

The Role of Art in History and the Art of the Future

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Given the social, economic and ecological challenges of our times, mankind stands at the crossroads of its history. Human civilization may either end in a global catastrophe or enter into the promised land of freedom and happiness. Art finds itself at a turning point as well. For it has finally discovered its true nature and freed itself from the dictates of a wrongly conceived history. Furthermore the future of mankind and the future of art are closely dependent upon one another. On the one hand, art has an important role to play in the fulfillment of the promises of historical progress and this progress is the necessary condition for art to flourish in the future. To clarify this mutual dependence, I shall first examine the structure of economic history, then consider the essence of art in order finally to be able to determine the role that the art of the future should play in future economic history.

A philosophy of history – how is it possible?

While engaging with the history of philosophy is often considered to be the only way to undertake philosophy today, at least in Europe, a philosophy of history itself seems to be an impossible undertaking. Philosophers who nevertheless address this idea, as Kant, Hegel and Marx did, face the following objection. History is the outcome of free decisions and their mutual interaction. Therefore it is a highly contingent phenomenon, made up of a series of completely unpredictable events, for which no law, not even a law of probability, can be derived. Philosophy, on the other hand, is concerned with items that are necessary. So history cannot be a possible object of philosophy. If this argument were true, my project of determining the role of art in history in a philosophical way would be pointless right from the beginning. Therefore I have first to establish that a philosophy of history is indeed possible.

In my view (Seel 2008), a philosophy of history is not a theory *a priori*, it is not concerned with necessary facts or laws of history, and its aim is not to predict individual future events. However, it does seek to establish the general patterns and overall structure of historical progress and development. How is this possible? The only way to overcome this apparent contradiction is to look at some basic anthropological facts which, though contingent, make progress both possible and necessary.

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Anthropological facts of this kind can in fact be found. The first of these is that, due to their biological condition, human beings need to replace the energy that they expend through the very process of living: in order to stay alive they have to eat and drink. Furthermore, they do not immediately have available to them the things they need or want to have. They require certain means in order to obtain these ends and deriving such means involves effort. I call a concrete human activity 'labour' if it is the necessary means of obtaining something that we want for its own sake.¹

The second contingent anthropological fact that we have to take into account is our interest in activities of all kinds which have the highly valuable property of giving us pleasure and satisfaction. I call a concrete human activity 'leisure'² if it is chosen for its own sake or for the sake of the joy, pleasure and satisfaction it yields.

I should here emphasize that the two features of human activity I have distinguished cannot be used to classify kinds of activities. For the same kind of activity can be chosen by one person as a means to reach some end and by another as a form of 'leisure'.³ Furthermore, the two aspects of our activities are not mutually exclusive. For one and the same concrete activity can be a necessary means of our survival and at the same time be a source of pleasure and satisfaction such that we would engage in it even if it did not serve any additional purpose. Thus an artist or a scientist may make a living from the service he offers, but at the same time enjoy himself and get perfect satisfaction from his activity. However, certain activities do have the character of 'pure labour' while others have the character of 'pure leisure'. The first are engaged in by a subject only because they are required to attain a certain end. On the other hand, we engage in activities of pure leisure only because we desire them for their own sake. We choose them not by necessity but because of their intrinsic value (Seel 1982–83).

Concerning these two aspects of our human activities we may conceive two possible extreme scenarios, one worst-case scenario and one best-case scenario. The best case would be a situation where everybody could spend all of their time in leisure activities, whether because labour and leisure happened to coincide or whether because no labour was needed anymore. In the latter case our entire time-budget would contain only leisure time. The worst case would be a situation where everybody had to spend all their time in pure labour activities. Everybody would have to work for 24 hours every day in order to be able to stay alive for the next 24 hours. We might call the first type of situation 'paradise' and the second 'hell'.

Now, the third fact that makes a philosophy of history possible is that human beings find themselves not in paradise but in hell, or at least in some situation in between. It is very interesting in this context that practically all cultures have developed mythologies in which the difference between paradise and hell plays a central role and in which, after losing the joys of paradise humans constantly strive to regain them. A philosophy of economic history does nothing else but explain these mythologies through interpreting anthropological facts and describing the structure of historical economic progress on the basis of these.

