusion [and which] resented an art in which such skill was completely subordinated to the direct expression of feeling." And it was his view, in 1912, that the artists shown were "attempting to express by pictorial and plastic form certain spiritual experiences." Thus the artists "do not seek to imitate form, but to create form; not to imitate life, but to find an equivalent for life. . . . In fact, they aim not at illusion but at reality."[15] Under such claims it was important, typically, to establish two things: that the artist could draw, if he cared to, so that the work in question was not *faute de mieux*, and that the artist was *sincere*. These were issues of a kind which had no special application in the previous six hundred years of Western art. And beyond that Fry had to find a way of enfranchising the work of Rousseau, who clearly could not draw in the accepted sense of the term but who had gained the great admiration of artists who could.

It is impossible too greatly to admire Fry for endeavoring to find a new model for art which clearly was not endeavoring to prolong the Vasarian history, but it is no less to his credit that he saw it necessary to rise to a level of generality which would enable him to survey and to respond critically to art of both periods, and even to suggest that there were principles that the new art embodied more perfectly than the kind of art that had, irrelevantly it turns out, been admired for the kinds of reasons Vasari gave. Toward the end of his text, Fry characterizes the new French art as "markedly classical." By this he means that it answers to "a disinterestedly passionate state of mind." And one cannot help hearing the echo of Kantian aesthetics here, all the more so in that this "disembodied functioning of the spirit," as he puts it, is "completely free and pure, with no tincture of practicality." This "classical spirit is common to the best French work of all periods from the twelfth century," Fry claims, shifting the center of artistic gravity away from Italy. "Though no one could find direct reminiscences of a Nicholas Poussin here, his spirit seems to revive in the work of artists like Derain." It is clear that Fry's critical program will differ from Vasari's—it will be formalist, spiritual, aesthetic. But like Vasari, a single critical approach will apply throughout the history of art. It will be superior to Vasari's in that Fry's aestheticism can, as Vasari's illusionism cannot, accommodate the art of the French post-impressionists. Fry has a story, and possibly a progressive story to tell: the French post-impressionists may, especially in view of the nonnarrative character of their art, consisting as it did primarily of landscapes and still lifes, have found a way of presenting the classical spirit in its purest form. And the history of art is the slow stripping away of whatever is inessential until what is essential to art shines forth for those prepared to receive it. Fry is not hesitant, however, but eager to identify classicism, which defines the art he especially admires, with the essence of art itself, leaving it a serious problem what to do with art that is *not* "French." He is able

to explain how the art he admires is art despite its not doing what had been expected of art, by insisting that what had been expected of art was in the end not essential to art at all. But that leaves pretty much everything in the Vasarian epic cast into outer darkness unless it can somehow be thought of as "classical." Unless, that is, it is thoroughly aestheticized. Whatever the case, Fry's was a powerful counterresponse to the effort to discount modern art as inept or perverse, and was thus among the first theories to try to connect modernism with traditional art under a new narrative.

The inessentiality of imitation is argued for in Fry's catalog essay through the fact that a work of visual art is thinkable which does not imitate at all. Kandinsky is credited with having invented abstract art in 1910, two years before the exhibition at the Grafton Galleries, and while it is difficult to know with what velocity art news traveled in those years, Fry uses the term "abstraction." He speaks, abstractly as it were, of the "attempt to give up all resemblance to natural form, and to create a purely abstract language of form—a visual music," and he proposes that "the later works of Picasso" at least show this possibility. Fry is unclear whether such abstraction is successful, and it is instructive that he should write that "this can only be decided when our sensibilities to such abstract forms have been more practiced than they are at present." Note that perceptual matching, which does not have to be learned, has been replaced with mastering a language, which does. It is not clear that Fry in fact did master the "language." When, in 1913, he saw Kandinsky's painting *Improvisation 30 (Cannons)*, he claimed it was "pure visual music. . . . I cannot any longer doubt the possibility of emotional expression by such abstract visual signs."[16] Fry simply ignored the weapons that give the painting its parenthetical subtitle.

The concept of a "language," which may have been a poetic metaphor in Fry, was put forward as a seriously literal theory by one of the first theoreticians of cubism, Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, in a text of 1915: "A new manner of expression, a new 'style' in the fine arts, often appears illegible—as impressionism in its time and now cubism: the unaccustomed optical impulses do not evoke memory images in some viewers because there is no formation of associations until finally the 'writing,' which initially appeared strange, becomes a habit and, after frequently seeing such pictures, the associations are finally made."[17] It is possibly an insight to think of cubism as a language, or, better, as a kind of "writing"—a suggestion altogether congenial to the poststructuralist mentality nourished on Jacques Derrida's concept of *ecriture*. The difficulty

with it is that Kahnweiler appears to treat *all* styles as forms of writing, in particular the impressionist style, and argues by analogy that with practice cubism will become as legible to us as impressionism. In truth, this has not happened. I think that while we have become habituated to cubism in one sense (the cubist landscape, portrait, or still life is common museum stock), and while nobody has great difficulty in "reading" cubist pictures, they have resisted becoming as transparent as a language with whose writing we are familiar. Picasso's portrait of Kahnweiler has not succeeded in looking, as it were, photographic. Familiarity has not made it natural at all. Fry's and Kahnweiler's theories really conjure up an image of someone acquiring fluency in reading a difficult language, hence the reference to "practice." But no one today has to practice in order to read impressionist canvases: they look altogether natural, and that is because they are altogether natural. Impressionism is, after all, a continuation of the Vasarian agenda; it is concerned with the conquest of visual appearances, with natural differences between light and shade.

