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The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art

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Foreword by Jonathan Gilmore

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For Barbara Westman

constitute that culture anthropologically. This scarcely can be considered without pressing the question of inhowfar there is an analogy between cultures and works of art—a translation effected with the easy insouciance of genius by Burkhardt in treating the state "as a work of art" in his study of the Renaissance. To carry the analogy through, one would have to decide in the first place whether a culture might be regarded as a mode of presenting the world to its own members—a *Weltanschauung*, as we say—and hence already has a kind of representational content. One would then have to show the sort of interplay between that content and its mode of representation, which then constitutes, so to say, the style of the culture. This is to invert a celebrated saying of Wittgenstein, in this case to imagine a form of life being to imagine a language. By a language here, of course, I mean a system of representations rather than a system of uses, or it is to understand the system of uses as a set of symbols through which the members of a culture live their way of representing the world. It then would be the task of interpretation to decide which of the many day-to-day activities of the members of the culture carry this expressive overcharge. Even in works of art, as we saw, not everything belonging to the object belongs to the work. I do not know, for example, whether the alliteration "distinguished old dray horse" works together with the two commas, or not.

I scarcely could hope to carry the analogy further here, or perhaps anywhere, and not just for reasons of time. But if it has any chance at truth, artistic criticism becomes a paradigm of what we might now call cultural criticism, and the philosophical structure of the cultural sciences will then be so different from what those who framed the division between the *Natur-* and the *Geisteswissenschaften* had in mind by the latter that we hardly have any idea of what such sciences involve. We have no idea yet of what the humansciences are to be like, hence no idea of what it means finally to be human if participation in such forms is to be a condition of that—no idea, that is to say, save what guidance we may derive from the philosophy of art and the structures it has begun to bring to light.

V.

The End of Art

Art is dead.
Its present movements are not at all indications of vitality; they are not even the convulsions of agony prior to death; they are the mechanical reflex actions of a corpse submitted to galvanic force.

—Marius de Zayas, "The Sun Has Set,"
Camera Work (July 1912), 39:17.

This essay grew out of a brief contribution to a symposium on the state of the artworld and published, with comparable statements by John Berger, Clement Greenberg, and Rosalind Krauss, under the witty title "Art Attacks" in the lamented Soho News. *On the basis of that statement, I was invited to the Walker Institute for Contemporary Art in Minneapolis, to present one in a series of lectures on the future. That lecture was expanded considerably to form the target contribution to a volume, edited by Berel Lang and published by Haven Publications, entitled* The Death of Art, *to which Lang invited a number of others to respond either to my paper or to the topic.*

In each of its stages, the essay is a response to the dismal state of the artworld, for which I sought—and continue to seek—an explanation. I am increasingly persuaded by the model of art history I finally develop—it is taken a stage further in Essay IX—but it will be clear that it represents one form of the disenfranchisement of art described in Essay I. It supposes that its own philosophy is what art aims at, so that art fulfills its destiny by becoming philosophy at last. Of course art does a great deal more and less than this, which makes the death *of art an overstatement. That ours is a post-historical art, however, is a recognition deepened with each succeeding season.*

THERE ARE PHILOSOPHICAL visions of history which allow, or even demand, a speculation regarding the future of art. Such a speculation concerns the question of whether art has a future, and must be distinguished from one which merely concerns the art of the future, if we suppose art will go on and on. Indeed, the latter speculation is more difficult in a way, just because of the difficulties which go with trying to imagine what the artworks of the future will look like or how they will be appreciated. Just think how out of the question it would have been, in 1865, to predict the forms of Post-Impressionist painting, or to have anticipated, as late as 1910, that there would be, only five years in the future, a work such as Duchamp's *In Advance of the Broken Arm*, which, even when accepted as a work of art, retained its identity as a quite ordinary snow shovel. Comparable examples can be drawn from the other arts, especially as we approach our own century, when music and poetry and dance have yielded exemplars which could not have been perceived as art had anything like them appeared in earlier times, as sets of words or sounds or movements. The visionary artist Albert Robida began in 1882 the serial publication of *Le vingtième siècle*. It meant to show the world as it would be in 1952. His pictures are filled with wonders to come: *le téléphonoscope*, flying machines, television, underwater metropolises, but the pictures themselves are unmistakably of their own era, as is the way much of what they show is shown. Robida imagined there would be restaurants in the sky to which customers would come in airborne vehicles. But the boldly anticipated eating places are put together of ornamental ironworks of the sort we associate with Les Halles and the Gare St. Lazare, and look a lot like the steamboats that floated the Mississippi at that time, in proportion and in decorative fretwork. They are patronized by gentlemen in top hats and ladies in bustles, served by waiters wearing long aprons from the Belle Epoque, and they arrive in balloons Montgolfier would recognize. We may be certain that were Robida to have depicted an underwater art museum, its most

advanced works would be Impressionist paintings, if Robida had eyes even for those. In 1952, the most advanced galleries were showing Pollack, De Kooning, Gottlieb, and Klein, which would have been temporally unimaginable in 1882. Nothing so much belongs to its own time as an age's glimpses into the future: Buck Rogers carries the decorative idioms of the 1930s into the twenty-first century, and *now* looks at home with Rockefeller Center and the Cord automobile; the science fiction novels of the 1950s project the sexual moralities of the Eisenhower era, along with the dry martini, into distant eons, and the technical clothing worn by its spacemen belong to that era's haberdashery. So were *we* to depict an interplanetary art gallery, it would display works which, however up to the minute they look to us, will belong to the history of art by the time there are such galleries, just as the mod clothing we put on the people we show will belong to the history of costume in no time at all. The future is a kind of mirror in which we can show only ourselves, though it seems to us a window through which we may see things to come. Leonardo's wonderful saying, that *ogni dipintore dipinge se*, implies an unintended historical limitation, as may be seen from Leonardo's own visionary drawings, so profoundly part of their own time. We may imagine *that* all sorts of things will come to be. But when we seek to *imagine* those things, they inevitably will look like things that *have* come to be, for we have only the forms we know to give them.

Even so, we may speculate historically on the future of art without committing ourselves on what the artworks of the future are to be like, if there are to be any; and it is even possible to suppose that art itself has no future, though artworks may still be produced post-historically, as it were, in the aftershock of a vanished vitality. Such indeed was a thesis of Hegel, certain of whose views have inspired the present essay, for Hegel said quite unequivocally that art as such, or at least at its highest vocation, is quite finished with as a historical moment, though he did not commit himself to the prediction that there would be no more works of art. He

might have argued that, certain as he was that his astonishing thesis was true, he had nothing to say about those works to come, which might, perhaps must, be produced in ways he could not anticipate and enjoyed in ways he could not understand. I find it an extraordinary thought that the world should have gone through what one might term the Age of Art, parallel to the way in which, according to a theological speculation of the Christian theorist Joachim of Flores, the Age of the Father came to an end with the birth of His Son, and the Age of the Son with the Age of the Holy Spirit. Joachim did not claim that those whose historical fulfillment lay in the Age of the Father will become extinct or that their forms of life will abruptly disappear in the Age of the Son: they may continue to exist past the moment of their historical mission, historical fossils, so to speak, as Joachim would have supposed the Jews to be, whose time on the stage of history he believed over with. So though there will be Jews in time to come, whose forms of life may evolve in unforeseeable ways, still, their history will no longer be coincident with the history of History itself, conceived of as Joachim did, in the grandest philosophical manner.