Indeed, a philosophy of economic history is possible because on the one hand, human beings find themselves in a situation that is other than paradise and on the other hand, they are able to realize the intellectual and natural conditions for reducing step by step the percentage of their vital time that needs to be devoted to pure labour. Thus human beings may be said to be on the way to gaining or regaining paradise. This is what technological and economic progress is about.⁴ The guiding idea of this progress is the idea of freedom from the burden of labour and the opportunity to choose freely the way of spending one's limited time of life. In other words, the end-point of economic history is a situation where pure labour has disappeared and human beings are finally free to engage in activities they choose for their own sake.⁵ It is possible to reach this end because human beings are able to improve the productivity of labour by technological inventions and economic collaboration. However, it is not sufficient simply to reduce pure labour; we need also to fill

in the gained leisure time with rewarding and meaningful activities. It is here that art presents itself, for art is one of the possibilities, maybe the most sophisticated and noble of these, for giving a sense to our life. But in order to determine this role for art, we must first determine what art is.

What is art?

With this question we confront no lesser problems than those encountered with our first question. For philosophy of art seems to be an impossible undertaking today. To be sure, since Plato philosophers have tried to determine the essence of art and the nature of the different kinds of art. But the conclusions they have traditionally reached came under challenge when the arts changed radically, first with the development of abstract art and later with Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* and Andy Warhol's *Brillo Boxes*. Under this challenge Nelson Goodman (1978: 57) had already diagnosed that the philosophers were putting the wrong question. Instead of asking 'what is art?' they should ask 'when is art?' Arthur Danto (1997: 114) took a further step forward by declaring that 'everything can be art'. Now, if this is correct, there is in fact no essence of art to be found by philosophers or, to put it in a paradoxical way: the essence of art is to lack any essence.⁶

However, Arthur Danto's statement that everything can be art seems to be correct only if we take it that art consists of works of art and that works of art are substances. If, on the contrary, we consider art as an activity, we cannot say this anymore. For there are activities like scientific research, economic transactions or surgery – to give only some salient examples – which clearly are not and could not possibly be art. If this is correct, then Arthur Danto's statement must mean that any object whatsoever is capable of being used in an artistic activity. However, in order to see why this is true we have to determine which kind of activity art essentially is.

The starting point of my investigation into the essence of art is the observation that art, if it is well executed, provokes strong, deep and great emotions and a high degree of pleasure (Seel 2003). In fact, art can induce an addiction; we can fall in love with works of art and we often neglect our daily business when indulging ourselves with art. Therefore, an important task for any theory of art has to be the explanation of these emotions and of this pleasure. Unfortunately, current philosophical aesthetics mostly neglects this question, as pleasure itself is no longer a central subject of philosophical reflection. We need to restore these subjects to their old glory. Furthermore, we need to explain the existence of special aesthetic qualities and justify the objectivity of aesthetic value judgments.

The normal way to determine the essence of an item is to look for the features that distinguish it from the other items that fall under the same kind. What other activities does art have to be distinguished from? Traditionally, philosophers distinguish two kinds of human activity: searching for knowledge and mastering private and social life. The first is called 'theory', the second 'praxis'. Very late in the history of philosophy a third kind of human activity appeared as an object of philosophical interest, namely play. Thus, in his third critique Kant added aesthetics as a third field of transcendental philosophy in addition to the traditional philosophies of knowledge and ethics. Indeed, in Kant's aesthetics the concept of 'free play' is central. Later in the same era, the poet Friedrich Schiller (1962: 359) emphasized that 'man only plays when he is a man in the full meaning of the word, and he is only completely a man when he plays' [*Der Mensch spielt nur, wo er in voller Bedeutung des Wortes Mensch ist, und er ist nur da ganz Mensch, wo er spielt*]. In the last century, Hans-Georg Gadamer (1977: 29) defended a similar position saying that 'play is an elementary function of human life' [*Spiel ist eine elementare Funktion des menschlichen Lebens*]. It is this third type of human activity that, in my opinion, is the key to the correct understanding of the essence of art. In fact in my view, art is a close cousin of games like chess, football and tennis. But what is the special feature of play that distinguishes it from theory and praxis?

