

ON THE END OF
ART HISTORY, THEORY, AND CRITICISM



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Title Image: Jesse Small, *Mantle for an empire*, porcelain, 2004.

Preface:

When I started my research on the “End of Art, History, Theory, and Criticism” project two years ago I thought that the proposition that art had ended was merely a joke and that this paper would be finished shortly after it begun. This project was intended to be concluded in a matter of months, instead it turned into a matter of years. Each turn I took revealed a mass knots that needed unraveling to continue on—located both in the theory itself and in published misinterpretations of theories at hand. Throughout my inquiry on this issue, I have found it necessary to seek out mentors from diverse ranges of backgrounds and specialties. This process has led me to humbly come to terms that the only conclusion I have at this point in time is that I am not mature enough in my own scholarship to provide any conclusions on this subject. I have realized that the core problem in this essay is not at all an issue confined within the study of art, but rather one of society, philosophy, and culture. The breadth of the concept of an “ending” has brought many times to numerous paths that will take me many more years to explore.

I have decided to post this essay nonetheless, with the aim to return to it at a later time when I am more philosophically prepared to reignite the questions and problems that my proposed topic brings to the forefront. Meanwhile, I hope that my progress thus far will be useful and captivating to potential readers.

In conclusion to this preface, please keep in mind that this essay in its current state is an experiment, a work-in-progress, a study. And as always, all comments, questions, and concerns are welcome. —AI 2009

During the early 21st century art history, theory, and criticism have experienced a vibrant rise in academic programs throughout the United States and Europe. International biennials have encouraged large audiences to renew interest in emerging artists, more art criticism is being written than ever before, and the growth in art historical inquiry is bringing previously overlooked art to light. Yet, concurrently, these topics are purportedly experiencing a dreadful event—for the *end* of all of these practices is said to have passed.

The History of their Declared Deaths

The declaration of their deaths is not newly cited. It has been announced during at least three separate points throughout art's recent history: in the late 18th century, during Hegel's lectures on aesthetics, as the oncoming of conceptual art was anticipated; in the 1960s, as consequence of the theoretical explosion which was caused, in part, by the emergence of MFA programs; and, most recently, as the focal-point of institutional discourse in London, Ireland, New York, Chicago and other major cities throughout the US and Europe. The underlying question here I plan to address is: why are disciplines experiencing such growth simultaneously thought to be dead, let alone experiencing its *third* death?

Since all of these disciplines continue regardless of their proclaimed death, it can be assumed that the end of art is an occasion for something else. Indeed, a type of critical *tradition* has developed out of proclaiming the end of art. Such inquiry suggests that the tradition of the discourse surrounding the end of art has a purpose to stimulate new values, goals, theory, and qualifications impossible to achieve in previous states or times.

The “end” of art history, theory, and criticism reveals not an ending of these disciplines, but instead an institution-wide anxiety regarding the shift of traditional values and definitions of art.

In order to fully explore these implications it is essential to refer back to one of the earliest citations of art’s death: GWF Hegel’s *Lectures on the Fine Arts* (1828). Within the introduction of this work, art historians have found a phrase which they continually reach back into time to grasp, dust off, and present anew: “art, considered in its highest vocation, is and remains for us a thing of the past.”¹ Though Hegel never precisely stated the “end” or “death” of art, this quote has been married to the standard turn of phrase “the end of art.”

Within its original context, this statement does not seem to be pronouncing an *end* to art at all, but rather a new paradigm separating future art from how it was traditionally produced and thought about. If there is any *death* Hegel describes, it is only of the body—or the artistic object—which has allowed the unconstrained flight of the spirit—or ideas. Hegel thus prefigured the type of conceptual based artwork of early 20th century philosopher/artists such as Marcel Duchamp (and, as we will see later, Andy Warhol).

Nearly 130 years after Hegel’s lectures, following Modern art’s frustrated attempt to define all-inclusive symbols, the general nature of art took a turn from the faith in a universal/objective definition of art to a relative/internal mode. The rise of MFA programs in the studio arts in the 1960s and 70s encouraged artists to become reflexive producers, aware and actively questioning: “What is this thing called art?” “How does art function?” Artist/art theorist Joseph Kosuth described the transition from the artist as

¹ G.W. F. Hegel, *Hegel’s Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*. Translated by T.M. Knox. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975): 11.

maker to the artist as philosopher in his claim “Art is itself philosophy made concrete.”² The massive philosophical inquiries of the late 20th century encouraged the capsizing of boundaries, a process since defined as the leading quality of postmodernism.

