

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 extinguish 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 them selves through making art is inextinguishable, and that, in that sense, art is "everlasting."<sup>4</sup> 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 groups artists. There may even be theories of art to account for the importance art is perceived to have in the common course of things.