The post-impressionists no longer generate outrage, but they look no more natural than cubist paintings do. Familiarity has not reduced the differences between them and paintings of the Vasarian tradition. But one has to honor those pioneer thinkers who sought to reduce that difference by rethinking art of the tradition, and addressing it by other than illusionistic criteria. Of course the reception of modern art did not always involve the effort to bring the new art under some sort of explanatory theory of the kind we find in Fry's and in Kahnweiler's work. People became enthusiasts for it without feeling the need to frame an enfranchising theory. Here is a contemporary response to the Salon d'Automne of 1905 by Etta and Claribel Cone:

> We now come to the most stupefying gallery in this Salon so rich in astonishment. Here all description, all reporting as well as all criticism become equally impossible since what is presented to us here—apart from the material employed—has nothing whatever to do with painting: some formless confusion of colors: blue, red, yellow, green: some splotches of pigment crudely juxtaposed: the barbaric and naive sport of a child who plays with the box of colors he just got as a Christmas present. . . . this choice gallery of pictorial aberration, of color madness, of unspeakable fantasies produced by people who, if they are not up to some game, ought to be sent back to school.[18]

I draw attention to the "has nothing whatever to do with painting" in this passage, and to the fact that the expression of indignation is exactly that

emitted by visitors to the exhibition of post-impressionists Fry describes in his essay. Here, by the way, is a confirming patch of critical prose aroused by the very show so creatively responded to by Fry:

> Nothing but the gross puerility which scrawls indecencies on the walls of a privy. The drawing is on the level of an untaught child, the sense of colour that of a tea-tray painter, the method that of a schoolboy who wipes his fingers on a slate after spitting on them. They are works of idleness and impotent stupidity, a pornographic show.

This bluster, the prose equivalent of actual defacing, was written by a poet, Wilfred Scawen Blunt, to a show made up of Cézanne, Van Gogh, Matisse, and Picasso, but it was a standard reflex to say (as he does) that "the exhibition is either an extremely bad joke or a swindle."[19] The *Munchner Neueste Nachrichten* had this to say of the exhibition of the New Artists' Association in Munich in 1909: "There are only two possible ways to explain this absurd exhibition: either one assumes that the majority of the members and guests of the Association are incurably insane, or else that one deals here with brazen bluffers who know the desire for sensation of our time only too well and are tryng to make use of the boom."[20] I do not know whether, like the Cone sisters and Gertrude Stein, Blunt lived through a transformation of aesthetic consciousness to become an enthusiast for the works that moved him to such singular indignation, but I rather doubt it. "I am old enough to remember the pre-Raphaelite pictures in the Royal Academy of 1857 and 1858," he wrote, and the exhibition at the Grafton Galleries was half a century later. Nor am I clear that the Cones's transformation was accompanied by a new way of thinking about painting of the kind that Fry undertook to develop. They simply adapted to a new artistic reality and learned how to respond to it aesthetically once they abandoned the theories that disqualified these works as painting in the first place, even if they had no new theories to put in place. It is always possible to adjust in this way, to learn to respond sensitively and with discrimination to works nothing in one experience especially prepared one for. For someone whose interaction with art is of this order, a theory about the end of art makes no sense at all: one continues adjusting and responding to whatever comes along, without benefit of theory. In the 1980s a great many collected art because it was art, without anything like an empowering definition of what made it art or why it was important.

At some level, Fry and Kahnweiler must have been of this sort as well, responding pretheoretically, so to speak, to work that struck them as

powerful and important, even if it violated every principle they must have accepted. For that matter, the painters who made the art in question probably did so with no clear sense of what they were after, or why they produced work they had to know would produce the kinds of revulsion I have illustrated. What our two theorists undertook to do was to fill in a blank in practice, to explain to artist and audience alike what was taking place, and to impose a new narrative template. In both cases, it seems to me, the effort was to soften the differences, to explain, in the case of Kahnweiler, that it was only a matter of getting used to a new form of writing, without explaining why a new form of writing was required; and, in the case of Fry, to demonstrate the continuities between what Derain or Picasso were doing and what Poussin had done, without explaining again why Poussin experienced nothing like the resistance these painters did. And I think they perhaps would have said that the mimetic features of the earlier painting disguised what was really true of it, and which remained true of the new art although the disguises of mimesis had been torn away. It was as though the new art were arrived at by subtraction—subtracting mimesis, or distorting it to the point where it no longer seemed the point of the art. Neither Fry nor Kahnweiler, it seems to me, was prepared to say that the new art was really new, or new in a new kind of way. The only thinker I am aware of who rose to that level of vision was Clement Greenberg, who merits a chapter of his own. It is interesting that when Greenberg brought modernism to a level of philosophical consciousness, it was nearly over as a moment in the grand narrative of the visual arts. Modernism ended in a way Greenberg had no room for in his account.

NOTES

1. "The Master said, Is Goodness indeed so far away? If we really wanted Goodness, we should find that it was at our very side" (*The Analects of Confucius*, trans. Arthur Waley [New York: Vintage Books, N.D.], book 7, no. 29).

2. Heinrich Wölfflin, *Principles of Art History: The Problem of the Development of Style in Later Art*, trans. M. D. Hottinger (New York: Dover Publications, n.d.), ix.

3. Henri Matisse, "Statements to Teriade, 1929–1930," in *Matisse on Art*, trans. Jack Flam (London: Phaidon, 1973), 58.

4. Joseph Margolis, in "The Endless Future of Art," endeavors to argue that "past" and "future" belong to narratives, which are "constructions," and hence not to art itself. But this is tantamount to arguing that art is eternal and *cannot* have a beginning, since beginnings belong to narratives. I seek to counter his views in my own "Narrative and Never-

Endingness: a Reply to Margolis," in Arto Haapala Jerrold Levinson, and Veikko Rantala, eds., *The End of Art and Beyond* (New York: Humanities Press, 1996).

5. Steve Lohr, "No More McJobs for Mr. X," *The New York Times*, 29 May 1994, sec. 9, p. 2.

6. John Pope-Hennessy, *Cellini* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1985), 37.

7. Ernst Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956), 314, 388.

8. Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (New York: Basic Books, 1959).

9. Ernst Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, 73.

10. Ibid., 116.

11. Ibid., 8.

12. Ibid., 116.

13. Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, trans. Mrs. Jonathan Foster (London: Bell and Daldy, 1868), 2:384.

14. Ibid., 1:98.

15. Roger Fry, "The French Post-Impressionists," in *Vision and Design* (London: Pelican Books, 1937), 194.

16. Roger Fry, cited in Richard Cork, *A Bitter Truth: Avant-Garde Art and the Great War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 18.

17. Daniel-Henry Kahweiler, cited in Bois, *Painting as Model*, 95.

18. Brenda Richardson, *Dr. Claribel and Miss Etta: The Cone Collection* (Baltimore: The Baltimore Museum of Art, 1985), 89.