Following this turning point in how art is conceptualized, in 1997 the self-described essentialist and historicist in the philosophy of art Arthur Danto suggested art had reached a “post-historical” state. Throughout *The End of Art*, Danto describes the momentous historical shift that took place in the production of artworks, citing specifically Andy Warhol’s *Brillo Box* (1964) as proof of art’s ending. Danto’s fascination with *Brillo Box* roots in the problem it presented by appropriating the exact appearance of an actual mass-produced non-art object. According to Danto, if art is no longer visually identifiable, then nearly all of the previous attempts to define art historically have fallen short.³ Thus, art must now be identified using altogether different values. He wrote:

“I was writing about a certain narrative that had, I thought, been objectively realized in the history of art, and it was that narrative, it seemed to me, that had come to an end. A story was over. It was not my view that there would be more art, which ‘death’ certainly implies, but that whatever art there was to be would be made without benefit of a reassuring sort of narrative in which it was seen as the appropriate next stage in the story.”⁴

His “end” was thus an end of a developmental art history. Danto claims “if you were going to find out what art was, you had to turn from sense experience to thought. You

² Joseph Kosuth, *Art after Philosophy and After: Collected Writings, 1966-1990*. Edited by Gabriele Guercio. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991): 52.

³ Arthur C. Danto, *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997): 193.

⁴ Danto: 4.

had, in brief, to turn to philosophy.”⁵ Claiming the artist’s mission is now complete, he hands the job to philosophers.⁶

In late 2001, the contemporary art, theory, and criticism journal *October* presented a roundtable discussion in New York City titled *The Present Conditions of Art Criticism* to address the crisis in art criticism spurred by the perception that art critics were losing their authoritative role in the arts world.⁷ This discussion was followed by Columbia University National Arts Journalism Program’s release of the survey *The Visual Art Critic*, which published the results of questionnaires sent to 230 qualifying American art critics. One of the most striking aspects of the survey’s results was the announcement “rendering a personal judgment is considered by art critics to be the least important factor in reviewing art.” The most important duty reported was instead the task of providing an accurate description and contextualization of artworks.⁸ This finding prompted a surge of introspections by art critics concerning their own place in the history of art and the future of their profession. In *What Happened to Arts Criticism?* (2002) art historian/critic James Elkins describes:

“Art criticism is in worldwide crisis. Its voice has become very weak, and it is dissolving into the background clutter of ephemeral cultural criticism. But the decay is not the ordinary last faint push of a practice that has run its course,

⁵ Danto: 13.

⁶ As Noël Carroll describes in “The End of Art?” [“Danto and His Critics: Art History, Historiography, and After the End of Art.” Edited by David Carrier. *History and Theory* 37, no.4 (1998): 20.], Danto not only seems to predict the future in stating there will never again be developmental art history, but also claims artists have accomplished all that they are able to and must give up their work to philosophers. “As anyone familiar with artists knows, this is like waving a red flag at a bull.”

⁷ See Baker, George, et al. “Round Table: The Present Conditions of Art Criticism.” *October* 100 (Spring 2002): 201-228.

⁸ Szántó, András, ed., *The Visual Art Critic*. New York: National Arts Journalism Program, Columbia University, 2002: 11. (www.najp.org/publications/researchreports/visualarts.html)

because at the very same time, art criticism is also healthier then ever...So it's dying, but it's everywhere. It's ignored, and yet it has the market behind it."⁹

Similarly, in *Critical Mess*, an edited collection of essays on the state of art criticism, Raphael Rubinstein declares art criticism is "hopelessly confused and will have to be left to work itself out."¹⁰

Five Prominent Symptoms

Leading up to art's death, certain notable symptoms have been revisited by theorists. Many of these symptoms remain consistent throughout various discourses, regardless of whether art's passing has already been completed or if we are still witnessing its "sickness unto death." Key symptoms often seem combined, some appear direr than others, and all seem based on the wide range of interpretations defining art. The most prominent symptoms are: the prevalence of the market as a determiner of artistic value, the rise of conceptual art and theory over aesthetics, the increase of mechanical reproduction in the processes of creating artworks, the perception of contemporary art's lack of verifiable progression, and the lack of definitive contemporary critical judgments being made. Often, as these symptoms emerge in one field, they appear simultaneously in others, causing their ailments to appear synchronized.