To answer this question let us analyze two examples, the game of chess and the game of football. Obviously, we have here activities that human beings did not engage in right from the beginning of their history. These activities were invented at some moment of time. Legend has it that the inventor of chess was promised the sum total of the grains of wheat that results when one grain is put on the first square of the chessboard and then the number of grains is doubled for each subsequent square – a truly royal reward. Apparently the king liked chess so much that he considered this reward as appropriate, not immediately realizing that all the grains of wheat in the world would be insufficient to meet it. How can we explain the extraordinary amount of pleasure and satisfaction games like chess and football give us, when we play them well, or even when we only watch them?

These games are activities which follow more or less firm rules. Yet not all activities that follow firm rules are pleasant. Think of military service. So we must look for the special features of game rules if we want to explain the pleasure the corresponding activities provide. If we analyze the rules of chess or football we see that we have to distinguish three kinds of rules.

1. The first are rules that fix the meaning of the symbols used in a game. I therefore call them ‘semantic rules’. For instance, it must be established by convention how to distinguish players from spectators, what kind of item has to be considered as a chessboard or as a playing field, which type of event counts as a goal etc. This kind of rule is also responsible for the supervenience of non-natural qualities on natural qualities. We can describe a goal in football, using physical predicates, as the fact that a spherical object of a certain diameter and a certain weight has crossed a given line inside a rectangular surface. It is purely conventional that this kind of event counts as a potential decider in a football game. This is the only possible and correct explanation of the phenomenon of supervenience. As we shall see, the supervenience of aesthetical qualities on physical qualities has to be explained in the same way. This first kind of rule is in a special way constitutive for a kind of game. For these rules define as well which type of action counts as playing the game in question and which does not. Therefore these rules are sometimes called ‘constitutive rules’ (Striker 1991: 33). It will become clear, however, that the three kinds of rules foreshadowed are together constitutive of a game and not just the first.
2. The second kind of rule that is constitutive of a game is that which permits, forbids or directs the players to execute certain types of actions. Striker (1991: 33) calls them ‘restrictive rules’. These rules allow us to decide whether a game is played in the correct way or not. This is not the same as deciding whether the game is actually being played or not. If, for instance, a football team leaves the field before the end of the game, we take it that the players have stopped playing. If, on the other hand, a football player uses his hand to score a goal, we consider this as a way of achieving the object of the game but one which is considered faulty. That this is the correct description of these types of action can be seen from the fact that in the first case the referee calls the game off while in the second case he punishes the fault and lets the game go on.
3. We have to distinguish a third kind of rule which is often confused with those of the second type. These are rules that set a goal for the players or give them a challenge, but which leave it up to them how to reach that goal or cope with that challenge. According to Striker (1991: 33) such rules are ‘strategic rules’, although she denies that they are rules of the game in the strict sense. In the case of football, the strategic rule consists of the challenge to score as many goals as possible and to hinder the adversary from scoring any at all; in the case of chess it is the goal of checkmating the adversary’s king or, if this is not possible, of reaching stalemate.

The fact that every game is constituted by these three kinds of rules is the basis of our explanation of the pleasure we find in playing games. In order to arrive at this explanation we need to know what pleasure is and what its causes are. As mentioned earlier, unlike ancient philosophers, modern thinkers have had little to say about pleasure and its sources. Therefore I will look for some clarification in ancient philosophy, especially in Plato and Aristotle. According to Aristotle, pleasure is the sensible knowledge of the presence of something good (*De anima* III, 7, 431a 10–12). Still according to Aristotle, the only thing that is intrinsically good for human beings is the exercise of our intellectual capacities insofar as these capacities allow us to cope with and overcome the greatest difficulties and the toughest obstacles (*Nicomachean Ethics*, X.7, 1177a 12–18). This consequently means that pleasure is nothing other than the sensible experience of our mastery over undertaking difficult and challenging activities (Seel 1984).