In almost precisely this way, Hegel's thought was that for a period of time the energies of history coincided with the energies of art, but now history and art must go in different directions, and though art may continue to exist in what I have termed a post-historical fashion, its existence carries no historical significance whatever. Now such a thesis can hardly be pondered outside the framework of a philosophy of history it would be difficult to take seriously were the urgency of art's future not somehow raised from within the artworld itself, which can be seen today as having lost any historical direction, and we have to ask whether this is temporary, whether art will regain the path of history—or whether this destructured condition *is* its future: a kind of cultural entropy. So whatever comes next will not matter because the concept of art is internally exhausted. Our institutions—museums, galleries, collectors, art journals, and

the like—exist against the assumption of a significant, even a brilliant, future. There is an inevitable commercial interest in what is to come now, and who are to be the important practitioners in movements next to come. It is very much in the spirit of Joachim that the English sculptor William Tucker has said, "The 60's was the age of the critic. Now it's the age of the dealer." But suppose it *has* really all come to an end, and that a point has been reached where there can be change without development, where the engines of artistic production can only combine and recombine known forms, though external pressures may favor this or that combination? Suppose it is no longer a historical possibility that art should continue to astonish us, that in this sense the Age of Art is internally worn out, and that in Hegel's stunning and melancholy phrase, a form of life has grown old?

Is it possible that the wild effervescence of the artworld in the past seven or eight decades has been a terminal fermentation of something the historical chemistry of which remains to be understood? I want to take Hegel quite seriously, and to sketch a model of the history of art in which something like it may even be said to make sense. Better to appreciate the sense it does make, I shall first sketch two rather more familiar models of art history, for the model which will finally interest me presupposes them in a striking and almost dialectical way. It is an interesting fact that though the first model has application primarily to mimetic art, to painting and sculpture and moving pictures, the second model will include them and include a great deal more of art than mimesis can easily characterize. The final model will apply to art in so comprehensive a way that the question of whether art has come to an end will have as wide a reference as the term "art" itself has, though its most dramatic reference will be to the objects purveyed in what is narrowly known as "the artworld." Indeed, part of the explanation lies in the fact that the boundaries between painting and the other arts—poetry and performance, music and dance—have become radically unstable. It is an instability induced

by the factors which make my final model historically possible, and which enables the dismal question to be put. I will conclude by asking how we are to adapt to the fact that the question has an affirmative answer, that art really is over with, having become transmuted into philosophy.

Thomas Kuhn surprises us when, in the course of laying out his novel views of the history of science, he observes that painting was regarded in the nineteenth century as the progressive discipline *par excellence*: proof that progress was really possible in human affairs. The progressive model of art history derives from Vasari, who, in a phrase of Gombrich, "saw stylistic history as the gradual conquest of natural appearances." Interestingly enough, this is Gombrich's view as well, enunciated as such in his book, *The Image and the Eye*, and throughout his writings. The history of art, or at least of painting so conceived, really did come to an end, so I will begin with this familiar model.

The progress in question was largely in terms of optical duplication, in that the painter commanded increasingly refined technologies for furnishing visual experiences effectively equivalent to those furnished by actual objects and scenes. The decreasing distance between actual and pictorial optical stimulation then marks the progress in painting, and one could measure the rate of progress by the degree to which the unaided eye marks a difference. Art history demonstrated the advance, inasmuch as the unaided eye could more easily mark the differences between what Cimabue presented than what Ingres did, so art was demonstrably progressive in the way science hoped to be, granting that optics here is but a metaphor for achieving for the human mind a representation as exact as the unaided cognitions of a divine being's—though as late as Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* it was still a possible semantical fantasy that what Wittgenstein terms "the total natural science" should be a composite picture, logically isomorphic with the world conceived of as the sum total of facts. The history of

science could then be read as the progressive shrinking of the distance between representation and reality. There was in this history a basis for the optimism that the remaining pockets of ignorance would bit by bit yield to the light, so that everything could finally be known just as, in painting, everything could finally be *shown*.

Now it is possible to give a somewhat wider conception of artistic progress than painting alone allows, by reflecting on the expansion of our representational powers brought about by the invention of moving pictures. Artists had of course long since achieved technologies for depicting things in motion: there is little doubt that Bernini's *David* depicts a young warrior in motion, propelling a stone, or that the horsemen of Leonardo are rearing, or that water in his drawings of it is surging, or that the clouds in his storm pictures are driving across the heavens. Or that Christ is raising an admonitory arm in the Arena fresco of Giotto, driving out the money lenders. Still, though we know we are looking at a moving thing, we do not see something equivalent to what moving things in fact present to the eye, for we do not see the movement. We inferred it on the basis of subtle cues implanted by the artist to motivate an inference to what correspondent objects and events would possess in real space and time. So there would have been depictions of moving things without these being *moving depictions*, and from this distinction it is possible to appreciate what moving pictures and, by retrospection, linear perspective attained to, namely the elimination, in favor of a kind of direct perception, of mediating inferences to perceptual reality facilitated by cues. Before the discovery of perspective, artists could facilitate the knowledge that we were perceiving objects receding in distance: by using occlusion, differential sizes, shadows, textural gradients, and the like. But with perspective they could actually show them as receded. One knew that the figure in the pink robe had to be closer to the window than the figure muttering at the angel, but with the technology of perspective we could more or less directly perceive this fact.

So the progress we are considering might generally be

appreciated in terms of an imperative to replace inference to perceptual reality wherever possible with something equivalent to what perceptual reality itself would present. To be sure, it is philosophically arguable that there is an inferential component in even the most direct perceptual knowledge. Even so, the inference required to move from the perception of something equivalent to perceptual reality, to the perceptual reality itself, is distinguishable from the inference involved in the perception of reality whenever this may be considered knowledge. Thus we may explain the posture of a shown figure by saying it is of someone in movement. But we *see* the actual movement of moving figures, and moving pictures give us something equivalent to this, where the need for explanation is circumvented by the technologies of representation. In another kind of case, which perhaps marks a logical limit to this progress, we always have to infer what others are *feeling* on the basis of cues furnished in expression and behavior. We may have to infer that what *we* are feeling is love or anxiety—but at least we feel it, as we do not with the love or anxiety of others. If there were something effectively equivalent to feeling their feelings, that would be an example of this sort of representational progress.