In addressing the problem of the market's authority to attribute value to art, Victor Burgin describes:

"In contemporary capitalism, in the society of the simulacrum, the market is 'behind' nothing, it is *in* everything. It is thus that in a society where the

⁹ James Elkins, *What Happened to Art Criticism?* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003): 2.

¹⁰ Rubinstein, Raphael, ed., *Critical Mess: Art Critics and the State of their Practice*. (Lenox: Hard Press Editions, 2006): i.

commoditization of art has progressed apace with the aestheticizing of the commodity, there has evolved a universal rhetoric of the aesthetic in which commerce and inspiration, profit and poetry, may rapturously entwine.”¹¹

This appropriation of value serves as art theorist Donald Kuspit’s leading “proofs” of art’s death. To this determination Kuspit declares the contemporary artist has accepted a role as a businessman, sacred-ity has been estimated a monetary price, and the concept of art’s identity has emerged as simply *being* a commodity with exchange-value. In point Kuspit states, “Art may be indeterminate, but money has the power to determine what is art.”¹²

This tightened relationship between art galleries and artists parallels those felt by the commercial market and art critics to the point where an art critic’s validity rises according to how little she is getting paid for her critical work. On one end, art critics seem nostalgic for eras—referenced by Rosalind Krauss in the *October* roundtable—when art dealers seemed to *need* serious texts by art critics to endorse the success of artworks. In our contemporary era of strategic marketing, non-critical essays commissioned by galleries take the place of press clippings in artists’ folders to construct proofs of the artists’ undeniable integrity.

The concept of the artwork accepting a role as a commodity is especially troublesome to Kuspit, whose concept of art’s value strongly adheres to its ability to create an aesthetic experience. Without aesthetic value, he claims, an artwork becomes “aesthetically neutral,” an “indifferent cultural artifact.”¹³ This conflict is evidence of

¹¹ Victor Burgin, *The End of Art Theory: Criticism and Postmodernity*. (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities International Press, 1986): 174.

¹² Danto: 150.

¹³ Donald Kuspit. *The End of Art*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005): 21.

another primary symptom: the rise of conceptual art and theory over aesthetics.

According to Kosuth, the logic interchanging aesthetical value for artistic value is inherently flawed. Tracing the origins of aesthetics Kosuth has described the act of judging art according to aesthetics as a stubborn *habit* referring to a time when art functioned primarily as decoration when a philosophy was developed to dictate ideas of beauty and taste, and now causes viewers to assume the two modes are conceptually connected. As art has accepted greater cultural value he believes it is *necessary* to separate aesthetics and artistic value. Recent explorations by artists into anti-aesthetics has offered a testimony of the two are not only unattached, but at times they are drastically conflicting.

According to Kosuth, aesthetics are not only an antiquated approach to art, but irrelevant. He describes this turn in relation to the title he chose for his essay *Art as Idea as Idea*:

“ ‘Art as idea’ was obvious; ideas or concepts as the work itself. But this is a reification—it’s using the idea as an object, to function within the prevailing formalist ideology of art. The addition of the second part—‘Art as Idea *as Idea*’—intended to suggest that the real creative process, and the radical shift, was in changing the idea of art itself.”¹⁴

Whereas Kuspit’s critiques the object gaining value without consideration of its aesthetic value, Kosuth thinks “*objects are conceptually irrelevant* to the condition of art,”¹⁵ a view Danto reaffirms.¹⁶ Danto explains the type of aesthetic experience Clement Greenberg sought (and Kuspit shares) is one informed by 18th century philosopher

¹⁴ Kosuth: 47.

¹⁵ Kosuth: 26. [emphasis added]

¹⁶ Danto, “For art to exist there does not even have to an object to look at, and if there are objects in a gallery, they can look like anything at all.” (16)

Immanuel Kant, who in *Critique of Judgment* explains the artwork's sole function is as an aesthetic object. This concept, which denies useful objects of art potential, is no longer valid in post-historical art.¹⁷

The rise of conceptual art's capability to reflect back onto itself was previously mentioned as one of the symptoms of art history's death, and it was equally troubling to art critics. Whereas before artworks asked for art critics to judge and describe, artist-philosophers under this new era are publishing their own interpretations of their work. During *October's* roundtable Benjamin Buchloh stated:

“it is from within the purview of the most radical artistic practices of the sixties and their subsequent developments that not only the commodity-status of the work of art or its institutional frame are targeted—one of the targets of this work was also the secondary discursive text that attached itself to artistic practice. Criticism and all secondary discourse were vehemently attacked.”¹⁸

The critic was no longer welcomed as an intermediate between the artist and the viewer; she was instead viewed as an excessive and potentially disruptive additive to the art experience of viewing and digesting art.