Now the role of the three kinds of rules in producing this form of pleasure becomes clear. Rules of the third kind set the challenge, rules of the second kind establish the obstacles that make the achievement difficult and rules of the first kind set the artificial and virtual frame in which the activity has to unfold.

Furthermore, the three kinds of rules allow us to explain how value judgments are possible in the realm of games and which status they have. The second and the third kinds of rules allow us perfectly well to judge whether a player or a team has played well or not. Experts on a given game make these judgments all the time. These judgments are not at all subjective. For a dispute over whether a certain move in a game was a good or a bad one can be decided with reference to the rules of the game and to the experience the experts had should they have played the game themselves. So these value judgments are objective, but they are relative to the rules and to the experience of playing by the rules.

Let me now try to bring to the fore the differences that distinguish play from theory and praxis. At first sight there seems to be no difference at all.

For theory and praxis also have rules that define them and these are rules of semantics, restriction and challenge, just as in the case of play. So theory and praxis are difficult activities as well, and they yield pleasure and satisfaction if they are carried out with mastery and success. The first and most important difference between play and the latter is, however, that the rules of a game are freely invented and the aim of each game is arbitrarily fixed and may be changed, whenever the community of the players likes, while the rules and aims of theory and praxis are fixed by human nature and human reason. We cannot replace the aim of finding truth or the aim of establishing a just society by some other aim just as we like. These aims are – to use a Kantian term – transcendental ideas that guide progress in the sciences and in politics in a necessary way.

This first difference leads immediately to a second one. Transcendental ideas confront humans with tasks of infinite extent, ones that they are unable to accomplish once and for all. Each scientific problem that is resolved immediately generates a new one; each social progress produces new injustice, and moral improvement of the one provokes resentment and jealousy of the other. This means that whatever pleasure and satisfaction we may gain from these activities is always undermined by a feeling of frustration and lack of perfection. In this sense, Sartre notoriously spoke of the ‘*conscience malheureuse*’ which characterizes human existence. On the other hand, games can in principle be played in a perfect way because we can shape the restrictive and challenging rules in such a way that, by training and exercise, a player can reach complete mastery and thus the height of pleasure and satisfaction. Perfection in play is possible in principle and therefore games are a so much greater source of pleasure and joy than the other types of human activities. As Schiller said (1962: 359), only when man plays can he feel like a god.

A third but no less important difference follows from the two explained earlier. Theory and praxis have their history, but play has not. The possibility of progress is an essential feature of history. Progress presupposes the possibility of distinguishing, by clear criteria, the better from the worse, the primitive from the advanced, the prior from the posterior. These are the prerequisites of what Arthur Danto calls a 'narrative'. What are these criteria? Our human nature leads us to pursue truth, seek economic welfare and fight for justice and peace. Without these guiding ideas we could not speak of progress or regression. Now, games have their rules, but not any such guiding idea that would allow them to make progress and have a history. We invent the rules of a game, but we neither invent the aims of history, nor can we decide whether or not to take part in it, as we do in the case of games.⁷ Therefore, in the realm of games we have no history, at the most we have histories. And all these histories are condemned to an early end. This occurs when all possible solutions of the problems have been found and all challenges met. Then the game loses its attractiveness. As a consequence people either try to restore the lost attractiveness by changing the rules or simply turn to another game.

In summary we can say that playing games is characterized by three liberties:

- a) the liberty to invent a game;
- b) the liberty to find new answers to the challenges of the game, and
- c) the liberty to play the game or leave it.

Art and play

To reach the conclusion of this section needs only one further step: to demonstrate that art is really a kind of play. Here again there are obvious and traditional objections. From Plato through Kant and Hegel to Heidegger, most philosophers have believed that art is a special kind of knowledge.⁸ However, if this were true, art would be a very deficient form of knowledge as Hegel in fact argued.⁹ In my view, the only way to preserve the autonomy of art and to show that it is irreducible to the other kinds of human activities is to consider it a close cousin of play. The following considerations strongly support this suggestion.