19. Wilfred Scawen Blunt, *My Diaries: Being a Personal Narrative of Events, 1888–1914*, (London: Martin Secker, 1919–20), 2:743.

20. Cited in Bruce Altshuler, *The Avant-Garde in Exhibition: New Art in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Abrams, 1994), 45.

PHOTOGRAPH OF JACKSON POLLOCK BY MARTHA HOLMES. REPRODUCED BY PERMISSION FROM *LIFE MAGAZINE*, AUGUST 9, 1949. © TIME INC.

CHAPTER FOUR

Modernism and the Critique of Pure Art: The Historical Vision of Clement Greenberg

IN THE PREFATORY pages of his *Problems of Style*, published in 1893, Alois Riegl preempts what he feels is certain to be an incredulous response on the part of his readers to the very idea that ornament has a history, and in so doing reveals how the concept of having a history must have been understood a century ago in art-historical circles. The paradigm of something having a history was painting, construed as the art of mimetic representation, so that the history of painting could then be understood in terms of an internal development in representational adequacy. Artists got better and better at representing visual appearances through constructing visual arrays that corresponded to what reality itself presented; and from this perspective there is a developmental asymmetry in the sequence of painterly representation from, say, Cimebue and Giotto to (just to stay within Vasarian boundaries), Michelangelo, Leonardo, and Raphael. In finding it incredible that ornament should have what Riegl explicitly terms "a progressive development,"[1] Riegl's audience, in his view, was "paralyzed" by a thesis against which he polemicizes tirelessly throughout his book: the thesis of "the materialist interpretation of the origins of art" derived from the writings of Gottfried Semper. The materialist sees ornament primarily in term of surface decoration, and surface decoration primarily in terms that derive from, and refer to, ways of meeting certain material needs of human beings, specifically clothing and shelter, both of which involve weaving. Ornament derives from the under-and-over, in-and-out criss-cross and zigzag of textile and wickerwork, the same wherever human beings make clothing and enclosures. In effect, because of its elementary and universal character, ornament must have as little possibility of having a history as, say, reproduction does, or, more controversially, perception. Riegl felt

obliged to destroy this model in order to establish the possibility of a progressive development, which means, as with painting, that later stages in the sequence of ornamental styles go beyond earlier ones in meeting the same artistic goals, and earlier ones enter into the explanation of the later ones. It was the parallel structure in the "progressive development" of painting that Ernst Gombrich sought, with some considerable success, to explicate through the mechanisms of "making and matching," which is marked by progress only because the later figures in the history could compare their representations with those of their predecessors, from whom they learned and beyond whom they progressed, as well as with appearances which presumably remained the same from stage to stage of that history. Needless to say, if earlier work were not preserved and studied, there would be no possibility of a progressive developmental history, only a kind of natural evolution. But even in Upper Paleolithic times, on the cavern walls of Lascaux, later painters had their predecessors as models, since the ritual decision that there should be a fixed place to paint, just as there was a fixed place to build fires,[2] made the wall a kind of anticipatory pedagogic museum. Of course no one knows what progress meant to our paleolithic forebears twenty thousand years ago.

Such was the idea of what it was to have a history circa 1893, when Riegl's *Problems of Style* was published, and it remained, so far as I can tell, the conception of having a history that prevailed when, in 1983, the historian Hans Belting published his profound but elusive *The End of Art History?*, in which he registered the fact that art did not seem, in that objective sense, any longer to have the possibility of a developmental progressive history. And the question for Belting then was how there could be an art history of the present if this objective condition failed? There would, no doubt, be interpretation of individual works, hence art criticism; and one could practice, perhaps, a kind of scholarship constrained by limits of the kind Riegl describes in connection with the philological study of ornament in his own era, marked by an extreme reticence "to propose any sort of historical interrelationships, and even then, only in the case of limited periods and closely neighboring regions."[3] That would be one meaning of not having a history, and, in the case of the visual arts, even one meaning of art having come to an end, since art, understood primarily as painting, once exemplified what it meant to have a history in the progressive developmental sense. In his subsequent *Likeness and Presence*, a masterpiece by any imaginable criterion, Belting proposes to write the history of the devotional image in the West "before the

era of art." It is interesting that his posture and polemic are very similar to Riegl's. He has to defend the claim that the devotional image has a history against what he takes as a claim that the image itself has no history, much as Riegl had to defend the view that ornament had a history against Semper's view that it is everywhere grounded in the same material processes. Belting somewhat misleadingly villainizes the thought of David Freedberg's important study *The Power of Images* by ascribing to Freedberg the thought that, since making images is a universal human propensity, everywhere and always the same, image making cannot have a history. In much the same way, really, Riegl villainized Semper, who was a far richer thinker than Riegl makes him out to be. In any case, Belting wants to present an historical explanation of how the devotional image came to play so central a role in a religion—Christianity—that originally accepted the commandment against graven images. This is not, Belting goes on to say, a proper history, in the sense of being developmentally progressive, since "we have as yet no suitable framework for structuring the events which shaped the image in the era before the Renaissance."[4] Moreover, it is unclear that an art criticism of the devotional image is in order, since these were works created before the era of art and were not in any sense offered for aesthetic enjoyment. So Belting's view of "having a history" appears to remain very much the standard one, original as his ideas and his investigations have been. His problem is to conceive of the history of something that lacks a "proper" history.

Between the time Vasarian structure seemed no longer to apply to the art that was being made and the present moment of narrative disorder in the art scene to which Belting refers in his text on the end of art, there is the intermediate period I think of as modernism, during which artists stopped being guided by the imperative that made it possible for art to have the kind of history Riegl more or less took for granted in the last decade of the nineteenth century, though modernism, as I understand it, had well begun by that time. It had begun, according to Clement Greenberg, in the work of Manet, or, in my own sense of beginnings, with the radical deviations from an orthogonal defined by Vasarian criteria, in the work of Van Gogh and Gauguin in the late 1880s. It should not be held against Riegl that he had not noticed what even those close to painting must have paid very little attention to in those years, even if Riegl might have been struck at the time by the way in which the histories of ornament and of painting were beginning to mingle with the advent of art

nouveau, by the way in which decoration had become an artistic motivation in the work of those who followed Gauguin, and by the opening of the Paris Salon up to craft and even studio furniture in the 1890s.