In a mode appearing nostalgic for an era preceding the industrial revolution, a symptom appears in Kuspit's citation of the increase of mechanical reproduction in the creation of artworks as an attribution to its death. Revisiting the argument by Walter Benjamin regarding the *aura* of artworks, Kuspit declares art is “tamed by being reproduced, the reproduction seems more real than the real thing and more acceptable, that is, more comprehensible and familiar.”¹⁹ This statement by Kuspit suggests the

¹⁷ Danto: 82-85.

¹⁸ Szántó: 205.

¹⁹ Kuspit: 9.

devaluation of art that, instead of aspiring to create an exotic aesthetic experience, turns to the familiar for inspiration. It is no surprise then that Allan Kaprow—whose art and theory is centered on encouraging the prospect that everyday life can be art—is suggested by Kuspit to be one of the largest felons of art’s wellbeing. Additionally troublesome to Kuspit is the incorporation of technology driven artwork, such as video and electronics, which he describes as expressionless technical gimmicks.

Another symptom leading to the speculation of art’s death is attributed to the difficulty of determining a sense of progression to contemporary art. This symptom is prompted by the crisis felt at the difficulty in determining a continuation of the linear narrative commonly accepted as the master-narrative of Western art, and is one of the leading qualities of Danto’s theory of the “post-historical” art. The issue of linearity arises when discussing problems in art criticism and art history because it demands a greater resolution of the problematic issues regarding the definition and goals of these disciplines. It also precedes larger problems in determining the nature of history itself. These issues will be discussed in length below.

Finally, the last major symptom I will highlight regards the scarcity of definitive critical judgments being made regarding contemporary art. As with the symptom directly preceding, part of this symptom is rooted in the larger problem art professionals have faced regarding their discomfort in making authoritative judgments during this current era of pluralism—a state of ambiguity which has risen from the multiple political, social, and cultural agendas fighting for precedence over one another. I will describe some of these issues later in this article as well.

Following these modern symptoms, Hegel's prediction of the approach of conceptual art made nearly two centuries ago is astonishing; many of these symptoms theorists have given as important evidence proving art's death are the same qualities liberating art in its contemporary era and are aligned with the theories of postmodernism. This coincidence hints at an overpowering nostalgia felt on behalf these philosophers, artists, and art historians for an art more definable, more recognizable, more prefigured into the "natural" progress of the history of art.

Indeed, perhaps part of what theorists would describe as "the end of art" discussion's success can be found in the nature of our postmodern condition. In *The End of Art Theory: Criticism and Postmodernity*, conceptual artist/writer Victor Burgin says postmodernism is not so much a "concept" as it is a problematic, or "a complex of heterogeneous but interrelated questions which will not be silenced by any spuriously unitary answer."²⁰ Part of this problematic has been revealed through the work of post-structuralist philosophers who have challenged the framework behind traditional notions of definition. In this process, fundamental problems within the discourse itself must be identified.

Essential Problems

One of the essential problems satelliting the discussion of the ending of art history, theory, and criticism is the seeming inability of professionals to agree on what precisely these fields of study are. Begun as three independent academic disciplines in the

²⁰ Burgin: 160.

18th century,²¹ each field often overlaps and blurs into the others almost seamlessly: artists moonlight as critics and theorists, curators and historians create art, and the distinction between art history and art criticism has been fought to the teeth for a reputable position.

As a distinguished discipline, the history of art has traditionally been understood as a canon of artworks, used to define through similitude what art looks like in order to separate superior forms of visual expressions from their inferior imitations. But, at the advent of contemporary art, the problems inherent within the traditional techniques used to define art seemed to completely disintegrate, to the extent of survey texts regarding the history of art awkwardly segregate post-war art from artwork preceding it, with additional disjoints built for artwork existing beyond the theory of Western art.²² The master-narrative of the history of art accepted by generations of academia was finally understood widely as one single interpretation of the history of art. The underlying editing this history has undergone is evident in the example of modernist critic Clement Greenberg's refusal to admit Surrealism to his version of art history. In response to the criticisms of post-structuralists, some of the most ground-breaking research being done in the field of art history includes: the heralding of art by women whose fit to the discipline was historically undervalued as a result of the social implications of their sex, art movements previously excluded due to controversial politics in regards to the nationality of the author, and entire forms of art left due to their prominence within popular culture.