It seems that play and art have the same origin. They both go back to an original and primitive form of spending the time of leisure. Ethnologists and specialists of early history have observed that practically all primitive societies invented and developed special institutions to spend the time gained by economic progress. They used to have – at least once a year – a feast or festival. A festival is an event in which all the members of a community engage. Though each member of an early society may have had a special role to play in their festivals, the modern division of participants into actors and spectators did not yet exist, nor did the differentiation of the different arts and games. A festival integrates music, play, visual arts and games, and follows more or less strict rules corresponding to the three kinds we distinguished above. Though festivals originally had a religious function as well, their main purpose has traditionally been one of enjoyment. As Gadamer (1977: 52–60) argued, the original form of art was the festival. But festivals are also the origin of games. Arts and games, as we know them today, are the result of a development and a differentiation of the original artistic functions and elements of the festival.

The common origin of art and games also explains the following common features:

1. As is the case of games there are a plurality of arts and styles which exist side by side at the same time.

2. Every art and every style is defined by a set of rules that allow us to distinguish one art and one style from the others. Like the rules of a game the rules that define an art and a style are of the three kinds we distinguished before. So each style is characterized by semantic rules which allow us to explain the supervenience of aesthetical qualities on natural qualities. Each art and each style has its proper restrictive and challenge rules as well, for instance the challenge to represent three dimensional space on a two dimensional canvas or to represent movement in an unchanging piece of marble. The fact that each style is defined by the second and the third kind of rules is important when it comes to defending the possibility of aesthetic judgments. As in the case of games these value judgments are perfectly objective, but relative to the restrictive and challenging rules of a particular style.
3. The pleasure and satisfaction the arts yield is similar to the pleasure of playing games. It is a divine pleasure that we owe to our own invention and creativity. Kant says in § 5 of his *Critique of the Faculty of Judgment*, ‘Favour (liking what is beautiful, G.S.) is the only free liking. An object of inclination and one that a law of reason orders us to desire, leave us no freedom to turn anything into an object of pleasure for ourselves’ (Kant, KdU, AA V, 210; Transl.G.S.).¹⁰ What we enjoy in art is – just as in the case of play – the experience of our capacity to overcome with ease and mastery self-created difficulties and self-imposed challenges.
4. Like the games we play, art has no history, but only histories. Let me explain my point. As I said before, in order to speak of history in the narrow sense we need a guiding idea that allows us to judge by clear criteria whether a progress is made or not. Furthermore – as Kant emphasized – these guiding ideas define an end that will never be reached. We will never possess complete knowledge, we will never reach a state of perfect justice and we will never reach moral perfection. Art has no such guiding idea. Those who believe that in art, beauty plays this role are mistaken. There is no univocal idea of beauty; rather, what we mean by ‘beauty’ is different for each genre and for each style. Therefore we cannot say that baroque art marks a progress in relation to Renaissance art or expressionism in comparison to impressionism. The only progress we find in the arts is progress within a given style. Here we observe a typical development in three phases. First a group of artists discovers a new artistic challenge, for instance to present space as the human eye sees it, and proposes initial tentative and naïve answers to this challenge; then the next generation arrives at classical solutions to the problem posed by this style; finally a last generation, by exaggeration and over-implementation, reduces the rules of this style *ad absurdum*. Once this ultimate phase of a style is reached, artists lose interest in it and turn to new challenges defining new styles. Thus styles have limited histories, but they are not a part of one all-embracing history of art.

However, this thesis faces an obvious objection. Historians of art have always supposed and still suppose that there has been an all-embracing history of art and that this history is still going on. Indeed, the steps, developments and reversals of a unique history of art are the central objects of their research. Who could seriously deny the existence of this history? Isn’t the evidence historians have for their position so overwhelming that my thesis has to be abandoned right from the beginning? Even if we accept the thesis of Hans Belting and Arthur Danto according to which the history of art conceived of as an all-embracing history came to an end at the end of the twentieth century, my position still remains challengeable. For, in order to have an end, history must have existed in the first place (Seel 2006: 119) and this is – according to my conception of the essence of art – impossible. Consequently I find myself on the horns of a dilemma whose two alternatives are equally unacceptable: either my conception of art is correct and the history of the

art-historian is but a methodological illusion, or there was a real history of art and my conception of art is wrong.