The problem was how to continue the "developmental progressive" narrative with painting that no longer appeared to be continuing the Vasarian history, and the solution initially took the form, as we saw in the last chapter, of saving the appearances either by denying that it *was* painting save in the most reduced and material sense of the term, or by attributing subversive motives to the artists themselves—motives of the kind that drove the dadaists after World War I, but which hardly figured in the explanatory drives of the early modernists. I am not unsympathetic with those who sought to explain away the new art in this manner, but it is worth remarking that it was not a strategy, so far as I know, that had to be resorted to in any earlier phase of art history, where any development could be justified under Vasarian terms. And I mention this to underscore my conviction that the change from the mimetic to the modern moments in the history of art was a change of a different kind and order from that which characterized the development from Renaissance pictorial strategies to those of Mannerism, the baroque, the rococo, the neoclassical, the romantic, and even, radical as it may have appeared at the time, the impressionist. Indeed, in my view, the change from modern to postmodern was again a change of a different sort from those changes. For those changes more or less left the basic structure of painting undisturbed: one could see deep continuities from Raphael through Correggio, the Carracci, Fragonard and Boucher, Ingres, Delacroix, to Manet, and hence, from the vantage point of 1893, continue to believe in a progressive developmental history. Those changes would, one might say, lie outside the pale of the kind of history I am seeking to tell, where there are breaks in the development, first with modernism, and finally with postmodernism.

The early theorists who sensed that there had been a change of a different order than those which could be grasped as stages in a linear development, Roger Fry, for example, or Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, can be understood in two different ways. One way would be: the story had ended and a new story had begun. A new system of signs had replaced the old system, in Kahnweiler's view, and it might be replaced in turn. And this more or less meant that the larger history of art was after all not developmental, since there seemed to be no obvious sense in which cubism represented a development beyond impressionism. In this respect, Kahnweiler's thesis bears a distant resemblance to the remarkable view

of art's history articulated by Erwin Panofsky, according to which it consists in a sequence of symbolic forms that replace one another but do not, as it were, constitute a development. Panofsky's almost breathtaking move consisted in taking a discovery that had virtually emblematized progress, that of linear perspective, and transforming it instead into what he termed a symbolic form, where it simply represented a different way of organizing space. And, as a way of organizing space, it belonged to a certain underlying philosophy manifest in other aspects of a culture, like its architecture, its theology, its metaphysics, even its moral codes, which formed cultural wholes of a kind to be studied through what Panofsky called *iconology*. But as between these cultural wholes, and hence as between the art which expressed them, there was no continuous developmental history. Rather, as I see it, having a developmental history belonged to the art of *one* of these cultural wholes, namely that which belonged to Western art from roughly 1300 to 1900. Then, with modernism, we move into a new cultural whole that lasts, roughly, for eighty years, say from 1880 to 1965. And , faithful to the philosophy of symbolic forms, we will find expressions of the same underlying structure in everything that defines our culture: our science, our philosophy, our politics, our codes of moral conduct. I am by no means unsympathetic with this view, as I shall explain in due course. It is in any case one way of representing the difference between what one might call an internal change and an external change in the history of art. An internal change is within a cultural whole, leaving the underlying complex intact. An external change is from one cultural whole to another.

The other response, articulated by Roger Fry, was that the artists were no longer concerned to imitate reality but to give objective expression to the feelings reality elicited in them: "Peindre non la chose mais l'effet qu'elle produit," as Stephan Mallarmé wrote in a phrase that continued to have a great deal of meaning for modernist abstractionists such as Robert Motherwell. This move, from the eye to the psyche, and from mimesis to expression, brought into critical discourse a number of factors which would have had no special relevance earlier—sincerity, for example. There perhaps could be a developmental progressive narrative of expression, as artists learned to express their feelings better and better—but this, one feels, would almost be the story of lowered inhibitions or of giving vent to feelings heretofore repressed and stifled. It would be a history of freedom, construed as the freedom of expression. No doubt there is a possible technology of expression—we find something like it in theatrical training, for example. But one would have

wanted to be far surer than I think anyone was of the truth of Fry's account before one would have undertaken to rethink the history of art in the terms it recommends.

In neither of these ways of reading the theorists was the narrative carried forward, and indeed it should be clear that the idea of a progressive developmental history is somewhat limited if these theories should be true. But there is another way of reading them. What they sought to do, on *this* reading, was to move the narrative to a new level, where the problem was to redefine art, and to say what philosophically art is, thus fulfilling, through art itself, the Hegelian injunction. It was on this reading as if the narrative now moved forward not in terms of increasingly adequate representations, but rather in terms of increasingly adequate philosophical representations of the nature of art. There could now be a developmental progressive story to tell, but it would be the story, as it were, of a progressive degree of *philosophical* adequacy. What they did not have, it seems to me, was a sense of what caused the shift to a new, reflective level to take place—or a sense of a narrative structure in which the new—or modern—art continued to fall under a narrative form but on a new level. For that recognition we have to turn to the writing of Clement Greenberg, who achieved, one might say, a self-consciousness of the ascent to self-consciousness, and whose thought was guided by a quite powerful and compelling philosophy of history. What is interesting to note is that all these theorists were also critics, responding, as I see it, to the question of how, if Vasari's thesis was no longer philosophically adequate, art criticism was to be practiced.