²¹ Although the beginning of art history is also cited as beginning in the 1550 with the publication of Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* it was not recognized as an academic discipline until Johann Joachim Winckelmann. See Donald Preziosi, ed., *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology* (Oxford University Press, 1998).

²² See James Elkins, *Stories of Art* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

The inarticulation of the history of art has been translated by Danto to be evidence of an ending to the historical narrative of art, stated to have occurred when satisfying mimetic representation was mastered. In Danto's interpretation, "Part of what the 'end of art' means is the enfranchisement of what had lain beyond the pale, where the very idea of a pale—a wall—is exclusionary."²³ Here Danto supports the postmodern tendency to deconstruct the master-narrative of the history of art in order to entertain what has been excluded. He describes:

"A certain kind of closure had occurred in the historical development of art, that an era of astonishing creativity lasting perhaps six centuries in the West had come to an end, and that whatever art was to be made from then on would be marked by what I was prepared to call a *post-historical* character."²⁴

His proposal of the narrative-ending is thus a proposition for a wider definition regarding art and its history, one he describes as liberating to artists who previously were expected to continue whatever historical narrative was active during their career.

One of the results of the disintegration of the myth of an art canon is conservative historians of art are no longer inheritants of a clear definition of art and a framework to focus upon. Kosuth describes some of the issues involved in his acceptance of the work of art as a "*definition of art*." Recalling Donald Judd's statement "if someone calls it art, it is art," Kosuth describes the artwork as a *tautology*, where the artist's intentions that something *is* art is all it needs to *be* art. "The actual works of art are ideas," Kosuth declares.²⁵ In his own terms he defines:

²³ Danto: 9.

²⁴ Danto: 21.

²⁵ Kosuth: 3.

“I think that to be an artist now means to question the nature of art—that’s what being ‘creative’ means to me because that includes the whole responsibility of the artist as a person: the social and political as well as the cultural implications of his or her activity.”²⁶

According to Danto, this investigation is better left to philosophers to work out.

A similar difficulty in definition is found in the nature of art criticism. During the “State of Art Criticism” symposium, organized by Elkins in 2005, it was declared, “art criticism has a crippling inability to talk about what it is.”²⁷ Historically, critical judgment was mainly concerned with the assessment of whether traditional rules of the academy or guild were observed and whether an artist was of great skill. During the 18th century, the critic was identified as someone who possessed a certain heightened “taste” enabling him to detect successful art. Regarding the perception of the art critic serves as a cultural ambassador Burgin describes:

“The picture of the critic as a ‘cultivated’ person of ‘sensitivity’ is the picture of someone who is bourgeois to the core; it is this core of sensitivity which, made to resonate in contact with the art object, will vibrate in perfect sympathy with other similar sensitivities, similarly exposed to the same object.”²⁸

Certainly, as an interest in a wider acceptance of art from diverse backgrounds has been identified, this time of “cultural colonialism” has lost some of its appeal, yet this only installs additional detours preventing one from further from identifying what this discipline is.

²⁶ Kosuth: 54.

²⁷ Elkins, *State of Art Criticism*: 228.

²⁸ Burgin: 151.

The absence of a definitive canon also seems to be an ailment in the study of contemporary art criticism. During *The State of Art Criticism* symposium, Elkins described, though art criticism in its current form has been recognized as a practice reaching back three hundred years, the absence of an established structure or any firm stance regarding a proper curriculum of study for a professional art critic has helped cause this discipline from being included in academic studies. Whereas literary criticism has long been a standard in any literary studies curriculum, art criticism is only now beginning to be involved in studies of art and the history of art.²⁹

In response to the ever-changing definitions of art, the definitions of art criticism itself are forced into constant flux. Recent roundtables on art criticism have brought to the forefront essential questions surrounding the discipline: “What is it?” “What is its use?” “Who reads it?” “What do they expect?” More difficult questions arise from questioning whether art criticism even has a place next to art. Is it worthwhile/possible to reform criticism? Can art criticism nourish and sustain a public desire to engage with art? All of these questions appear to be as difficult to answer as “*What is art?*” inspiring a sort of crisis or (more aptly put by Raphael Rubinstein) a “mess” within the field among critics who are confronted with a fractured image of self-reflection.