There is only one way out of this dilemma. I found it by reflecting on the role philosophy played in the history of art. Right from the beginning, the understanding artists had of what they were doing was largely influenced by philosophers. It may be that, at some time, artists favoured imitations of reality, but it was only because certain prominent philosophers had defined the essence of art as mimesis that artists, instead of inventing ever-new games, engaged in the unique endeavour of bringing mimesis to perfection, or in Arthur Danto's words, to produce 'increasingly adequate representations of the world' (1997: 136). This endeavour marked a long period of artistic creation and gave rise to a first type of history of art. Even when, at the end of this period, artists began to make art for its own sake and to reflect on the material conditions for making art, it was still the model of philosophy, namely the necessity of reflecting on its own conditions, that was guiding the new period of the history of art. Finally, when at the beginning of the twentieth century one *avant-garde* was closely followed by another, each convinced of having found true art, the real impulse for this avalanche of radical changes in art was the philosophical idea that there was indeed an essence of art and accordingly that there was only one true art which had to be found if it did not already exist.

However, we came to know that there is no true art in this sense. This fact was discovered not by philosophers but by artists themselves when Duchamp with his *Fountain* and then during the 1960s Warhol with his *Brillo Boxes* proved that everything could be a work of art. The conclusion to be drawn from this is that, until the end of the twentieth century, art had proceeded on the basis of a misunderstanding of its own nature, promoted by past philosophy, and that this misunderstanding made 'history' possible. In reality, the history of art was nothing but the attempt to actualize an incorrectly understood 'essence' of art; the end of art history turns out to be the end of this misunderstanding, which has been denounced by artists themselves and thereby overcome. Thus the end of the history of art coincides with the discovery of the true nature of art, that is, the discovery that artists play self-invented games, each of which has its own rules and which are incommensurable with the rules of any other. Hence art has come to itself through itself. Philosophy can only take note of this realization and attempt to explain it. This is the reason why the end of the history of art is final. Art is definitely free from the pale of history, the bounds of essence and the rule of philosophy.

Although my conception of the essence of art is overtly inspired by Kant, Schiller and Gadamer, there are still some differences that I would like to mention. Kant does not really overcome the traditional model of art as a kind of knowledge. This can be seen from the fact that he conceives the experience of the beautiful as *freies Spiel der Erkenntniskräfte*, free play of the cognitive faculties (he means imagination and understanding). Neither he nor Schiller nor Gadamer ever gave a clear account of the features of play that distinguish this type of human activity from theory and praxis. Gadamer also thinks that play is an element of every human activity (that is of science, politics, economy and religion), while I have shown in the preceding analysis that it is essentially different from these activities and should be acknowledged as a third type of human activity in addition to theory and praxis.

I would like to offer a double justification for my conception. On the one hand, art – as it is historically known – shares the essential features of play which have been analyzed above and these features differ in essence from those of theory and praxis. On this point I could give only a sketchy comparison between play and art. The definitive justification of my position will consist of case studies that show that in fact historical styles are sets of special rules of the three kinds that have determined the activities of artists and art consumers within a historical context. Reasons of space impede presenting these case studies here. My second justification is of a negative nature. To

my knowledge, this is the only theory of art that allows the autonomy of art to be maintained with regard to the other types of human activities. It is the only non-reductionist theory of art. Those who believe in the autonomy of art and yet want to challenge my position shall therefore propose an alternative non-reductionist theory. Of course, it is not forbidden to try to reduce art to theory or praxis. But, as far as I can see, all such attempts have neglected the obvious particular features of art that any serious phenomenology of it brings to the fore.