The ascent to a level of philosophical self-consciousness may be far more culturally prevalent than just within art, and quite possibly it is one of the marks through which modernism, understood as one of Panofsky's cultural wholes, may be defined. In an early passage in *Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger observes that "the real 'movement' of the sciences takes place when their basic concepts undergo a more or less radical revision. . . . The level which a science has reached is determined by how far it is *capable* of a crisis in its basic concepts."[5] Heidegger writes further, "Among the various disciplines everywhere today there are freshly awakened tendencies to put research on new foundations." He enumerates cases of this sort across a wide spectrum, and I dare say he counts his own work a contribution to just such a revision in philosophy. And I am proposing that we might think of modernism in general in those terms, as a moment in which it seemed as though things could not continue as they had been, and fresh foundations had to be sought if they were to continue

at all. This would explain why modernism so often took the form of issuing manifestos. All the main movements in philosophy of the twentieth century addressed the question of what philosophy itself was: positivism, pragmatism, and phenomenology each undertook radical critiques of philosophy, and each sought to reconstruct philosophy on firm foundations. In one way postmodernism is marked by antifoundationalism, as in the thought of Richard Rorty or Jacques Derrida, or at least by the recognition that if there are to be foundations, they must be consistent with an art world as unstructured as Hans Belting has found ours to be. "Western civilization is not the first civilization to turn around and question its own foundations," Greenberg wrote in 1960. "But it is the one that has gone furthest in doing so."[6] Greenberg sees "this self-critical tendency" as beginning with Kant, whom he somewhat archly classes as "the first real Modernist" because the first "to criticize the means itself of criticism." And he sees the "essence of modernism" to lie "in the use of the characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline." This is *internal* criticism, and it in effect means, in the case of art, that art under the modernist spirit, at every point, is self-questioning: and this in turn means that art is its own subject and, in the case of painting, which was essentially Greenberg's concern, the subject of painting was painting. And modernism was a kind of collective inquiry from within by painting into painting in the effort to exhibit what painting itself is. What makes Heidegger a "modernist" philosopher is that he takes the ancient question of Being, and, rather than confront it head on, he asks what kind of being it is for whom that question arises, so that in effect his inquiry is about itself. What makes Modernist painting modern is, on Greenberg's account, its taking upon itself the task of determining "through its own operations and works, the effects exclusive to itself." This essence of art coincided, Greenberg thought, "with all that was unique in the nature of its medium." And to be true to its essence each modernist work was obliged to "eliminate . . . any and every effect that might conceivably be borrowed from or by the medium of any other art." In consequence, each art, under self-criticism, would be "rendered pure," a concept perhaps Greenberg really did borrow from Kant's notion of *pure reason*. Kant called a mode of knowledge pure when "there is no admixture of anything empirical," that is, when it was pure a priori knowledge.[7] And *pure reason* is the source of the "principles whereby we know we know anything absolutely *a priori*."[8] Each modernist painting, in Greenberg's view, would then be a critique of pure painting: painting from which one should be able to deduce the principles peculiar to painting as painting.

Greenberg, notoriously, identifies the essence of painting with flatness: "It was the stressing of the ineluctable flatness of the surface that remained . . . more fundamental than anything else to the processes by which pictorial art criticized and defined itself under Modernism." While emphasizing flatness did not exclude representation from painting, it did exclude illusion, which requires the use of three-dimensional space, itself a borrowing from another art and hence a contaminant of painting construed as pure. The Vasarian project was in effect a project of encroachment: painting had a developmental and progressive history only by usurping the prerogatives of sculpture.

Whatever one thinks of Greenberg's positive characterization of modernist painting, my interest in it here lies in the powerful historical vision of modernism that it expresses. It is overwhelmingly to Greenberg's credit that he perceived the post-Vasarian history as a history of self-examination, and identified modernism with this effort to put painting, and indeed each of the arts, on an unshakable foundation derived from discovering its own philosophical essence. But Greenberg is typical of the period he tries to analyze in that he has his own definition of what the essence of painting must be. In this he is belongs to the Age of Manifestos, as much so as Mondrian, or Malevich, or Reinhardt, though each of these sought to define pure painting by example. The point is that, in general, providing a philosophical definition of art was what marked the drives of modernism. Greenberg both recognized this as a general historical truth, and, at the same time, tried to provide his own philosophical definition.

Before examining Greenberg's thought in detail, let us seek to get a view of the overall history of art with which it fits. And here is an analogy of sorts. The history of art is structurally parallel with the developmental history of individual human beings like you and me. Our first period is marked by mastering ways to get more and more reliable pictures of the external world, just as the history of painting in the West was. No doubt this history could go on and on, but a moment arrives when we have mastered the skills of representation and have a fairly reliable picture of the world. We move to a new level of thought when we begin to see ourselves as part of the story and try to get a certain clear picture of what we are. This corresponds to the moment of self-consciousness when painting, for reasons I have not at all endeavored to identify, undertakes to ask what it itself is, and so the act of painting becomes simultaneously a philosophical investigation into the nature of painting. There is a beautiful moment in the dialogue *Phaedrus* when Socrates, precocious as always, deflects a certain line of questioning by saying that he has no time for such matters: "I can't as yet 'know myself,' as the inscription at Delphi enjoins, and so long as that ignorance remains, it seems to me ridiculous to inquire into extraneous matters."[9] In the introduction to his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke writes, "The understanding, like the eye, whilst it makes us see and perceive all other things, takes no notice of itself; and it requires art and pains to set it at a distance and make it its own object."[10] Modernism was a collective move of this sort, all across the face of culture, to make the activities and enterprises of culture objects for themselves. In a spirited defense of modernism against the usual kind of attack, this time against the *Neue Kunstlervereinigung Munchen* exhibition of 1909, Franz Marc spoke of the movement then spreading across Europe as "defiantly self-aware,"[11] hence not a pathology of a few sick minds. Modernism is thus the age of self-critique, whether in the form of painting, or science, or philosophy, or morals: nothing is taken for granted any longer, and it is hardly matter for wonder that the twentieth century is the age par excellence of upheaval. Art is a mirror of this cultural whole, but so is everything else. Greenberg as a philosopher and critic belongs, in this sense, to high modernism, whose painterly dimension he articulated more forcefully than anyone else: his is a critique of pure painting, or of painting as pure.

The internal drives of modernism, as Greenberg saw them, were through and through foundationalist. Each of the arts, painting as well as others, had to determine what was peculiar to itself—what belonged only to it. Of course painting would "narrow its area of competence, but at the same time it would make its possession of that area all the more certain." Hence the practice of an art was at the same time a self-criticism of that art, and that means the elimination, from each of the arts, of "any and every effect that might conceivably be borrowed from or by the medium of any other art. Thus would each art be rendered 'pure,' and in its purity find the guarantee of its standards as well as of its independence. 'Purity' meant self-definition." Note the art-critical agenda implicit here: it is a criticism of a work of art that it is impure, namely, that it contains an admixture of any medium other than itself. It becomes a standard critical reflex to say of such mixed art that it is not really painting, or even not really art. This kind of essentialism is the matrix for a great deal of what passes for moral criticism in our time. That its opposite is also a matrix is a mark of having entered a new historical era. Alongside "Be a man!" it becomes an acceptable imperative to let one's feminine side come through.