Perhaps just as troubling is the examination of what place text has *at all* next to works of visual art. It has become a standard that a “good” work of art will come with a stack of literature, qualifying its status. An artwork is expected to be accompanied by wall-text authenticating an artist-author, their use of art materials, and perhaps a synopsis of the symbolism inherent in the work. In addition, the exhibition catalogue or brochure frames the artwork within historical and cultural contexts and frequently provides a

²⁹ Elkins, *The State of Art Criticism*: 117.

complex analysis of the imagery used. In the art institution and commercial art galleries artwork without text appears “naked.”

Regardless, though, of how well images of art are reproduced, it seems to be a matter of fact that art criticism does have a place, be it indefinable, within the greater art community. But, as Danto states, “A pluralistic art world calls for a pluralistic art criticism,”³⁰ and there is no clear definition to be found.

As stated previously, part of the difficulty found in corralling these disciplines is the fact that they frequently blur into each other. Though art criticism seems to have a lower academic status (due to its closer relation to the consumption of visual art) compared to the study of the history of art, one of the perplexing details in the study of art is how these critical texts transition mystically into texts of art historical importance. How and when does this happen? At strike of midnight, with a glass slipper? If there is such a difference between the art criticism and art history (as many traditional art historians will attest), how could one become the other after the passage of some unknown measure of time? Among the most revolutionary concepts emerging from the acknowledgement of the parallels of the history of art is the heightened awareness of the extensive editing the history of art has undergone, which has revealed that the nature of history writing is closely related to the nature of critically defining what art is.

As we can see through these arguments, a peculiar aspect of this discourse is how something so vaguely defined could ever be definitively *ended*. During this period of deconstruction the lack of a cohesive structure to begin appears most evident—thus exhibiting one of the deepest problems inherent in this claim. The exciting contemporary

³⁰ Danto: 150.

era of art examines this wall and appears to have unifying decided it is no longer beneficial for the understanding and practice of art.

The second essential problem I would like to raise in regards to the “end of art” discussion is the difficulty in the definition of history itself. For if one does not know what history is, how can one proclaim a definitive beginning or end? Once conceived as a single linear story, recent political, social, and cultural interests have worked to deconstruct and reveal history’s relative nature. In *The Illusion of the End*, postmodern philosopher Jean Baudrillard claims, “The fact that we are leaving history to move into the realm of simulation is merely a consequence of the fact that history itself has always, deep down, been an intense simulation model.”³¹ Not because history exists in a narrative or interpretation, but because it presupposes a linear time “which is at once the time of an ending and of the unlimited suspending of the end.”³² History— defined by Baudrillard as a succession of non-meaningless facts, engendering each other by cause and effect and standing open to the future—is no longer real. By giving events the same liberations we have given art, events once were referable as “historical” are free to pursue their own trajectories far from the central goal—“the referential orbit”—necessitated by a master-narrative. Baudrillard declared:

“No end is conceivable, not even the end of history. We are reduced to working on what happens beyond the end, on technical immortality, without having passed through death, through the symbolic elaboration of the end.”³³

³¹ Jean Baudrillard. *The Illusion of the End*. Translated by Chris Turner. Sanford: Sanford University Press, 1994: 7.

³² Baudrillard: 10.

³³ Baudrillard: 91.

Some sort of conclusion...

Responding to these discussions, Eva Geulen suggests in *The End of Art: Readings in a Rumor After Hegel* (2006) that the adherence to this master-narrative—and thus the claim there *can* be an end—stems from a sort of “cultural-pessimistic melancholy” desiring an “escape strategy.” Geulen seems to suggest what the academic art community desires most is a sort of purifying rebirth, which would allow the narrative of art to restart and new goals to be sought. She claims it has become “de rigueur to debunk the end of art as a white elephant of modernity” and the discourse has become “cliché” and “reduced to gossip.” Yet, she states, the “end of art” discourses have maintained its place as one of the leading philosophies of art since the late 1880s.³⁴

Though this discourse exists almost entirely as an academic discourse rooted in the anxieties and concerns of Western historians regarding the future of their profession, the questions risen from the depths of the “end of art” discourse have prompted profound and essential investigations regarding how art is conceptualized. This investigation also displays the necessary struggle historians, theorists, and critics must experience in order to adapt to the paradigm shift occurring in art itself.

³⁴ Eva Geulen, *The End of Art: Readings in a Rumor after Hegel*. Translated by James McFarland. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006): 3.

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