There are some deeply interesting aspects to this sort of progress. For example, to the degree that we are able to replace cues and inference with equivalences to direct perception, we approach something universal and, one may say, nonconventional. Or at least this is so when the cues themselves are more matters of convention than we realize. Artists have worked out a code for motivating inferences to things they could not, given the limitations of medium, directly represent. These cues are signs, the meaning of which have independently been learned, almost the way a language must, or at least a vocabulary. There is a marvelous art history to be written of how visual cues for smells and sounds are planted. No group of artists has been more inventive in this regard than comic-strip cartoonists (their ingenuity carries over into the animated cartoon), where wavy lines over

a fish mean that it stinks or a saw in a log means someone is snoring or a series of tiny clouds mean that something is moving. My favorite example shows the fact that a man is turning his head by drawing his head in several positions, united by some broken circles. *We* read this as a man turning his head, rather than a polycephalic figure of the sort familiar in Hindu sculpture, but that is because ours is a picture-rich culture and we have learned to do so. Show it to members of a culture where there are other signs or who have no pictorial need for depicting movement, and they will not know what is going on. Or they will guess. As we have to guess when considering pre-Columbian or Indian depictions of this order. But when we show them movies, none of this arises, for movies directly reach the perceptual centers involved in seeing movement, and so function at a subinferential level. Of course it took considerable time before the movement shown was convincing: it was a matter of "making and matching," to use Gombrich's expression, before movie-makers knew just how many frames per second had to pass the aperture to give us an equivalent to movement as really perceived.

It is this inferential bypass to which we refer when we speak of "fooling the senses," and there can be little question that this was an achievement of perspective. Fooling the senses does not of course mean fooling the viewer: our beliefs about the world form a system, and the fact that we know we are viewing a picture neutralizes what our foolish senses disclose. But my interest in perspective lies elsewhere for the moment, for philosophers have at times insisted that perspective is wholly a matter of convention and thus has specifically to be learned, like anything symbolic—perhaps in contrast with perceiving representations whose outlines are congruent with the edges of things, where there is a body of evidence which suggests that such recognition is spontaneous and perhaps wired in. It *is* true that it took a long time for perspective to be discovered, so far as the technologies of representation are concerned, but while artists had to learn

to show things in perspective, no one had to learn to *see* things that way. Gombrich observes that Giotto's contemporaries would have gasped at the verisimilitude of the banal depictions of bowls of cereal on our boxes of breakfast food. But their gasping would be evidence that they immediately saw how much more faithful to perceptual reality these were than Giotto's depictions, even if it took centuries for artists to learn to make convincing pictures like that. There is unfortunately not the same symmetry between recognizing and producing pictures that there is between understanding and producing sentences, which is one basis for supposing that pictorial competence differs from linguistic competence and that pictures do not constitute a language. There is a continuity between recognizing pictures and perceiving the world, but picture-making is a different sort of skill: animals are demonstrably capable of pictorial recognition, but picture-making seems exclusively a human prerogative. And its having to be learned is part of the reason that art—or at least representationalistic art—*has* a history. Our perceptual system may have evolved, but that is not the same as having a history.

What *may* be a matter of convention is the cultural decision to make pictures which look like what they are of. Other pictographic systems exist, but Vasari, and of course Gombrich, have claimed that only twice, first in ancient Greece and then in Renaissance Europe, has optical fidelity been a marked artistic aim. I think this is an underestimation. There is internal evidence that the Chinese, for example, would have used perspective if they had known about it, perhaps to their artistic detriment. For often one finds clouds and mists used to break up lines which, had they been allowed to be continuous, would have looked wrong: and a culture sensitive to optical wrongness may be described as committed to goals it has not learned to achieve. The Japanese, when they did finally see Western drawings in perspective, realized immediately what was wrong with theirs—but right or wrong from the viewpoint of perspective would

make no sense if there were not an implicit pursuit of optical fidelity. The architypically Japanese artist Hokusai immediately adopted perspective when he learned of its existence—without his prints looking "western" at all. Our own optical concerns explain the presence of shadows in Western paintings and their virtual absense in many other pictorial traditions, though even when there are none, as again in Japanese art, we have to decide whether they had a different pictographic culture or simply were retarded by technological slowness in achieving solidities: that light should have a source and not be simply a diffused illumination—if indeed we can think of Japanese paintings in terms of light at all—must be connected with the same considerations under which space is regarded as defined by the eye as a source and rays which vanish at a point. I have little doubt that the oriental conception of space failed to coincide with the way orientals perceived in space, which is not, I am claiming, a matter of convention any more than the senses as a perceptual system are: we are built that way. To the degree that we regard the representation of space as merely a matter of convention, the concept of progress evaporates and the structure of art history we are discussing loses any application. I now return to that structure.

The cultural imperative to replace inference with direct perception entails a continuous effort to transform the medium of representation if the progress this imperative defines is itself to continue. I suppose we should, in fact, distinguish between the development and the transformation of the medium. Imagine a history in which we begin with the outline drawings of things, where color is implied, viewers being counted on to know what colors things of a given shape are likely to be. And then it occurs to someone to actually show those colors, so that inference is no longer required. But now, while colored shapes are a step toward verisimilitude, their relation to one another in space is a matter of inference, artists depending upon us to know what these relationships are likely to be. It then occurs to someone that variations in

color and value will be seen as changes in depth, with the discovery that the sharpest values are those closest to the eye. This discovery might mark the development from icons to Cimabue and Giotto. The discovery of perspective then makes it possible to perceive as directly as we do perceive in reality how far away relative to the viewer and to one another objects are actually located. This would be an example of a development, since the medium itself is not especially altered, and we are dealing with the traditional materials of the painter, used with greater and greater effect so far as the imperative itself is concerned. But we still have to infer movement, and once it is decided that this is something we want instead to *show,* the inherent limitations of the medium become obstacles. And these limits can be overcome only by a transformation of the medium of the sort that motion-picture technology exemplifies. The change from black-and-white cinematography to color, and from single aperture spatiality to stereoscopic representation, might be regarded as the *development,* while the adjunction of sound might constitute a *transformation* of the medium. Whatever the case, increasingly complex technologies are needed for each advance at this point, and the division between development and transformation may become somewhat blurred. What I want to say is only that complexity goes with cost, and decisions have to be made as to whether we can live within the limits of our medium as it stands, or whether we are to be driven by the imperative that generates progress on to costlier and costlier mediations. Perhaps there is a parallel with the costliness of scientific advance: with each descent into the microstructure of the universe, more and more energy is demanded, and we have to make a social decision as to whether it is worth the costs to achieve the increment in cognitive control the next descent will bring. The technology is now in place for a transformation of the medium it might be well at this point to consider, namely moving holography. Thus far this has been a kind of scientific toy, though simple or still holography has been used by artists in something like

the spirit in which video has been used—as offering opportunities for artistic experiment without special reference to the concept of progress I have been discussing. It has been used, so to speak, for its physical possibilities, the way Rauschenberg used the physical quality of pencil marks or erasures.