The history of modernism is the history of purgation, or generic cleansing, of ridding the art of whatever was inessential to it. It is difficult not to hear the political echoes of these notions of purity and purgation, whatever Greenberg's own politics actually were. These echoes still crash back and forth across the tormented fields of nationalist strife, and the notion of ethnic cleansing has become a shuddering imperative of separatist movements the world round. It is not surprising, simply shocking, to recognize that the political analog of modernism in art was totalitarianism, with its ideas of racial purity and its agenda to drive out any perceived contaminant. "The more closely," Greenberg writes, "the norms of a discipline become defined, the less freedom they are apt to permit in many directions. The essential norms or conventions of painting are at the same time the limiting conditions with which a picture must comply in order to be experienced as a picture." And, as if to underscore the depth of the political analogy, Greenberg wrote explicitly, apropos of an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, "The extreme eclecticism now prevailing is unhealthy, and it should be counteracted, even at the risk of dogmatism and intolerance."[12] Greenberg was an intolerant and dogmatic person, but dogmatism and intolerance belong to the symptomatology (to follow him in using medical imagery) of the Age of Manifestos. You cannot use the idiom of purity, purgation, and contamination and at the same time take easily to the postures of acceptance and toleration. Because Greenberg's views drew their energy from what we might speak of as the spirit of the times, he was not alone in his denunciatory stance, which remains a feature of critical discourse in New York even today—even in our age of relativism and multiculturalism, when one might expect a degree of toleration and openness.

Greenberg's comment about "intolerance and dogmatism" was in fact written in 1944, sixteen years before the great formulations of "Modernist Painting," and for that matter before the true emergence of abstract expressionism and the painting of the New York School, with which Greenberg is inextricably associated, and whose espousal of which was to give him so high a degree of credibility. The *Life* magazine article on Jackson Pollock, which credited a "formidably highbrow New York critic" with claiming him to be the "greatest American painter of the Twentieth Century," appeared on 8 August 1949. Greenberg had in fact expressed the view, in 1947, that Pollock was "the most powerful painter in contemporary America and the only one who promises to be a major one." And as early as 1943 he praised Pollock's canvases at Peggy Guggenheim's Art of

This Century Gallery as "among the strongest abstract canvases I have yet seen by an American." But Greenberg was in possession of his basic philosophy of history already in 1939, when he published his epochal essay "Avant-Garde and Kitsch." Pollock at that time was working through the influence of Mexican art, especially the idiom of José Clemente Orozco, and the only American abstraction to speak of was the geometrical Neo-Plasticism of the followers of Mondrian. Here is how Greenberg characterized avant-garde art at that time:

> It has been in search of the absolute that the avant-garde has arrived at "abstract" or non-objective art—and poetry too. The avant-garde poet or artist tries in effect to imitate God by creating something valid solely on its own terms, in the way nature itself is valid, in the way in which a landscape—not its picture—is aesthetically valid: something *given*, increate, independent of meanings, similars, or originals. Content is to be dissolved so completely into form that the work of art or literature cannot be reduced in whole or part to anything not itself.[13]

It is indeed as if the goal of the avant-garde was to collapse the distinction between reality and art by making an adjunct reality, with no more meaning than reality itself possesses, and the aesthetic qualities of which are analogous to those of sunsets and surf, mountains and woods, actual flowers and beautiful bodies. A work of art, to paraphrase the famous line, must not *mean* but *be*. In philosophical truth, this is an impossible theory, and its impossibility became manifest in the 1960s when artists produced objects so like real objects—I am thinking of the *Brillo Box* once again—that it became clear that the real philosophical question was how to prevent them from simply collapsing into reality. One small step toward a solution was to recognize that, just as Greenberg says, reality has no meaning, but that, contrary to his posture, art does. At the most one can say that reality defines a limit art can be said to approach—but which it cannot reach on penalty of no longer being art. In a discussion of Picasso, in 1957, Greenberg wrote, "Like any other kind of picture, a modernist one succeeds when its identity as a picture, and as a pictorial experience, shuts out the awareness of it as a physical object."[14] But this is just a leap of faith: how would a monochrome red painting show its difference from a flat surface just covered with red paint? Greenberg believed that art alone and unaided presents itself to the eye as art, when one of the great lessons of art in recent times is that this cannot be so, that artworks and real things cannot be told apart by visual inspection alone.

Greenberg seems to have become sensitive to this dilemma. In his famous essay "The Crisis of the Easel Picture" of 1948 he describes a consequence of projecting the impulses which led to modernism. These tended—"but only tended," he cautions—"to reduce the picture to a relatively undifferentiated surface." So the most advanced painting—the all-over painted flat surface—approaches the condition of the wall or at the very best the condition of "decoration—to wallpaper patterns capable of being extended indefinitely."[15] This "dissolution of the picture into sheer texture, sheer sensation, into the accumulation of smaller units of sensation, seems to answer to something deep-seated in contemporary sensibility," he noted, going on to draw a fascinating political correspondence: "It corresponds perhaps to the feeling that all hierarchical distinctions have been exhausted, that no area or order of experience is either intrinsically or relatively superior to any other." Whatever it means, Greenberg felt that the consequences for the easel picture, which had been the vehicle of the history of art regarded progressively and developmentally, was that artists driving to overcome the philosophical boundaries of the picture was something they "cannot help doing" but through which "these artists are destroying it."