The role of art and play in economic history

This brings me back to the question I started from. If – as we said at the outset – it is the aim of economic and technical developments to reduce the time of labour and to increase the time of leisure, typical leisure activities will gain in importance and typical labour activities will lose it. Let us therefore see which of the three kinds of activities best fits the features of leisure. To be sure, theory and praxis can be chosen for their own sake. However, in the past they were necessary for the survival of humankind and made economic progress possible. Thus they had mostly the character of labour, even if at the same time they gave much satisfaction and pleasure to those who executed them. On the other hand, play has no direct utility for life. To be sure, artists have always made a living by their art, but this was possible only because others rewarded the artists for the pleasure and satisfaction the activities of the artists yielded them. The services of artists are not necessary for life as are the services of doctors, attorneys or teachers. They are superfluous and pure luxury.

This shows that play and art depend on economic progress. They can only be fully developed when there is enough time for leisure in a society. On the other hand economic progress makes sense if and only if the time of leisure we gain can be filled with activities that make sense even though they are not utility oriented. But playing games and engaging in art are exactly the kind of activity that ensures that leisure time is not boring. Thus play and art are the future of mankind. But in order to play that role they have to be liberated and developed.

The art that will play such an important role in the future of human kind will not be the art of the past, but the art of the future. However, if Hans Belting and Arthur Danto are right with their diagnosis that history of art has come to an end, the art of the future will be the art ‘after the end of art’ (1997: 136). Though we cannot predict what this art will look like, we can project some general characteristics of it:

1. The new art will play games with the ‘history of art’ by using historical works of art in new artistic projects and giving them a new sense.¹¹
2. The new art will not be monadic, but pluralistic.
3. In the new art *avant-gardes* will have lost their role as drivers of historical progress.
4. The new art will be esoteric, not exoteric.

However, maybe we have sounded the trumpets of the liberation of art too soon. For the end of the history of art does not necessarily establish the liberation of art in all respects. To achieve this, the discovery of art’s true essence and its liberation from the dictates of philosophy are not enough; art must also liberate itself from political and economic enslavement. Art will not achieve this by engaging in political campaigns – as Benjamin thought – but by undermining and mocking the serious people who hold political and economic power. Artists have the privilege of enjoying already what humanity as a whole will only reach at the end of economic history, that is, the playing of self-invented games by self-given rules. However they have to pay for it through their exclusion from economic and political power. Is that too high a price to pay?

Notes

1. My conception of 'labour' differs markedly from mainstream theories which are influenced by the ideas of Hegel and Marx. Marx conceives 'labour' as an 'act of self-constitution'.
2. Unlike the German word *feiern* the English term 'leisure' doesn't exactly express what I mean, but I cannot find any better word in English.
3. For instance, mountaineering is a way of making a living for an alpine guide while it is chosen as leisure by his client.
4. We shall see later that this is not the only guiding idea that makes historical progress possible.
5. The attentive reader will notice that this conception of history comes very close to Marx's conception (see Seel 1987).
6. For my arguments see Seel (2006; 2003).
7. The followers of Thomas Kuhn will have some misgivings concerning this point. However, in my view, in the sciences a paradigm shift is always a scientific progress as well, while in the realm of games and art a paradigm shift has not to be considered as a progress. Therefore Kuhn's theory applies only and truly to this field.
8. The only exception is Nietzsche, according to whom 'We have art in order to escape dying of truth' [Wir haben Kunst, damit wir nicht an der Wahrheit zu Grunde gehen (*Der Wille zur Macht*, 822)].
9. Art, writes Hegel in his *Lectures on Aesthetics*, is no longer the highest need of our mind: 'ihre Form (der Kunst) hat aufgehört, das höchste Bedürfnis des Geistes zu sein'.
10. 'Gunst ist das einzige freie Wohlgefallen. Ein Gegenstand der Neigung und einer, welcher durch ein Vernunftgesetz uns zum Begehren auferlegt wird, lassen uns keine Freiheit, uns selbst irgend woraus einen Gegenstand der Lust zu machen.'
11. Danto (2004: 95) has given some good examples of this.

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