Fixed-point perspective, as is well known, had no way of accommodating parallax, so that if one abandons that point in space which defines orderly recession, the scene slumps into distortion like a failed soufflé. In the celebrated ceiling fresco by Pozzo at St. Ignatius in Rome, in which the saint is shown in apotheosis, the illusion of his vertical transport into the heavens onto which the church opens up is available only from a certain point below, considerately identified by a marble disk in the floor. In fact the baroque artist uses cloud to camouflage parallactic discrepancies to much the same end as the Chinese used them to abort perspectival distortion, granting that in both cases clouds carried a spiritual and even a topographical significance—i.e., identifying the location as heaven or as the hills, respectively. We have learned to live with skewed parallax in movies as elsewhere, much, perhaps, as the Chinese viewer learned to live with anomalous pictorial spaces or as we all learn to live with the inconveniences of life—dust, noise, mosquitoes—in a kind of stoicism, until it occurs to us to do something about them, supposing something can be done. Those whom it badly bothers have the option of finding seats in movie houses which minimize parallactic discomfort. Holography makes possible parrallactic conservation, with actually rather revolutionary implications for theatrical design, in some degree anticipated in the legitimate theater, so-called, through theater-in-the-round. Just as this concept liberates actors from a kind of artificial two-dimensionality imposed by the architecture of the proscenium stage, moving holography enables cinema-in-the-round, images being liberated from the plane of the movie screen. The images would have a virtual three-dimensional identity, and appear, like visions,

full but impalpable, in our very midst. Priests in ancient times created illusions of gods in the uncanny space of temples by using Chinese mirrors, which enable the reflection of an actor, portraying Hercules, say, to appear detached in space, while recourse was had to clouds of incense (those ever-handy clouds!) to distract credulous celebrants from any cues to mendacity. As noted, holographic images could not be *felt*, and there would be a further question to face as to whether this was just something else to live with, or whether it was artistically worthwhile to finance research toward this further transformation of medium. Or we could retain impalpability to make an analogy to mystical vision natural, or even to provide a metaphor for art.

It is somewhat instructive to ponder this choice against a background furnished by the history of sculpture. Daedalus is legended to have confected moving dolls for the royal children of King Minos, who of course grew up to more spectacular distractions. But for the main part sculptors have preferred to allow movement to be inferred, as in the cited case of Bernini. Largely, I think, this must be because the machinery required to animate figures was unavailable, or cumbersome, or too conspicuous, and in consequence the movements too unconvincing for successful illusion: we have to remember that the ancients painted their statuary in a way doubtless too close to mortuarial cosmetics for us to be wholly comfortable. We would be even less comfortable with artificial animation: there is something evil in the idea, or at least uncanny—think of the dancing doll in *Coppélia*—and the clockwork statue of Abraham Lincoln voicing the Gettysburg Address at Disneyland is perhaps overdeterminately sickening.

Kinetic sculpture became aesthetically tolerable only when abstract, as in Calder's mobiles, where we do not have the obvious references to the real world which make the thought of moving sculpture in somewhat bad or even barbaric taste. But I have visited Hindu temples where the figures are sufficiently garishly colored that I am certain that

devotees would have adored having Shiva's arms rotate like a windmill. With holography, in any case, three-dimensional nonabstract moving objects have at last the possibility of convincingness, and the two figurative practices of our tradition—picture-making and effigy-making—merge, fulfilling a fantasy of mimetic progress. And *now* I want to raise the question of whether palpability presents a further opportunity. The *Apollo Belvedere* was painted in nice pink flesh tones, I dare say, but felt cold to the touch. Marble and bronze just feel like marble and bronze, whether shaped like breasts or pectoral muscles, and no one has ever sought (before at least Duchamp) to overcome material impediments and produce effigies palpably equivalent to flesh and skin, so that Venus' emblematic breasts feel like the real thing. It would, but this is my taste, be a kind of aesthetic perversion, like fondling life-size plastic dolls of the sort manufactured for shy and hopeless men. The tackiness may diminish when movement itself becomes convincing, as in holography. But perhaps it would be imprudent to press speculation past this point, as my only aim is to illuminate some of the kinds of aesthetic and even moral considerations which enter into technical decisions in the domain of representational advance.

There is, however, one observation I cannot forebear making. Thomas Mark has maintained, I believe correctly, that there are certain musical compositions demanding high virtuosity on the part of the performer, of which it has to be said that part of what they are about is the virtuosity demanded to play them: these are what we term showpieces. But I think it very generally true that works of art often, and perhaps always in the traditional concept of the masterpieces, are about the virtuosity exacted in their execution, so that the immediate subject of the work, if it has one, is typically merely an occasion for the *real* subject, which is the display of virtuosity. Thus the brushstroke, in New York School painting, is less the subject than the occasion for displaying the real subject, which is the virtuoso action of painting. The early works which employ linear perspective

use subjects which enable the perspective to be displayed, such as classical landscapes with the orderly array of columns and the recticiliar forms; wooded landscapes of the sort favored by Corot and the School of Barbizon would be useless for this purpose, and the very choice of them implies a more romantic and less regimented attitude toward space: less like a box or stage. One can sympathize with an artist like Paolo Uccello, who, since obsessed with perspective, chose unlikely subjects in order to demonstrate its power, such as battle scenes, emphasizing ranks of lances and rows of pennants, alas comically: the real battle is between subject and treatment, with Uccello as failed hero.

Now, whenever there is a technical expansion of representational possibilities, something like this internal connection between subject and technology becomes the most prominent feature of the works. When the first movies came from the studios of the Lumière brothers, the subjects chosen displayed movement for the sake of movement: a moving picture of a table full of apples would have been an idiotic choice, though it would be true that only for the first time was stillness an objective feature of the work, since only now was motion really possible. What audiences were shown was: crowds surging out of the factories, or traffic at the Place de l'Opéra, or trains, or the leafy boughs over the heads of picnickers in the Bois de Boulogne. And even today the chase as cinematic *pièce de resistance* has not cloyed. Cinerama hurled *us* through virtual space, trivially in the main, since the experiences of being on a roller coaster or a spinning airplane have deep limitations. My choice for the first holographic subject is, naturally, the Transfiguration of Christ, as described in the St. Matthew Gospel. After that I would want to see that masque which Prospero summons with a flourish of his staff out of airy nothing, for the charmed amazement of his daughter and her lover. What we will probably have, of course, will be stampeding cattle and bucking horses and cursing cattlemen. When, however, *palpability* should become a technical possibility, these could

hardly be appropriate subjects: and there is a serious question of whether palpability could ever become integrated into narrative sufficiently to suppose an artistic development beyond the technical one. If films, for example, had not gone narrative, our interest in the mere display of motion would surely have paled—after all, we can see the real thing any time we want. And I think it generally the case that unless mimesis becomes transformed into diegesis, or narative, an artform dies of diminishing excitement.