"Cannot help doing" returns me to the conception of historical inevitability which motivates my discussion of Greenberg's philosophy of art. The theory goes somewhat as follows, using Greenberg's own words so far as possible. "In turning his attention away from the subject matter of common experience, the poet or artist turns it upon the medium of his own craft." This in effect means a transformation, in the case of painting at least, from representation to object, and from content, accordingly, to surface, or to paint itself. This, Greenberg insists "is the genesis of the abstract," but it is a special kind of abstractness, what one might call the *material* abstract, where the physical properties of the painting—its shape, its paint, its flat surface—become the inevitable essence of painting as art. I contrast this with what one might call the *formal* abstract, with which Greenberg's name is indissolubly associated. Neo-Plasticism is formally abstract. Pollock, in a certain sense, was the material abstract. In his 1943 review Greenberg talks about the "mud" from which Pollock got such effect (and which he traces back to Ryder and to Blakelock in American painting): "The mud abounds in Pollock's larger works." And he talks about "the chalky incrustations" as if describing geological examples. The artists upon whom, in 1939, Greenberg sought to rest his argument fit, it seems to me, a materialist aesthetic very poorly. "Picasso, Braque, Mondrian, Miró, Kandinsky, Brancusi, even Klee, Matisse, and

Cézanne," he wrote, "derive their chief inspiration from the medium they work in." In "Towards a Newer Laocoön," published in 1940, he wrote, "Guiding themselves . . . by a notion of purity derived from the example of music, the avant-garde in the last fifty years [note that this returns us to 1889, which is when it seems to me high modernism really did begin] achieved a purity and a radical delimitation of their fields of activity, for which there is no previous example in the history of culture." And purity itself is characterized as it will be twenty years later: "the acceptance, the willing acceptance, of the limits of the medium of the specific art." This, like the Vasarian narrative, is progressive and in a way developmental: it is the story of "the progressive surrender of the resistance of the medium." "So inexorable was the logic of this development," Greenberg writes—and I will not conclude the sentence, for I want only to draw attention to the concept of historical inevitability contained in his account of a progress which ends with the destruction of the easel picture and the dissolution of the distinction between paintings and mere walls. So Greenberg too had his own notion of the end of art, as must anyone who perceives the history of art under a developmental narrative.

It perhaps is neither here nor there in the unfolding of Greenberg's narrative that his examples would have resisted his characterization. Picasso, whatever he had in mind in painting *Guernica*, was little concerned with the limits of the medium: he was more concerned, by an inestimable degree, with the meaning of war and suffering. Miró, who conceived of his *Still Life with Old Shoe* as his own *Guernica*, did not conceive of it as abstract in any sense whatever: "The [Spanish] civil war was all bombings, deaths, firing squads, and I wanted to depict this very dramatic and sad time."[16] And Miró vehemently rejected the label of abstractionist, and went so far, in a late interview, as to deny that Mondrian was really an abstract painter at all. All this, I think, may be granted, without this deeply affecting Greenberg's overall materialism, which he expresses in a widely discussed passage in "Modernist Painting."

> Realistic, naturalistic art has dissembled the medium, using art to conceal art. Modernism used art to call attention to art. The limitations that constitute the medium of painting—the flat surface, the shape of the support, the properties of the pigment—were treated by the old masters as negative factors that could be acknowledged only implicitly or indirectly. Under Modernism these same limitations came to be regarded as positive factors, and were acknowledged openly. Manet's became the first Modernist pictures by virtue of the frankness with which they declared the flat surfaces

> on which they were painted. The Impressionists, in Manet's wake, abjured underpainting and glazes, to leave the eye under no doubt as to the fact that the colors they used were made of paint that came from tubes or pots. Cézanne sacrificed verisimilitude or correctness, in order to fit his drawing and design more explicitly to the rectangular shape of the canvas.[17]

This, if true, helps us understand what the overwhelming resistance to the impressionists when they first exhibited came from. But I want to underline the identification of Manet as a beginning as evidence of Greenberg's extraordinary historical intuition. For it was precisely with Manet that Oswald Spengler associated the *end* of painting in the decline of West: "with the generation of Manet, all has ended again." End or beginning, it was clear in any case that Manet marked a deep change. "Has painting lived, after all, two centuries more?" Spengler asks. "Is it still existing? But we must not be deceived by appearances." It is striking that the demise of modernism has been identified in very recent times with the "death of painting," which I shall confront in due time. But for now my concern is only to acknowledge Greenberg's tremendous achievement in moving the narrative of art history onto a new plane, even if there may be some resistance to his close identification of the essence of the medium of painting with the flatness of surfaces.

Let me address myself at this point to the brushstroke (and by implication to its expressionist affines, the drip, the smear, the swipe, the wipe, etc.), as partial confirmation of Greenberg's view, but also as something he might have used instead of flatness as a criterion of painting as painting. It strikes me that the brushstroke must have been very largely invisible throughout the main history of Western painting, something one might know was there but which one saw through or past, roughly in the way in which we see through or past the raster of the television monitor: like the raster, the brush would have been a means for bringing an image before the eyes, without itself forming part of the meaning of that image; and where, again as with television, the aspiration would have been toward higher and higher resolutions until the raster literally disappears from visual consciousness, this time as a matter of optical mechanics rather than as a matter of aesthetic convention. By "aesthetic convention," I mean a tacit agreement not to pay attention to brushstrokes. This is easily achieved, since there would in ordinary cases be no way in which the brushstroke could be construed as part of the images it facilitates, but also because of the tremendous power of mimetic theories of pictorial representation, and finally because of the role the concept of illusion played throughout the history of painting down through the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century. Let me offer something of an argument for this.

When photography was invented, in 1839, the painter Paul Delaroche famously pronounced that painting was dead. When he learned the news about Daguerre's invention, he was at work on a thirty-foot canvas depicting the history of art. Whatever that canvas shows about the use of the brush, it had a surface that looked photographic, that is, unbrushed. Hence it must have seemed to Delaroche that all the skilled reflexes he had mastered could be built into a mechanism that, once the question of scale had been solved, could produce a work indiscernible from his. It did not occur to him to say "What about the brushstrokes?" That would have implied that the camera was incapable of attaining the quality of surface and touch that the visible, palpable brushstroke can. Delaroche's art exemplifies what I mean by the invisibility of the brushstroke, and his famous declaration could not have been made had he invested the brushstroke with any aesthetic importance.