Whatever the case, it has always been possible to imagine, at least grossly, the future of art construed in terms of representational progress. One knew in principle what the agenda was, and hence what progress would have to be if there was to be progress. Visionaries could say such things as "Someday pictures will move," without knowing how it was to be achieved, just as not long ago they could say, "Someday men will walk on the moon," without knowing, again, quite how *this* was to be achieved. But then, and this has been the main reason for canvassing this entire theory, it would be possible to speak of the end of art, at least as a progressive discipline. When, for every perceptual range R, an equivalent could be technically generated, then art would be over with, just as science would be over with when, as was thought to be a genuine possibility in the nineteenth century, everything was known. In the nineteenth century, for example, it was believed that logic was a finished science, and even that physics was, with a few nagging details to mop up. But there is no internal reason for us to think that science, or art, has be be endless, and so there was always a question that would have to be faced, as to what post-progressive life would be like. To be sure, we have more or less abandoned this model in art, since the production of perceptual equivalence no longer much dazzles us, and in any case there are certain definite limits set when narrativization becomes an artistic fact. Even so, as we shall see, the model has an oblique pertinence even today.

Before coming to that, however, I want to raise a philo-

sophical point. So long as the philosophy of art was articulated in terms of success or failure in technologies of perceptual equivalence, it would have been difficult to get an interestingly general definition of art. Aristotle widened the notion of imitation to include the imitation of an action, in order to bring narrative drama into the scope of that concept, but at that point the theory of mimesis parts company with the concept of perceptual equivalences, since it is far from plain that drama presents us with merely perceptual equivalences to what a sort of eyewitness to the action would perceive. And while this is, in the case of dramatic presentations, a mistakenly entertainable ideal, it is not so at all when we consider *fiction* as the description of an action. And when we think of description as against mimesis, we may immediately notice that it is not at all clear that there is any room for the concept of progress or of technological transformations at all. Let me explain this.

Thinkers have, from Lao Tzu to the present, lamented or celebrated the inadequacies of language. It is felt that there are descriptive limits, and then important things beyond these limits which language cannot express. But to the degree that this is true, no expansion of representational possibilities, say by introducing new terms into the language, will remedy the situation, largely because the complaint is against descriptivity itself, which simply is too distant from reality to give us the experience reality itself affords. And it is a mark of the natural languages that whatever can be said in one can be said in any (and what *cannot* be said in one cannot be said in any), allowing always for differences of felicity and degrees of roundaboutness. So there cannot ever have been a technological problem of expanding the descriptive resources of the natural languages: they are equivalently universal.

I do not mean to imply that there are no limits to language, but only that whatever they are, nothing is going to count as progress toward their overcoming, since this would still be within language as a representational system. So

there is no logical room for the concept of progress. At no point in the history of literature, for example, would visionaries have been able to prophesy that someday men will be able to say certain things—in part perhaps because in saying what men will be able to say, it is *already* said. Of course someone might have been able to say that someday men will be able to talk about things then forbidden, sex perhaps, or be able to use language to criticize institutions which they are not able to do now. But this would be a matter of moral progress, or political progress, if it is that, and would have as much application to pictures as to words. Whatever the value of doing so, we can today see things in movies it would have been unthinkable to show a generation ago—the star's breasts, say. But this is not *technological* advance.

The linear or progressive model of the history of art thus finds its best examples in painting and sculpture, then in movies and talkies and, if you wish, feelies. There has never been a problem of *describing* motion, or depth, or for that matter palpability. "Her soft and yielding flesh" describes a perceptual experience for which there is no mimetic equivalent. Our next model will make a more general definition possible, since it is not thwarted by the differences between words and pictures. But then it eliminates those factors from the essence of art which made it possible to think of art as a progressive discipline.

I like to surmise that a confirmation of my historical thesis—that the task of art to produce equivalences to perceptual experiences passed, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, from the activities of painting and sculpture to those of cinematography—in the fact that painters and sculptors began conspicuously to abandon this goal at just about the same time that all the basic strategies for narrative cinema were in place. By about 1905, almost every cinematic strategy since employed had been discovered, and it was just about then that painters and sculptors began ask-

ing, if only through their actions, the question of what could be left for *them* to do, now that the torch had, as it were, been taken up by other technologies. I suppose that the history of artistic progress could be run backward: we can imagine the projected end state as having been achieved, but now it seems a good idea, for whatever reason, to replace perceptual equivalences with cues to inference—perhaps because a greater value gets put on inference (= Reason) than on perception. Bit by bit cinematography gets replaced with the cues to kinematic motion of the sort we find in Rosa Bonheur or Rodin, and so on, until, I suppose, perceptual equivalence disappears from art altogether and we get an art of pure descriptivity, where words replace perceptual stimuli. And who knows, this may seem too closely tied to experience and the next move might be music. But given the way progress itself *was* conceived, about 1905 it appeared that painters and sculptors could only justify their activities by redefining art in ways which had to be shocking indeed to those who continued to judge painting and sculpture by the criteria of the progressive paradigm, not realizing that a transformation in technology now made practices appropriate to those critera more and more archaic.

The Fauves are good examples. Consider the portrait by Matisse of his wife done in 1906, in which Madame Matisse is shown with a green stripe down her nose (indeed, the title of the painting is *The Green Stripe*). Chiang Yee told me of a painting done by a Jesuit artist of a Chinese emperor's favorite concubine, which shocked her, since she knew her face was not half black and *he* used shadows. Instruction on how the world really looks would have made her recognize that *she* really looked the way he had shown her, given the realities of light and shade. But nothing of that sort is going to redeem Matisse's painting for the history of perceptual equivalences, not even if there happened to be a greenish shadow along his subject's nose—for it would not have been *that* particular green. Nor were ladies at that time using nose shadow as those of our time use eye shadow. Nor was she

suffering nasal gangrene. So one could only conclude (as people did) that Matisse had forgotten how to paint, had remembered how to paint but had gone crazy, was sane but was perverting his skills to the end of shocking the bourgeoisie, or trying to put something over on the collectors, critics, and curators (who are the three C's of the artworld).

These would have been standard rationalizations of objects, beginning to appear in epidemic quantity just then, which were unquestionably *paintings*, but which fell short by so considerable a degree of perceptual equivalence to anything in either the real world or the artworld, that some explanation of their existence seemed imperative. Until, that is, it began to be grasped that only relative to a theory which may have been put to a challenge was there any discrepancy at all, and that if there was one, well, it might be the fault of the theory. In science, ideally at least, we don't blame the world when our theories don't work—we change the theories until they do work. And so it was with Post-Impressionist painting. It became increasingly clear that a new theory was urgently required, that the artists were not failing to yield up perceptual equivalences but were after something not to be understood in those terms primarily or at all. It is to the credit of aesthetics that its practitioners responded to this with theories which, however inadequate, recognized the need, and a good example of at least a suitable theory was that painters were not so much representing as expressing. Croce's *Estetica come scienza dell'espressione* appeared in 1902. Suppose then that *The Green Stripe* tries to get us to see how Matisse felt about the subject shown, his own wife, calling for a complex act of interpretation on the part of the viewer.

This account is remarkable for the fact that it incorporates the theory of perceptual equivalences in the sense that it presupposes the discrepancies, which it then explains as due to feelings. It acknowledges, as it were, the intensional character of emotional states, that feelings are *about*, or *toward*, some object or state of affairs; and since Croce supposes art to be a kind of language, and language a form of

communication, the communication of feeling will succeed to just the extent that the work can show what object it is toward which the feeling is expressed—e.g., the artist's wife. Then the discrepancies between the way this object is in fact shown and the way it would be shown were mere perceptual equivalence aimed at, no longer marks a distance to be covered by the progress of art or by the artist's mastery of illusionist technique, but rather consists in the externalization or objectification of the artist's feelings toward what he shows. The feeling is then communicated to the viewer to just the degree that the viewer can infer it on the basis of the discrepancies. Indeed, the viewer must generate some hypothesis to the effect that the object is shown the way it is because the artist feels about the object the way he does. Thus De Kooning paints a woman as the locus of slashes, El Greco paints saints as stretched verticalities, Giacometti molds figures as impossibly emaciated, not for optical reasons nor because there really are women, saints, or persons like these, but because the artists respectively reveal feelings of aggressiveness, spiritual longing, or compassion. It would be very difficult to suppose De Kooning is expressing compassion, let alone spirituality, or that El Greco is expressing aggression. But of course the ascription of feelings is always epistemologically delicate.

It becomes particularly delicate when the theory recommends the view that the object represented by the work becomes the occasion for expressing something about it, and we then begin to reconstitute the history of art along these new lines. For we now have to decide to what degree the discrepancies with an ideal perceptual equivalence are a matter of technical shortfall, and to what degree a matter of expression. Obviously we are not to read all discrepancies as expressive, for then the concept of progress no longer applies: we must assume that in a great many cases an artist would eliminate discrepancies if he but knew how. Even so, certain discrepancies which would be laughable from the point of view of representation become artistically fundamental from that of expression. At the time of the Fauves, the deviations emphasized by apologists of the new art and subscribers to the new theory were made acceptable by pointing to the fact that the artist after all could *draw*: one pointed in evidence to Matisse's academic exercises, or to Picasso's amazing canvases of his sixteenth year. But these anxious questions lost their force after a time as expression seemed more and more to carry the definitional properties of art. Objects became less and less recognizable and finally disappeared altogether in Abstract Expressionism, which of course meant that interpretation of purely expressionist work required reference to objectless feelings: joy, depression, generalized excitement, etc. What was interesting was the fact that since there could be paintings which were purely expressive and hence not explicitly representational at all, representationality must disappear from the definition of art. But even *more* interesting from our perspective is the fact that the *history* of art acquires a totally different structure.

It does so because there is no longer any reason to think of art as having a progressive history: there simply is not the possibility of a developmental sequence with the concept of expression as there is with the concept of mimetic representation. There is not because there is no mediating technology of expression. I do not mean to imply that novel technologies of representation may not admit novel modes of expression: beyond question there are expressive possibilities in cinema that simply had no parallel in the kind of art cinema transformed. But these new possibilities would not constitute a progressive development—viz., there would be no basis for saying that we now can express what we could express badly or not at all before, as we could say that we now can show things we could only show badly or not at all before. So the history of art has no future of the sort that can be extrapolated as it can against the paradigm of progress: it sunders into a sequence of individual acts, one after another. Of course there may be feelings one dare not express at a given time but which in time one can express, but the raising or

lowering of the thresholds of expressive inhibition belong to the history of morality. And of course there may be a history of *learning* to express feelings, as through a kind of therapy, but then this would belong to the general history of freedom, with no particular application to art. Heidegger has said that not one step has been taken since Aristotle's *Rhetoric* in the philosophical analysis of feelings—but this surely is because the range of human feelings can be very little different from what it was in ancient times. There may be new objects for these feelings, even new ways of expressing them—but once more this is not a development history.

There is a further point. Once art becomes construed as expression, the work of art must send us ultimately to the state of mind of its maker, if we are to interpret it. Realistically speaking, artists of a given period share a certain expressive vocabulary, which is why, right or wrong, my casual interpretations of De Kooning, El Greco, and Giacometti seem at least natural. Even so, this seems to me a quite external fact, not at all necessary to the concept of expression, and conceivably each artist could express himself in his own way, so that one vocabulary, as it were, would be incommensurable with another, which makes possible a radically discontinuous view of the history of art, in which one style of art follows another, as in an archipelago, and we might in principle imagine any sequence we choose. In any case we must understand each work, each corpus, in the terms that define that particular artist we are studying, and what is true of De Kooning need have nothing to do with what is true of anyone else. The concept of expression makes such a view possible, relativizing art, as it does, to individual artists. The history of art is just the lives of the artists, one after another.

It is striking that the history of science is thought of somewhat along these lines today—not, as in the optimism of the nineteenth century, as a linear, inevitable progression toward an end state of total cognitive representation, but as a discontinuous sequence of phases between which there is a radical incommensurability. It is almost as though the semantics of scientific terms were like the semantics of terms like "pain," where each user is referring to something different and speaking in a private idiom—so that to the degree that we understand one another at all, we do so on our own terms. Thus "mass" means something different in each phase of science, in part because it is redefined with each theory that employs it, so that synonymy between theory and theory is ruled out. But even if we stop short of this extreme lexical radicalism, the mere structure of history might insure some degree of incommensurability. Imagine the history of art reversed, so that it begins with Picasso and Matisse, passes through Impressionism and the Baroque, suffers a decline with Giotto, only to reach its pinnacle with the original of the *Apollo Belvedere*, beyond which it would be impossible to imagine a further advance. Strictly speaking, the works in question *could* have been produced in that order. But they could not have the interpretation, nor hence the structure, we perceive them as having under the present chronology. Picasso, only for example, is constantly referring to the history of art he systematically deconstructs, and so presupposes those past works. And something of the same sort is true of science. Even if scientists are not as conscious of their history as artists are, in truth there are intertheoretic references which assure a degree of incommensurability, if only because we know Galileo and he could not have known us, and to the degree that our uses refer to his, the terms we use cannot have the same meanings his did. So there is an important respect in which we *have* to understand the past in our *own* terms, and there can in consequence be no uniform usage from phase to phase.