The brushstroke became salient in impressionist painting, but that was not the intention of the movement. It counted on optical rather than physical mixing, and juxtaposed dabs of color to achieve chromatic intensity, but the dabs did not fuse. They were stridently visible, the way they might be in an oil sketch, when these were exhibited as finished paintings, a concept which implied the disguise of the brushstroke. So it seems to me transparent that the brushstroke became important only when illusionism receded as the basic aim of painting and mimesis receded as the defining theory of art, which in my view gave a retroactive validity to impressionist canvases, now accepted for what the impressionists would have regarded as the wrong reasons. One is not supposed to look at the dots in pointillist painting; ideally they are to disappear in favor of a luminous image, which never happens, of course, because the eye has its limits. In my view, these validations happened when the painting itself became an end rather than a means, and when the brushstroke indicated that the painting was to be looked at rather than through, in the sense of "through" which implies transparency. I tend to believe that the distinction between insider and outsider, between specialist and audience, itself dimmed as this happened. To see the painting as paint-*ing* meant to see it from the artist's point of view, with this difference: the impressionist applied brushstrokes intending that they fuse in the viewer's perception, so to see things from the artist's point of view would

have meant seeing it as determined by what the artist supposed the viewer's point of view would be if the illusion worked. It would be analogous to theatrical production, where the stage is set in such a way as to achieve what the *metteur en scene* believes will promote illusion. Naturally, the same artistic impulse which brings the brushstroke to the audience's conscious attention has its counterparts in letting the mechanisms of theatrical production be part of theatrical experience, letting us, as it were, see backstage and frontstage at once. But no dramaturge to my knowledge went so far as to put on a production consisting only of stagehands pulling ropes and moving flats: that would be the proper analog of making a painting which consists exclusively of brushstrokes, such as came to be standard in abstract expressionist painting. In any case, with impressionist painting, for the first time the insider's perspective in fact became the outsider's perspective. And, just possibly, paint took over, and the artist decided the pleasures of the painter could be delivered over as pleasures for the viewer, who, like the painter, became a sensualist of paint.

An argument could be made that modernism began with the impressionists, if we accept Greenberg's materialist aesthetic, just because they made the dab and daub visible, even if, as is almost certainly true, they set themselves to capture the pleasures of bourgeois life, as art historians have in recent years maintained. And something of the same sort remains true of Van Gogh, whose gouged and plowed surfaces are incapable of being sublated, however gripped we may be by the images of his art. Indeed, the sense we have from those unmistakable surfaces of the artist's passionate gestures is an important component, given the abiding energy of the romantic image of "the artist" even in our own time, an important component in the popularity of his painting.

Greenberg stresses the flatness of painting—"the ineluctable flatness of the surface"—since "flatness was the only condition painting shared with no other art," and modernism was a drive (on his view) that defines each medium through what it and only it possesses, and what differentiated it accordingly from ever other medium. It is difficult to think of anything more unique to painting than the brushstroke—even the lack of brushstrokes is a property of painting of a certain sort, by contrast with poetry (or Western poetry at least—Oriental poetry is of course another matter), which lacks brushstrokes as a matter of genre. Little matter. The point is that Greenberg defines a narrative structure which is naturally continuous with the Vasarian narrative, but one in which the substance of art slowly becomes the subject of art. And this happened insidiously, without

those who affected what we might, following Professor Quine, speak of as the ascent to media, realizing that they had done so. "Manet began modernism" is a sentence much like "Petrarch opened the Renaissance," what I designate a narrative sentence, and it is marked by the fact that Manet no more than Petrarch knew he was doing what he did under these crucial historical descriptions. An ascent to a new level of consciousness had been made without those who made it necessarily having been aware that they did so. They were revolutionizing a narrative they believed themselves to be continuing. "Art gets carried on under modernism in much the same way as before."

Modernism came to an end when the dilemma recognized by Greenberg between works of art and mere real objects could no longer be articulated in visual terms, and when it became imperative to quit a materialist aesthetics in favor of an aesthetics of meaning. This, again in my view, came with the advent of pop. Much in the way in which modernism was resisted in its early phase by claiming that its practitioners were unable to paint, postmodernism was not perceived by Greenberg as the beginning of a new era, but as a blip in the materialist history of art, whose next episode instead was post-painterly abstraction. But perhaps nothing better defines the transition from modernism to our present age than the decreasing applicability of classical aesthetic theory to the art of the present moment. I accordingly turn to that next.

NOTES

1. "How many of you are now shrugging your shoulders in disbelief merely in response to the title? What, you ask, does ornament also have a history?" (Alois Riegl, *Problems of Style: Foundations for a History of Ornament* trans. Evelyn Kain [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992], 3).

2. Meyer Schapiro, "On Some Problems in the Semiotics of Visual Art: Field and Vehicle in Image-Sign," in his *Theory and Philosophy of Art: Style, Artist, and Society* (New York: George Braziller, 1994), 1.

3. Riegl, *Problems of Style*, 3.

4. "If one consults David Freedberg's book on *The Power of Images*, one even finds a warning against attempting to devise a history of the image at all, as the author considers the image to be an ever-present reality to which mankind has responded in ever the same way" (Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, xxi). I have my difficulties with Freedberg's book, but he almost certainly never maintains something like this.

5. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 29.

6. Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, 4:85. Unless otherwise specifically indicated, references are to this text.

7. Immanuel Kant, "Introduction," *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1963), 43.

8. Ibid., 58.

9. Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. R. Hackforth, in *Plato: The Collected Works*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 229e–230a. Plato, here as elsewhere, is sly. Compare the disclaimer to Phaedrus with his earlier utterance in the dialogue: "I know my Phaedrus. Yes indeed, I'm as sure of him as of my own identity" (228a). How sure can that be? I owe to my former student, Elinor West, the strategy of looking in the dialogues for these tensions, which, in her view, are the keys to the dialogues' meaning. I hope she succeeds in bringing her discoveries systematically together.

10. John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. A. C. Frazier (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1894), 1:8.

11. Franz Marc, "Letter to Heinrich Thannhauser," cited in Bruce Altschuler, *The Avant-Garde in Exhibition: New Art in the 20th Century* (New York: Abrams, 1994), 45.

12. Greenberg, "A New Installation at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and a Review of the Exhibition *Art in Progress*," *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, 1:213.

13. Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, 1:8.

14. Greenberg, "Picasso at Seventy Five," *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, 4:53.

15. Greenberg, "The Crisis of the Easel Picture," *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, 2:223.

16. Joan Miró, *Selected Writings and Interviews*, ed. Margit Rowell (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1986), 293.

17. Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, 4:87.

18. Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Form and Actuality*, trans. C. F. Atkinson (New York: Knopf, 1946), 1:288. I am grateful to Chares Haxtausen for drawing Spengler's discussion to my attention.