There have been philosophies of history which have made these incommensurabilities central, if not for precisely the reasons I have sketched. I am thinking just now of Spengler, who dissolved what had been assumed to be the linear history of the West into three distinct and self-contained historical periods, Classical, Magian, and Faustian, each with its own vocabulary of cultural forms, between which no com-

mensurability of meaning could be assumed. The classical temple, the domed basilica, the vaulted cathedral are less three moments in a linear history than three distinct expressions in the medium of architecture of distinct underlying cultural spirits. In some absolute sense the three periods succeed one another, but only in the way in which one generation succeeds another, with the specific analogy to be drawn that each generation reaches and expresses its maturity in its own way. Each of them defines a different world, and it is the worlds that are incommensurable. Spengler's book was notoriously titled *The Decline of the West*, and it was reckoned exceedingly pessimistic when it first appeared, in part because of the biological metaphors Spengler employed, which required each of his civilizations to go through its own cycle of youth, maturity, decline, and death. So the future of *our* art is very dim, if we accept his premises, but—and how optimistic he after all was—a new cycle will begin, with its own peaks, and we can no more imagine it than *we* could have been imagined from an earlier cycle. So *art* will have a future, it is only that *our* art will not. *Ours* is a form of life that has grown old. So you could look on Spengler as saying something dark or something bright, depending upon how you feel about your own culture within the framework of the severe relativism it, as indeed all the views I have been discussing in this section, presupposes.

And the reason I am stressing this relativism here is that the question I began with, whether art has a future, clearly is antirelativistic in that it really does presuppose a linear history in some sense. This has an absolutely profound philosophical implication, in that it requires an internal connection between the way we define art and the way we think of the history of art. Only, for instance, if we first think of art as representation can we then think of art as having the sort of history which fulfills the progressive model. If, on the other hand, we think of art as simply being expression, or the communication of feelings, as Croce did, well, it just can't have a history of that sort and the question of the end of art can have no application, just because the concept of expression goes with that sort of incommensurability in which one thing just comes after another thing. So that even if it is a fact that artists express feelings, well, this is only a fact, and cannot be the essence of art *if* art has the kind of history within which the question of its coming to an end makes sense. That art is the business of perceptual equivalence is consistent with its having that sort of history, but then, as we saw, it is insufficiently general as a definition of art. So what emerges from this dialectic is that if we are to think of art as having an end, we need a conception of art history which is linear, but a theory of art which is general enough to include representations other than the sort illusionistic painting exemplifies best: literary representations, for example, and even music.

Now Hegel's theory meets all these demands. His thought requires that there be genuine historical continuity, and indeed a kind of progress. The progress in question is not that of an increasingly refined technology of perceptual equivalence. Rather, there is a kind of *cognitive* progress, where it is understood that art progressively approaches that kind of cognition. When the cognition is achieved, there really is no longer any point to or need for art. Art is a transitional stage in the coming of a certain kind of knowledge. The question then is what sort of cognition this can be, and the answer, disappointing as it must sound at first, is the knowledge of what art is. Just as we saw is required, there is an internal connection between the nature and the history of art. History ends with the advent of self-consciousness, or better, self-knowledge. I suppose in a way our personal histories have that structure, or at least our educational histories do, in that they end with maturity, where maturity is understood as knowing—and accepting—what or even who we are. Art ends with the advent of its own philosophy. I shall now tell this last story by returning to the history of past perceptual art.

The success of the Expression Theory of art is also the

failure of the Expression Theory of art. Its success consisted in the fact that it was able to explain all of art in a uniform way—i.e., as the expression of feelings. Its failure consisted in the fact that it has only one way of explaining all of art. When discontinuities first appeared as puzzling phenomena in the progressive history of representation, it was a genuine insight that perhaps artists were trying to express rather than primarily to represent. But after about 1906, the history of art simply seemed to be the history of discontinuities. To be sure, this could be accommodated to the theory. Each of us has his or her own feelings, so it is to be expected that these will be expressed in individual ways, and even in incommensurable ways. Most of us, of course, express our feelings in very similar ways, and there are forms of expression which must in fact be understood in evolutionary, not to say physiological, terms: we are built to express feelings in ways we all recognize. But then the theory is that these are artists and artists are defined in part through the uniqueness of their feelings. The artist is different from the rest of us. But the trouble with this plausible if romantic account lay in the fact that each new movement, from Fauvism down, let alone the Post-Impressionism from which that derived, seemed to require some kind of *theoretical* understanding to which the language and the psychology of emotions seemed less and less adequate.

Just think of the dazzling succession of art movements in our century: Fauvism, the Cubisms, Futurism, Vorticism, Synchronism, Abstractionism, Surrealism, Dada, Expressionism, Abstract Expressionism, Pop, Op, Minimalism, Post-Minimalism, Conceptualism, Photorealism, Abstract Realism, Neo-Expressionism—simply to list some of the more familiar ones. Fauvism lasted about two years, and there was a time when a whole period of art history seemed destined to endure about five months, or half a season. Creativity at that time seemed more to consist in making a period than in making a work. The imperatives of art were virtually historical imperatives—Make an art-historical period!—and success consisted in producing an accepted innovation. If you were successful, you had the monopoly on producing works no one else could, since no one else had made the period with which you and perhaps a few collaborators were from now on to be identified. With this went a certain financial security, inasmuch as museums, wedded to historical structure and the kind of completeness which went with having examples from each period, would want an example from you if you were a suitable period. As innovative an artist as De Kooning was never especially allowed to evolve, and De Chirico, who understood these mechanisms exactly, painted de chiricos throughout his life, since that's what the market wanted. Who would want a Utrillo that looked like Mondrian, or a Marie Laurencin that looked like Grace Hartigan, or a Modigliani like Franz Kline? And each period required a certain amount of quite complex theory in order that the often very minimal objects could be transacted onto the plane of art. In the face of this deep interplay between historical location and theoretical enfranchisement, the appeal to feeling and expression seemed just less and less convincing. Even today we hardly know what Cubism was really about, but I am certain that there is a great deal more to it than Braque and Picasso ventilating their surprisingly congruent feelings toward guitars.

The Expression Theory, while too thin by far to account for this rich profusion of artistic styles and genres, has nevertheless the great merit of having approached works of art as constituting a natural kind, surface variations notwithstanding, and to have responded in the spirit of science to what has been a brooding question since Plato—namely, What is Art? The question became urgent in the twentieth century, when the received model collapsed, though that was not even a good model when no one could tell that it was not. But the inadequacy of the theory became year by year—or, if I may, period by period—more apparent as each movement raised the question afresh, offering itself as a possible final answer. The question indeed accompanied each

new artform as the Cogito, according to a great thesis of Kant's, accompanies each judgment, as though each judgment raises about itself the question of What is Thought? And it began to seem as though the whole main point of art in our century was to pursue the question of its own identity while rejecting all available answers as insufficiently general. It was as though, to paraphrase a famous formula of Kant, art were something conceptuable without satisfying any specific concept.

It is this way of looking at things which suggests another model of art history altogether, a model narratively exemplified by the *Bildungsroman*, the novel of self-education which climaxes in the self's recognition of the self. This is a genre recently and, I think, not inappropriately to be mainly found in feminist literature, where the question the heroine raises, for reader and for herself, is at once who is she and what is it to be a woman. The great philosophical work which has this form is Hegel's astonishing *Phenomenology of Spirit*, a work whose hero is the spirit of the world—whom Hegel names *Geist*—the stages of whose development toward self-knowledge, and toward self-realization through self-knowledge, Hegel traces dialectically. Art is one of these stages—indeed, one of the nearly final stages of spirit's return to spirit through spirit—but it is a stage which must be gone through in the painful ascent toward the final redeeming cognition.

The culmination of Geist's quest and destiny is, as it happens, philosophy, according to Hegel's scheme, largely because philosophy is essentially reflexive, in the sense that the question of what it is is part of what it is, its own nature being one of its major problems. Indeed, the history of philosophy may be read as the story of philosophy's mistaken identities, and of its failures in seeing through and to itself. It is possible to read Hegel as claiming that art's philosophical history consists in its being absorbed ultimately into its own philosophy, demonstrating then that self-theoretization is a genuine possibility and guarantee that there is something

whose identity consists in self-understanding. So the great drama of history, which in Hegel is a divine comedy of the mind, can end in a moment of final self-enlightenment, where the enlightenment consists in itself. The historical importance of art then lies in the fact that it makes philosophy of art possible and important. Now if we look at the art of our recent past in these terms, grandiose as they are, what we see is something which depends more and more upon theory for its existence as art, so that theory is not something external to a world it seeks to understand, so that in understanding its object it has to understand itself. But there is another feature exhibited by these late productions which is that the objects approach zero as their theory approaches infinity, so that virtually all there is at the end *is* theory, art having finally become vaporized in a dazzle of pure thought about itself, and remaining, as it were, solely as the object of its own theoretical consciousness.

If something like this view has the remotest chance of being plausible, it is possible to suppose that art had come to an end. Of course, there will go on being art-making. But art-makers, living in what I like to call the post-historical period of art, will bring into existence works which lack the historical importance or meaning we have for a very long time come to expect. The historical stage of art is done with when it is known what art is and means. The artists have made the way open for philosophy, and the moment has arrived at which the task must be transferred finally into the hands of philosophers. Let me conclude by spelling this out in a way which might make it acceptable.

"The end of history" is a phrase which carries ominous overtones at a time when we hold it in our power to end everything, to expel mankind explosively from being. Apocalypse has always been a possible vision, but has seldom seemed so close to actuality as it is today. When there is nothing left to make history—i.e., no more human beings—

there will be no more history. But the great meta-historians of the nineteenth century, with their essentially religious readings of history, had rather something more benign in mind, even if, in the case of Karl Marx, violence was to be the engine of this benign culmination. For these thinkers, history was some kind of necessary agony through which the end of history was somehow to be earned, and the end of history then meant the end of that agony. History comes to an end, but not mankind—as the story comes to an end, but not the characters, who live on, happily ever after, doing whatever they do in their post-narrational insignificance. Whatever they do and whatever now happens to them is not part of the story lived through them, as though they were the vehicle and it the subject.

Here is a pertinent summation by that profound and influential commentator on Hegel, Alexandre Kojève:

> In point of fact, the end of human time, or History—that is, the definitive annihilation of Man, properly speaking, or of the free and historical individual—means quite simply the cessation of action in the full sense of the term. Practically, this means the disappearance of wars and bloodly revolutions. And also the disappearance of Philosophy. For since Man no longer changes essentially, there is no reason to change the (true) principles which are at the basis of his understanding of the world and himself. But all the rest can be preserved indefinitely: art, love, play, etc.: in short, everything that makes man *happy*.

And Marx, in a famous passage upon which there can be little doubt that Kojève based his, describes the life of man when all the contradictions that define history, and which are expressed socially as the class wars so ominously specified in *The Communist Manifesto*, have worked themselves out through the agony of history, so that society is now classless and there is nothing left to generate more history, and man is deposited on the promised shores of utopia, a paradise of nonalienation and nonspecialization. There, Marx tells us, I can be a hunter in the morning and a fisher in the

afternoon and a critical critic in the evening. Post-historical life, for Hegel as for Marx, will have the form of a kind of philosophical *Club mediterranée*, or what used to be known as heaven, where there is nothing left for us to do but—in the phrase of our adolescents—hang out. Or, to take another image, this time from Plato, where, at the end of his *Republic*, he depicts a choosing situation, in which men, purged in the afterlife and ready to reenter the world, have arrayed before them the variety of lives from which they may pick one: and the canny Odysseus chooses a life of quiet obscurity, the sort of life most people live most of the time, the simple dumb existence of the sitcom, village life, domestic life, the kind of life lamented, in a painful episode, by Achilles in the underworld. Only, in Marx and in Hegel, there is no history to rumble beyond the distant horizons. The storms have abated forever. And now we can do what we like, heeding that imperative that is no imperative at all: *Fay çe que voudras*—"Do whatever you want."

The End of History coincides, and is indeed identical, with what Hegel speaks of as the advent of Absolute Knowledge. Knowledge is absolute when there is no gap between knowledge and its object, or knowledge is its own object, hence subject and object at once. The closing paragraph of the *Phenomenology* suitably characterizes the philosophical closure of the subject it treats of, by saying that it "consists in perfectly knowing itself, in knowing what it is." Nothing is now outside knowledge, nor opaque to the light of cognitive intuition. Such a conception of knowledge is, I believe, fatally flawed. But if anything comes close to exemplifying it, art in our times does—for the object in which the artwork consists is so irradiated by theoretical consciousness that the division between object and subject is all but overcome, and it little matters whether art is philosophy in action or philosophy is art in thought. "It is no doubt the case," Hegel writes in his *Philosophy of the Fine Arts*, "that art can be utilized as a mere pastime and entertainment, either in the embellishment of our surroundings, the imprinting of a life-enhancing